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JOURNEYING TO THE GOD WHO IS HERE:
JOHN BAILLIE'S THEOLOGY OF REVELATION
IN THE CONTEXT OF HIS LIFE AND THOUGHT

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This dissertation entitled

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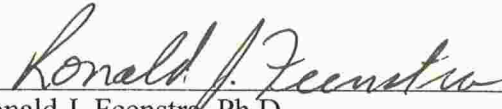
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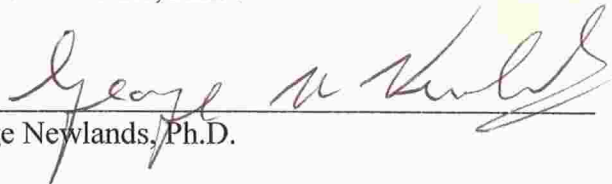
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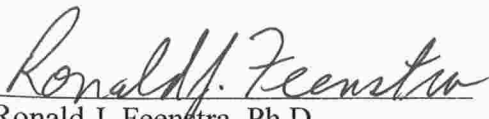
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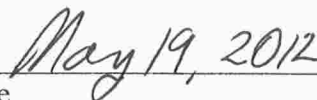
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God is not really found until we find not merely One whom we have long sought and could not find, but One who has all the time been seeking us and whom we have all the time been attempting to elude. If we seek God and think we cannot find Him, the question we should put to ourselves is whether, even as we seek, there is not One who is seeking us and whose solemn demands we are attempting to evade. Then the quest for God is likely to turn into a quest for that in us which prevents our being found by Him.

—John Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*

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ABSTRACT

Scottish Presbyterian theologian John Baillie (1886-1960) was a significant theologian and scholar who thoughtfully took up throughout his career the questions of how and why we know God. This dissertation shows that Baillie's unique contribution to the theology of revelation in the idea of the mediated immediacy of God's presence plays a formative role in the rest of his theology and is valuable for a Reformed theological engagement of twenty-first century theology.

Throughout his career Baillie made several offerings relevant to this area of study, most notably *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), which has been considered Baillie's most original work. In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie suggests that revelation is a direct encounter with the presence of God mediated through the natural world, fellow humans, the church and, most significantly and clearly, Jesus Christ. The roots of this conception of revelation as both mediated and immediate can be seen in some of his earlier published manuscripts as well as his early journal articles. Even after the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie continued to return to and build upon the theological perspective he had articulated there. This dissertation uniquely contextualizes Baillie's thesis on the nature of divine revelation by examining some of his unpublished course lectures and private correspondence, only recently publicly available by The Baillie Project archive at Edinburgh University Library Special Collections Department. Examination of the large volume of Baillie's varied writings reveals that his conception of God's revealing presence as a mediated immediacy both played a formative role in his

theology and was an idea he labored to articulate in an ever-changing theological and ecclesiastical context.

Baillie's theology of revelation remains relevant today. This dissertation demonstrates Baillie's relevance by showing the substantial common ground Baillie shares with contemporary Reformed epistemology by means of a comparison between Baillie and Alvin Plantinga's *Warranted Christian Belief*.

CHAPTER ONE

A Single Pilgrimage: An Introduction to John Baillie's Life and Thought

Christians through the ages have sought an answer to the question of the nature of our knowledge of God; they have sought an answer that reflects the teaching of Scripture, employs the insight of the Christian tradition, and makes sense of human experience. What is sought in the answer to this question is not only illumination of the nature of our knowledge of God, but equal illumination as to why some people know God and some do not, why some people believe and some do not. How is it that an infinite Creator God makes himself knowable and, in fact, known to his finite creatures? What capacity or opportunity do humans possess that uniquely enables us to perceive and to know God? Why is it that some people appear to exercise this capacity while others do not? Are some people privileged with the opportunity to know God while others are not? Finally, what is the purpose of our knowing God? In short, we long to know both how and why we know God.

The twentieth century was a particularly fruitful time of study for the theology of revelation and epistemological matters in general. Deep and urgent inquiry into the nature of our knowledge of God was sparked by a variety of factors, most notably theological liberalism, world war, and the crisis theology it provoked. Though less well known today than during his lifetime for his work in this area, Scottish Presbyterian theologian John Baillie should be engaged as a significant theologian and scholar of the twentieth century who thoughtfully took up throughout his career the questions of how

and why we know God. This dissertation will show that John Baillie's unique contribution to the theology of revelation in the idea of the mediated immediacy of God's presence plays a formative role in the rest of his theology and is valuable for a Reformed theological engagement of twenty-first century theology.

Throughout his career Baillie made several offerings relevant to this area of study, most notably *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), which has been considered Baillie's most original work, and *The Sense of the Presence of God* (1962), the undelivered Gifford Lectures published posthumously. In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie suggests that we conceive of revelation as a direct encounter with the presence of God mediated through the natural world, fellow humans, the church and, most significantly and clearly, Christ. The roots of this conception of revelation as both mediated and immediate can be seen in some of his earlier published manuscripts, for example, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926) and *The Interpretation of Religion* (1928) as well as his early journal articles. Even after the publication of *Our Knowledge of God* in 1939, Baillie continued to return to and build upon the theological perspective he had articulated there. The large volume of Baillie's varied writings reveals that this conception of God's revealing presence as a mediated immediacy both played a formative role in his theology and was an idea he labored to articulate in an ever-changing theological and ecclesiastical context.

Baillie was a professor of theology in several notable academic institutions in both North America and Scotland. He lectured and published frequently on the theological issues of his day on both continents and engaged both professionally and

personally other major players in the twentieth-century theological scene. During his career, Baillie was a prolific writer of manuscripts, public lectures, devotionals, radio broadcasts, and divinity courses. This diversity of material offers a broad context for his thought, providing a rich look at his theology of revelation.¹ Specifically, Baillie's divinity lectures give insight into how he integrated, and sometimes later modified, his theology of revelation with the rest of his theology. Because he writes on the topic of knowledge of God across several decades,² we benefit from the insights gained, modified and confirmed over time and changing contexts.

In this dissertation, select published works are used to outline Baillie's theology of revelation and his perception of his contribution to the Reformed theological tradition and contemporary church. These published sources function as plotting points in his reflection on the nature of our knowledge of God and include *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926), *The Interpretation of Religion* (1928), *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (1942), *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (1956), and *The Sense of the Presence of God* (1962). Some of Baillie's devotional material is also illuminating to this study and is occasionally incorporated.

Special attention is also given to the divinity lectures Baillie gave at New College School of Divinity in Edinburgh, which are currently archived in Special Collections at

¹ Employing these texts in an examination of Baillie's theology is especially needed now that an extensive archive of John Baillie's unpublished lectures, letters, study notes and diaries has been made available at the University of Edinburgh's special collections library.

² It is worth pointing out that these were politically, socially, and ecclesiologically turbulent decades.

the University of Edinburgh. Much of what Baillie published was occasional—lecture series which were later adapted to manuscript form. While this shows that Baillie’s theology was valued in the scholarly community, an examination of his published material only can make it difficult to identify the theological framework in which Baillie was working. Baillie’s divinity lectures help to contextualize his published material, particularly that related to his theology of revelation. Furthermore, Baillie’s lectures offer us the insight of a different (and largely overlooked) genre of his theology. Classroom lectures are prepared for a different audience than public lectures and are crafted for a different purpose. Public lectures are generally revised for publication, but once published become a static representation of a person’s thought, whereas classroom lectures are revisited and often revised each time the professor presents the material and so tend to be more fluid than publications.

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the scholarship on the theology of revelation by way of engaging John Baillie’s theology. The question of the nature of our knowledge of God will be framed in the context of the twentieth-century theological scene, particularly in the area of the theology of revelation, and will locate Baillie in this context. Since this dissertation is interested in the value of Baillie’s theology for contemporary scholarship, it will focus on the secondary source material engaging Baillie’s thought since his death in 1960. Continued engagement with Baillie’s theology shows that he remains a relevant contributor to today’s theological and philosophical discussions of divine revelation and religious epistemology. A survey of current Baillie

scholarship also exposes the neglect of his theology of revelation as it is expressed in several key texts spanning his career and contextualized by his unpublished divinity lectures.

Survey of Scholarship

Despite having contributed to the twentieth-century theological scene for nearly forty years (including several posthumously published works), John Baillie is today an inadequately studied figure.³ While scholars have continued to take up his theology of revelation since his death fifty years ago, a survey of the scholarship shows that this scholarship has not reached far enough; what is missing is a focused study of the development, coherence, and theological contextualization of Baillie's religious epistemology.

Baillie was a prolific writer and popular lecturer, both in and outside of the classroom, and much of his writing served his speaking agenda. His classroom lectures read like manuscripts, and in many cases, became the basis for publication. Meanwhile, some of his later lecture notes include cut and pasted (literally) sections of his published works. All of Baillie's twenty published manuscripts find their root in either classroom or public lectures. Baillie's publishing on two continents over the course of several decades meant that he was a familiar figure on the theological scene. His publications

³ Baillie's publishing career began in 1912 with the brief article, "The Subliminal Consciousness as an Aid to the Interpretation of Religious Experience," *Expository Times* 24 (1912): 353-358. Four books were published after his death, including *Sense of the Presence of God* (1962), *Christian Devotion* (1963), *A Reasoned Faith* (1963) and *Baptism and Conversion* (1963).

were regularly reviewed in multiple journals and students of theology began writing their dissertations on his thought as early in his career as 1933.⁴ Some of his books enjoyed a second publication many years later, which confirms that Baillie's thought continued to be enjoyed and engaged.⁵ As one surveys the reviews of Baillie's publications over the decades of his career, it is notable that the number of reviews of each publication increased through his career so that when *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* was published, no less than thirteen reviews were written in the two years that followed. Common themes in the reviews of Baillie's scholarship over the years include appreciation for his skills of analysis, his clarity in summary and his irenic approach to theological tangles.⁶

⁴ The reviews on Baillie's publications are extensive, spanning almost forty years. Several doctoral and master's theses were written during Baillie's career. See Allen Russell Stowell, "The Logic of Faith and the Scientific Method: John Baillie and Henry Nelson Wieman" (master's thesis, Oberlin College, 1933); George Alden Cole, "A Presentation and Critique of the Theology of John Baillie" (master's thesis, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1944); William Norman Grandy, "The Problem of Religious Knowledge as Developed in the Writings of John Baillie" (master's thesis, Northwestern University, 1944); James Robert Regan, "The Christology of John Baillie and William Adams Brown" (master's thesis, Duke University, 1947); John Walter Murray, "Development in the Thought of John Baillie Concerning Religious Knowledge" (master's thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1948); Allen Whitman, "Death in the Theology of Nicolas Berdyaev and John Baillie" (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1952); Clifford Lewis Braman, "The Philosophical Theology of John Baillie" (PhD diss., New York University, 1954); Wayne Perrin Todd, "Contemporary Concepts of Revelation: A Survey of the Views of Emil Brunner, Karl Barth, William Temple, and John Baillie" (master's thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1957).

⁵ *Our Knowledge of God*, first published in 1939 was reprinted twenty years later in 1959. *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, first published in 1942 was re-published in 1961. In both cases the re-issuing of the books occasioned a second journal review. Similarly, *Baptism and Conversion* was published postmortem in 1963 at the request of many who had been present at the original lectures in 1955. And, of course, *A Diary of Private Prayer* continues today to flourish as a modern spiritual classic.

⁶ See the bibliography for these reviews.

Baillie's retirement from New College in 1956 occasioned the inauguration of Baillie scholarship in an article written by John Mackay,⁷ Baillie's friend and then President of Princeton Theological Seminary, whose method of appraisal began a trend in the scholarship that would follow. In fact, the most serious scholarship on Baillie began after his career. *Our Knowledge of God* and *The Sense of the Presence of God* function almost as bookends to Baillie's mature thought on revelation and it is these, along with *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, which most scholars have engaged since Baillie's death in 1960.

John Mackay's 1956 tribute to Baillie is significant for Baillie scholarship for several reasons. First, in the course of the article, Mackay surveys Baillie the man, the theologian, the professor and the churchman – four categories of appraisal which have continued in Baillie scholarship, most notably in David Fergusson's *Christ, Church and Society* and George Newlands' *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology*.

Second, scholars seemed to take seriously Mackay's insistence that to understand the person and thought of John Baillie one must take into consideration his roots and influences.⁸ Subsequent articles and books on Baillie consistently include reflection on

⁷ John A. Mackay, "John Baillie: A Lyrical Tribute and Appraisal," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9 (1956): 225-235.

⁸ Mackay writes, "No one can understand or appreciate either the personality or the writing of the Principal of New College, Edinburgh, without considering the fact that he belongs to the Celtic race, and that his spiritual heritage has its roots in the region north of the Grampians." John A. Mackay, "John Baillie: A Lyrical Tribute and Appraisal," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9 (1956): 226.

his life and the influence of his experience on his thought.⁹ It is likely Mackay took his cue from Baillie himself: it was common for Baillie to reference his experience and acknowledge various influences in his writings. In fact, he specifically took up this self-reflective task in the following frequently cited and biographically foundational pieces: “Confessions of a Transplanted Scot” (1933), “Some Reflections on the Changing Theological Scene” (1957), and “Looking Before and After” (1958). With these and other sources, therefore, Baillie scholars have several primary source reflections on Baillie’s life, as well as evidence that the method Baillie used in his theology took into serious consideration the revelatory impact of one’s upbringing and culture, that is, of one’s experience. Thus there is strong precedent for a study of John Baillie’s theology that attends to his life situation. Abbreviated efforts of this method can also be found in Klinefelter’s article, “The Theology of John Baillie: A Biographical Introduction,” and Power’s “John Baillie: A Mediating Theologian.” Even so, little attention has been given to the shaping influences of his life experience on Baillie’s theology of revelation in

⁹ See William L. Power, “John Baillie: A Mediating Theologian,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 24 (1968): 47-68; Donald S. Klinefelter, “The Theology of John Baillie: A Biographical Introduction,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (1969): 419-436; David Fergusson, ed., *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald Baillie* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993); and George Newlands, *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002). See also dissertations by Clifford Lewis Braman, “The Philosophical Theology of John Baillie” (PhD diss., New York University, 1954); Roger William Johnson, “The Concept of Responsible Trust in the Theology of John Baillie” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1964); William L. Power, “The Knowledge of God, the Nature of God, and the Function of Theological Language in the Theology of John Baillie” (PhD diss., Emory University, 1965); Donald S. Klinefelter, “The Theology of John Baillie: An Historical Analysis and Interpretation” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1967); Patricio B. O’Leary, “Revelation and Faith in Our Knowledge of God according to the Theology of John Baillie” (PhD diss., Gregorian University, 1968); Robert J. Genovese, “‘Religious Man’ in the Thought of John Baillie” (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1970); and James Roy Tozer, “The Concept of God in the Writings of John Baillie” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1970).

particular.¹⁰ The nearest attempt we find is in David Fergusson's "Orthodox Liberal," where he takes a serious look at Baillie's theological influences in his Edinburgh years as a preface to an examination of themes that preoccupied Baillie's study throughout his career, including the theology of revelation.¹¹

Finally, Mackay's article is formative to Baillie scholarship in that it is the first to describe Baillie as a mediating theologian, a descriptor that has continued for decades, and to evaluate him as such. Mackay writes, "Baillie's significance as a thinker lies largely in the fact that he has been a mediating theologian. He has been a bridge-builder, not only between the religious thought and outlook of two continents, but between the older Liberalism and the new Dialectical Theology, now commonly called Neo-orthodoxy."¹² He goes on to observe that the qualities of Baillie's character, his ability to "understand, appreciate and communicate the thought of other people," enabled him to be a mediating theologian.¹³ Mackay's assessment of Baillie as a mediating theologian is exactly right and can be viewed as a kind of key to his thought.

¹⁰ Donald S. Klinefelter, "The Theology of John Baillie: A Biographical Introduction," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (1969): 419-436; and Donald Klinefelter, "The Theology of John Baillie: A Biographical Introduction," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (December 1969): 419-436.

¹¹ David A. Fergusson, "John Baillie: Orthodox Liberal" in *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald Baillie*, ed. David A. Fergusson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 123.

¹² Mackay, "John Baillie: A Lyrical Tribute," 229.

¹³ Development of the idea of Baillie as a mediating theologian can be found early on in William Power, "John Baillie: A Mediating Theologian" (1968) and Donald Klinefelter, "The Theology of John Baillie: A Biographical Introduction" (1969). Klinefelter puts it well: "John Baillie both temperamentally and professionally served as a mediator and interpreter among competing Continental, British, and American theologies; between naturalism and supernaturalism; reason and revelation; science and history;

Baillie's work of mediation had as its goal the pursuit of truth. For example, in a 1933 reflection, Baillie wrote,

No more during these later years than during the earlier ones has the philosophic quest, taken narrowly by itself, appeared able to afford me complete mental satisfaction. My interest in poetry, in the general literature of the few countries whose language I could command, in history, in various forms of art, as well as in nature itself, has not lessened but rather increased as the years have gone by. Yet not one of these varied pursuits has even been followed as a *mere* pastime. They have all, in some way, been parts of a single pilgrimage. In all of them I have, however mistakenly, seemed to myself to be seeking the One True Light, and I think that my interest in any one of them would have collapsed very suddenly if I had come to feel that it could in no way advance my central quest.¹⁴

Baillie's commitment to mediation is further demonstrated by the testimony of one student: "The question in his classes always was 'what is the truth?—not 'what does the Church teach?' nor 'what does Calvin say?' nor even 'what does the Bible say?' He was always trying to show us where nuggets of truth were to be found in a great variety of sources."¹⁵ And in the preface to *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie's inclination toward mediation can be clearly observed. Referring to the theology of revelation, Baillie writes, "At the present time the field is occupied by a number of competing views, each of which is likely to have something valuable to contribute to our total understanding, yet any two of which necessarily exclude one another if accepted in the form in which alone they are

empiricism and rationalism; theology and philosophy; morality and religion; orthodoxy and liberalism; liberalism and neo-orthodoxy, neo-orthodoxy and post-Barthian liberalism; and finally, between the several Christian (and non-Christian) communions." Donald Klinefelter, "Theology of John Baillie," 434.

¹⁴ John Baillie. "Confessions of a Transplanted Scot" from *Contemporary American Theology*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Round Table Press, 1933), 56-57.

¹⁵ John C. Lusk, "John Baillie—as a Student Saw Him" in *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald Baillie*, ed. David Fergusson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 263.

offered to us by their most devoted adherents. My purpose has been the irenic one of endeavoring to distinguish the true insight within each alternative from that blindness in it which renders it insensitive to the insight of the other.”¹⁶ Baillie’s mediatory approach to the theology of his day endeared him to his students, colleagues and readership and provides theologians today with a model for gracious engagement.

Consistent with the reputation Mackay had articulated, T. F. Torrance wrote a gracious essay in 1960 in Baillie’s memory which celebrated his life and bridge-building work, observing that “in all his theological work John Baillie sought to lay bare the mutual dependence and the interlocking of the mind’s understanding of God and the Christian way of life, that is, of theology and ethics.”¹⁷ In the few years after Baillie’s death, four books of Baillie’s works were published, most notably the Gifford Lectures he was never able to give along with three compilations of some of his previous addresses.¹⁸

The bulk of the scholarship on Baillie since his death in 1960 has been in the form of graduate theses. Eleven theses were written on Baillie’s thought in the 1960’s, and six have been written since 1970. While a couple of dissertations during this time period

¹⁶ John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), v.

¹⁷ T. F. Torrance, “A Living Sacrifice: In Memoriam of John Baillie,” *Religion in Life* 30 (1960-1961): 322.

¹⁸ The undelivered Gifford Lectures were published as *The Sense of the Presence of God* (1962). The other works included *Christian Devotion* (1962), *Baptism and Conversion* (1963) and *A Reasoned Faith* (1963).

focus on secondary issues in Baillie's theology,¹⁹ the majority have examined his theology of revelation in some way.²⁰ Some of the authors of these dissertations have also contributed to Baillie scholarship through publication. Both Power and Klinefelter published a couple of articles on Baillie's theology following their dissertations and Tuck and Hood published manuscripts based on their dissertations. The publication of material since 1970 is relatively modest in volume, but it is substantial enough to indicate that interest in Baillie has steadily continued.

A decade-long interest in John Baillie and his brother Donald was harnessed in David Fergusson's *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald*

¹⁹ See John Mack Stanley, "Church and World: A Critical Evaluation of the Corpus Christianum Approach in the Thought of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1966) and James R. Wilson, "A Study of How the Self-Disclosure Principles of Interpersonal Relationships Relates to the Assimilation of Persons into Christian Community with Particular Reference to Writings of Sidney Jourard, John Baillie, John Macmurray, and Lawrence Richards" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1980).

²⁰ These include: Burton Browne, "A Study of the Theology of John Baillie" (B.div. thesis, Eden Theological Seminary, 1964); W. Randall Lolley, "The Christian Philosophy of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1964); Roger William Johnson, "The Concept of Responsible Trust in the Theology of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1964); William Larkin Power, "The Knowledge of God, the Nature of God, and the Function of Theological Language in the Theology of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1965); William Power Tuck, "The Concept of Religious Knowledge in the Theology of John Baillie (ThD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1965); Neal F. Fisher, "Knowledge of God in John Baillie's Theology (PhD diss., Boston University, 1966); Patrick Eugene Green, "The Problem of the Knowledge of God: A Study in the Theology of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1966); Donald S. Klinefelter, "The Theology of John Baillie: An Historical Analysis and Interpretation" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1967); Patricio B. O'Leary, "Revelation and Faith in Our Knowledge of God According to the Theology of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Gregorian University, 1968); James Roy Tozer, "The Concept of God in the Writings of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1970); Robert J. Genovese, "'Religious Man' in the Thought of John Baillie" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1977); Thomas P. Hudson, "The Concept of God in the Writings of John Baillie" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1985); Adam Hood, "The Ground and Nature of Religious Belief in the Work of John Macmurray, John Baillie, and John Oman, with Special Reference to Their Understanding of the Relation between Ordinary Experience and Religious Belief" (PhD diss., Oxford University, 1999); and Gregory Chad Wilkes, "Anti-sensationism and *Sensus Divinitatis*: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Christian Belief" (PhD diss., Southern Methodist University, 2005).

Baillie in 1993.²¹ While this collection of essays was a windfall for Baillie scholarship, only two of the sixteen essays deal directly with John Baillie's theology. The book contains biographical information, personal reminiscences on the brothers, and chapters assessing the theology and impact on the church (both in terms of the Church of Scotland and the ecumenical movement) and society of both Baillie brothers. David Fergusson's essay, "John Baillie: Orthodox Liberal," is a valuable and frequently cited survey of the development of Baillie's theology and critique of his mature thought. George Newlands' essay, "The Sense of the Presence of God," looks at Baillie's ideas presented in the book of that same title in light of subsequent scholarship and recommends that Baillie be engaged in contemporary theological discussion.

A more recent contribution was made with the 2002 publication of *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology* by Newlands. This book makes extensive use of some of the private diaries and papers of the Baillie brothers in order to construct a more detailed account of their lives and better contextualize their ministries and scholarship. While the Baillie brothers' theology is addressed in this book, Newlands does not aim to critically engage it, per se. Rather, Newlands is interested in the Baillie brothers more as a case study in the examination of theology with an eye turned toward the context in which it was done. One can trace Newlands' interest in theology's personal contextualization to his 1993 essay in *Christ, Church and Society*. In the end, Newlands

²¹ David Fergusson, ed., *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald Baillie* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993).

sees Baillie's theology as so richly informed by his situation in life that the fruit of Baillie's contribution is not to be found so much in his theology itself as in the way he engaged the theology of his day.

Adam Hood's, *Baillie, Oman and Macmurray: Experience and Religious Belief* (2003), offers a more in-depth critical engagement of Baillie's theology, though its focus is more topical. Hood's interest is in the relationship between what he calls "ordinary experience" and religious belief, and he finds some useful, shared insights in each of the approaches of the theologians he examines. Hood's two-chapter examination of Baillie does a fine job mining Baillie's many publications and even a couple of his unpublished lecture series to conclude that Baillie's "religious belief is a kind of perceptual belief which arises out of the experience of perceiving or intuiting universal moral demands."²²

Wilkes' 2005 dissertation, "Anti-sensationalism and *Sensus Divinitatis*: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Christian Belief," engages Baillie's understanding of the sense of the presence of God alongside such widely recognized theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Rahner. In Wilkes's defense of including Baillie in such a line up, he notably cites his appreciation for Baillie's unique theological contribution, and also the very gracious, mediating way in which he communicates his position and navigates the scholarship.²³ Wilkes' dissertation itself follows in the mediating tradition of Baillie; he proposes that the thought of Schleiermacher, Baillie and Rahner suggests a

²² Adam Hood, *Baillie, Oman and Macmurray* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003), 67.

²³ Wilkes, "Anti-sensationalism and Sensus Divinitatis," 108-110.

middle ground between modernity's dogmatic sensationalism and postmodernity's subjectivism.

Shifts in the theological landscape over the last forty years have occasioned new and renewed interest in Baillie's thought and life and we can conclude that he has retained his relevance. It would then appear that Mackay's observation in 1956 that "mediating theologies tend to be short-lived" cannot be claimed in the case of John Baillie's theology.²⁴ Regarding some of Baillie's works, that is, many of his more occasional pieces, we can agree with Newlands: "John Baillie's work does not read like a timeless *Summa*. Indeed it could not, because it quite deliberately addresses current intellectual issues with a sympathetic sensitivity to their own agenda.... Yet its methodology, of careful dissection of all the relevant concepts, has a classic quality which makes it a model of its kind."²⁵ Newlands, like Mackay, maintains that the occasional nature of Baillie's work limits its relevance, claiming that the effectiveness of Baillie's work "depends on its particularity, and a new examination would require a new engagement with a new range of issues and studies."²⁶ It can be argued, however, that the particularity of Baillie's work does not limit the contribution and applicability of his theology to today's study. Certainly his method of mediation is a welcome model for the ecumenically minded, but many of the themes found in his theology of revelation

²⁴ Mackay, "John Baillie: A Lyrical Tribute," 229.

²⁵ George Newlands, *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002), 310.

²⁶ Newlands, *Transatlantic Theology*, 310.

continue to be points of interest and study today. So, for example, Baillie's theology of revelation, which was articulated in *Our Knowledge of God* when Barthianism was newly dominating the theological scene as a corrective to widespread Protestant Liberalism, can make a valuable contribution to the recent work being done in the areas of Reformed epistemology, pneumatology and spiritual formation.²⁷

Many scholars continue today to benefit from Baillie's survey of the theology of revelation in *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (1956); aside from his devotional work, *A Diary of Private Prayer*, this seems to be the most broadly used text of Baillie's.²⁸ The focus of interest since the 1980s on religious epistemology has renewed interest in Baillie's unique theology of revelation and shows promise for further application of his insights. Indeed, it is of interest to note that engagement of Baillie's theology of revelation has been concentrated more recently in the philosophical theology conducted by those who have come to be identified with Reformed epistemology.²⁹

²⁷ In chapters 5 and 6, these areas of reformed epistemology, pneumatology and spiritual formation will be shown to be a fruitful context for Baillie's theology today.

²⁸ For example: Paul Jewett, *God, Creation, and Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996); Keith Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions* (Gloucestershire: Clarendon Press, 1994); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); and Jorge J. E. Gracia, *How Can We Know What God Means? The Interpretation of Revelation* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

²⁹ Scholars in the field of reformed epistemology making special use of Baillie include: George I. Mavrodes, *Revelation in Religious Belief* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); William P. Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See also Anthony O'Hear, *Experience, Explanation and Faith* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

A survey of current Baillie scholarship also exposes the neglect of his theology of revelation particularly as it is contextualized by his unpublished divinity lectures. Among the recent literature, it appears that only Hood has taken up a meaningful examination of his divinity lectures as a way of filling in Baillie's thought. The assessment of Baillie's published work as "occasional" is correct.³⁰ This is why his divinity lectures are so valuable for understanding his thought. As Hood's work illustrates, there are connections to be made between Baillie's published writings and his lectures. To date, however, no one has seriously examined his lectures to see how they might enrich our understanding of Baillie's main theological contribution to the study of revelation.

A Biographical Sketch

In order to demonstrate that Baillie makes a unique contribution to the theology of his day, it is useful to provide surveys of Baillie's life and the theological context in which his own theology developed and was expressed. The following biographical sketch shows that religious epistemology was a theme to which he returned again and again in his career and that his upbringing, education, and professional experiences fostered his unique perspective. The contextual sketch shows, more broadly, how Baillie's interest in matters of revelation was linked very closely to his interest in addressing and making sense of the theological questions of the day.

³⁰ Fergusson characterizes Baillie's writing as occasional and concludes that he was not interested in the development of a dogmatic theological system; see Fergusson, "Orthodox Liberal," 123.

There are several additional reasons to give a sketch of Baillie's life at the outset of a study of his theology of revelation. First, as mentioned in the survey of scholarship, much of the Baillie scholarship since his death in 1960 has taken an interest in his biography. Second, historical contextualization of his education and scholarship will provide deeper insight into his thought and meaning. Third, Baillie frequently referenced his own experience in the exposition of this theology, and wrote several pieces reflecting on his life and the influences of his experiences on his thought; Baillie himself appeared to believe that locating one's thought in the experiences and context of one's life was vital to deeper understanding.

John Baillie was the firstborn son of a Scottish highlands minister.³¹ He had two younger brothers. Donald, just a year younger than John, was his dear friend and also became a notable theologian and churchman. Peter, the youngest, was a missionary doctor to India; his untimely death by drowning was a great sorrow for the whole Baillie family. Baillie's father died when he was about four years old and his mother, who never remarried, devoted herself to the raising of her three sons. Baillie understood his upbringing to have a profound impact on his perspective of God, the Bible, and the world. He identifies the beginning of his theological training at age five with his learning the Westminster Shorter Catechism. "Our father's Calvinism had been of the most rigorous and uncompromising kind and, true to the memory of a husband with whom she had lived for only six years, our mother was most anxious that her children's upbringing

³¹ Baillie was born March 26, 1886 in Gairloch, Ross-shire, Scotland.

should be in the same tradition....It was a very rigid Calvinistic outlook with which we were indoctrinated in our boyhood's home."³²

Baillie clearly had enormous respect for his mother: hailing her conversance with the Westminster standards, he writes, "If her sons later developed any aptitudes of a philosophic kind, it was undoubtedly by this home training in theological dialectic that their minds were first sharpened."³³ Baillie's mother was a strong influence in his life and her expectations had a profound influence on each of her sons. "When our father died, our mother resolved that all three of her sons should follow in his footsteps as ministers of the Church....I cannot remember a time when we did not already know that this is what lay in store for us, nor was there ever a time when we did not, to say the least, accept it without demur."³⁴

The highland community of Baillie's youth was informed in its theology, sincere and devoted in its piety, and strictly Calvinistic in its Presbyterianism.³⁵ The community cultivated a strong awareness of one's need for regeneration, and though it was not approving of sensational or over-emotional religion, its twice-yearly celebration of the

³² John Baillie, "Donald: A Brother's Impression," in *The Theology of the Sacraments* by D.M. Baillie (London: Faber, 1957), 13.

³³ Baillie, "A Brother's Impression," 14.

³⁴ Baillie, "A Brother's Impression," 16.

³⁵ The community referred to here is Inverness, Scotland's highland capital.

Lord's Supper took on for Baillie a real sense of the holy.³⁶ Baillie regularly reflected on these home and church life experiences in his writings and employed his memories to illustrate points of his theology. For example, he writes in *Our Knowledge of God*, "My earliest memories have a definitely religious atmosphere. They are already heavy with 'the numinous'....I cannot remember a time when I did not already feel, in some dim way, that I was 'not my own' to do with as I pleased, but was claimed by a higher power which had authority over me....As far back as I can remember anything, I was somehow aware that my parents lived under the same kind of authority as that which, through them, was communicated to me. I could see that my parents too behaved as though they, *even they*, were not their own."³⁷ The recollection of this experience, for example, witnessed to Baillie that to whatever degree we may begin life with a blank slate, it is not an atheistic slate—there is a sense of the divine in us from the beginning. Mackay, having known the Baillie family and having shared some of the same history further observed the shaping impact Baillie's roots had on the trajectory of his life.

It was natural, too, that a true son of an old Highland manse should be interested in learning and piety. The fact that to a greater extent than any professional theologian of our time, John Baillie's work combines the finest scholarship with a deep devotional spirit, harks back to Highland religion at its best. The atmosphere of the old Ross-shire manse, with its family worship morning and evening, and where the scholarly traits of a devout father and free play, help to explain that classic of devotional literature, *A Diary of Private Prayer*, as well as the profound interest of its author in religious experience. It was the glory of

³⁶ John Baillie, "Confessions of a Transplanted Scot," in *Contemporary American Theology: Theological Autobiographies*, ed. Vermiglius Ferm (New York: Round Table Press, 1933), 33-34.

³⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 4-5.

religion in the Scottish Highlands in those days that theological orthodoxy and personal piety were an equal concern. It was no dead orthodoxy that reigned, for the ultimate criterion of the religious life and a person's worthiness to become a church member, and to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, was his ability to show that he had been a subject of divine grace and that the roots of the new life were in him.³⁸

Baillie was schooled as a youth at the Inverness Royal Academy, which was then at a peak in its distinguished history.³⁹ There Baillie was introduced to classical English literature and Greek and Latin thinkers, which he immediately took an interest in and which introduced to him new expressions of truth and experience. The scientific outlook that marked the intellectual life at the turn of the twentieth century and which surely characterized his education at the esteemed Royal Academy also had an impact on Baillie, initiating an early wrestling with his religious instruction. "We were trained at school," Baillie recalls, "to develop a fastidious sense for the weighing of historical evidence, and for distinguishing fact from legend; but our training at home did not allow us to practice this skill on the Bible stories.... We were abruptly introduced to the world-view of modern science, and we could not make it square with the up-and-down, three-storey, geocentric universe of the Biblical writers and of our Catechisms, or with their

³⁸ Mackay, "John Baillie: A Lyrical Tribute," 227.

³⁹ Alec C. Cheyne, "The Baillie Brothers: A Biographical Introduction," in *Christ, Church and Society: Essays on John Baillie and Donald Baillie*, ed. David Fergusson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 9.

assumptions about the natural history of the human race.”⁴⁰ Thus, it would seem, the dissonant perspectives Baillie later sought to mediate were introduced at an early age.

Baillie attended the University of Edinburgh from 1904-1908, where he became devoted to philosophy. The tensions introduced to his thought during his schooling at Inverness intensified and philosophy became the catalyst for his questions and disquiet.⁴¹ Baillie reflects, “The bleak naturalistic outlook of the last quarter of the previous century still had much power to persuade....So I descended into the valley of the shadow of the negative.”⁴² And in this valley there was no place for religion. “I can remember,” Baillie writes of his student years in Edinburgh, “walking home one frosty midnight from a philosophical discussion on the existence of God, and stopping in my walk to gaze up into the starry sky. Into those deep immensities of space I hurled my despairing question, but it seemed to hit nothing, and no answer came back.”⁴³ As Baillie later reflected on this season of doubt and spiritual turmoil, he concluded that his doubt of God was rooted in what he rejected about the God he knew rather than an insufficient knowledge or assurance of God’s existence. He explains, “Part of the reason why I could not find God was that there is that in God which I did not wish to find. Part of the reason why I could

⁴⁰ Baillie, “A Brother’s Impression,” 15. For a similar testimony, see Baillie, “Confessions of a Transplanted Scot,” 36.

⁴¹ George Newlands’ book, *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology*, offers interesting details about Baillie’s college life and accomplishments.

⁴² Baillie, “Confessions of a Transplanted Scot,” 39.

⁴³ John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956), 138.

not (or thought I could not) hear Him speak was that He was saying some things to me which I did not wish to hear. There was a side of the divine reality which was unwelcome to me, and some divine commandments the obligatoriness of which I was most loath to acknowledge.”⁴⁴ In the end, a combination of philosophical and theological influences rescued Baillie from this negativity and ushered him into an intellectual space for religious insight. Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, a professor of philosophy at Edinburgh (1891-1919), played a central role in Baillie’s emergence from his valley of the negative.⁴⁵ Into his career, Baillie maintained his agreement with and appreciation of Pringle-Pattison’s main philosophy, the truth of which was further substantiated by both Plato and Kant, whom he viewed as the original sources of this thinking, sources which he described as having “drunk deep and long.”⁴⁶

After graduating from the honors school of philosophy at Edinburgh, Baillie’s philosophical interests continued throughout his theological studies at New College in Edinburgh, which began in 1908. It was at this time that his interest in the psychology of religion also began. But he was most influenced by his theological studies which, Baillie writes, “seemed to show me that what was necessary for the solution of my problem was

⁴⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 55-56.

⁴⁵ Pringle-Pattison was a Hegelian philosopher who distinguished his Hegelianism by insisting on the unique self-consciousness (and therefore unique identity) of the human person and of God. He wrote several books, the one most frequently cited by Baillie being his 1917 work, *The Idea of God in Light of Recent Philosophy*. Pringle –Pattison also undoubtedly influenced Baillie with his conviction that our knowledge of God, the Absolute, begins in various concrete aspects of our experience, including our moral experience.

⁴⁶ Baillie, “Confessions of a Transplanted Scot,” 43.

rather a deeper insight into religion itself than the successful construction of a lay system of metaphysics.”⁴⁷ As Baillie tells it, the most important shift in his thinking occurred during his New College years: “I think what it amounted to was the gradual realization that religion is in possession of an insight into reality which is all its own and cannot be reached at all without its aid. This is the change of mind, of course, which in European thought is represented in different ways by the two great names of Kant and Schleiermacher, and it was in close connection with my study of the Critical Philosophy and of *Der christliche Glaube* that it was accomplished in my own case.”⁴⁸ Thus during these years of study Baillie found new theological insight in Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl, the influence of whom is seen most transparently in his writings leading up to the publishing of *Our Knowledge of God* in 1939. At no time in Baillie’s academic career, however, could he have been identified with a school of thought following one of these thinkers. It would appear that Baillie was, from the beginning, an independent thinker who had an interest in pulling together truth from whatever source it might be found.

Study at New College was complemented by summers spent in Jena and Marburg, Germany, where he studied under the same professors as Karl Barth. Baillie’s summers in Germany had a lasting impact on his perspective and career, including providing him with a strong grounding in the language, which enabled him to engage with the prolific German theology of the twentieth century. For example, in a retrospective article in

⁴⁷ Baillie, “Confessions of a Transplanted Scot,” 44.

⁴⁸ Baillie, “Confessions of a Transplanted Scot,” 46.

which Baillie recalls the impact that the post-liberal movement began to have on his own thought, he tells of translating large portions from Martin Buber and early works of Brunner and Tillich for his American students. Before the texts of these authors were translated for publication, Baillie was engaging their ideas and providing his students with exposure to their thought.⁴⁹

After his formal studies were completed, Baillie continued his academic pursuits and in 1913 began working as an assistant to the Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh. He published his first scholarly work and began working on a thesis on Kant's ethic which he hoped would earn him a doctorate in philosophy.⁵⁰ The outbreak of war in 1914 introduced significant change in Baillie's life and context. His cousin, Isobel Forrester, wrote that though many of his friends volunteered for combatant service, "for John with his grateful memories of study in Germany and his independence of judgment the issues were not as clearly-cut as they seemed to most of his generation, and at first he believed it to be his duty to continue his work as a minister."⁵¹ And so Baillie

⁴⁹ Baillie, "Looking Before and After," *Christian Century* 65 (1958): 401.

⁵⁰ Newlands, *Transatlantic Theology*, 44-45. Baillie's first publication addressed the role of psychology in religion: "The Subliminal Consciousness as an Aid to the Interpretation of Religion." He never did finish his thesis on Kant after the war; a hasty attempt at completion for submission was made in 1917, but the thesis was not accepted. (Newlands, *Transatlantic Theology*, 58) In "John Baillie: Orthodox Liberal," Fergusson notes that some material of the unpublished manuscript on Kant was published in 1926 as 'The Meaning of Duty: A Plea for the Reconsideration of the Kantian Ethic.' (Fergusson, "Orthodox Liberal", 127). Baillie never wrote a thesis to earn a doctorate; he received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Yale in 1934.

⁵¹ Isobel M. Forrester, "John Baillie: A Cousin's Memories" in *Christian Devotion* by John Baillie (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 7. Similarly, Newlands suggests that "warm memories of

joined the YMCA and spent most of the war in France offering lectures to the British troops; by the end of the war he had become the Assistant Director of Education for the YMCA. Of his years in France, Baillie reflected that they

were fallow years for me, as for so many others. I hardly read a page either of divinity or of metaphysic, and I had little time or opportunity for consecutive thinking. Yet the period brought with it a very great broadening of experience and, above all, such an understanding of the mind and temper, the spiritual needs and capacities, of average (perhaps I should rather say of normal) humanity as I at least had not before possessed. . . . When I turned again to my old pursuits after the war was over, the khaki figures still seemed to keep their place in the background of my mind, and in much of what I have written since these days a clairvoyant reader may find them haunting the margins of the page.⁵²

In fact, in Baillie's first published manuscript, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926), one reads that his army experience is the clearly-stated starting point for his reflections about the nature of faith and its religious expression.⁵³

The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 occasioned both a vocational and theological alteration in the trajectory Baillie's life seemed to be taking. His four years of service in the YMCA during the war should not be viewed as a mere interruption to his life and scholarship, as if his theology were a bit of knitting he might set down and then take up again where he had left off. His war experience sensitized him to the status and plight of the common person's belief in God and seemed to have cultivated in him a few foundational theological questions to which he kept returning throughout his academic

German friends meant that not all Scots ministers were ready to embrace the unthinking anti-German sentiment which engulfed the [Scottish] churches in 1914." (Newlands, *Transatlantic Theology*, 53)

⁵² Baillie, *Confessions of a Transplanted Scot*, 56.

⁵³ Further examination of the impact of Baillie's war experience on his theological formation will be made in the next chapter.

career. The war not only had an impact on Baillie's own theological perspective and concerns, but it changed the theological context in which he did his work. This change in context will be the focus of the next section of this chapter; suffice it to say that the Protestant liberalism that had flourished in pre-war optimism and progress was judged by many after the war to be incapable of providing a plausible view of God, humanity and the world.

Baillie's work among the British army in France was also the setting in which he met Jewel Fowler, a nurse who volunteered for service with the YMCA in France. John and Jewel met in Boulogne in 1916 and married three years later. As his wife, Jewel was active with her own work when her health allowed for it and was a true companion to John in his work. Jewel assisted John in his lectures to the army in France, traveled with him on his lecture tours and played an instrumental role in going through and submitting some of John's sermons and lectures for publication after his death. Together they enjoyed hosting students and colleagues in their home; former students have recorded fond memories of evenings in their home and their easy hospitality.

Shortly after John and Jewel wed in 1919, Baillie accepted an offer to teach systematic theology at Auburn Theological Seminary in upstate New York. Baillie lived in North America for fifteen years, where he held professorships at three institutions and forged lifelong friendships. He stayed at Auburn Seminary until 1927, when he took a position at Emmanuel College in Toronto. He stayed in Toronto for three years and then in 1930 moved to Union Theological Seminary in New York City, where he stayed on for

four years. By the end of his time in American theological schools, Baillie had earned a very fine reputation: one reviewer's praise of Baillie in 1934 confirms this: "The announcement of a book by Professor Baillie justifies keen anticipation. Two of his previous books are upon the shelves of most thoughtful clergymen. His classroom at Union Seminary, his lectures at Northfield and other assemblies, the reflex influence of his teaching in other countries and his editorial leadership of *Religion in Life* commend him as one of the most enriching factors in the religious life in America."⁵⁴ And in his last year in America, Baillie received an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree from Yale University.

In 1934 Baillie took the position of Chair of Divinity in University of Edinburgh; he was appointed Principal of New College and Dean of the Faculty of Divinity in 1950, from which he retired in 1956. These years in Edinburgh produced his most well-received books: *Our Knowledge of God* (1939), *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (1942), *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (1956) and *The Sense of the Presence of God* (1962). He also did a great deal of work for the Church of Scotland, serving as the convener of the "Commission for the Interpretation of God's Will in the Present Crisis" (1940-1945) and as the moderator of the General Assembly (1943-1944). Baillie's ecclesiastical service also extended to the ecumenical community: in 1954 he was appointed as one of the six World Presidents of the World Council of Churches. Baillie remained devoted to

⁵⁴ John W. Langdale, review of *And the Life Everlasting*, by John Baillie, *Religion in Life* 3 (1934): 156.

and energized by his work until, after an acute battle with cancer, he died on September 29, 1960. In surveying Baillie's life we can observe several shaping factors that influenced his work: his Calvinistic sensibilities, his value of the humanities, his love of philosophy, and his church-mindedness.

The Twentieth-Century Theological Context

Baillie's education in British and German universities and his professorships in North America and Scotland positioned him to have a broad view of the theological issues of his day, specifically the theology of revelation, to which he was able to make a uniquely informed contribution. It is helpful to survey the theological climate in which Baillie was trained and later conducted his scholarly work. Such a survey is critical to seeing Baillie's work as a navigation across the theological battle ground on which he found himself. As previously mentioned, Baillie's work has been identified as "occasional," and indeed it is, which is why some insight into the occasions to which Baillie was responding deepens our understanding of and appreciation for his thought. This survey of Baillie's twentieth-century context focuses roughly on the period from 1910 to 1960.

Nineteenth-century Protestant liberalism⁵⁵ came roaring into the twentieth century with all the confidence in progress that was characteristic of that view. It proclaimed the

⁵⁵ Part of the difficulty in defining classical liberal theology may come from the various terms used to reference it. Some interchangeable terms to be found in the scholarship include: Protestant liberalism, liberalism, humanism, liberal evangelicalism and in America, modernism (as contrasted to

immanence of God and maintained an optimism that was fueled by the peace and progress in the West at the turn of the twentieth century. Assessing liberalism in theology at the end of his career, Baillie defined Protestant liberalism “as a movement towards greater freedom from the fixity of traditional beliefs and established dogmas.”⁵⁶ In the same article he wrote, “Nothing is more characteristic of liberalism than the effort to distinguish the substance of the received teaching from its accidents, the kernel from the original or traditional husk, the unchanging truth from its time-conditioned setting.”⁵⁷ It may be observed in Baillie’s description Protestant liberalism’s confidence in the unhampered human ability to perceive truth accurately, especially now that the modern human no longer needed to be tethered to the myths and caging superstitions of the past. Such a confidence was not accidental to the theology of immanence prevalent at the time. The understanding of the nearness of God functioned to sanction the capacities and achievements of a liberated humanity, and the season of progress and increase

fundamentalism). Grenz and Olson observe five characteristics of movement in Protestantism that came to dominate theological academia at the dawn of the twentieth century: 1) Like Schleiermacher, whose theology laid the foundation for classical liberalism, Protestant liberalism was committed to the task of reconstructing Christian belief in the light of modern (i.e., scientific) knowledge. 2) It emphasized the freedom of the individual Christian thinker to criticize and reconstruct traditional beliefs. 3) It focused on the practical or ethical dimension of Christianity. 4) It generally sought to base its theology on some foundation other than the absolute authority of the Bible. 5) Perhaps unconsciously, it continued a drift (begun with Schleiermacher) toward divine immanence at the expense of divine transcendence. See Stanley J. Grenz and Roger J. Olson, *Twentieth Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 51-52. Representatives of Protestant liberalism include Germans Albrecht Ritschl, Adolf Harnack, and Wilhelm Herrmann and American Walter Rauschenbusch.

⁵⁶ John Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 4.

⁵⁷ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 8.

experienced in the western world only reinforced the conflation of divine immanence with human achievement.

The ideal of progress and the confidence in humanity's capacity to know the truth and do the good which undergirded Protestant Liberalism in Europe were devastated by the experience of world war. Devastation gave way to disillusionment and readied people to engage Barth's theology of crisis,⁵⁸ first introduced in his *Epistle to the Romans* in 1918. While the war and Barth's theology formed a catalyst for a postliberal perspective in European theology, modernism in America had been under attack well before the country's introduction to Barth's theology. In fact, anti-modern protests made by American Christians, who would come to be known as Fundamentalists, began as early as the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁹

Baillie's education and career exposed him to the theological personalities of Scotland, Germany and America and his reflections on his experience are valuable for fleshing out the context in which his own theology took shape. Reflecting on his education, Baillie observed geographical distinctives within pre-war liberalism. His

⁵⁸ The movement inaugurated at this time has been referred to by a variety of names: post-liberalism, neo-orthodoxy, crisis theology, transcendence theology, dialectical theology and Barthianism. The matter of terminology here can be confusing, as there does not appear to be a standard for terms used in the scholarship. Furthermore, the terminology used in Britain and the continent isn't always understood in the same way in America.

⁵⁹ Fundamentalists were named so after the famous five points of fundamentalism and the publication of *The Fundamentals* pamphlets. The five fundamentals outlined at the Niagra Bible Conference in 1895 were the inerrancy of the scriptures, the virgin birth of Christ, Christ's substitutionary atonement, his bodily resurrection, and his personal return. The pamphlets were widely circulated to pastors and lay leaders from 1910-1912. See Goen, C.C. "Fundamentalism in America," 55-56.

British and German professors had in common the presuppositions of theological liberalism. His German professors, however, seemed more ready to depart from a traditional understanding of the Christian faith in their pursuit of higher criticism than their British colleagues, who, in their church-mindedness, seemed to be more cautious with their traditional Christianity.⁶⁰ Furthermore, “there did not develop in nineteenth-century Scotland the same gulf between Church and people as appeared in some continental lands. . . . Its pulpits and theological faculties continued to be influential within the community at large” and were rooted in the ordinary life of the church in a way that Baillie did not find among the faculties of continental universities.⁶¹ One can detect Baillie’s approval of his British brethren in his comparison and can also observe his endorsement of their blending the roles of theologian and churchman in his own life.

Baillie’s first teaching positions were in the United States, where he observed liberalism, generally referred to as modernism, as having more of a German characteristic. Baillie connects the influence of German liberalism in the United States

⁶⁰ John Baillie, “Looking Before and After,” *Christian Century* 65 (1958): 400; here Baillie writes, “My Scottish and my German mentors would doubtless now be regarded as having shared the same general platform of presuppositions, namely those of pre-1914 liberalism. Yet on that platform they occupied very different positions. The former were active and evangelically minded churchmen who would have been (and indeed had been) as much at home in pastorate and pulpit as they were in the classroom; while the latter, with few exceptions, were much more narrowly academic in their outlook and interests. Furthermore, and perhaps consequently, our Scottish—and more generally our British—theologians were much more cautious and temperate in their departure from preliberal modes of thought and in their critical ventures than were their German colleagues. Often I would hear them dismissed by the latter as mere “mediating theologians,” while these in turn regarded the Germans as *schadenfroh* in their iconoclasm, vying with one another in their eagerness to reach critical conclusions ever more upsetting to the traditional understanding of the Christian faith.”

⁶¹ Ernest Payne, “The Protestant World” in *Twentieth Century Christianity*, ed. Stephen Neill (Garden City: Dolphin Books, 1963).

with the country's own conflict in the first quarter of the twentieth century between modernism and fundamentalism. One of the characteristics of Baillie's work in North America was to navigate the polemic between modernism and fundamentalism. He writes, "I was always being asked to which of these parties I belonged, but I found myself at a loss for an answer. I had scant enough sympathy with the fundamentalists, yet I found myself very ill at ease with those who were most eager to proclaim themselves as modernists."⁶²

The impact of postliberal theology in America was both diluted and delayed.⁶³

Barth's commentary may have exploded in 1919 like a bombshell on the theological playground of Europe, but it took many years for the shockwaves to reach America. For a decade American theologians remained nearly oblivious to the powerful new movement which was being forged in Europe. While a number of critical articles devoted to postliberal theology began to appear after 1926, the first English translation of Barth's writings did not become available until 1928. And it is significant that even then Americans were not introduced to Barth's commentary on Romans but to *The Word of God and The Word of Man*, a collection of addresses originally published in Munich in 1925. The 'bombshell' itself was not translated until 1933.⁶⁴

There are likely a variety of factors that contributed to the late impact of Barth's postliberal theology in America. Reasons may range from the fact that America had not felt the same strain of World War I as had Germany and the rest of Europe and so was

⁶² John Baillie, "Some Reflections on the Changing Theological Scene," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 12 (1957): 3.

⁶³ See Dennis N. Voskuil, "America Encounters Karl Barth, 1919-1939," *Fides et Historia* 12 (1980): 61-74.

⁶⁴ Voskuil, "America Encounters Karl Barth," 62.

perhaps less acutely dissatisfied with the prevailing liberalism's weaknesses to the fact that "Barth's own writings were at first found very indigestible," according to Baillie.⁶⁵

One might assume that postliberal theology provided theologians on the American scene with a ready-made middle ground in the modernism-fundamentalism debate, but this is not the case. Though Baillie would employ its insights, he and others never would align themselves to Barth's postliberal theology entirely; they remained appreciative but critical. A survey of twentieth-century Christianity published in the early 1960s proposed a category for "former liberals who have tempered and corrected their views in the light of Barth's criticisms and emphases, but have not accepted his system as a whole:" post-Barthian liberalism.⁶⁶ John Baillie is suggested as a clear example of post-Barthian liberalism: "in America, he challenged our too simple forms of liberalism with the dialectal theology's judgments; in Scotland, he fought against a too worshipful acceptance of Barth's system."⁶⁷

As we have said, then, the theological values and presuppositions referred to as Protestant Liberalism in Europe were more likely to be referred to as modernism in America in the early twentieth century. And where neo-orthodoxy took hold in Europe as a reaction to Protestant liberalism, it was Fundamentalism in America that reacted to

⁶⁵ Baillie, "Looking Before and After," 400.

⁶⁶ W.M. Horton, "The Development of Theological Thought" in *Twentieth Century Christianity*, ed. Stephen Neill (Garden City: Dolphin Books, 1963), 276.

⁶⁷ Horton, "Development of Theological Thought," 277. It is perhaps challenging to label the thought of a mediating theologian; some suggestions have included orthodox liberalism (Fergusson), liberal neo-orthodoxy and post-Barthian liberalism (Klinefelter).

the perceived threat of modernist theology. The orthodoxy that Fundamentalism sought to defend and preserve, however, was not the orthodoxy that Barth intended to retrieve. Baillie makes a similar critique of both Fundamentalism and Barthianism. Of Fundamentalism, which he understood to be defending its Puritan tradition, Baillie reprimands it for “belligerently repudiating the whole development of modern documentary criticism and scientific historiography” that had developed since the days of Puritanism.⁶⁸ He also critiqued the modernists, who seemed “to be using their new-found freedom in order to read their own very nineteenth-century predilections and philosophy of life into the Biblical teaching, and thus corrupting the true and original Christian message.”⁶⁹ In both cases Baillie expressed his disapproval of any perspective that appeared to simply dismiss or avoid both the insights and challenges of an alternative perspective. Similarly, Baillie was not comfortable with Barthianism because it “had the effect of moving from the Reformers around the thought of the Enlightenment, especially Kant and Schleiermacher (despite Barth’s protest that such was not *his* intention), as if we had nothing to learn from this period, rather than through it and then beyond it.”⁷⁰ These critiques make sense when viewed in contrast to Baillie’s own approach to theology. In both his divinity lectures and his books, Baillie operates with the conviction

⁶⁸ Baillie, “Some Reflections on the Changing Theological Scene,” 3.

⁶⁹ Baillie, “Some Reflections on the Changing Theological Scene,” 4.

⁷⁰ Donald S. Klinefelter, “Theology of John Baillie,” 432. See also Baillie, “Looking Before and After,” 401.

that ideas and beliefs travel through history being shaped by the journey; the various influences on ideas from their changing contexts should be engaged rather than ignored.

Unity of American fundamentalism and European postliberalism against Protestant liberalism took the form of a defense and explication of a theology of the Bible as the word of God. While the theology born of these two movements cannot be identified with one another, they do share a common concern. And what this shared ground shows us is that the central point of theological negotiation in the western world in the first half of the twentieth century was revelation and authority and its implications for the rest of theology. In this twentieth-century theological tangle Baillie, characteristically irenic, worked to stay on course in his single pilgrimage toward truth.

In this chapter we have briefly surveyed scholarship on Baillie, noting that some of the main characterizations of his life and work made in the early stages of this scholarship have influenced the trajectory of subsequent study. Specifically, we observed that Baillie's life has received nearly as much attention as his thought. After our own review of Baillie's life, we can see that his upbringing, interests and experiences fostered the kind of mediation of ideas for which he has become known. In the next chapter we will take a focused look at how Baillie mediated the Barth-Brunner debate on nature and grace in arguably his most significant published work, *Our Knowledge of God*; this chapter will introduce us to themes central to Baillie's theology. Chapter 3 will examine the root of these themes in Baillie's early articles and select manuscript publications as well as some of his unpublished divinity lectures. Chapter 4 will continue the

examination of these themes in Baillie's mature work following the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*. Chapter 5 will compare Baillie's theology of revelation, as analyzed in Chapters 2 through 4, with the late twentieth-century emergence of Reformed epistemology expressed most notably in the work of Alvin Plantinga. Chapter 6 will provide a brief summary of the dissertation and suggest future avenues of Baillie scholarship based on the analysis and conclusions of this dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

A Canticle for the Journey: Baillie's Mediating Theology, A Survey and Analysis of *Our Knowledge of God*

The bulk of John Baillie's most recognized published scholarship, as was noted in the Introduction, is taken up with the theology of divine revelation. In this chapter we will examine what is unique to Baillie's theology of revelation. As has been stated in the thesis of this dissertation, Baillie's unique contribution to the theology of revelation is in his understanding of the quality of divine self-revelation as both mediated and immediate; that is, our knowledge of God comes to us "in, with, and under" our experience of the created world even as it comes to us directly in our encounter with the omnipresent Creator. While the roots of this thought are observable in earlier books and articles, Baillie's first and most systematic expression of this theology is found in *Our Knowledge of God*, published in 1939, five years into his tenure as Chair of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh.

The previous chapter introduced Baillie as a mediating theologian, concerned with finding the insight and value of all perspectives and constructing a cohesive position built from what he understood to be the best expressions of truth. In the case of *Our Knowledge of God*, the occasion of the Barth-Brunner debate concerning nature and grace led to the insights that have come to be celebrated and criticized as Baillie's theological legacy. Baillie sought to mediate not only the positions of Barth and Brunner, but also the Reformed tradition they claimed to champion and the Enlightenment

tradition they appeared to circumvent. In fact throughout the book, Baillie tenaciously bridges the insights of modern psychology and the Westminster Standards, of philosophy and scripture, of a medieval Christian tradition and a twentieth-century Christian scene, and of personal experience and special revelation.

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the Barth-Brunner debate in order to introduce the situation which Baillie was most immediately concerned to address. It should be noted, however, that though the theology of *Our Knowledge of God* was articulated in response to this particular situation, the theology in this book was long in the making and continued to be a focus for Baillie until his death.¹ Thus the thought in this book marks an important stage in the maturity of Baillie's theology and scholarship. The main part of this chapter includes a careful survey and assessment of the theology and argument in *Our Knowledge of God*. The focus here is to show how Baillie's proposal is, in fact, unique and valuable. The chapter closes with an identification of some key points in the theology expressed in *Our Knowledge of God* which form the mapping points to be followed, in the next chapter, through several key published works as well as some of Baillie's unpublished divinity lectures.

Summary of the Barth-Brunner Debate

The immediate contemporary theological context Baillie was engaging with his publication of *Our Knowledge of God* was the debate between Karl Barth and Emil

¹ This claim will be examined in the next two chapters.

Brunner over the continuity of nature in grace. Specifically, the concern of this debate was the relationship between human creation, now fallen, and God's redemptive re-creation as it bears on the question of the source of our knowledge of God. Central to this debate was the nature of revelation, which was a concern reflected in the broader theological scene, and which has been surveyed in the previous chapter.² Far from being simply an obscure theological feud from generations past, the Barth-Brunner debate crystallized the issues at the heart of the modern struggle over the nature of our knowledge of God, a struggle that continues today. These issues will be highlighted below in the summary of the debate. The continued relevance of the issues taken up in the Barth-Brunner debate is testified to by the fact that theologians still find it useful to return to the debate as a starting place for fresh inquiry into these old but important questions.³

Brunner's essay, first published in 1934, is crafted as a response to a disagreement with Barth begun several years earlier. We learn from Barth something about the grounds for their disagreement in his "Angry Introduction." He writes,

² Aside from the fact that the Barth-Brunner debate reflected theological concerns of the day, the debate drew attention in its day for several reasons. First, Barth and Brunner shared extensive common theological ground and were perceived by the theological community as holding harmonious perspectives, so a published disagreement drew notice. Second, Barth's response to Brunner's initial essay was vehement in its opposition. Barth's answer to Brunner was titled "Nein!" and began with an "Angry Introduction."

³ For example, see Garrett Green's helpful survey and analysis of the debate in service to his theology of religious imagination as a revelatory point of contact. Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

Ever since about 1916, when I began to recover noticeably from the effects of my theological studies and influences of the liberal-political pre-war theology, my opinion concerning the task of our theological generation has been this: we must learn again to understand revelation as *grace* and grace as *revelation* and therefore turn away from all ‘true’ or ‘false’ *theologia naturalis* by ever making new decisions and being ever controverted anew. When (roughly since 1929) Brunner suddenly began to proclaim openly ‘the other task of theology,’ the ‘point of contact,’ etc., I made it known that whatever might happen I could and would not agree with this.⁴

Though they shared much common ground, Barth accused Brunner of cultivating a natural theology that was simply incoherent in a theology that intended to seriously uphold the *solas* of the Reformation. Understanding revelation as grace and grace as revelation, as Barth did, meant that there could be no room for a revelation or grace that was not imparted solely from God to otherwise blind and deaf sinners.

At the heart of the Barth-Brunner debate is the question of the *Anknüpfungspunkt* (point of revelation), that unique capacity of humans by which we perceive the divine.⁵ For both Barth and Brunner, this point of contact is the image of God; their disagreement has to do with their understanding of the status of the image. Barth explains his view in a passage from his *Church Dogmatics* later targeted by Brunner:

Faith is not one of the various capacities of man, whether native or acquired. Capacity for the Word of God is not among these. The possibility of faith as it is given to man in the reality of faith can be understood only as one that is loaned to man by God, and loaned exclusively for use. There can be no receiving of God’s Word unless there is something common to the speaking God and hearing man in

⁴ Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising “Nature and Grace” by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply “No!” by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 71.

⁵ Garret Green describes the *Anknüpfungspunkt* as the anthropological point of contact for revelation. See Green, *Imagining God*, 29.

this event, a similarity for all the dissimilarity implied by the distinction between God and man, a point of contact between God and man....This point of contact is what theological anthropology on the basis of Gen. 1:27 calls the “image of God” in man.⁶

Barth understands the image of God in humanity to be annihilated by sin at the fall, so one will not find a status of receptivity to God’s revelation existing in any human at any time since the original fall. The capacity to receive God’s self-revelation has been destroyed. Necessarily, Barth concludes, such a capacity must be given with the revelation extended by God himself. Since Barth conceives of revelation strictly as an event based on God’s act and decision to reveal himself in a particular moment to a particular person, there is no such thing as a static revelatory object or writing that one might stumble upon and happen to obtain revelation with his retained capacity to receive revelation.

In the closing paragraph of his essay, Brunner warns, “In the long run the Church can bear the rejection of *theologia naturalis* as little as its misuse. It is the task of our theological generation to find the way back to a true *theologia naturalis*.”⁷ For Brunner, and for Baillie as we will see, the way back requires distance from what is perceived as Barth’s one-sidedness. Though Baillie did not ultimately share Brunner’s conclusions, he also desired to move away from extremes and find a mediating perspective. In what follows, we will summarize the Barth-Brunner debate, focusing on four theological issues

⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. G.W. Bromiley, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975), I/1:238.

⁷ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 59.

central to the dispute. This background will lay a helpful foundation as we turn to examine Baillie's theology of revelation as it was articulated in *Our Knowledge of God*.⁸

Brunner begins his response to Barth in his essay, "Nature and Grace," by identifying the theologians' common ground. At the heart of their shared perspective lay the concern "that the proclamation of the Church has not two sources and norms, such as e.g. revelation and reason or the Word of God and history, and that ecclesiastical or Christian action has not two norms."⁹ Doctrines of grace and free mercy, the total sufficiency of Christ for salvation, justification by faith alone, the total authority of scripture, and the bondage of the will were reclaimed and formative doctrines.

Brunner then identifies six conclusions which he interprets Barth to have drawn from their common theology, particularly "the doctrine of sola gratia and the position of the Bible as the sole ultimate standard of truth."¹⁰ These are conclusions with which Brunner does not agree. In what follows each of the six conclusions will be identified, Brunner's critique of them will be given, and the essence of Barth's response to Brunner will be briefly summarized. The value in reviewing these six points of dispute and the theologians' engagement with them is that it provides an important context for

⁸ Brunner and Barth's essays were published together in one volume, *Natural Theology*, for the first time in English in 1946, having been translated by Peter Fraenkel. The introduction to this volume was written by John Baillie. *Our Knowledge of God* was published in 1939, five years after the pair of essays by Brunner and Barth were first published in German and seven years before the translation was published.

⁹ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 18.

¹⁰ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 20.

understanding the conversation Baillie steps into in *Our Knowledge of God* and the particular points of discussion he takes up.

The Six Points of Dispute and Brunner's Critique

First, Brunner identifies Barth's first thesis to state that humans, as sinners, have absolutely no remnant of the image of God. While sinful humans retain the capacity for culture and humanity, these contain no traces of the image of God. Brunner agrees that the image of God has been significantly marred by sin; furthermore, he agrees something of the image of God has been lost in humans insofar as human total depravity has resulted in total inability, that is, the bondage of the will that renders one unwilling and incapable of loving God. But in an effort to make a distinction that will allow retention of the image in non-salvific terms; he distinguishes between the formal and material image of God. The formal image refers to that which marks humans as distinct from creation, namely, their capacity for speech (that is, being subjects, ones with whom others can speak) and their responsibility. Even as a sinner a person is able to speak and is responsible. "Formally the imago is not in the least touched—whether sinful or not, man is a subject and is responsible."¹¹ Materially, the image is completely lost.

Second, according to Brunner, Barth maintains that because scripture is the sole norm for our knowledge of God, the suggestion of a general revelation is to be rejected. There are not two kinds of revelation, only one, that is, the complete revelation in Jesus

¹¹ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 24.

Christ. In contrast, Brunner argues that neither the sufficiency of Christ for revelation nor the normativity of scripture requires us to deny another form of revelation like general revelation. Brunner first points out that it is the nature of any creation to display traces of its creator, and that praise of God through his creation is a biblical concept and practice. Not only is it reasonable to assume that God would be revealed in what he has made, but Scripture supports this idea.

Building on his first counter-thesis on the formal image of God in man, Brunner states that “the reason why men are without excuse is that they will not know the God who so clearly manifests himself to them.”¹² This statement assumes both elements of the formal image—that man has the capacity for speech (to receive the communication in creation) and is responsible (for what he has been “told”).¹³

For Brunner the dispute ought not to be over whether there are two kinds of revelation, but how the two are related. The revelation in creation is not sufficient for salvation (although it evidently is for condemnation). We can only recognize the revelation in creation with the light of revelation that comes through Jesus Christ. In this way Brunner affirms the idea that there is only complete revelation in Christ, while allowing for revelation in nature.

¹² Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 25.

¹³ Perhaps the argument he seems to be following is from Romans 5, which teaches there cannot be sin, understood as transgression, where there is not law. For the sake of justice, the law must be communicated to people for them to be held responsible for keeping or violating it.

Third, Brunner observes that Barth denies that there are multiple kinds of grace; given that Christ is the sole saving grace of God, there cannot be a grace of creation and preservation that is active and apparent. As noted earlier in the introduction to the debate, Barth insists that we must see grace and revelation as synonymous. That is, grace is necessarily a saving grace, and if it does not save, it is not a form of grace. Brunner, on the other hand, is trying to show that holding to the grace in Christ as the sole saving grace does not need to be held in contradiction to other kinds of grace. For example, given the vast difference of the divine and human beings, there must be some means by which God is present to his fallen creatures, and that, says Brunner, is through his preserving grace. Since preserving grace has a different purpose than abolishing sin, it does not need to be in conflict with saving grace in Christ. God uses the activity of humans to preserve his creation amidst its corruption—not in a redeeming way, but only in a preserving way. Just as it is only possible to see natural revelation in the light of the revelation in Christ, so preserving grace can only be seen by the light of Christ.

Fourth, according to Brunner, Barth maintains that since there are no ordinances of preservation, there is no natural law that can be a part of Christian theology. But Brunner allows for ordinances of preservation on the basis that he allows for preserving grace. Brunner gives an example: “Matrimony is a ‘natural’ ordinance of the creator because the possibility of and desire for its realization lies within human nature and because it is realized to some extent by men who are ignorant of the God revealed in Christ....But...only by means of faith can their [that is, the ordinances’] *significance* be

perfectly understood and therefore is it only by means of faith that they can be realized *according to the will* of him who has instituted them.”¹⁴ Brunner’s example illustrates his recurring claim that humans’ retained capacity of God’s image does not undermine the need for special grace.

Fifth, Brunner observes that Barth denies the point of contact on the basis that it would lessen the complete grace of Christ in salvation. But Brunner says that the point of contact exists in the formal image of God retained in all people. He is careful to point out, in light of Barth’s concerns, that the receptivity to God’s self-revelation created by the point of contact simply opens up the possibility of a divine address; it has no bearing on one’s response to the divine address, should it come. Again, this possibility presupposes man’s responsibility. Here Brunner emphasizes the necessary epistemological dichotomy of the state of sin: “*Without* knowledge of God there can be no sin: sin is always ‘in the sight of God.’ *In* sin there can be no knowledge of God, for the true knowledge of God is the abolition of sin.”¹⁵ If the point of contact is understood to be the formal image, then according to Brunner the doctrine of *sola gratia* is not endangered.

Sixth, Brunner claims that Barth maintains that the new creation in salvation is not a perfection of the old, but comes into being through the destruction of the old, which it replaces. Brunner disagrees. It is not the case that the new self replaces the old; rather,

¹⁴ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 30.

¹⁵ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 32.

there is continuity of subject and self-consciousness in salvation. The Holy Spirit present in us does not displace our personality but sanctifies it. Scripture speaks of salvation as repair, and it can be said that a thing is repaired in such a way that it is said to be new, and this is the sense of it in scripture.

A key point of divergence between Brunner and Barth is their understanding of the extent and effects of sin. For Barth, sin obliterates the image of God in humanity such that a person has absolutely no access to knowledge of God, and therefore no access to salvation, apart from the free, sovereign, electing grace of God that creates a revelatory experience whereby a person encounters Christ. Brunner argues that humans do retain the image of God in a way that yet does not allow them to contribute to their own salvation. Barth denies that what Brunner has outlined in the six points summarized above is his position because, he explains, “‘natural theology’ does not exist as an entity capable of becoming a separate subject within what I consider to be real theology—not even for the sake of being rejected.”¹⁶ So Barth takes up his rejection of Brunner by rejecting the whole of what he has put forth and insisting there is only one way to God through Christ, and that humans are in no way capable of receiving his revelation apart from whatever capability Christ creates at the moment of encounter.

Four central theological issues are the focus of the Barth-Brunner debate and are also significant focal points in Baillie’s *Our Knowledge of God*. These four doctrines can be viewed as building blocks for a theology of revelation. First and foundational to the

¹⁶ Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 75.

Barth-Brunner debate is their theology of the extent of sin. How pervasive is sin in human lives and what effect does it have? Both Brunner and Barth agree that sin extends into the whole person; this is the Reformed doctrine of total depravity with its accompanying doctrine of bondage of the will. This common ground Barth and Brunner share splits as it is applied to their theology of the image of God, the nature of grace and of revelation.

Given human depravity, the next question must be asked whether or to what extent humanity retains the image of God in its sin-polluted state. Barth says that sin, as extensively destructive as it is, obliterates the image of God in humanity. Brunner, on the other hand, wants to nuance the image of God so that some measure of it is retained, though he is careful to insist that this remnant of the image does not undo humanity's bondage of the will to sin. Related to this matter of the image of God is the question of continuity between a pre- and post-salvific state. In the case of Barth, grace represents such a radical confrontation and transformation in the life of a person such that he understands there to have taken place a literally new creation in which the obliterated image has now been restored. For Brunner, who maintains there exists a residue of the formal image in fallen humanity, there is some element of continuity between the two states.

Another point of divergence in the debate has to do with the doctrine of grace. Is grace exclusively salvific? In other words, is there a grace that God extends to humanity that is not also a saving grace? Barth denied that there was; grace is revelation and

revelation is salvation—there is no grace given that does not also save. Brunner claimed that God extends a preserving grace that complements and in no way diminishes the necessity of saving grace, which humans depend upon solely for reconciliation with God.

A closely related doctrine is that of general revelation, which becomes the crux of the Barth-Brunner debate. Is there any revelation of God in nature, a revelation that does not necessarily save but does actually illuminate God? Both Barth and Brunner's answers to this question are consistent with their understandings of grace. According to his conviction that grace is revelation, Barth vehemently opposes the idea that God's self-revelation exists without the corresponding fruit of belief. Brunner, consistent with his view of a preserving grace, maintains that there is an objective revelation in which the creation contains traces of its maker. Based on their positions on these four doctrines, Brunner builds a natural theology and Barth rejects one. And a natural theology makes room for a point of contact in the human person for God's revelation.

This summary of the highlights of the Barth-Brunner debate will provide context and clarity for what follows as we review Baillie's engagement with their debate and his navigation of the issues it raised. In particular, we will draw attention to the four foci outlined above: 1) the extent of sin, 2) the image of God and the matter of continuity, 3) the nature of grace and 4) the nature of revelation with its question of the point of contact.

Summary of Our Knowledge of God

In his brief preface to *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie shares his perspective on the current theological efforts to understand the nature of God's self-revelation and his methodological approach to contributing to this situation. He writes,

At the present time the field is occupied by a number of competing views, each of which is likely to have something valuable to contribute to our total understanding, yet any two of which necessarily exclude one another if accepted in the form in which alone they are offered to us by their most devoted adherents. My purpose has been the irenic one of endeavoring to distinguish the true insight within each alternative from that blindness in it which renders it insensitive to the insight from another.¹⁷

This statement of method gives us insight not only into Baillie's approach to the subject in *Our Knowledge of God*, but to the theological task in general. We can observe in Baillie a passion for theological discussion; by this means insight is gathered and truth moves forward. Though Baillie begins the book by directly interacting with Barth and Brunner's thought, the subject takes him into larger spheres of conversation in which he takes as discussion partners great thinkers like Anselm, Aquinas, Descartes, Immanuel Kant, and Martin Buber. Even as Baillie seeks to discern the insightful contributions of Barth and Brunner, he believes that the truth of the matter cannot be discerned simply by working within the relatively narrow perimeters of these two thinkers; rather, he does not feel constrained by the alternatives laid down by Barth and Brunner. Addressing the issues raised by the Barth-Brunner debate doesn't simply entail settling their dispute, but it requires engaging the traditions they represent and to which they react. He exhibits a

¹⁷ John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), v.

kind of intellectual freedom, where the whole of human history and thought is available to instruct him.

We gain further insight into the essence of Baillie's critique of the Barth-Brunner debate from the Introduction he wrote for the English translation of the essays, published under the title *Natural Theology* in 1947.¹⁸ He gave this commentary on the common ground shared by Barth and Brunner:

The idea of the total corruption of human nature, strongly entrenched in orthodox Protestantism but lately fallen into disrepute, was now not only vigorously reaffirmed by both writers, but was given an application even more extended than orthodoxy had usually given it; this total corruption being made to cover the human reason as to render men incapable of reaching any knowledge of God by the exercise of their own powers of thought, or even of bringing them to a point in their thinking such as would enable them to welcome the Christian revelation, when it came, as answering a question they had already raised or meeting a need they had already felt....It did, indeed, meet with a response from those elected to respond to it, but this response was not on the ground of anything already present in their own souls; rather did the revelation create its own response.¹⁹

At the close of the Introduction, Baillie urges his readers to take up the issues put forth by Brunner and Barth, both in *Natural Theology* and their subsequent publications, with these important questions in mind: "Which of them is right? Or, if neither is entirely right, which of them comes nearer the truth, and where exactly does each go astray? And may there even be something amiss with the ground they occupy in common?"²⁰ We can

¹⁸ Baillie's Introduction (1947) was, of course, written well after *Our Knowledge of God* (1939) was published. His comments in the Introduction therefore reflect his substantial engagement with the key points of the debate and demonstrate the continuity of his position eight years after his book was published.

¹⁹ Baillie, Introduction to *Natural Theology* by Barth and Brunner, 6.

²⁰ Baillie, Introduction to *Natural Theology* by Barth and Brunner, 12.

imagine that these were the very questions Baillie himself brought to his reading of these essays a decade before.

Chapter One: “Confrontation with God”

The question of the nature of God’s self-revelation is necessarily two-fold: How does God make contact with us so that he is made knowable and how do we perceive his contact so that we do, in fact, know him? In the first chapter of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie introduces his answer to the first question and lays the groundwork for answering the second.²¹ The thesis of the first section of the book is that all people of all times and places have been confronted with God, who has a claim on them. God’s claim is based on the fact that we are God’s own, made to know him, hear him, and follow him. In our sinful state we resist this divine claim and seek, through a variety of ways, to avoid the conflict created by this unwelcome confrontation. The evidence of this confrontation can be found, Baillie observes, in a common restlessness and discontent that leads to the formation of religion. And in the West particularly, where history and cultures have been so profoundly influenced by Christianity, he specifies that people experience the confrontation of God in Christ.²²

In Baillie’s words:

²¹ *Our Knowledge of God* is composed of five chapters, each divided into four sections.

²² Though Baillie often makes reference to other religions (especially primitive ones) and to pre-Christian thought and culture in the West, it is important to note that Baillie is here, and in most of his work, assuming a Western context influenced by centuries of Christianity. The assessment of Baillie in this dissertation will also assume this same context, although a valuable future study might attempt to assess Baillie’s thesis from another cultural vantage point.

My contention has been that the only humanity known to us is a humanity which has already, in some degree at least, been confronted with the reality of God and disturbed by the challenge of his holy presence, and that it is this fact which determines the form and conditions the success alike of theological argument and of religious appeal. That not one of us has been left quite alone by God, that we have been sought out from the beginning, that from the beginning we have possessed more light than we have used—this seems to be a necessary part of our confession of sin.²³

It is notable in this passage that Baillie understands our theology of revelation to have a direct impact on the nature of our ministry of the gospel. Baillie criticizes the assumption he has observed in recent generations of preachers and teachers that people in the west have become inoculated to the gospel, which has led to a shift in ministry methodology. “We have made stammering excuses for our intrusion,” Baillie criticizes, “For the old direct challenge we have substituted the language of debate. Where our forefathers would have confronted [a non-believer] with God’s commandments, we have parleyed with him over God’s existence and over the authenticity of his claims.”²⁴ The weakness in this approach, for Baillie, lies in the fact that it does not cooperate, so to speak, with the way in which God confronts humanity. That is, it engages the non-believer as though God is *not* confronting all people with himself, as though this is not a reality the minister can assume and appeal to. In contrast to this trend, Baillie affirms the more direct style of confrontation taken by Barth and others, though he is wary of the dogmatic assertions that he sees as characteristic of Barth. Though the communication of the gospel is not

²³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 17.

²⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 14.

dependent on a well-reasoned or argued apologetic, Baillie expresses concern that going too far in the other direction can lead to a dogmatic arrogance that desensitizes one to the value of articulating the reasonableness of the gospel and the obedient faith to which it summons us. Thus Baillie is not opposed to the valuable role of reason and argumentation when it comes to faith, but he does believe it has limits, which he will explore more in chapter 3 and conclude in chapter 5.

The four central theological issues we distilled from the Barth-Brunner debate are engaged in the first chapter of *Our Knowledge of God* and developed in the subsequent chapters. To review, these four issues include 1) the extent of sin, 2) the image of God and the matter of continuity, 3) the nature of grace and 4) the nature of revelation with its question of the point of contact. In this chapter Baillie critiques Barth and Brunner and formulates his position on these four issues in reference to them. His view on these four issues, which we have said must be engaged in any theology of revelation, becomes the foundation for the rest of the book.

Baillie identifies in Barth “a fundamental premiss that no knowledge of God exists in the world save in the hearts of regenerate Christian believers.”²⁵ Baillie attributes the root of this position to the Lutheran christocentrism that characterized Ritschl’s and Herrmann’s theology and which influenced Barth. But Baillie thinks such a position is “guilty of unduly simplifying the delicate complexity of the spiritual situation with which we have here to do, and that in [Barth’s] anxiety to recover and conserve one

²⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 17.

precious evangelic truth he is going far towards surrendering another.”²⁶ What Barth preserves (and Baillie is concerned that this preservation takes the doctrine too far) is the teaching that our sin has slain us; we are dead in sin and we are in need of a resurrection. Barth offers a corrective to an overly optimistic, even humanistic, natural theology in which sin and its effects was downplayed, but his corrective goes so far as to deny any light of God in humanity. As we saw in the overview of the Barth-Brunner debate, Barth denies any point of contact for divine revelation in the fallen human nature or consciousness. Sin and its effects are so devastating that there can be no point of contact. The soul of a Christian is literally and utterly a new creation. There is nothing in fallen humanity to which revelation makes its appeal—fallen humanity lacks the capacity for such an appeal to be received or heard, let alone responded to. Baillie is not opposed to the idea that God can create something totally new, for this is precisely the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, but he does not think such a doctrine of creation characterizes the nature of God’s revelation to fallen humanity.

Baillie agrees with Barth that God must work in a person in a miraculous way in order for that person to receive new life; it is the nature of this miracle and of the person receiving the miracle which Baillie disputes. Baillie distinguishes himself from Barth on the nature of the miracle at work by describing it in terms of a re-creating instead of a creating. In the case of creation or even birth there is no continuity between the “is” and

²⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 19. We can notice here Baillie’s serious and persistent concern that our theology make sense of our common experience.

the “is not.” Once angels and dark matter and hydrogen and insects did not exist and now they do; once there was an egg and sperm separated by two bodies, and from their joining, there is now a unique human person formed with the capacity to know people and things and ideas, to communicate with body and voice, to feel emotion and the world around her. But in the case of re-creation or re-birth, there is continuity between the “before” and “after;” that is, a continuity of need and remedy. Baillie finds evidence for this continuity with regard to the image of God in the fact that the preacher’s task of leading others to saving knowledge of God in Christ certainly is a task that includes “calling upon God to perform a miracle, but not *that* miracle [of creating this knowledge in “stocks and stones”]—and not that miracle precisely for the reason that he is also calling upon *man* to do something, namely, to decide for God.”²⁷ The tension of human participation in God’s miraculous intervention to recreate and renew his image in a person is one Baillie insists must be maintained.

Baillie describes the theology of new life discontinuity as a rending of the doctrine of the image of God and the doctrine of revelation and claims, “I cannot believe that [Barth] is right in thus severing the connexion between the doctrine of the *imago dei* and the doctrine of revelation.”²⁸ In other words, for Baillie, the image of God is organically connected to God’s self-revelation. This connection is exposed in the fact that our human nature is made known to us as a good thing gone bad. In some way we

²⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 25.

²⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 22.

are deeply aware that life is not as it is supposed to be, and this awareness stirs the restlessness in us that Baillie says is a result of our confrontation with God. It is the image of God in humanity, then, in which Baillie locates the point of contact for God's self-revelation. Specifically, he describes that image in three-fold terms: reason, conscience, and religion. When encountered by the holiness of God, a sinful person is challenged and an inner conflict is generated. It is our marred image—our derailed reason, our wayward conscience and our misguided religion—that God illuminates with his holiness. We see that what we do and desire is not what it ought to be, and certainly it isn't as fulfilling as we long for it to be. For "if it be true that man was first created in the image and likeness of God, the total obliteration of that image could mean only the total obliteration of his humanity. For, as Calvin says, 'the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals'."²⁹ Thus our careful effort to improve ourselves, others and our collective lot along with our persistent dissatisfaction with some or all of life testifies to some retained image of God in humanity.

Baillie acknowledges that his position on the continuity of the image of God is more aligned with Brunner, with whom he shares several points in common opposition to Barth. Baillie does not agree with Brunner on his absolute distinction between the formal and material in the image of God. Human receptivity to and addressability by the Word of God make up for Brunner only the *form* of the image of God in humanity. Here

²⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 27.

Baillie agrees with Barth's critique of Brunner: you simply cannot draw an absolute distinction separating form from matter. The following quote is a fine example of Baillie's careful navigation between the positions of Barth and Brunner:

The one writer is as fond of making his distinctions absolute as the other is suspicious of drawing any distinctions at all; and unfortunately neither way is the way of wisdom. Dr. Barth denies that we have any revelation, any knowledge of God, any impartation of divine grace, apart from the knowledge of Christ. Dr. Brunner contends that in some measure we have all three; and there I must agree with him rather than with his adversary. But he insists on drawing an absolute distinction between such general revelation, such formal knowledge, such 'sustaining' grace, and the special saving revelation and knowledge and grace which are through Christ alone; and that seems to me as untenable a position as it does to Dr. Barth.³⁰

In the end, Baillie finds error in Brunner's assertions both that the form of the image of God is unreached by total depravity and that the content of the image of God is so utterly lost to it. He positions himself against Barth and Brunner by rejecting the idea that sin extends so far as to obliterate either some or all of God's image in his human creatures.³¹

Baillie closes his first chapter with his conclusion on the matter of natural theology. The natural theology Barth was so concerned to reject was rooted in a time when people maintained that God, at creation, had endowed humans with the power of reason, and that the exercise of this reason unaided by some special intervention of God

³⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 30.

³¹ Against both Barth and Brunner's idea that either all or part of human nature can be devoid of any remnant of God's divine image, Baillie appeals to the Augustinian idea of the nature of evil as a privation of the good. The idea of absolute evil can only be an idea, since the actualization of utter, absolute evil would in fact be its self-destruction. In other words, it is impossible for us to think that we, in our fallen state, are as corrupt as we can be. Wickedness can only exist in the presence of the good, and the retention of this good testifies to the continuity of the image of God in us.

could yield some knowledge of him. But since the 19th century, Baillie says, both our conceptions of revelation and of nature have been changing. He writes, “Revelation consists neither in the dictation of writings nor in the communication of information, but in personal communion—the self-disclosure of a Personality. So also in the sphere of morals, what has been revealed to us is not a code of rules which we must obey but a Person to whom we are constrained to respond.”³² Another way of expressing this shift is that it is no longer assumed that knowledge of God comes to us through things that are static. For example, revelation does not occur just because someone has memorized the propositions of the Apostles’ Creed or has gazed upon the Andes Mountains. What is revelatory about the Apostles’ Creed and the Andes Mountains is God confronting us in, with and under them. Revelation is dynamic and personal. So while scripture and nature (especially human nature) are still viewed as essential forms of revelation, they are no longer taken to be static forms. Baillie especially focuses on this shift in reference to our idea of human nature. It had been the assumption that universal elements of human nature like the seed of religion or the conscience were innate, characteristics that were just part of the mechanism of humanity. But Baillie suggests, influenced by this more dynamic view, that such characteristics “are not, strictly speaking, innate either in the race or in the individual, but have resulted rather from the continuing living communion

³² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 37. Baillie contrasts this view with the view of revelation expressed in Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* and the Westminster Confession of Faith, I.1.8.

between God's Spirit and the spirit of man."³³ God reveals himself through things; things don't reveal God to us on their own.

The Barth-Brunner debate functioned as a catalyst for Baillie to articulate his theology of revelation. In the other four chapters of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie develops and defends the conclusions he has made in this first chapter. This constant encounter with God is a unique gift given only to humanity and is what maintains the divine image in humanity. Because this encounter is constant and the image of God is organically identified with it, it is impossible that the image of God in humanity could be utterly lost to sin. Sin, to be sure, has marred this image, and this marring Baillie identifies with the chronic attempt by humanity to act as though God is not in fact present and making his claim on us, an attempt that leads to restlessness and discontent. The constant encounter with God means that his self-revelation is just as constant and universal to all humanity, which in turn means that the point of contact for revelation is equally constant and universal and is identified with the image of God in humanity. The retained image of God means also that there is continuity between the pre- and post-salvific states.

Chapter Two: "Ways of Believing"

Baillie sees the view he has outlined in the first chapter as a defense of Romans 1: 18-21:

³³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 41.

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of human beings who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Thus Baillie's teaching that God is continuously confronting humanity, all people at all times and places, is motivated by his serious regard for the biblical text, which teaches that God reveals himself to humanity in such a way that all people are accountable for having knowledge of God. Baillie seeks to make sense of how someone can both know God and not know God, as the Romans 1 passage suggests. If God has revealed himself to all people, why are there so many who appear, whether by their actions or their confession, to deny his existence? What motivates people to deny the God they already have some knowledge of? Baillie's theology of God's continuous encounter with all humanity is pressed by these very questions. In his second chapter, Baillie explores and articulates a theology of faith that takes into consideration biblical teaching, the Reformed theological tradition within which he stands and his observation of human experience, including his own. In other words, he seeks an explanation for why people *don't* believe in God just as much as he wants an explanation for why people do.

If Baillie is right about revelation—that it occurs in the continuous event of God's personal presence to all humanity throughout history, then we must conclude that the existence of atheism, or any agnosticism for that matter, is due only to suppression and

self-deception. Each person is responsible for the knowledge of God she has received. While Baillie will later develop the nature of this universal knowledge, he first emphasizes our accountability in having received it. Thus Baillie denies that the atheists' claim of having no knowledge or experience of God provides evidence against his thesis concerning God's continuous encounter of all humanity.

To counter the atheists' objection, Baillie introduces an analogy he will return to again later in his book: the solipsist and the subjective idealist who deny the existence of external people or realities. Does their denial of these things, Baillie asks, mean that we, who do believe in the existence of external people and realities, are obliged to concede that the external world that is present to us in our experience is not also present to them in their experience?

Why then should we, who believe in God, think it necessary to allow that because some men, the so-called atheists, deny the existence of God, God cannot therefore be directly present to their consciousness as he is to ours? We should say that the solipsists and subjective idealists are as conscious of their neighbors and of the world about them as we are, but that they have been misled by false and confused philosophical argumentation into a meaningless (though doubtless quite sincere) intellectual denial of their existence. We should say that though they deny the reality of their neighbors and of the world about them with *the top of their minds*, they believe in them all the time in *the bottom of their hearts*. Why then should we be precluded from occupying the same ground with regard to the so-called atheists?³⁴

Thus Baillie introduces his distinction between conscious and self-conscious belief—conscious belief being that which is believed at the bottom of the heart and self-conscious belief being that which is believed at the top of the mind. “All belief must in some sense

³⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 51-52.

be conscious—unconscious beings cannot entertain beliefs—but not all belief need be conscious of itself. We may have an awareness of a certain reality without being aware of that awareness.”³⁵ By this scheme Baillie is able to explain how it can be the case that God is present to the atheist who denies him. The atheist denies God with the top of her mind but retains belief in God in the bottom of her heart, a split that is made possible by the psychologically confirmed capacity of humans to suppress their knowledge and feelings.

The fact of suppression of religious knowledge prompts Baillie to ask an important question that targets the nature of unbelief: “If all men have some knowledge of God and do in some sense believe in him in the bottom of their hearts, what is it that prompts some of them to deny Him ‘with the top of their minds’?”³⁶ In answer to this question, Baillie proposes a two-fold explanation. First, sometimes there is a moral root to our doubt, where we suppress the knowledge of God revealed to us as one who makes a claim on our life because we don’t want to have to respond to his claim. We don’t find God because we don’t really want to find him as he is. In other words, we can be earnestly looking for the God we want to find, but have suppressed our desire to the claim on our life by the God who is and so have a built-in road block to communion with him. Baillie personally identifies with the moral root of doubt and substantiates his point from his own experience. He writes, “Part of the reason why I could not find God was

³⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 51.

³⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 54.

that there is that in God which I did not wish to find. Part of the reason why I could not (or thought I could not) hear Him speak was that He was saying some things to me which I did not wish to hear. There was a side of the divine reality which was unwelcome to me, and some divine commandments the obligatoriness of which I was most loath to acknowledge.”³⁷ Baillie continues,

We seek God ‘carefully with tears.’ But because we are so loath to find Him as He is, sometimes we cannot find Him at all. We have conceived our own idea of God, but it is an idea in the formation of which our sloth and selfishness have played their part; and because there is no God corresponding to our idea, and because we are looking for none other, we fail to find the God who is really there....When we turn a deaf ear to His commandments, we cease also to hear His promises. We cannot be assured of His care if we reject His claim. Before religion can be known as a sweet communion, it must first be known as an answered summons.³⁸

Characteristic of the moral root of doubt, then, is the culpable rejection of God as he has made himself known.

Second, and alternatively, says Baillie, sometimes there is an honest intellectual root to our doubt, despite otherwise pure moral intentions.³⁹ In such a case it may be that our idea of God is formed in close association with other beliefs, and as the falsity of these associated beliefs comes to light, the context upholding the belief in God folds and we are left with the choice to find another intellectual context in which our belief in God

³⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 55.

³⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 56.

³⁹ Baillie finds this suggestion in Plato and admits that Paul does not make this kind of distinction between an honest intellectual road block to knowledge of God and a culpable moral one. Even so, Baillie feels compelled to make room for this alternative source of doubt.

makes sense, or we are led to abandon that belief. Another scenario involves people endorsing a philosophy or some belief system that is essentially hostile to belief in God. In this case, arguments are made not against the original context of belief in God, but against belief in God itself. Here Baillie notes that especially in the West in the 19th century, a number of naturalistic and humanistic philosophies were developed which “succeeded in persuading us of the truth and importance of some of the positions for which they have contended. But, not having set out from the reality of God, not only have they (as indeed we should have expected) failed to arrive at any conviction of His reality, but they have conducted us towards a conception of universal being from which God seems to be definitely excluded.”⁴⁰

Thus, unbelief can be characterized as suppression of the knowledge of God, whether from moral or honest intellectual motivations. Baillie acknowledges that Paul only recognized moral culpability, but he is careful to allow the honest intellectual denial for the reason that he does not want to assume that all people willfully reject God. Having established the nature of unbelief, Baillie examines the nature of belief, of faith, maintaining his categories of belief in the bottom of the heart and belief in the top of the mind.

Baillie asks an important question to test the implications of his premise that there might be belief in the bottom of the heart: “If men may believe in God without knowing that they believe in Him, is it then very important that they should know that they believe

⁴⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 60.

in him? If men may have knowledge of him in the bottom of their hearts while denying him ‘with the top of their minds’, does such denial then very seriously affect their spiritual life?”⁴¹ In other words, what is the value and role of intellectual knowledge of God on the spiritual life?

Baillie says that we are always and only judged by God on the basis of faith, but he is eager to broaden his view of faith to include a kind of rudimentary faith which is weak enough that it is not self-conscious but present enough to be identified as the fruit of God’s Spirit. Baillie takes seriously and wants to understand the theological implications of Jesus’ teaching that a bad tree cannot bear good fruit—the fruit indicates the true identity of the tree.

Just as the intellectual affirmation of God’s existence is not of itself sufficient to initiate the soul’s communion with God, so the corresponding denial is not of itself sufficient to destroy that communion. After all, the central thing in religion is not our hold on God but God’s hold on us; not our choosing him but his choosing us; not that we should know him but that we should be known of him. And it would seem that sometimes, even when we deny him both with our lips and with our minds, he still retains his gracious hold upon us, dwelling within us as it were incognito and continuing to do his work in and for our souls.⁴²

In contrast to the intellectual denial of God in a person who yet demonstrates fruit of the Spirit, Baillie outlines the practical denial of God in a person who confesses belief in God. The practical denial consists of living in a way that destroys or stunts any fruit of the Spirit. Such hypocrisy renders the confession of belief meaningless. Of the two

⁴¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 62.

⁴² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 62.

modes of denial, the practical denial warrants greater concern for Baillie as it causes more spiritual damage.

Baillie is eager to locate his ideas about faith in the context of his theological tradition. Baillie thinks the role of the covenant community is vital to the life of faith, because it is in this community that the knowledge of God can be nurtured; otherwise, one is left with a stunted spiritual life. “A man may be in some way putting his trust in God without realizing that he is doing so, and may be held of God without knowing that he is so held; yet cannot, while this condition lasts, lead any but a very impoverished spiritual life.”⁴³ Baillie identifies this teaching with early Protestant theology, which distinguished between *fides directa* (direct faith) and *fides reflexa* (reflective faith).⁴⁴ He observes that his tradition

more than amply allows for the authenticity of a faith that is not conscious of itself, but it seems to allow this only, or mainly, with regard to one element in faith, namely the element of personal trust and reliance. Three elements have been distinguished in faith by the theologians, *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia*—information, assent, and trust. The Westminster Confession boldly asserts that there may be a faith in which the *fiducia* is not *reflexa* or conscious of itself; but does it allow the possibility of a faith in which the element of assent is not conscious of itself? The answer is that it does allow this with regard to children and imbeciles, but not with regard to those who have attained intellectual maturity.⁴⁵

⁴³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 69.

⁴⁴ Using this distinction of *fides directa* and *fides reflexa*, Protestant theologians maintained that the *fides directa* could exist without the *fides reflexa*.

⁴⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 70.

Baillie criticizes the Westminster's inability to conceive of an assent that is not conscious of itself as a consequence of their being "too intellectualistic in their in their interpretation of Christian faith, too much in love with creedal orthodoxy, too ready to understand revelation as consisting in communicated information."⁴⁶ And to this Baillie warns that there is a pharisaical tendency to become too overconfident in one's orthodoxy, and that right living should be just as important as right belief. Essentially, Baillie wants to be able to expand and extend the distinction of direct and reflexive faith to the faith element of assent as well as to the faith element of trust.

Up to this point, Baillie has taken pains to delineate one kind of faith in God, namely, the belief in God that all people have, which the preacher assumes in his hearers, which is revelation's point of contact, and which is identified with the image of God. It is this faith that is retained when knowledge of God is suppressed through either moral or honest intellectual doubt. In closing his study of the ways that we believe in God, Baillie examines saving faith, which is a belief in God that not all people have, a belief that God summons people to through the preaching of the gospel. This is a belief that confesses itself in community. Baillie asks whether these two ways of believing are different kinds of belief altogether or simply different degrees of the same kind of belief. The issue that lies at the heart of this question is the relationship of nature and grace, and this is Baillie's chief concern in examining the nature of faith. "Since those who possess saving faith are said to be in a state of grace, and those who possess it not are said to be in a state of

⁴⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 72.

nature, this is the same as to ask, Is there a clean cut between the state of nature and the state of grace?"⁴⁷ Baillie again takes up his position on the continuity of nature and grace. The image of God and the "bottom of the heart" belief associated with the image lead to the conclusion of there being some kind of continuity. As Baillie states several times throughout *Our Knowledge of God*, the theologian and preacher alike are tasked to bring belief in God to a consciousness of itself.⁴⁸

Chapter Three: "Is Our Knowledge of God's Existence Inferential?"

One of Baillie's practical concerns in his construction of a theology of revelation is its implications for the preacher. If, as he has stated, the preacher's task is to bring belief in God to self-awareness, the question remains *how* this is to be done. In his third chapter, Baillie investigates whether preachers should get tactical training in apologetics; that is, he questions whether our knowledge of God is inferential. This particular question regarding the nature of belief arises on account of a strong Christian tradition employing theistic proofs as evidence for belief in God.⁴⁹ This tradition, Baillie says, is built upon the assumption that our knowledge of God is inferential; it is this assumption he questions in chapter three.

⁴⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 78.

⁴⁸ This sentiment Baillie adapts wholly and with great appreciation from Cook Wilson's 1897 paper, "Rational Grounds of Belief in God." The exact line Baillie quotes from Wilson is, "The true business of philosophy is to bring the belief to a consciousness of itself."

⁴⁹ Already in chapter one Baillie showed that, outside of the Christian tradition, an ancient Greek philosophical tradition of argument for the existence of God was in place. In this chapter he turns his focus to the function of theistic proofs in the Christian tradition.

Baillie traces the root of the assumption that our knowledge of God is inferential to the epistemology of medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas. According to Aquinas, Baillie observes, the five senses engaging the natural (physical) world are the only means we have of experiencing direct knowledge of any existence. This means that our knowledge of non-sensible realities is necessarily indirect and discursive, “reached by inference from the things we see and touch.”⁵⁰ Thus, according to our natural knowledge of God, that is, according to our reason, we can know that God is and what he is not.

In addition to the natural knowledge of God, Aquinas acknowledges that we also have a supernatural knowledge of God available to us through faith in the biblical revelation. Baillie observes in Aquinas that the knowledge available through faith can be uniquely characterized by “a direct persuasion of its truth in the heart of the believer, and here St. Thomas approaches very near to the Reformation doctrine of the *testimonium internum spiritus sancti*.”⁵¹ As for the relationship between these two modes of knowing (reason and faith), one can believe in God’s existence based on argument or on the testimony of scripture, although the basis of argument and reason is superior in terms of a ground for belief. Aquinas distinguishes the superiority of reason in terms of its ability to provide evidence versus its ability to provide certitude. Faith as a mode of knowing is superior with regard to certainty. The knowledge we have by faith is still knowledge of God through his effects, but it is a broader knowledge by which we are made aware of

⁵⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 109.

⁵¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 113.

more of his effects. Thus, Baillie observes, Aquinas' ascending order of knowing (with regard to evidence) is faith, then reason, and finally vision. Vision, as a mode of direct, immediate knowing, is something that will come to the saints who are separated from their sinful mortality, according to Aquinas. This mode is therefore impossible to receive while we are "on the way," this side of immortality.⁵² Baillie's whole survey of Aquinas intends to show that Aquinas utilizes the rational argument for the existence of God in his theology and endorses it as the superior mode of knowing God's existence. In addition, Aquinas introduces, with sweeping influence, the tradition that we do not and cannot have direct knowledge of God (vision), that it is something that only comes with immortality.

Baillie goes on to examine whether or not a tradition of arguments for God's existence is found in the biblical narrative. He describes the "atheism" depicted in the Old Testament as having more to do with the "sinful evasion" of God than with intellectual denial. He writes, "All through the Old Testament it is assumed that the knowledge of God rests, not on cosmological speculation, but on the revelation of Himself which He has vouchsafed—on the theophanies of Mount Sinai, on the laws He gave to Moses, on the words He spoke to the prophets."⁵³ The Old Testament doesn't

⁵² Regarding the few occasions in scripture that seem to depict people experiencing this direct vision in their mortal state, Aquinas answers that this is out of the ordinary and is miraculous.

⁵³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 122.

question whether God exists, but rather assumes that he does and then discusses how God is known and what he is known to be.⁵⁴

Baillie observes continuity between the Old and New Testaments with regard to their perspectives of unbelief. Jesus frequently spoke of the problem of unbelief, but, Baillie notes, “the unbelief which He so bitterly deplored was not an intellectual persuasion of God’s non-existence but rather something that was wont to consort with the most undoubting intellectual persuasion of His reality. Those whom He rebuked for their lack of faith were not men who denied God with the top of their minds, but men who, while apparently incapable of doubting Him with the top of their minds, lived as though He did not exist.”⁵⁵ The Epistles, like the Gospels, presume people’s intellectual recognition of God’s existence. Of the Romans 1:20 passage so often used as a proof-text for the teleological argument, Baillie writes, “What is said is not that the works of God’s hands prove His existence but that they reveal certain aspects of his nature.”⁵⁶ Baillie concludes from his brief survey of the biblical material that knowledge of God is neither elusive or inferential. “God is One who is directly known in His approach to the human soul. He is not an inference but a Presence.”⁵⁷ God is knowable and known, and this was assumed in the biblical text. Baillie concludes from this that we, too, ought to share the

⁵⁴ See Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 122-123.

⁵⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 123-124. For example, see Matthew 7:15-23, a passage Baillie references in *Our Knowledge of God*.

⁵⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 126.

⁵⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 126.

biblical assumptions that people have some kind of knowledge of God and that unbelief is exhibited in the way one's life is lived.

Baillie links the common understanding of the distinction between natural and revealed knowledge to the distinction between the Greek philosophical way of arguing for the existence of God versus the revelation found in scripture to be accepted by faith. He observes that these two modes of knowledge have been assumed and joined in both the Thomistic tradition and the Reformed tradition (on this point he cites Hodge). Baillie is uncomfortable with the marriage of these two modes of knowledge and insists that we must choose between the two. He has been arguing that our knowledge of God is not inferential; however, the assumption that our knowledge of God is inferential underlies the apologetic or proselytizing use of arguments for the existence of God. Therefore, in opposition to the traditions that make room for a way of knowing God inferentially, Baillie aligns himself with the contemporary trend of objections to arguments for the existence of God as providing a way to belief, a trend he identifies with Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Herrmann, Sabatier, Barth and Heim. Baillie clearly states his position on the traditional distinction between natural and revealed theology:

We are rejecting logical argument of any kind as the first chapter of our theology or as representing the process by which God comes to be known. We are holding that our knowledge of God rests rather on the revelation of His personal Presence as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are thus directly challenging St. Thomas's doctrine that we have no knowledge of God *per se* but only *per ea quae facta sunt*—through His effects in the world of nature, and are allying ourselves rather with the strain in medieval thought, which was opposed by St. Thomas and about which more will have to be said in the next chapter—the doctrine presented by St. Bonaventure's dictum that God is present to the soul itself. Of such a Presence it

must be true that to those who have never been confronted with it argument is useless, while to those who have it is superfluous.⁵⁸

It should be emphasized that the basis for Baillie's rejection of arguments for God's existence has to do with how they function in our epistemology. What he is rejecting specifically is their use as a means by which God may be known. Baillie points out that philosophical arguments for the existence of God function for believers more as "afterthoughts, subsequent to their belief in Him rather than the cause of it;" they are "not so much reasons as rationalizations."⁵⁹ Of the thinkers who have put forth such arguments (and here he takes as examples Plato, interestingly, along with Berkely, Paley, and Spinoza), he writes: "These great men were not ignorant of God before they lighted upon these proofs of Him, nor would they, if these proofs had failed them, have kept their minds quite open to his non-existence until they had lighted on other and better ones."⁶⁰ Baillie will take up the rightful place of theistic argument at the end of the final chapter. At this point in his argument, he intends mainly to show that such arguments never function as the *basis* for belief in God; they are never proofs that convince an otherwise agnostic disposition.

Baillie rejects not only *a posteriori* arguments for the existence of God (e.g., the cosmological, teleological and moral arguments), but also the *a priori* ontological argument classically put forth by Anselm. What Baillie values in Anselm is the

⁵⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 132.

⁵⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 132.

⁶⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 133.

distinctive fact that his formulation of the ontological argument is not put forth as a means of knowing God, but as a way of faith seeking to understand itself. Baillie ends up distancing himself from Anselm, however, in an effort to distance himself from the idea that there is *any* inference whatsoever involved in coming to faith, even inference drawn from prior knowledge of God. In his treatment of Aquinas, Baillie already denied that there is explicit inference from argument to faith. And Anselm, who admittedly puts forth a different kind of argument—not arguing from prior knowledge of the world to knowledge of God—still seems to be arguing that there is an implicit inference that takes place from prior knowledge. Anselm’s argument, Baillie claims, regards “the knowledge of God as itself *a priori*, finding in God Himself the premiss from which His existence must be deduced.”⁶¹ Baillie means to radically reject inference as a means of coming to knowledge of God; God’s existence, Baillie insists, is not deduced from any prior knowledge, whether gained by *a posteriori* or *a priori* reason. Baillie states it strongly: “It is not the result of an inference of any kind, whether explicit or implicit, whether laboriously excogitated or swiftly intuited, that the knowledge of God’s reality comes to us. It comes rather through our direct personal encounter with Him in the Person of Jesus Christ His Son our Lord.”⁶² Thus, arguments for the existence of God are insufficient—

⁶¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 143.

⁶² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 143.

not because there is a superior argument yet to be articulated, but for the reason that they are just the wrong sort of means by which to know God.⁶³

Chapter Four: "The Urgent Presence"

Having defended his position that our knowledge of God is not inferential and that therefore any approach to God by means of argumentation is misguided, Baillie further develops his thesis that the presence of God himself is the source of our knowledge of him. It is helpful to note that throughout the book Baillie has assumed that the starting point for the contemporary Christian epistemology of inference, rooted in the division between natural and special knowledge of God, can be found in Aquinas' theology. The tradition of the division of modes of knowledge of God has continued, but Baillie is attempting to show in these two middle chapters (three and four) that we are not bound to accept this tradition as infallible in light of the biblical testimony, alternative Christian perspectives, or modern philosophical insight.

In this chapter Baillie begins by breaking down the implications of his claim that our knowledge of God is not inferential. To infer something is to reach a conclusion about a reality by means of argument; that is, we "deduce this reality from some other

⁶³ So what function do arguments for the existence of God have, if any? For Baillie, their function is not to show us *why* we already believe in God, but only to convince us *that* we already believe in him; he develops this point in his fourth chapter. Essentially, Baillie agrees with Brunner that theistic arguments serve a limited function. According to Brunner, "The wrong way of making contact is, to put it briefly, to prove the existence of God. For this presupposes the Roman Catholic view of *theologia naturalis*, a self-sufficient rational system of natural knowledge of God. But though proof is excluded, this does not exclude the possibility of a discussion pointing towards such evidence of the existence of God as we have." (Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology*, 58.)

reality which is already known to us.”⁶⁴ But unless we want to commit the fallacy of infinite regress, we cannot claim that all our knowledge is built from argument; there must be some reality that is more direct, more immediate, something not inferred:

There must be some reality by which we are directly confronted—some reality which we know, not because we know something else first, but rather as itself the ground of our knowledge of other things. This does not mean that this prime reality either originally was or conceivably could be known to us in isolation from all other realities—for there is nothing that can be known by us out of relation to all other things; it means only that in being known together with other things it is known and recognized as their ground.⁶⁵

If we must have a prime reality, as Baillie puts it, then what is it? One answer is the natural world (e.g., Aquinas, who said that we know all things, directly or indirectly, through the senses). Modern philosophy, influenced by Descartes, however, moves away from viewing the material world as a reliable starting point for knowledge; Descartes finds ultimate certainty in himself. Baillie finds in the Cartesian revolution both a gain and a loss. First, there is gain in that God is seen as a more direct reality than the senses, but the loss is that Descartes puts the self as more directly known than God. Specifically what is lost in Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* is epistemological objectivity. Descartes’ mistake, Baillie observes, is “in supposing that the consciousness of the self preceded the consciousness of the not-self, or could remain after the consciousness of the not-self had

⁶⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 147.

⁶⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 148.

disappeared. The truth is that only in the knowledge of what is other than myself am I able to rise to the knowledge of my own existence at all.”⁶⁶

Baillie also finds support for his thesis in the thought of Kant. Baillie connects the fact of God’s omnipresence with God’s unwavering claim on us, confronting and challenging us at all times and places. There is no other reality that is nearer to us than God himself. Baillie observes that though we often try to avoid or deny the claim made upon us by God, “in the bottom of our hearts we have never been able to doubt its right. We have always known that there is no other sovereign right but this, and no other ‘totalitarian’ authority. We are surrounded by many glaring realities that occupy the foreground of our consciousness and make all sorts of claims on our attention and allegiance; but we have always known that the only one obligation is absolute and one imperative categorical.”⁶⁷ The significance of a Kantian influence on Baillie’s thought can be observed in his depiction of the inescapable sense of moral obligation laid upon us that leads us to knowledge of God. But again, for Baillie, the existence of God is not inferred; rather are we confronted with God’s existence in and with the moral sense of obligation.

The Kantian revolution, following the Cartesian one, makes a valuable recovery of an important truth related to Baillie’s position. Baillie observes,

⁶⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 153.

⁶⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 156.

Kant's great rediscovery was that of the Primacy of the Practical Reason, as he called it. It is not in the realm of sense, he believed, that we are all really in touch with absolute objective reality, and certainly not in the realm of the supersensible objects of scientific and metaphysical speculation, but only in the realm of the practical claim that is made upon our wills by the Good. Ultimate reality meets us, not in the form of an object that invites our speculation, but in the form of a demand that is made upon our obedience.... There is here, as it seems to me, most precious and deeply Christian insight.⁶⁸

This insight, however, was limited by what Baillie calls Kant's "bondage to the humanistic tradition." Baillie criticizes Kant because he does not take his insight far enough, that it only yielded in Kant a respect for the law and that the religion of Kant is too narrow for the reality of God.

As an example of the limitations of Kant's philosophy, Baillie notes that prayer, conversation with God, becomes an absurdity for Kant. Baillie's response on this point is illuminative of his view of God, in his personal presence, as the source of all our knowledge of him. Baillie writes,

It seems to me that it is precisely such a sense of *converse* with the Living God as Kant thus clearly saw to be excluded by his own system that lies at the root of all our spiritual life. That life finds its only beginning in the revelation to our finite minds of One whose transcendent perfection constitutes upon our lives a claim so sovereign that the least attempt to deny it awakens in us a sense of sin and shame; and thus is initiated the sequence, ever extending itself as the revelation of the divine nature becomes deeper and fuller, of confession, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the new life of fellowship. *There is no other spiritual sequence than this.*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 157.

⁶⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 159. For all Baillie says about the moral sense, he here points out that our notion of a mere "moral consciousness" is "an abstraction obtained by stripping this sequence of most of its characteristics and all its deepest features, until at last it has the appearance of a process that

Despite Kant's problems and limitations, says Baillie, we ought "to see in Kant's philosophy a most valuable recovery of the fundamental truth that Absolute Reality, instead of being reached speculatively by means of deduction from the data of sense, is revealed to us directly in the form of an Absolute Obligation. This means that what is revealed to us is not theoretical knowledge but practical guidance, and that what is asked of us in return is not intellectual assent but willing obedience."⁷⁰ Despite his earlier critique in chapter two of the kind of favoritism given to intellectual assent in faith, as expressed in the Westminster Confession, Baillie is careful at this point to maintain a link between intellectual assent and obedience. For, he writes, "It is only by knowledge that we can be guided... [since] we cannot obey what we do not understand. In the obligation that is revealed to us some element of knowledge must be implicitly contained."⁷¹

Baillie ultimately and fundamentally opposes Kant:

Where he erred was in his understanding of the relation of faith [our mode of knowledge of God] to the guidance. He taught, as we have seen, that the guidance is originally revealed to us in the form of a self-evidencing law—a mere obligation detached, as it were, from Him who lays the obligation upon us; and that the knowledge of him who thus obliges us is afterwards reached as an inference from the felt nature of the obligation. We, on the other hand, have argued that the Source of the obligation is Himself directly revealed to us and that it is in this vision of His glory and His holiness that our sense of obligation is born. It is *His* perfection that rebukes us; it is *His* love that constrains us. Hence it is no mere law that is revealed to us, but a living Person, and what we call the

goes on entirely within ourselves rather than a converse that takes place between ourselves and Another." (Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 159-160.)

⁷⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 161.

⁷¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 161.

moral law is but an abstraction which our limited and limiting minds make from the concreteness of the living Glory that is revealed.⁷²

Another way Baillie distances himself from Kant is in his effort to qualify the Kantian language of “demand.” When confronted with God, who is omnipresent and therefore always confronting us at every turn, we experience a demand made of us, but Baillie wants to describe this demand as a gift that we should accept. “We are asked, not to do anything in our own strength, but to let God do something for us. We are summoned, not to save ourselves, but to accept Christ’s salvation.”⁷³

Baillie states that “It is not enough, then, to acknowledge God as the most real of all realities. We must acknowledge Him also to be, of all realities, that by which we are most directly and intimately confronted.”⁷⁴ Baillie goes on to say that because of this real and immediate presence and therefore awareness of God, it is entirely inappropriate to indulge in theoretical discussions about whether or not God exists. He concludes,

The unreality and impropriety of the theistic arguments lie in the fact that they all start from a possible atheism. They start from a situation in which God is not yet. But there is no such situation, if it be true that in every moment I am called upon to obey His holy will—and that I have been called upon from the beginning. Atheism is not a prior situation which theism must presuppose, but a situation

⁷² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 162.

⁷³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 163. Interestingly, Baillie here points out that this understanding of the demand is, in a sense, only understood in retrospect. For he writes, “It is true that while we continue to give no heed to the summons the glory of the gift will remain hidden from us, and we shall be aware only of the demand....He who refuses God’s love can only know His wrath.” (Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 163.)

⁷⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 175.

which itself presupposes the theism of a world already challenged by the revelation of God in Christ.⁷⁵

This intimate confrontation with God is the reason why, for Baillie, Aquinas' religious epistemology (and all those subsequently built from it) must be mistaken, for it does not connect God's immediate presence with our knowledge of him. Thus Baillie claims that God is not only the ground of all being, an assumption shared by most Christians, but that he is also the ground of all knowing.⁷⁶

Baillie confesses he is uneasy with being at odds with the strong Thomistic theological tradition, but finds this uneasiness settled by the fact that Aquinas' religious epistemology is rooted in Aristotelian epistemology and a neo-Platonic view of God's hiddenness.⁷⁷ He suggests that if one does not share Aquinas' presuppositions, then there is no reason why one must feel beholden to his conclusion that our knowledge of God is inferential and analogical. There is an alternative strain of medieval neo-Platonism, however, in which Baillie's thought finds some resonance. This alternative strain, found in Bonaventure and Anselm, allows for some vision of God in this life apart from special miracle. Baillie claims this alternative tradition for his own position. About Bonaventure Baillie writes,

He holds not only that the ecstatic experience of God is the crown of the religious life on earth, but also that *some* direct knowledge of God is native to every human soul prior to the construction of all arguments to prove His existence. Such

⁷⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 176.

⁷⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 176.

⁷⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 167-169.

arguments, he explains, may indeed be constructed, but they are never the real point of departure. God is indeed knowable to us through the things which He has made (*per creaturas*), but He is still more clearly known to us through His presence (*per praesentium*) and in Himself (*quantum est de se*). He is ‘most truly present to the very soul of man and is in that fact already knowable’. He is indeed far enough removed from us in the order of being, yet He is directly present to us in the order of knowledge.⁷⁸

Baillie contrasts Bonaventure with Aquinas. Both, he acknowledges, affirm that there is a difference between the knowledge we have on earth and that which we have in heaven, but Bonaventure doesn’t insist that this difference involves two different kinds of knowledge or vision.

Most of Baillie’s focus in the first four chapters of *Our Knowledge of God* has been in making the case that we do, in fact, have direct, immediate knowledge of God. And though he has made a strong effort to show that God is not known through inference of the world known by the senses, Baillie does want to reconnect knowledge of God with knowledge of the world under a different model.

We do not know God through the world, but we know Him with the world; and in knowing Him with the world, we know Him as its ground. Nature is not an argument for God, but it is a sacrament of Him. Just as in the sacrament of Holy Communion the Real Presence of Christ is given (if the Lutheran phrase may here be used without prejudice) ‘in, with and under’ the bread and wine, so in a wider sense the whole corporeal world may become sacramental to us of the presence of the Triune God. The conception of a sacramental universe thus expresses the truth that lay behind St. Thomas’ natural theology, while being free from the errors in which the latter became involved.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 170.

⁷⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 178-179.

And here is the basis for Baillie's unique understanding of our knowledge of God: "The knowledge of God which we have on earth is of a kind that we cannot conceive to exist apart from some knowledge of things."⁸⁰ For Baillie, then, the knowledge we have of the material world is a means to knowledge of God, but this means is not by way of inference. He reconstructs how we should view the role of our knowledge of the world such that the world is the means by which God's actual presence comes to us and is made known to us. "God does not present Himself to us except in conjunction with the presence of our fellows and of the corporeal world."⁸¹ This reconfiguring of the mediating role of our knowledge of the world produces Baillie's unique contribution to the theology of revelation. In other words, Baillie is not denying that our knowledge of God is mediated by creation, but he wants to uniquely construct how we think about this mediation: "The immediacy of God's presence to our souls is a mediated immediacy."⁸²

An epistemology of the mediated immediacy of knowledge of God has several important implications for how we view and engage the world; it means that we take seriously our reflection on personal experience and on the community of which we are a part. Both are means of God's self-revelation. Baillie frequently looks back to his own upbringing to see where God was reaching him through his parents and his childhood experiences. In fact throughout the book, and particularly here where he is explaining

⁸⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 179.

⁸¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 178.

⁸² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 181.

what he means by a mediated and immediate knowledge of God, Baillie reflects on his life to illustrate his theology of revelation. He identifies this first knowledge with an awareness that he was not his own. He says this awareness came to him from the spiritual environment of his home. Baillie's parents lived in such a way as to communicate to him that there was an authority, a demand, placed on them as well as on their children. Their parenting pointed back to the authority they lived under. Speaking of his mother, Baillie recalls, "I knew that she had a right to ask of me what she did; which is the same as to say that I knew that what she asked of me was right and that my contrary desire was wrong. I knew, therefore, that my mother's will was not the ultimate source of the authority which she exercised over me."⁸³ He also says that he was aware that his family was part of a wider community also under this authority, an authority that he knew was somehow connected to a larger story: "I knew that that story was somehow the source of the authority with which I was confronted. I could not hear a Bible story read without being aware that in it I was somehow being confronted with a solemn presence that had in it both sweetness and rebuke. Nor do I remember a day when I did not already dimly know that this presence was God."⁸⁴

Baillie includes reflection of his experience because growing up in a Christian home and community and hearing the story of the bible were media through which God first revealed himself to him. Baillie recalls the awareness not simply that God had

⁸³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 182.

⁸⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 183.

revealed himself to the characters in scripture he heard about growing up, but that God revealed himself in the stories of these people's lives. He remembers, "As I read of his calling and commanding them [i.e., the biblical characters], I at the same time found Him calling and commanding me."⁸⁵ Baillie says, though, that it is not only the biblical characters that mediated God to Baillie, but other stories had this effect, too. Baillie feels comfortable broadening out the scope of the kinds of stories in which he finds the presence of God because of his view of history. Regardless of its chronology, all stories are either "BC" or "AD," depending on how they relate to the center of history: Christ himself. Thus Baillie finds the media for God's self-revelation in people, past and present, relationships and stories, whether fact or fiction. In short, all things under the sun can mediate the direct presence of God.

As we have seen at several points by now, though Baillie distances himself from one thread of Christian tradition, he is eager to show how his perspective harmonizes with other threads in the tradition and the contemporary theological context. For example, Baillie wants to see how his doctrine of mediated immediacy fits with Luther's teaching on mediation as taken up by Ritschlian and Barthian theologians, both also deeply influenced by Kant. Baillie finds in Luther a kinship with Kant in that they both warn against the attempt to know God through speculation. Luther states it differently, though, calling such speculation a work contrary to faith. It is faith in Christ that yields knowledge of God. Baillie writes:

⁸⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 184.

Christ is the Mediator not only of our reconciliation with God but also of our knowledge of Him; though indeed the two are one, since the only knowledge of God offered us is a reconciling, a saving, knowledge. A speculative knowledge of God as He is in His naked majesty would not and could not save, but would rather terrify and destroy. A saving knowledge, a knowledge that meets our situation as regards conscience and justification and reconciliation, must be a veiled knowledge. Such a veiled knowledge is given us in Christ.⁸⁶

Here Baillie makes an important connection between soteriology and epistemology, between knowledge of God as redeemer and knowledge of God at all. This connection is strengthened by his agreement with Augustine and Luther that it is human sinfulness that clouds our vision of God. In contrast, Baillie observes that Aquinas linked the very nature of humanity itself to the limitation it has of seeing God, “so that even an unfallen human knowledge of God must have been only inferential in character.”⁸⁷ Therefore Baillie makes the following observation about the most significant mediation of God’s presence to us—Christ himself:

When Luther affirms that Christ is the Mediator of the knowledge of God, he does not mean that we argue from Christ to God; he means that it is in Christ that we see God. We see Him veiled and humiliated, but it is nevertheless God that we see. The kind of directness for which we have contended in our knowledge of God is thus not at all interfered with, but is rather implemented, by the fact of Christ’s mediatorship. This is what I have tried to express in the conception of a mediated immediacy. In Christ we know God not by argument but by personal acquaintance. In Christ God comes to us directly.⁸⁸

Baillie’s position on the knowledge of God mediated through Christ is defensible from scripture. For example, John 14:5-14 records Jesus assuring his disciples that in him they

⁸⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 191.

⁸⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 195.

⁸⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 196.

have seen and know God the Father. Jesus said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”⁸⁹ Just as God became a human in order to illuminate himself to his wayward creation, so Baillie understands that God’s presence in, with and under all of creation, though fallen, is still mediated through what he has made.

Finally, Baillie defends the use of “vision” to express the directness of our knowledge of God. First, we are permitted the language of vision because it is language that scripture uses (here he cites John 10:30; 14:11; 12:45; 14: 7-9). Second, we need not feel beholden to Aquinas’ classification of two kinds of seeing that cannot intermingle; instead, we can affirm the route that Bonaventure suggests—that there is one kind of seeing that we now experience in a diminished way. Third, Baillie affirms what was at his time the new movement in eschatology affirming a realized eschaton. To be sure, we still await the time when the veil will be lifted and we will see God clearly, but even now we are able to enjoy the deposit of this promise that has been made.⁹⁰

Chapter Five: “The Other Who Is Most Near”

In the scholarship regarding the nature of our knowledge of the other, relatively recent in his day, Baillie finds some helpful parallels and insights to the study of the nature of our knowledge of the divine other. There are three trends in this contemporary epistemological movement that Baillie focuses on and in which we can see

⁸⁹ John 14:9, TNIV.

⁹⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 198.

commonalities with his own religious epistemology. First, the older view that our knowledge of others comes solely through inference is challenged by this new epistemology. No longer is it assumed, based on my knowledge of myself and my observation of external bodies that appear to function as I do, that I infer that these bodies are subjects like me. Second, the element of directness or immediacy that exists in our knowledge of others is logically, though not chronologically, *a priori* in nature. We do not gain knowledge of otherness prior to an encounter with an other; rather, it is *in* the encounter with the other that we possess this concept. That is, the knowledge comes *with* the experience. Third, the immediacy of our apprehension of others shows that there is an innate social dimension in our consciousness. In other words, we have the requisite epistemic apparatus to make sense of the encounter we have with others.

Baillie takes these trends in epistemology and utilizes them in his understanding of our knowledge of God.⁹¹ While there are many comparisons to be made in our knowledge of human others and the divine other, a significant point of difference that necessarily qualifies our encounter with God versus our encounter with human others is the fact that God is omnipresent. For Baillie, there are several epistemological consequences to God's omnipresence. First, just as God's presence continually confronts us, so his claim on us continually confronts us. Baillie puts it this way, "Again, just

⁹¹ Baillie is particularly influenced by the work of Martin Buber in *I and Thou*. He makes considerable use of Buber's insight in the section "The Divine Other;" however, he does not adopt his ideas uncritically. Baillie does not share Buber's aversion to the language of "experiencing God" or "religious experience." We need not associate our experience of something or someone with the idea of using it or him to our own ends. So Baillie freely uses the language of experience while affirming that "all the saints and theologians agree that we must not *uti deo* but only *frui deo*." (Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 222.)

because God is the omnipresent Knower, His knowledge of us precedes all our knowledge of Him, and His address to us precedes and conditions our address to Him, which is therefore always in the nature of a response.”⁹² A second implication of God’s omnipresence is that all things may be used by God to mediate his presence to us; anything can be revelatory. Third, Baillie draws out from God’s omnipresence that it is never wholly appropriate to speak about God in the third person as if he were not here with us.⁹³ A final implication of God’s omnipresence that Baillie urges us to take into consideration is that atheism is an “artificial academic hypothesis” which has no place when God is present to all people, and if it were to be the case that God is not at all present to some, then arguments for God wouldn’t work anyway, as they would have no grounding or basis in experience.

Having established that the omnipresence of God has significant epistemological implications, Baillie examines the nature of the otherness of God. He observes that Barth, Brunner and others have taken the route of Rudolf Otto—that God is wholly other. Baillie identifies two ways by which we can express the otherness of something or someone: something can be wholly other on the basis of numeric distinction or qualitative resemblance.⁹⁴ Baillie opposes contemporary theologians who would insist that God is wholly other than us in a qualitative way, for this would require that sin

⁹² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 222.

⁹³ This existentialism lies at the heart of dialectical theology, which reflects the tension of having to speak about God though he is present to us always.

⁹⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 228.

would have entirely annihilated the image of God in humanity. As we saw earlier in the book, Baillie opposes such a radical notion of total depravity. Baillie agrees that God is wholly other in that he is wholly distinct from humanity. “Though not wholly unlike me, He may yet be wholly distinct from me, wholly over against me, confronting me wholly from without myself.”⁹⁵ The image of God retained in humanity even after the fall means that there is a likeness retained between humanity and God, but this shared likeness does not mean there is also shared identity. Baillie cannot be accused of pantheism.

Baillie appreciates the effort of contemporary theologians who teach the absolute otherness of God to correct the “excesses of nineteenth-century immanentism” by returning to a proper understanding of God’s transcendence: “The question is whether the situation can be righted only by taking refuge in the opposite extreme and denying that there is any truth whatever in the thought of divine immanence. Is the relation between God and the soul of man to be understood as an external relation merely? Is God in no sense *in* the soul, but only presents Himself *to* the soul; just as you, my fellow man, are not in me but only present yourself to me?”⁹⁶ Again, Baillie appeals to humans as image bearers in order to defend his thesis that God is not simply present to us externally, as another person is. We were created from the stuff of the earth, which was created from nothing—this testifies to our separateness, distinctness and otherness from God. But God infused his human creatures with a soul and created us to bear his image. Baillie notes

⁹⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 229.

⁹⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 230.

that this has typically been understood by Aquinas and others to mean that we imitate God in his nature but do not participate in his nature at all.⁹⁷ Baillie is concerned that this perhaps does not take into account the omnipresence of God. He writes, “The reason why it is difficult to regard the relation of man to God as merely a relationship between two beings who stand over against each other (and are in that sense wholly other) is that *God appears in some sort to be present on both sides of the relationship*. When I respond to God’s call, the call is God’s and the response is mine; and yet the response is God’s, too; for not only does He call me in His grace, but also by His grace brings the response to birth within my soul. His Holy Spirit is the real author and originator, not only of His address to me, but of my address to Him.”⁹⁸ Baillie illustrates his point with further appeal to his experience and prayer life.

Nearly all the blessings of which I have been the unworthy recipient—have come to me through the free will of my fellow men, through my mother’s self-sacrifice for my sake, through the kindness and generosity of a host of men and women,

⁹⁷ Baillie sees a link here between Aquinas’ unwillingness to allow for some divinity of the soul, or participation in God’s nature with the fact that Aquinas believes that we can have no vision of God this side of glory. Baillie identifies Calvin as sharing the same perspective. The human soul resembles and imitates the divine nature, but does not share in it at all. It would appear Baillie understands Aquinas to make a distinction between the divine nature and the divine being. It is impossible to tell from the text of *Our Knowledge of God* whether or not Baillie is aware Aquinas clearly states that humanity’s being participates in divine being (see Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.15.5), although it is not unreasonable to assume Baillie read the whole of *Summa Contra Gentiles*. In this section of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie references a passage from Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.85 (perhaps from paragraph 15), which states, “But the likeness in question is no proof that man is part of the divine substance, for man’s understanding suffers from many defects – which cannot be said of God’s. This likeness, then, is rather indicative of a certain imperfect image than of any consubstantiality.” Baillie says Aquinas understands the *imago dei* to mean that humanity imitates God’s nature, but does not in any sense participate in God’s nature.

⁹⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 234.

some teachers, some lifelong friends, some casual acquaintances and ‘ships that pass in the night’. I thank them all, but I thank God too. For the same deed I thank them both; and not for different parts or shares of it, as say the Synergists and Molinists with their talk of *concursum simultaneum*; but I thank God for the whole of it, and under God I thank them for the whole of it too. Moreover, what is true of grace is true of inspiration. In the Bible it is God who speaks to us, yet every word we read in it was also spoken—and thought and written—by man.⁹⁹

In other words, God works in, with and under history, including its people and relationships, to extend his grace to his people.

Baillie closes *Our Knowledge of God* by returning to the question of the proper place of argument in religious epistemology. He has labored to show that we cannot prove to others or ourselves that God exists, but we “may do something to persuade both ourselves and others *that we already believe in Him*.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, Baillie states that “it is to this end that the whole argument of this book has been directed, and I must try now to bring the matter to a head.”¹⁰¹ What follows is Baillie’s proposal, built on the premises he has defended throughout the book, that the function of argument is to bring to self-awareness the knowledge of God one already has on account of the mediated presence of God.

⁹⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 235.

¹⁰⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 240.

¹⁰¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 240.

According to Baillie, there is much to be commended in recent theology that suggests the route to knowledge of God is found in our sense of the holy.¹⁰² Baillie affirms that we do indeed share a universal experience of the holy, but he critiques any development of this idea that would divorce a true sense of the holy from a sense of moral obligation. Baillie claims that we all recognize something as holy, which we revere and that a true sense of holiness is necessarily connected to a sense of duty or expectation: “That which is truly holy to us all, and which calls forth reverence in us, is always some loyalty, some standard, some principle, some ideal....Where we meet the holy thing is always in some holy demand that is made upon our lives. What is holy to us somehow resides in what we know we ought to be. Something is being asked of us, expected of us, and it is at the source of that expectation that holiness lies.”¹⁰³

At this point of intersection between holiness and morality, Baillie suggests what he considers to be the only place for argument against atheistic positions. Such an argument is designed to appeal to universal experience and common sense. The point of the argument is to demonstrate that any recognition of an unconditional or absolute obligation carries with it the necessary recognition that a holy God lies at the source of the obligation.¹⁰⁴ An argument toward this end would require two propositions: 1) “No obligation can be absolute which does not derive from the Absolute,” and 2) “Since

¹⁰² From several theologians who have developed their epistemology around the idea of the holy, Baillie takes Rudolf Otto to be representative and it is on him that he focuses his critique.

¹⁰³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 243.

¹⁰⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 244.

morality is essentially a function of personality, we can feel no moral obligation to an Absolute who is not apprehended by us as a personal being.”¹⁰⁵

Baillie further analyzes this sense of the holy and the reverence we feel in response to it to signify our awareness that the claim being made on us is for our own good. He writes, “For I believe that even those who think they do not believe in God do nevertheless in some degree possess the knowledge, not only that something is being demanded of them, and that this demand is fundamentally a demand that they should accept something that is being offered them, but also that here is something for which it behoves them to be *thankful*.”¹⁰⁶ Baillie goes on, “The sentiment of gratitude implicitly contains in itself the recognition of some being who has benefited us: and equally clear that this being is implicitly recognized to be personal in nature.”¹⁰⁷ This feeling of the rightness of giving thanks is a strong indicator for Baillie that a person truly believes in God in the bottom of her heart though such belief may be denied or uncertain with the top of her mind. Thus we see clearly that when Baillie speaks about a belief at the bottom of one’s heart, he means minimally the belief that there is a being who is both personal and absolute who has made a claim on us for our own good and to whom we sense the obligation to submit.

¹⁰⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 244.

¹⁰⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 248.

¹⁰⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 249.

All moral knowledge, then, is “a fruit of the vision of God,” according to Baillie.¹⁰⁸ Moral ideals reach us in our experience of the holy, and these ideals (for example, justice, goodness, love) come to us not as observations of the actual but as confrontation with the ideal. This means, contra Aquinas, that we do not reach such ideals *via eminentiae*. We have these notions of the good and the just not because we elevate and magnify something from our own experience, but because we have encountered God.

Baillie writes, “All these conceptions we do certainly possess, yet it is clear that we do not find them in ourselves or anywhere in the created world. Rather do we and all creation stand condemned by being brought into the light of them. It must be then that we have some direct knowledge of Another who is Uncreated and in whom these qualities inhere. Such qualities are known, not *a posteriori* but *a priori*; which is to say, being interpreted, that they are first seen not on earth but in heaven.”¹⁰⁹ Baillie is critical of the idea that one can mount up our finitude and brokenness and reach the conception of infinite perfection. “To say that we gain the conception of perfect being by ‘comparing less perfect beings with more perfect’ is to forget that such a comparison cannot itself be instated save by the aid of an already apprehended standard of perfection. How can we say that this is more perfect than that unless we already know what

¹⁰⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 250.

¹⁰⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 251.

perfection is? Surely there can be no reason for the adoption of so difficult a view apart from the prior refusal to contemplate the possibility of direct knowledge of God.”¹¹⁰

In the beginning of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie set out to make sense of the Apostle Paul’s claim that all people have some basic knowledge of God and are therefore accountable for their response to him. Baillie saw that it was problematic to uphold this biblical claim in the light of the theology of revelation expressed in the Barth-Brunner debate. Using the Barth-Brunner debate as a starting point to address an influential trend in contemporary theology of revelation, Baillie argued that the preacher can and must assume a point of contact in any person to which the gospel message might take hold. He built his case employing a moderate theology of depravity and defending the continuity of the image of God in humanity even after the fall. He claimed that the retained divine image means that there is a kind of knowledge or belief that all people have regarding God, a belief visible in the fruit of people’s lives even when they deny such belief. The retention of the image and its corresponding knowledge of God, Baillie argued, is made possible by the fact that God stands in constant relation to each person by way of his immediate, intimate presence mediated to us in the tapestry of our experience. Thus the preacher’s gospel appeal ought not to take the form of argument by inference, as we see in classical arguments for the existence of God, but by an appeal to one’s own experience which, when reflected upon, ought to show that one already lives as though God exists.

¹¹⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 253.

Assessment of Our Knowledge of God

The previous summary is intended to depict not only what Baillie argued in *Our Knowledge of God*, but also how he argued it. The assessment of *Our Knowledge of God* will include observations about some of the distinguishing features of his method, highlight and comment on some of the unique ideas included in his argument, and distill Baillie's own view on the four theological issues identified as central to the Barth-Brunner debate.

At this point, one of Baillie's main goals in writing the book may be recalled, that is, "to distinguish the true insight within each alternative from that blindness in it which renders it insensitive to the insight of the other."¹¹¹ As stated earlier, this goal rightly depicts not only Baillie's approach to the Barth-Brunner debate, but also his engagement with the whole history of theology, philosophy and religion. Thus the reward of a careful summary of Baillie is the clarity to see how he both aligns himself with and departs from various threads within the Christian tradition and which philosophical insights he utilizes in support of his argument. It is interesting to observe what sources Baillie appeals to in order to substantiate or give weight to his position.

For example, in the fourth chapter in which he introduces the idea of God's mediated immediacy, Baillie finds common ground in both Descartes and Kant that he claims in defense of his view—that is, the directness of the knowability of God. Baillie repeatedly takes up his critique of Aquinas as the father of inferential religious

¹¹¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, v.

epistemology. Baillie says something interesting in the second chapter in his discussion of nature and grace that can illuminate for us why he feels comfortable mining modern philosophy to defend his position against a Christian tradition begun in a medieval era. He claims “that everywhere there is some truth; that this truth comes originally from God; and that this truth, great or little, is usually mediated to the soul, neither by a spiritual miracle nor by the sheer efforts of individuals, but by traditions, schools, and churches.”¹¹² In other words, truth can be found anywhere among anyone. This is why Baillie appeals to sources from a variety of disciplines and times throughout his book. Baillie is aware, however, that taking on an established tradition is not inconsequential. He takes this step with care. Chapter four highlights a tension Baillie maintains in his approach to orthodoxy. On the one hand he takes the Christian tradition seriously and confesses he is uneasy with being at odds with orthodoxy. But, on the other hand, he finds this uneasiness eased when he is able to understand the reasoning or context behind a position. He writes, “Now I am not myself so anti-Roman in sentiment that it can ever be an entirely easy thing for me to find myself at variance with an important tenet of medieval orthodoxy. Yet it sometimes happens that, if only I am able to discover what were the influences leading to the adoption of such a tenet, the measure of its authority

¹¹² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 92.

seems to be very palpably lessened.”¹¹³ In other words, ideas have pedigrees—and the lineage of some ideas lessens their status.

Baillie even turns to his own experience to help illuminate or illustrate his theology. Multiple times throughout the book, Baillie uses his experience to corroborate a point he is making. We can assume he does this in part because he believes truth can be found anywhere, and this would include oneself. We can also discern in this practice an important value at work, namely, that our theology must make sense in light of our experience. At several points throughout the book, as our summary shows, Baillie cites his own story of growing up, encountering God and coming to faith to illustrate a point he has made.

Baillie’s employment of different sources might cause some speculation about how authoritative a role Scripture plays in his theology and argument. One might suggest that only a hopeless relativism can be expected for our religious epistemology when such an appeal to broad expressions of truth and personal experience are elevated and used. But scripture plays a significant guiding role in the development of his theology and argument. For example, Baillie describes his entire first chapter as being “concerned to defend the view...that all men ‘are without excuse; because, though knowing God, they have not glorified him as God nor given him thanks.’”¹¹⁴ Baillie seeks to defend this idea that one is culpable for rejecting the known God against the theology of Barth. In other

¹¹³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 167.

¹¹⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 47.

words, he is holding up other theology to the light of scripture. Another example is found in chapter three in which he briefly surveys the epistemological assumptions in the Old and New Testaments in contrast to Aquinas'. Baillie concludes, as already noted, "For the New Testament as for the Old, God is One who is directly known in His approach to the human soul."¹¹⁵ These examples do not prove that Baillie held Scripture as an authority above all others, but they minimally show that he looked to scripture as a valued authority.

Several important ideas developed in *Our Knowledge of God* will be useful to highlight in this brief assessment of Baillie's work. These ideas will be examined, not in the order that they are introduced in the book, but in an order showing the construction of Baillie's idea of the revelatory significance of the mediated immediacy of God's presence.

The omnipresence of God is a fact essential to Baillie's theology of revelation and he insightfully assumes that there must be an epistemological consequence to God's presence. If God is everywhere, then one's opportunity to encounter him is just as boundless as he is. Baillie's idea of the *continuous* confrontation of God is grounded in God's omnipresence. If it is God's nature to be present in all places, then it follows that God is present always in all places. His presence is not, however, a passive presence. God's presence is not like a sleeping cat in the corner of a room, whose presence one may or may not take notice of. God's presence demands notice because it is conveyed to us in

¹¹⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 126.

the manner of an expectation placed upon us. It is a presence waiting for a response, a conversation not yet finished.

Another idea grounded in the omnipresence of God is Baillie's thesis that we have direct knowledge of God. God's self-revelation is a personal encounter and is not instead a propositional conclusion we draw based on logical inference. This directness is not only rooted in God's nature, but in human nature as well. Baillie identifies human nature with the image of God it bears, and he understands this image to be shaped by the continuous presence of God. In other words, we are made to know God and have the capacity to perceive him—a capacity sufficient enough to both perceive him and then reject him. Baillie's insistence on immediacy in our knowledge of God should not be misunderstood as rejection of mediation. Baillie affirms that our knowledge of God is a mediated knowledge, but he wants to qualify the nature of this mediation. Our knowledge is not mediated by inference, that is, the mediation with which we have to do here is not rooted in our capacities for logical inference, for rightly perceiving and piecing together the clues to God in creation. On the contrary, the mediation of God's immediate presence is rooted in God's ability to utilize anything in any place and at any moment for revelatory impact.

Another important implication of God's omnipresence and the mediated immediacy of his self-revelation is that God is not only present to us but is in fact present in us. God not only works in, with and under things outside of ourselves to reveal himself, but he works in, with and under us, too. God is on both sides of the revelation

equation, that is, he is on both the transmission and reception sides. The insight of Baillie's doctrine of the mediated immediacy of God's self-revelation and its relevance for today's theology will be the focus of chapter five of this dissertation, in which Baillie's theology of revelation will be assessed and utilized.

Two interesting points which have come to characterize Baillie's theology developed out of his defense of the mediated immediacy of God's self-revelation. First, as a result of articulating the continuous confrontation with God to all people at all times, Baillie had to develop a theology of faith that would make sense of how it is that people could both have a knowledge of God they are held accountable for and suppress such knowledge to the degree that they experience ignorance of God. To this problem Baillie developed the memorable and somewhat complicated distinction of believing God at the top of one's head and believing him at the bottom of one's heart.¹¹⁶ Belief at the bottom of one's heart refers to the knowledge of God that all people have. It is the most primitive knowledge of God that consists mainly of the belief that God is, that he is personal and that he has a rightful claim to one's life. This is the knowledge people are universally held accountable to and it is this divine claim that people reject. This knowledge characterizes us as human beings and part of being an image bearer of God. Baillie's distinction between belief at the bottom of the heart and top of the head is important to him because he asserts that many people live in a way that affirms the belief

¹¹⁶ While chapter two in *Our Knowledge of God* focuses on developing this distinction, I think it takes the whole of the book to discern more precisely what Baillie means when he refers to believing God at the bottom of one's heart.

in their hearts but who then articulate their beliefs in ways that deny God. In many cases this denial is moral and therefore a culpable denial of God, although Baillie wants to leave room for the “honest intellectual doubt” that may exist without a rebellious motive. Thus Baillie’s theology of faith takes seriously the fruit born, that is, the life lived in addition to the commitments made. For Baillie, nothing is more offensive than the hypocrisy of the person who denies God in the bottom of her heart while committing to him with the top of her head.

A second point of Baillie’s theology, which was developed in his defense of the mediated immediacy of God’s self-revelation, is his strong argument against the tradition of inferential knowledge of God. In the end, the character of the knowledge of God Baillie argues for has the quality of innate knowledge in that it is something that is part of the experience of being human, but he distances himself from this description. He finds in both inferential and innate knowledge theories a static rather than dynamic view of God’s self-revelation. Baillie spends much of his time showing the deficiencies of the inferential view because he clearly felt this was the prevailing view and the context into which he was positing his view.

Finally, we will briefly summarize Baillie’s own view on the four theological issues identified as central to the Barth-Brunner debate. The position one takes on these four issues significantly impacts the direction one’s theology of revelation takes. Baillie’s view on some of these topics will continue in the next chapter as we examine his theology of revelation as expressed in *Our Knowledge of God* in light of other published

works and various unpublished divinity lectures. On the question of the extent of sin, Baillie takes a less radical view than Barth and Brunner. He describes sin as it targets the image of God, specifically the human conscience, which he describes as being deformed by sin.¹¹⁷ Sin does not obliterate the image of God in humanity but disfigures it. With the image of God still intact, though damaged, Baillie says that what God does with it in salvation is not creation *ex nihilo* but a re-creation, which suggests that there is continuity between the old and new natures. If there is continuity between the pre- and post-salvation states of people, then there exists a revelatory point of contact in the fallen state. That is, there is some residue of the image of God remaining in people to which the gospel makes its appeal. And as Baillie identifies the image of God with the human capacities of conscience, reason and religion, it is in these three broken areas of sinful humanity that the gospel message ought to be directed to make the most of the continuity that exists. In his rejection of absolute depravity, Baillie likewise rejects the absolute severance between nature and grace. This means that when the gospel is embraced by an unbeliever the knowledge that was once buried at the bottom of the heart, perhaps, under different belief at the top of the mind surfaces and is embraced—it “comes home,” as Baillie puts it.

¹¹⁷ See Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 11.

Conclusion

This chapter has contextualized and examined John Baillie's theology of revelation in *Our Knowledge of God*. Special note has been made of his method of mediation between various positions and sources, and several important building blocks in his theology of revelation have been identified along with his position on some central doctrines involved in the Barth-Brunner debate. The next chapter will trace the trajectory of Baillie's thought through some key published manuscripts spanning over thirty years and examine how his theology of revelation plays a formative role in some other key points of theology, as articulated in his unpublished divinity lectures.

CHAPTER THREE

The Early Years of the Journey: A Study of Baillie's Theology of Revelation Leading up to the Publication of *Our Knowledge of God*

This chapter will identify the more outstanding points of continuity and discontinuity which will further illuminate Baillie's theology of revelation. Examination of Baillie's thought expressed in the unpublished course lectures, published articles and manuscripts predating the publication of *Our Knowledge of God* will be mined and analyzed in order to frame a context for his mature thought on revelation. This contextualization provides a long view of the continuity and discontinuity in Baillie's own thinking about the topics he addresses in *Our Knowledge of God*. There are at least four major points in Baillie's thought which can be identified and traced through his early writing and teaching prior to the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*: 1) the revelatory presence of God, 2) the universal human moral experience as the context for faith, 3) the defensible logic of faith, and 4) the revelation of God in, with, and under human experience of the world and others.

A careful reading of his written corpus reveals that the germ of many ideas (and sometimes even specific phrasing) expressed in *Our Knowledge of God* is already found in his thought a decade, sometimes two, prior. A wide reading of Baillie's work also reveals a common practice of his to engage his own past writing by taking note of where he has elsewhere discussed a particular idea and admitting when he has departed from his previous expression of it. Both these elements of continuity and discontinuity strongly

suggest that Baillie wrote with his own corpus in mind and that he critically reflected on it. In some cases, such a striking similarity of thought, sequence or expression can be found between different documents that it can only be concluded that he utilized the earlier writing in the drafting of the later. The cases where this similarity is found confirm that there are some ideas Baillie unwaveringly maintained throughout his career, both in substance and expression. The most helpful piece about the contextualization of Baillie's thought comes from seeing the building blocks of his theology constructed and configured in a variety of ways intended for a variety of audiences and serving a variety of theses.

Early Journal Articles, 1912 - 1926

Baillie's publishing career began before he took his first teaching post at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York in 1919. In this section the six articles Baillie published prior to the publication of *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* are briefly examined for their contribution to his general theology of revelation. Specific attention is paid to how each article addresses some of the themes found in *Our Knowledge of God*.

Decades before he would respond to the Barth-Brunner debate and specifically to Barth's denial of a point of contact for revelation, Baillie published a brief article responding to the psychology of the subliminal consciousness made popular in the theology of religious experience by William James and others. In his first article, "The Subliminal Consciousness as an Aid to the Interpretation of Religious Experience"

(1912), Baillie rejects the idea that there is any gain in relegating God's presence and revelatory work to the subliminal aspect of human experience. In his response we observe several things that deepen our understanding of what Baillie presented in *Our Knowledge of God*. First, it is notable that at this early date Baillie is critical of the notion of a *single* point of contact, which suggests both a narrow human function or capacity along with a narrow time frame by which God reveals himself to a person; instead, he advocates for the idea of a "continuous, omnipresent indwelling" of God in the whole person.¹

The *whole* soul is God's house, and if He dwells in any part of it rather than another, it is not in its underground crypts and cellars, but in its loftiest and clearest chamber. It is never anything but confusion that makes us seek for God in the occult and the unfamiliar and the exceptional, instead of in the open spaces of our everyday ethical and spiritual life. And there is nothing in the nature of the sense of the presence of God, which should tempt us to locate its springs in a subliminal region. It may take a subtle psychology to analyze it completely, but it should be obvious that it [i.e., the sense of the presence of God] is from beginning to end ethical; that it is with us most in our clearest moments; and that it takes its rise, not in dim, instinctive, semi-cerebral psychoses, but in the fullest light of human intelligence.²

Baillie's position in this article shows that, from a very early point in his career, he 1) connected the continuous presence of God with the divine self-revelation, 2) understood this presence not as something cryptic but as exposed and commonplace such that revelation is woven into the fabric of the everyday, and 3) associated the moral realm of

¹ John Baillie, "The Subliminal Consciousness as an Aid to the Interpretation of Religious Experience," *Expository Times* 24 (1912): 355.

² Baillie, "The Subliminal Consciousness," 355.

life, in particular, with divine revelation. It will be shown that these three points, articulated already in 1912, are found to be affirmed, although continually nuanced, as Baillie's thought progresses.

In a 1915 article, "Belief as an Element in Religion," Baillie addresses a widely held conception concerning the nature of religion.³ This article was published during the time when Baillie had joined the YMCA and was stationed with the British armies in France. Though the post-war studies of the common person's religion had not yet been published (these started to be published around 1918), the article does reflect his exposure to and observation of the kind of attitude toward Christianity and confessional religion in general that was later documented.⁴ Baillie summarizes the common person's view of religion:

For the ordinary man religion is not so much a matter of belief as a matter of practice. A man's religion, and therefore his worth in God's eyes, depend, not on what things he believes, still less on what things he says he believes or thinks he believes, but entirely on what things he does and on the spirit in which he does them. To give full assent to all the articles of a creed is not religion; but to go through life, as Jesus went through life, in a spirit of unselfishness and brotherly kindness, in devotion to the highest ends, in willingness to learn the discipline of

³ One of the subjects of study Baillie takes up in his articles, manuscripts and lectures is the study of religion. Here he engages the study of religion as distinct from the study of Christianity and even of other religions. As Baillie looks to articulate the root of faith in human experience, it is the study of religion that he undertakes. Religion is not a method of study or a system of belief; religion is a phenomenon which may be studied and about which beliefs may be formulated.

⁴ Such documentation can be found in Norman Maclean and J.R.P. Sclater, *God and the Soldier* (George Doran Company: New York, 1918), The Committee on the War and Its Religious Outlook, *Religion among American Men* (Association Press: New York, 1920), and D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion* (Association Press: New York, 1920).

sorrow, in repentance and perseverance, in the love of simple and noble things—that is pure religion and the only true essence of Christian piety.⁵

This position developed, Baillie asserts, in reaction to a situation in which creedal affirmation was viewed as coterminous with true religion. Baillie concedes that the role of belief, and orthodoxy in particular, has been mismanaged in the past, but he is not willing to demote its function in religion altogether. Particular belief is what makes religion distinct from morality. There are some beliefs that are essential to true religion; for example, “there is no absurdity in saying that a belief in the moral government of the world is a necessary condition of man’s highest spiritual welfare.”⁶ In fact, since people were interested in emulating the life of Jesus, Baillie points out that it was Jesus who taught a particular view of God and the world and that he actually supported this view by means of argument. Baillie gives a couple of examples of Jesus making his case using an argument from analogy in, for example, the parable of the prodigal son: “The argument rests upon the idea that our surest clue to the nature of God is to be found in the highest region of our own experience. And the object of the story is to bring home to the minds of Jesus’ hearers that there is nothing nobler in human life than a father’s unconditional forgiveness and undying love; and so to press home the conclusion that it is in terms of such love and such forgiveness that we must think of God.”⁷ Notice again the

⁵ John Baillie, “Belief as an Element in Religion,” *The Expositor* 9 (1915): 75.

⁶ Baillie, “Belief as an Element in Religion,” 85.

⁷ Baillie, “Belief as an Element in Religion,” 91.

assumption of God's self-revealing presence being made known through the moral experience or observation of a human father's unconditional love.

Baillie describes the arena of God's self-revelation in terms of "the loftiest and clearest chamber"⁸ of the human soul and "the highest region of our experience."⁹ These expressions can be understood to refer to the everyday experiences of human life and relationship on which we are able to reflect. In so doing, he insists belief plays a necessary role in religion. Here, though, belief is not understood as mere intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions. To be sure, belief has content, but it is seen to arise out of meaningful, memorable experience and not simply dogmatic tradition. He makes this case particularly in contrast to the Schleiermachian promotion of an inarticulate feeling as the seat of religion; Baillie continues to develop his idea of religion with appreciation for but ultimately in contrast to Schleiermacher's religious feeling of absolute dependence. Specifically, it is in his publications, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926) and *The Interpretation of Religion* (1928) that Baillie delineates his view of religion as a mediation between rationalism and romanticism.¹⁰

In 1920 Baillie delivered the inaugural address at Auburn Theological Seminary, where he had newly accepted the Chair of Christian Theology. He took this opportunity

⁸ Baillie, "The Subliminal Consciousness," 355.

⁹ Baillie, "Belief as an Element in Religion," 91.

¹⁰ John Baillie, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), and *The Interpretation of Religion: An Introductory Study of Theological Principles*. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1928). These publications will be examined and compared in an upcoming section of the chapter.

to survey “the present tendencies of theological enquiry” and offer a glimpse of his teaching task.¹¹ Using material that can be found, in recognizable form, in some of his lectures, Baillie begins his address with a brief summary of the origins of theological inquiry. Baillie understands the systematic approach to theology to be rooted in Greek philosophy. Medieval theology attempted to synthesize Christian theology and Greek philosophy. Though the Reformation introduced many changes to the church and its theology, Baillie says, it still upheld the authority of Scripture and the church’s tradition. A new time of theological inquiry, in which Baillie saw himself living, came through the contributions of Schleiermacher and Kant. He explains the distinctiveness of this new era in terms of “the changed attitude towards ecclesiastical and scriptural tradition.”¹²

According to Baillie, a common ground between the old and new eras is the affirmation that knowledge of God comes through the testimony of the Holy Spirit in the human heart. The difference lies in what the Spirit is testifying to. In the past, it was understood that the Spirit testified to the authority of scripture and/or the church. “Thus, for all practical purposes, the sole source of religious knowledge became for the Protestant the *ipsissima verba* of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures, and for the Roman Catholic the ex cathedra utterances of the Roman Pontiff. And the whole modern impulse to the study

¹¹ Baillie, “The Present Situation in Theology,” *Auburn Seminary Record* 16 (1920): 209.

¹² Baillie, “Present Situation in Theology,” 213. Though Baillie talks here about “eras,” it is worth noting that the new has not simply replaced the old. We should instead understand that the new era, set in motion by the work of Schleiermacher and Kant, has emerged from the old and now runs parallel to it. In fact, these eras can be expressed (albeit simplistically) in Baillie’s familiar designations of orthodoxy and liberalism.

of religion comes from the breaking up of these two external authorities: in other words, from our regained conviction that the testimony of the Spirit of God in the heart of man is granted not to the Pope alone but to all men, and bears witness to more and other things than the inerrancy of our sacred books.”¹³ What are these “more and other things” to which the Spirit testifies? Those things found in the realm of human experience.

Furthermore, according to Baillie, when reliance on the historical narrative provided by an authoritative scripture or tradition gave way, theology turned to philosophy and psychology to discern the source of knowledge of God. Baillie’s criticism of philosophical theology as an alternative source is that “it [philosophical theology] has thought it possible to proceed from nature to God, as if the divine in nature, instead of being discoverable only to the man who had already found the divine in his own soul, could itself be the premiss from a consideration of which one is first able to rise to a sure knowledge of God.”¹⁴ This early criticism of philosophical theology set the stage for Baillie’s rebuke in *Our Knowledge of God* of the ministerial reliance on logical arguments for the existence of God for the purpose of engendering faith.

As Baillie’s thought advances, he writes more narrowly about the kind of human experience in which God is revealed, though the idea of religion’s root in morality had been part of his theology since he began to study philosophy. Baillie more deeply

¹³ Baillie, “Present Situation in Theology,” 214. Notice Baillie does not assume that this breaking up of the narrow authorities amounts to a denial that the Spirit still uses them in God’s self-revelation, but that he does not use them exclusively.

¹⁴ Baillie, “Present Situation in Theology,” 215.

develops the revelatory association between religion and morality in “The True Ground of Theistic Belief” (1922). Here he claims that the origin of religion lies in the human conscience. Baillie contends that it is moral conscience that has been at the root of religious belief for all people of all ages. He writes, “The reason why man believes in God is that he cannot think out the meaning of life along the lines of the clue given him in his sense of moral value without supposing God’s existence. In this way the human conscience seems inevitably to create for itself a cosmic setting or context. Our contention is that this is the real and fundamental source of all truly religious belief in God.”¹⁵ Baillie develops this relationship of moral conscience with the root of religion further in *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* and *The Interpretation of Religion* in what he calls the “logic of faith.” An early expression of this logic of faith, however, is found in “The True Ground of Theistic Belief.” Baillie writes, “That a completely cogent logical connection [between morality and religion] exists and may be discovered and stated, it seems impossible to doubt. That by the mere statement of it we should ever be able to persuade men to believe in God, it seems vain to hope. Vain, and surely also wrong-headed; for nobody who is wise thinks that men can be argued into religion.”¹⁶ Here, as later, Baillie insists that there is a logic to faith, and therefore an argument may be made in defense of faith. But Baillie is careful here to emphasize the point, as he does

¹⁵ Baillie, “The True Ground of Theistic Belief,” *Hibbert Journal* 21 (1922): 51.

¹⁶ Baillie, “True Ground of Theistic Belief,” 52. Compare this to the passage quoted from “The Present Situation in Theology” (see note 15) in which Baillie critiques the hubris of philosophical theology to suppose one can be argued into belief.

elsewhere and throughout his career, that the logical basis or even defense for belief does not itself become a *source* of belief. This same point is articulated and argued in *Our Knowledge of God*.

At the close of his article on the ground of belief, Baillie employs an illuminating analogy to illustrate his point that logical arguments cannot function as the origin of belief. “Reasons can be given by the musical theorist why a Symphony of Beethoven is more beautiful than some orchestral ‘Selection’ from the latest musical comedy,” Baillie writes, “Yet if someone tells us that, having heard both, he prefers the musical comedy, we know that it is hopeless to try to convert him by setting before him what we take to be the true laws of melody and counterpoint, and arguing from these. We can only hope that a longer and wider musical experience will lead him to understand.”¹⁷ This analogy suggests several interesting points. First, it is claimed that Beethoven is more beautiful than the orchestral piece, regardless of what one’s opinion of the matter is; similarly, though Baillie roots religion in the subject’s experience, he still maintains that there is an objective reality to religion. Second, it is claimed that a person likes the music that she likes, apart from reason or argument—she simply receives certain music as pleasing; similarly, Baillie suggests that belief is immediate and intuitive, as opposed to something that can be argued into place. Third, one must “hear” the music differently on his own, Baillie claims, and this change comes about through greater musical exposure and

¹⁷ Baillie, “True Ground of Theistic Belief,” 52.

training; similarly, because belief is not grounded in argument in the first place, it is not through mere argument that one's belief can be altered.

In other words, Baillie suggests by his analogy that the beauty of Beethoven can be compared to the truth of God's self-revelation. Beethoven is intrinsically, objectively and arguably beautiful, says Baillie, though it may not necessarily be experienced as such when one has not the means (training, exposure, etc.) of perceiving it. So, for Baillie, God's truth of self-revelation is a reality, an encounter-creating experience, in which one will either embrace or reject the God encountered. One's response can be shaped in some sense by her context and exposure (which Baillie understands to be both humanly and divinely shaped). But just as one cannot be persuaded to find beauty in music when it simply is not experienced, so one cannot feel the weight of truth in God's self-revelation if it is not perceived by her as such. These implications drawn from Baillie's music analogy creatively express his thought well and can be observed in his theology over the course of his career.

It is helpful to take advantage of the perspectives Baillie sometimes expressed regarding the function of both a theological education and the theological educator as well as the task of the minister in the modern world.¹⁸ Just a few years into his first

¹⁸ Four articles spanning almost two decades are especially helpful in clarifying some significant points of interest in Baillie's pedagogical and ministerial perspective: "The Fundamental Task of the Theological Seminary" (1922), "The Young Minister and the Modern Situation" (1931), "The Office of the Ministry" (1934), and "The Theological Course as a Preparation for the Missionary" (1939). These articles provide a meaningful backdrop to the divinity lectures which will be examined in this and the next chapter and will also give insight into some of the core convictions informing Baillie's own ministry and scholarship.

position as Chair of Christian Theology at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York, Baillie wrote an article on “The Fundamental Task of the Theological Seminary.”¹⁹ In this article his analysis of how the church and its gospel ministry are positioned in the west informs his idea of how the modern minister should be prepared. Baillie identifies two groups, which he refers to as the “intellectual class” and “the masses,” that have been alienated from the church. In his assessment, the intellectual class has distanced itself from the church, in significant part, because the church is no longer among the leadership of the intellectual community; it is assumed that “the ministers who represent the Church in their city are second-rate men with second-rate minds.”²⁰ The masses, too, have an intellectual skepticism that has estranged them from the church.²¹ Baillie observes that the masses are doing their own thinking and are unconvinced that the Church provides meaningful answers to the great questions and problems of life.²² Between what might be called the snobbery of the intellectual elite and the skepticism of the common person, Baillie concludes that the church is facing a critical situation.

¹⁹ Baillie, “The Fundamental Task of the Theological Seminary,” *Reformed Church Review* 1 (1922): 259-275.

²⁰ Baillie, “Fundamental Task,” 268.

²¹ By “masses” I understand Baillie to mean those people who have not received a university education or seminary training. And perhaps the “masses” here can also be identified with “the common man” Baillie refers to in “Belief as an Element in Religion,” written seven years prior to this article. In both cases he substantiates his generalization about a broad group of people based on his experience with the army men in World War I.

²² Baillie’s reference to his World War I experience and the literature produced by others’ reflection on their similar experiences is deeply formative to his idea of the contemporary situation into which the gospel is preached. “One’s own widest and most recent acquaintance with the masses was with the army in France; for the British Army, at least, was just the young manhood of Britain in khaki dress.” (Baillie, “Fundamental Task,” 269.)

Given the situation, Baillie asks, should the theological seminary prepare men to be priests or scholars?²³ That is, should their education have a vocational or intellectual emphasis? Baillie answers “yes”: “If history has taught us anything, it has taught us that within Western civilization the priest is not likely to be effective, if he is not a scholar too.”²⁴ He does not deny the value of vocational training, but observes the supreme need for intellectual training.

I believe that what the men of today are looking to the Church to provide is above all things *guidance*—not comfort, not good-fellowship, not even religious exaltation or inspiration, and certainly not either oratorical thrills or social evenings, but light on the great puzzle of life. And I believe that if the Church will but realize in a really enterprising way her role as teacher, she has a magnificent future before her in our own generation.²⁵

Baillie includes himself among the ministers he gently admonishes,

We ministers are far too apt to assume that the criticism passed upon us by the society in which we live reflects rather the spiritual blindness of that society than any shortcoming in ourselves. If the present age rejects our message, let us not be content to mourn its loss of interest in the things of the soul, let us also ask ourselves whether the food we are offering is suited—both in the manner and the matter of it—to meet its real hunger.²⁶

Baillie’s conviction that the minister’s task includes a diagnostic function manifests itself throughout Baillie’s work. For him the gospel is relevant and it is the work of the Christian minister to assess the shape of the contemporary need and craft the gospel

²³ Baillie speaks exclusively of men as the recipients of theological education and the language of the survey of this article reflects that exclusivity.

²⁴ Baillie, “Fundamental Task,” 267.

²⁵ Baillie, “Fundamental Task,” 272.

²⁶ Baillie, “Fundamental Task,” 268.

message to fit the need. “We may hold that the gospel of Christ must meet every man’s need, but that is not to say that our presentation of it must do so.”²⁷ The unchanging gospel must nevertheless be meaningfully expressed in a changing epistemic climate. This understanding of the work of the minister leads Baillie to think carefully through the good news that saves, the nature of the faith that takes hold of it, and the stumbling blocks that prevent modern people from embracing it.

In this brief survey of Baillie’s early articles, several themes emerge and are revisited indicating a focus and solidification in Baillie’s thought. In summary, the articles show that Baillie long linked the presence of God with his self-revelation and linked this revelation with the universal human experience of morality. From these fundamental ideas emerged other ideas characteristic of Baillie’s thought. On the one hand, because experience is the context in which faith arises, Baillie claims, no logical argument for belief in God can be expected to function as a source of faith. On the other hand, claiming experience as the context for the birth of belief does not negate there being necessary and fixed content to belief. Baillie understood the moral experience, universal to all humanity, likewise able to produce a universally conforming but simple belief about a personal God and his love. Baillie described this connection between moral experience and belief in God as “the logic of faith.” He makes is clearest and most detailed argument for the logic of faith in his 1928 manuscript *The Interpretation of*

²⁷ Baillie, “Fundamental Task,” 268.

Religion.²⁸ This argument can also be found in an interesting article he wrote exploring the nature of orthodox belief two years earlier.

In “The Idea of Orthodoxy” (1926), Baillie explores the root and development of orthodoxy in Christian history: “At what period do we first discover any explicit recognition of a duty to believe alongside the duty to serve and to worship and to obey? When does the concern for purity of doctrine begin to take its equal place beside, or in any degree to take the place of, concern for purity of worship and conduct?”²⁹ Baillie observes in Jesus, according to the gospels, a deep and abiding concern for righteousness – in some cases this concern for righteousness appears even to trump a concern for right belief about God. In support of this, Baillie cites two passages that emerge elsewhere in his writings: Matthew 7:21 and Luke 6:43-45.³⁰ But he insists that Jesus’ teaching uniquely introduces into the history of religion a concern for orthodoxy, for right belief. It is faith in God that alone saves and heals. And how should this right belief be understood? In an important passage Baillie writes,

When, however, we inquire what exactly it is which Jesus has in mind when He thus speaks of faith or belief, we are compelled to allow that for Him the primary meaning of the word is not *credence*, but *reliance*: not assent to propositions, but

²⁸ *The Interpretation of Religion* will be examined in the next section of the chapter.

²⁹ John Baillie, “The Idea of Orthodoxy,” *Hibbert Journal* 24 (1926): 233.

³⁰ Matthew 7:21 says, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven.” And Luke 6:43-45 says, “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”

trust in a personal Power. When He says, “Have faith in God,” His primary meaning is clearly not that we should believe more *about* God, but that we should put more trust in Him. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that in this practical reliance upon God certain intellectual beliefs about Him are definitely implied, and that Jesus was fully conscious of this implication. “The man that draws near to God,” we read in Hebrews, “must believe that He exists and that He does reward those who seek Him.” But Jesus would have said, no doubt, that such utter self-surrendering trust as He demanded of men required a little more theology still, namely belief, not merely in God’s existence and accessibility to prayer, but also in His Fatherlikeness and Love.

The importance of this passage is that it clarifies, early on, Baillie’s affirmation of saving belief as having propositions. But these propositions do not themselves have saving power, as if by assenting to them one is saved; rather, these propositions are descriptors which must be believed of the God who may be trusted to save.

Contrary to the liberal Protestant agenda of his day, Baillie asserts that there is more to life and salvation than purity of heart. In fact, he says there are “truths which we should think shame not to believe, truths which (as has been said) we have no right to doubt.”³¹ The reason all people are constrained to believe certain truths is because such truths are rooted in and derived from our universal human experience. In an abbreviated form, Baillie argues for the logic of faith.

Religious faith begins in the conviction that, in doing my duty, I am doing what is in the nature of things expected of me, filling a place that has been somehow appointed me to fill, and so putting myself in line with the Eternal Purpose of things. This sense of appointment or of vocation cannot, however, support itself apart from the belief that the universe is not only alive, but also, at the heart of it,

³¹ Baillie, “Idea of Orthodoxy,” 245.

good; and thus the sense of duty rises through the sense of vocation to the sense of the presence of God in our lives.³²

While in this article Baillie makes a case for orthodoxy as opposed to mere experientialism, he remains critical of the dominating role orthodoxy has come to have in some Christian traditions. Baillie protests any tradition where faith has become a mere exercise of the intellect, an “abstraction from its practical roots.”³³

First Manuscripts: The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul (1926) and The Interpretation of Religion (1928)

Baillie’s first two manuscript publications indicate an early commitment to addressing the questions and problems he takes up later in *Our Knowledge of God* and even into the twilight of his scholarship. These two publications, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926)³⁴ and *The Interpretation of Religion* (1928)³⁵ can be introduced in tandem because they are so similar in content. The thinking that went into the preparation of *Interpretation of Religion* occurred between Fall 1922 and Spring 1925 during Baillie’s professorship at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York.³⁶ *Roots of*

³² Baillie, “Idea of Orthodoxy,” 246.

³³ Baillie, “Idea of Orthodoxy,” 247.

³⁴ John Baillie, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926). Future reference to this text in the body of the chapter will be abbreviated as *Roots of Religion*.

³⁵ John Baillie, *The Interpretation of Religion: An Introductory Study of Theological Principles* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1928). Future reference to this text in the body of the chapter will be abbreviated as *Interpretation of Religion*.

³⁶ Baillie, *Interpretation*, viii. Baillie prepared an Introduction to Theology course that was likely the foundation for both *Roots* and *Interpretation*. Particularly in the third lecture in the course, “The Scope

Religion was a compilation of five lectures delivered at the Midsummer Conference for Ministers and Religious Workers at Union Theological Seminary in 1925.³⁷ He published the lectures the next year at the urging of others, making only a few changes to the manuscript. Regarding his minimal editing of *Roots of Religion* for publication, Baillie explains, “One reason which has kept me from attempting to recast and expand the whole is that I have for some time been contemplating the publication, possibly at no very distant date, of a larger work in which I hope to deal with some of the same problems, as well as with some other problems, in a more detailed and technical matter.”³⁸ The larger work referred to here is, of course, what was published as *Interpretation of Religion*. So these two books represent Baillie’s thought in his early years at Auburn.

The main difference Baillie himself identifies between the two works is that one is written at a more popular level and the other at a more technical level. In fact, Baillie refers the reader, in his preface to *Interpretation of Religion*, to take up *Roots of Religion* as a less labor-intensive alternative to the content found in *Interpretation of Religion*. Without a doubt, *Interpretation of Religion* is Baillie’s longest and perhaps his most technical work. Despite their commonalities, *Roots of Religion* should not be viewed as a mere compendium of *Interpretation of Religion*. While they both take up to the same

of Theology,” one can find portions from almost every paragraph of the lecture in *Roots* and especially *Interpretation*. See Appendix I for this lecture.

³⁷ Baillie, *Roots*, vii.

³⁸ Baillie, *Interpretation*, viii.

subject, they reflect Baillie's thought with different expression as they speak to different audiences. *Roots of Religion* uniquely provides a clear view of the impact World War I had on Baillie's perspective of the context in which he was taking up the task of theology.

The biographical survey in the first chapter of *Roots of Religion* noted that Baillie's experience in World War I had a significant impact on his life and thought. While some of his very early work reviewed above shows that Baillie was thinking about matters of revelation and the role of morality in religion during his pre-war years, certainly his wide and extended exposure to people whose thoughts and religion were not formed by the academy had a significant and formative impact on his thinking. The First World War provided a unique occasion for Baillie and many others to witness the status of religion in the life of the common person. "Not only was the army's religion the religion of the nation's prime manhood, but it was the religion of that manhood when face to face with the most searching and testing experience that had come to it for long centuries."³⁹

Baillie concluded from this unique opportunity for observation that, for the common army person (both British and American), the church and its absorption with doctrine was viewed as antiquated and irrelevant. The cultural disinterest in the church, however, did not appear to leave the population in a moral vacuum. In fact, there appeared to be a conscientious cultivation of virtues that could be described as

³⁹ Baillie, *Roots*, 4.

characteristically Christian, though not intentionally rooted in the Christian faith. On this subject we can see in Baillie's quotation of Neville Talbot's *Thoughts on Religion at the Front* what might well be an early expression of some ideas that have come to be characteristic of Baillie's own theology.

“Deep in the men's hearts,” he says, “is the great trust and faith in God. It is an inarticulate faith expressed in deeds. The top levels, as it were, of their consciousness are much filled with grumbling and foul language and physical occupations; but beneath lie the deep spiritual springs, whence issue their cheerfulness, stubbornness, patience, generosity, humility and willingness to die. They declare by what they are and do that *there is a worth-whileness in effort and sacrifice.*” What the men are dumbly aware of,” he says again, “is that there is something going on in the world which demands primary allegiance, and the putting second of every self-interest. At the Front men hardly know what it is.... They only know—a wonderful majority of them—that *something great and righteous wants them and requires of them their help.*”⁴⁰

In this quotation Talbot makes a distinction between the conscious attitude toward faith, God, and the church and the practical expression (if perhaps unintentional) of one's values and commitments. Specifically, what is observed is a kind of practical faith that harmonizes with the life of Christian obedience, despite a conscious abandonment of the Christian religion. Talbot also identifies these distinctions with the “top” versus the “deep” parts of one's conscious beliefs and intentions. This, of course, sounds very much like Baillie's language for faith at the top of the head and the bottom of the heart and perhaps is the source of that expression.

Baillie is sympathetic with the notion found among the army that Christianity is irrelevant due to its complexity.

⁴⁰ Baillie, *Roots*, 27.

What our generation needs, in truth, is not to have the old religion replaced but to have it re-interpreted. Religion, as we know it in the world, is a thing of infinite variety, of endless ramification, of exceeding intricacy. Even Christianity may seem to be the name, not of a simple view of life, but of a vast and complex historical development; and there are many who have lost their way in its maze of doctrines and sects. That is the real root of our trouble and I believe there is only one way of meeting it—we must find our way back to the fountainhead. We must make re-discovery, of the true centre of gravity in this accumulated mass of tradition. We must dig down afresh to its deep foundations in human experience.⁴¹

In response to this observation, Baillie targets *Roots of Religion* to address what religion is, and specifically, to identify “where in the human soul lies the ever bubbling fountain from which it springs.”⁴² This same task is taken up in *Interpretation of Religion*, but on a much larger scale.

Interestingly, Baillie discusses the idea of “a special religious sense” under his treatment of common misunderstandings of the nature of religion: “There are some among us who, instead of using the language of feeling to explain religion, would use the language of perception. Religion they would tell us, is, in essence, neither thought nor feeling so much as immediate vision. It is possible, they say, to attain to a direct perception of God’s presence, and that is surely all the foundation that religion needs.”⁴³ Baillie is wary of this perception language used in reference to God and he concludes that the language of perception ultimately misleads us into wrong notions of the nature of our

⁴¹ Baillie, *Roots*, 39-40. For a similar expression of this idea, see John Baillie, “The Young Minister and the Modern Situation,” *Methodist Review* 114 (1931), 153.

⁴² Baillie, *Roots*, 43.

⁴³ Baillie, *Roots*, 81.

knowledge of God. He allows that there is a way in which we perceive God, but emphasizes that this perception is not sensual but spiritual in nature. In religion, we see by the light of faith—and this marks an important point in Baillie’s theology in which he links soteriology with epistemology, as is depicted in the following passage of *Roots of Religion*.

Where the religious man differs from the non-religious man is not, if we speak accurately, that he has seen something the other has not. God is not merely a stark fact that we may or may not have happened to notice, or that may or may not have happened to come our way; nor are there any objects present to the saint’s perception which are not part of the common experience of us all. What is true is rather that what the saint has seen means something different to him, something immeasurably more. And why? The answer is tremendously significant.... It is that he has a purer heart. “The pure in heart shall see God.”⁴⁴

In his early writing, then, we see the fundamental commitment Baillie has to the immediacy of God’s presence (God is present to all people, including those who perceive him and those who do not), but he is yet wrestling with how to express this idea of immediacy. This wariness of sensory perception language softened over the years; Baillie’s final work was titled *The Sense of the Presence of God*. While Baillie always wanted to make clear that God was not perceived through the five senses, he defends the language of perception in *The Sense of the Presence of God* as a meaningful and close analogy illuminating the nature of our faculty to receive and perceive God’s self-revelation. Perhaps Baillie was uncomfortable with the language of senses to describe God’s self-revelation because he didn’t want to suggest that in the same way that one can

⁴⁴ Baillie, *Roots*, 83.

see a person who is before her when he is present and can no longer see him when he is absent, so God is sometimes present to and absent from his creatures. Given that he clearly stresses the importance of maintaining the omnipresence of God in our discussions of the nature of our knowledge of God (as demonstrated in his 1912 article, “The Subliminal Consciousness”), Baillie would be wary of language that might suggest that one either does or does not know God depending on whether God shows up.

Having denied that perception of God is of a literally physically nature, Baillie also navigates between a purely cognitive or affective understanding of the human perception of the divine. In both *Roots of Religion* and *Interpretation of Religion*, Baillie critiques rationalism and romanticism as opposing proposals of the origin and faculty of religion. His assessment of rationalism and romanticism is very similar in both books, with the assessment in *Interpretation of Religion* being much more technical. In *Roots of Religion* he writes, “Rationalism seems to have been right in insisting that religion is grounded in intelligent insight, but wrong as to the sources of that insight. Romanticism seems to have been right in seeking a foundation for religion which should render it independent of scientific and metaphysical speculation, but wrong in thinking to find such a foundation in some region of the mind that lies below the level of reflective thought.”⁴⁵ The scientific method and metaphysical speculation are not the source of religious knowledge and insight any more than mystical feeling or subconscious

⁴⁵ Baillie, *Roots*, 97. See *Interpretation* for a similar passage, p. 256. Note also the consistent effort at a thoughtful critique that seeks to glean truth and value from all perspectives.

awareness. Mediating between these two proposals, Baillie suggests an alternative rooted in an awareness of the relationship between reality and value, that is, the assurance that even as we do our duty, we are aligning ourselves with God.⁴⁶ This awareness is cultivated when we commit ourselves to virtues like love and honor and courage; in such commitment we sense that we are “striking the rock-bottom of reality and are lighting upon the real key to the meaning and purpose of life.”⁴⁷ It is our values, Baillie proposes, that reveal God to us.

Baillie is careful to protect himself from the accusation that he is merely equating morality with religion; while they are organically related to one another, they are not identified with each other. How are they different? Morality has to do with values—that sense we have of what is expected of us, of what is right, of what is dutiful. Religion perceives from the fact of our moral consciousness, namely, that there is a reality that expects something of us, that calls us to do what it right. This view of religion as a relation of value and reality centers itself, Baillie writes in *Interpretation of Religion*, “in the trustful assurance that our values are securely grounded in the real nature of things.”⁴⁸ Conscience is the source of our moral ideals, but it provides no assurance that our morality is not relative and insubstantial. For Baillie, it is a simple truth, verified by the post World War I scholarship on religion, “that there is nothing of which man is more

⁴⁶ See Baillie, *Roots*, 110, 120.

⁴⁷ Baillie, *Roots*, 120.

⁴⁸ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 319.

certain than of his primary moral values. Loyalty and love and honour, truthfulness and purity and unselfishness—there is no knowledge of which I am surer... than that these things are infinitely well worth seeking and that there is laid upon me an absolute obligation to seek them.”⁴⁹ Faith grounds morality in reality, in the “trustful assurance” that morality is absolute and is formed in us out of a relationship to an absolute, moral and personal being.

In linking religion with morality instead of identifying it with an intellectual assent to religious propositions, rooting it in values and conscience instead of tradition and teaching, Baillie universalizes religion. It is identified with our humanness, our nature as moral beings. Faith provides assurance of things unseen, but morality is a firm foundation, a certainty. Baillie puts it this way:

It may often seem impossible to know what to believe, but there is always something which is worth doing, and which we know to be worth doing with an assurance that constitutes an imperative practical claim upon our wills. The search for the truth about the system of things of which we form a part is a long and arduous one and it may have its moments of utter despair; but even when the night of doubt and confusion is at its blackest, the values of right and noble conduct still stand firm. No night of doubt can ever make it doubtful to the earnest soul that it is right to be pure of mind and stout of heart, and, above all, that it is right to help one's fellow traveler out of the ditch.⁵⁰

A strong Kantian influence can be identified in this line of thinking. By his own testimony, Baillie's thought was greatly shaped by his study of Kant. Specifically, the

⁴⁹ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 342.

⁵⁰ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 343.

idea expressed in the quote above echoes a 1926 article in which Baillie defends the Kantian ethic.

Our immediate duty is usually (Kant, with all the eighteenth century, unfortunately said always) clear to us, or at least it is clearer to us than anything else in life. No other certitude granted to mortals is as solid and firm as the certitude of our immediate judgments of duty. On the other hand our ultimate ideas, our views as to the ultimate nature of the summum bonum, are always highly speculative and usually, no doubt, far enough from the truth. Here then is an ethical fact of the first order of importance – that we may be utterly unable to say what end we are living for, and yet in almost all concrete situations we are clear enough as to where our duty lies. We do not deduce our working moral code of duties and abstinences from a clearly conceived aim in life, but we try rather to guess what the aim of life is from a consideration of what we know, by more immediate means, to be right and wrong in various situations.⁵¹

Notice Baillie’s appeal here to what may be immediately known, namely, moral obligation. It is in the immediacy of moral perception that Baillie identifies the immediacy of God’s presence and our knowledge of him. Thus Baillie distinguishes between a true and universal core of religion (this immediate perception) and its historical trappings—the religious systems of belief and traditions.⁵²

The value of conceiving religion in terms of moral experience, in contrast to orthodoxy (right believing), is that the religious nature of all people is recognized. Baillie disagrees with those who would suggest that persuasive argument can sow the seed of religion in anyone. The seed of religion is present in our human make-up, in our moral being. And as such, there is a point of contact (though he does not use this term until

⁵¹ John Baillie, “The Meaning of Duty: A Plea for a Reconsideration of the Kantian Ethic,” *The Hibbert Journal* 24 (1926): 725.

⁵² Baillie was, in the mid to late 1920s, most strongly Kantian in his expression of religion and true religion’s distinction from the beliefs and practices that built up around it.

later) for religion. An appeal can be made to the experience people are already having in their lives now, for Baillie understands there to be logical and necessary implications for the fact of our moral experience. In *Interpretation of Religion* Baillie calls these steps of thinking “the logic of faith;”⁵³ the argument is as follows:

What faith, when squarely interrogated, seems centrally to insist upon is that in our consciousness of duty, or of ultimate values, there is contained an authentic intimation of the nature of the system to which we belong; and hence the only proper apologetic for religion is that which sets out the logic of this insistence. Perhaps there is no better way of setting it out than the very simple one of asking what else it can mean to say that I ‘must’ do this or this, except that the nature of things demands that I do it. Can any possible meaning be attached to absolute obligation, or to ultimate value, if these are conceived as having no sanction in the all-enclosing system? If I am right in feeling that it is absolutely demanded of me that I be pure in heart, and just and honorable in all my dealings, then can this mean less than that reality demands these things of me? And if reality demands these things of me, then reality must be interested in moral value; it must have a stake in the moral issue; it must be on the side of the good and against the unworthy and the evil. But that is to say that it is a moral Being itself, not indifferent to moral distinctions but, on the contrary, supremely sensitive to them, and really and deeply caring whether good or evil prevails. The ultimate reality must thus be One Who loves the Good.⁵⁴

There are two important assumptions supporting this logic. First, Baillie believes there are universal values that reflect an absolute obligation. Second, Baillie believes that the weight behind that absolute obligation is the weight of reality – the existence of some real thing that has the capacity to place such an obligation on another; on other words, God.

⁵³ This argument is present, though not in the same terms, in both *Roots* and *Our Knowledge of God*.

⁵⁴ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 352.

As he puts it, “No obligation can be absolute which does not derive from the Absolute.”⁵⁵

The fact that Baillie defends faith’s logic could lead one to think that he is attempting to put forth a proof for God’s existence, but we must recognize that this is not at all his intent. To this end, Baillie writes,

It is at least plain that such proof as there can be is no more than a drawing out into more consciously deductive and syllogistic form of the thought-process that is always present in religion itself. We can in no sense substitute, as the authors of the old theistic proofs seemed to think themselves able to substitute, for the train of reflection by which faith comes to birth in the soul another and different train of reflection. On the contrary, the most we can do is to bring religion’s own logic into sharper detail, with each successive step in it showing up more clearly, than is commonly found necessary in religion itself.⁵⁶

Religion has a logic, but that logic is not itself the seed of religion in all people; it is not even the point of persuasion for belief in God. For Baillie, knowledge of God is an awareness made possible by the immediate moral claim of God on all people. This awareness can be brought into focus and defended by logical argument, but it cannot be artificially manufactured.

Baillie understood early on in his career that there was a seed of religion in all people, which he identified with the moral capacity of human beings. He likewise understood that our moral capacity was not something static in us, but something that was created by being confronted by the “moral Being” of the universe, that is, God. All people have a conscience by which they experience moral obligation. God is the one

⁵⁵ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 350.

⁵⁶ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 351.

behind this demand and to him all must respond and *do* respond by either doing the right or rejecting it. All people are therefore in relationship to God, whether the relationship is acknowledged or not. And while there is a logical argument that can demonstrate the reasonableness of God, Baillie does not look to it as having any faith-forming capacity in itself. Again, in *Interpretation of Religion* he explains,

Some sense of duty we all have, and therefore it is perhaps true to say that we are none of us without the germ of faith in God; but it is in proportion as our sense of duty becomes deepened and refined by the experience of life and by the practice of progressive obedience to its behests that its fuller and diviner meaning comes home to us with compelling power, and faith becomes triumphantly definite and secure. The mere passive contemplation of the moral law never led any man to a realisation of its deeper meaning, but only an active surrender to its ever-developing demands. Argument is therefore here at its far-reaching disadvantage, that it carries conviction only in proportion to the depth of each man's moral consciousness, and that in that same proportion it is likely to have been already anticipated by the swifter processes of the intuitive understanding. For after all it is not as if the logic of religion were a very elaborate process of deduction requiring a clear head to follow it.⁵⁷

Roots of Religion and *Interpretation of Religion* are undoubtedly Baillie's most Kantian publications, in terms of their expression. As the 1926 article shows, Baillie was defending Kant at this point as having the superior, though still flawed, perspective on ethics and religion. In these early books Baillie much more commonly uses the Kantian terminology of morality than the religious language of sin and obedience. A shift in expression toward the more religious can already be observed in *Our Knowledge of God*.

⁵⁷ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 362. Similarly, in *Roots*, Baillie writes, "Can we construct a really watertight argument to show that our moral consciousness bears credible witness to the real nature of things? ...I have the gravest of doubts as to the effectiveness of such a formal argument, when taken by itself. It may indeed have a negative effectiveness in clearing away certain artificial hindrances of belief...but it is difficult to think that any mere argument could ever directly bring faith in God to birth in a man's soul." Baillie, *Roots*, 227, 228.

Further, as chapter two of this dissertation describes, Baillie provides an extensive critique of the limitations of Kant, though he retains his appreciation for what Kant defended, namely, the thesis that what is known by faith cannot be made known by scientific investigation.

The Interpretation of Religion *in Retrospect*

Among the many documents available for examination in the Baillie Papers there is an interesting correspondence between David Cairns and Baillie beginning in the late summer of 1930.⁵⁸ Baillie's private letters and published acknowledgements show that he had a steady correspondence with friends and colleagues, and especially with his brother Donald, regarding the public lectures and manuscripts in which he was investing at any given time.⁵⁹ In this 1930 correspondence between Cairns and Baillie, Cairns had read *Interpretation of Religion* and was now giving his feedback to Baillie. Cairns writes, "I go with you about all the way," and then offers criticism, the substance of which is evident in Baillie's remarks. Baillie's response to Cairns, in which he critically reflects on his own writing and thoughtfully responds to Cairns' critique, provides a

⁵⁸ Cairns' letter is dated August 12, 1930 and Baillie's correspondence is dated October 14, 1930. Baillie would have been writing as the newly appointed Roosevelt Chair of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York; Cairns was in Aberdeen, Scotland. The whole excerpt having to do with *Interpretation of Religion* is provided in Appendix II.

⁵⁹ In Appendix III there is an example of a manuscript outline and note written to Baillie's brother, Donald, and H.R. Mackintosh asking for their feedback about pursuing publication. The document provides an interesting insight into the process Baillie undoubtedly went through numerous times in the publication of his many books. It also shows the other side of publication—the manuscript, based largely on his course lectures, treating a subject valued by Baillie but evidently not one he was advised to pursue.

priceless view into the development and progression of Baillie's theology. There are several points of interest to note from Baillie's response which will bring into focus some continuities and discontinuities of Baillie's thought.

Baillie begins by admitting to Cairns that his thought has "moved on" since the publication of *Interpretation of Religion*. The question is in what way his thought has changed. It seems clear from this letter Baillie believes the substance of his thought remains the same, though it has shifted in emphasis. Were he to write the book again (and perhaps it can be said that he does, in some sense, take up this subject again in both *Our Knowledge of God* and *The Sense of the Presence of God*), he would engage the subject somewhat differently. Baillie puts it this way:

I am sure that a great deal of what you say in criticism is justified. As I have stated in the Preface, the last words of the book were written 5 ½ years ago in March 1925: so that although the book did not appear until the end of 1928, it really represents the thinking of my *first* years in Auburn. My thought has moved on since then, and I feel (it is no doubt a feeling which most authors have) that I could make the book *very* much better, were I to begin to write it now afresh. Yet I think the difference would be more in method of approach and in presentation than in fundamental view—though many *emphases* would no doubt be changed. But what I feel is that by using a different method of approach, and avoiding certain false emphases, and bringing out certain aspects of truth which I had previously rather neglected, I could make my central position and contention (to which I still fully adhere) much more acceptable than I have actually succeeded in making it.⁶⁰

According to Baillie, five and a half years after writing *Interpretation of Religion*, he still maintains his central position, though he would now state it differently. Later in the letter

⁶⁰ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/17/4 1930 Letter to Cairns.

he admits to having expressed himself in “too Kantian a way,” and it is perhaps this narrow form of expression that has led him to “certain false emphases.” And what is this misplaced emphasis? In defending the logic of faith, he admits that it may have appeared he was arguing that “we merely reached God at the end of an argument which started from our moral experiences.”⁶¹ This linking of human morality with the seed of religion lies at the heart of Cairns’ critique, which Baillie summarizes: “Your first doubt is whether I am right in making ‘our consciousness of moral obligation the one spring of religion,’ – whether in the constellation of faith there are not other elements, especially ‘the immediate awareness of God and of Christ of which the story of Christian biography is so full.’”

Baillie answers Cairns by saying that he has “never for a moment held that morality was the whole of religion.”⁶² If this misunderstanding has occurred because of the way he argues for the logic of religion in *Interpretation of Religion*, then Baillie admits he must not have balanced his argument well enough. Even so, he defends his reason for the focus on morality.

When a corroding unbelief threatens to destroy the religious outlook in which we have grown up, it is always upon our moral certainties that we are *thrown back*, as upon our spirit’s last entrenchment. Our moral certainty we *cannot* doubt, even if we doubt all else. This is really why I *begin* from our consciousness of moral obligation – because, as a matter of fact it is the only point where many of my students will let me begin, the only thing they will accept as a prime and initial certainty on which further certainties may be built. There are many senses in

⁶¹ Baillie, 1930 Letter to Cairns.

⁶² Baillie, 1930 Letter to Cairns.

which it would be false to speak of morality as the one spring of religion. In the deepest sense – in the *ordo essendi* – rather is religion the one spring of morality. That is, it is only because God is in our hearts that we have a moral consciousness. But the main sense in which it would be true to say that morality is the one spring of religion, is that it is the one unshaken *πόσις* from which, upon which, a disturbed faith may be rebuilt. To me, morality is not a thing separate from religion, but a part of it.⁶³

According to Baillie, then, there is such a corrosion of religious certainty, at least in the American culture in which he has been teaching that he finds it necessary to make his case for a more robust faith in God starting with a narrower slice of common ground than he would like.

Baillie pushes against Cairns' suggestion that one's consciousness of moral obligation is somehow distanced from an immediate awareness of God. For Baillie, moral consciousness, despite the fact that some would identify it as separate from religion, is actually a deeply religious experience. Baillie writes, "To me (as I put it on p. 462 of my book) 'In the experience of moral obligation there is contained and given a knowledge, not only of a Beyond, but of a Beyond that is in some sort actively striving to make itself known to us and to claim us for its own.' Of course the experience of *obligation* is not the only moral experience in which I find the direct impingement of the Spirit of God upon my own spirit."⁶⁴ Baillie goes on to identify other moral experiences by which God makes himself known: the sense of guilt, the impulse to repent and confess

⁶³ Baillie, 1930 Letter to Cairns.

⁶⁴ Baillie, 1930 Letter to Cairns.

wrongdoing, the attraction to goodness, purity and honorable self-sacrifice. Each of these is a moral experience, Baillie says, and they are

but *gratia irresistibilis dei* making itself felt within our souls... These, to me, are all *personal* experiences. And when you ask whether besides the moral experiences there are not in the constellation of faith other elements, notably “an immediate awareness” of God, I reply that the awareness which I have here, and the touch with God which I have here, is to me as immediate and direct and even personal as any that can be conceived. If you want an awareness of God more immediate than this one, you are (I should feel) doing less than justice to the immediacy of this one.⁶⁵

So Baillie clarifies, in light of Cairns’ critique, that the experience of moral obligation is the experience of God’s grace at work in people’s lives. “My real position,” Baillie explains, “has always been rather that God is actually and immediately present to us in our moral experience.”⁶⁶ This is an important thesis in Baillie’s thought that is made more explicitly in *Our Knowledge of God*, and which is perhaps somewhat shrouded in *Interpretation of Religion* by its notably Kantian expression and strong argument for the logic of faith.

Though Baillie does not maintain that morality is the whole of religion (as Cairns wonders), he does argue that religion is the whole of morality. He says, “Our moral experience is but a name for the presence of God in our souls and the touch of God in our lives.” In fact, he locates morality so squarely in the realm of religion, he claims that

⁶⁵ Baillie, 1930 Letter to Cairns.

⁶⁶ Baillie says he does, in fact, insist on this point in *The Interpretation of Religion*: “For it is not merely that through our values we reach God or that from them we infer Him, but rather that in them we find Him. Love is not merely an outward mark and symbol of this presence, but is His very self in action in our world.” Baillie, *Interpretation*, 470.

there is no part of religion “that has (as it were) a separate door of entrance into our souls.” He goes on, saying

But although no part of religion is independent of morality, *of course* religion goes beyond morality. The moral outlook, or what is usually called such, is not enough. Heart’s desire is not satisfied until we are lifted out of that coil of rights and duties, of commandments and prohibitions, of continual striving to be that which we are not. Perhaps in my book I have (in my anxiety to get the other point home) not sufficiently stressed the all-important respects in which religion goes beyond morality—though that is really nearer to my own heart. Still I have stressed it—e.g. pp. 331 foot – 332.⁶⁷ There is a deep sense in which religion carries us beyond the opposition of good and evil (which is the heart of morality) and a sense in which it is this release that is the secret of religious joy and peace. We escape from the continual straining after what *ought* to be to a satisfied resting in what eternally is. The “merely moral” point of view is transcended and all its categories left behind. Now this can only be true, if the presence of God in our souls is from the beginning something ampler and larger than a mere “consciousness of obligation”. The “consciousness of obligation” is rather the plainly-visible fringe (though to many secular moralists the only reality) of a far richer and more mysterious cohabitation of the Divine Person with our own human personalities. Yet what I feel so strongly is that there is no presence of God in the soul which is *alongside* our sense of obligation as something *separate* from it, and *independent* of it.

In *Interpretation of Religion*, in a passage following the one referenced in the quote above, Baillie provides a clarifying description of the relationship between religion and morality. He writes, “The relation of religious faith to our moral experience is thus seen to be in some sort a double one. First faith emerges out of the moral consciousness and then, having emerged, it quickens that consciousness. First it is born of moral desire and

⁶⁷ Baillie refers here to a passage in which he argues that religion is not a tool in morality, but morality is an entrance to true religion. “Faith is precious to us, in the first instance, because it rescues us from a life of mere slavish moral obedience to laws whose provenance we do not understand, and makes us free citizens of God’s universe – ‘no longer slaves, but sons’ Looked at from the vantage-ground of faith in God, sin, which was formerly felt to be merely forbidden, is now seen to be not even attractive. So that what the most strenuous efforts at obedience had failed to do before, very heart’s desire succeeds in doing now.” Baillie, *Interpretation*, 331-332.

then, being born, it reveals itself as the only means whereby that desire may be fulfilled.”⁶⁸ Again, this passage depicts morality as the entrance to religion; the two are necessarily linked, but not identical. Religious faith awakens one to the real context of morality, a relationship with God, in which obligation is transformed into desire.

Cairns challenges Baillie’s position that moral experience is the gateway to true religion. Cairns writes, “Is not the point that religion’s advance is always through prior moral development overstressed? It seems to me that if communion with God is real, God must be able immediately to communicate new and creative moral and religious ideals in a human spirit. I would hesitate to say that the road here is closed.” Baillie’s response to this is interesting and precipitates the kind of argument he later makes in *Our Knowledge of God* and *The Sense of the Presence of God*. Essentially, he says that the only limitation he makes for the nature of God’s revelation is the idea that God would reveal himself in some way apart from human experience.

The only road I close is the road by which (for example) a race of men could receive the insight that God was fatherly *before* they had received the insight that fatherliness is a high, the highest, value in the interrelationship of persons—a view which, it seems to me would be contrary to all our experience of the way in which insights come and of the self-impartation of the Divine Spirit to the spirit of man. *Of course* the *source* of all human insights is God. When we realise the appeal and charm and claim of any high good, it is because the goodness of God is pressing in upon our souls. But this pressure is first consciously realised by us as *a demand made upon us*, consequently as a *moral* insight in that sense. The conscious realization that the demand comes from God and is thus revelatory of God’s nature, so that our existing ideas of God must be revised in the light of it—that seems to me usually to come somewhat later.

⁶⁸ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 332.

Two points Baillie makes in his letter to Cairns here are worth noting. First, despite Baillie's case for the logic of faith made in *Interpretation of Religion*, he does not mean by it that knowledge of God is inferential. Here he confirms his position, which could have been more strongly stated in his book, that knowledge of God *comes from God*. As he states, "The source of all human insights is God." The draw, the sense of truth, the impulse of obligation comes to people because God is "pressing in upon our souls." Though this encounter is experienced as a moral experience, it is not merely moral in nature; it is a divine revelation.

Second, despite the more cerebral nature of his argument for God, Baillie insists divine revelation comes *in, with and under* the universal experience of human relationships. He puts it this way, "What my view amounts to then is simply that it is in the context of human interrelationships (and not abstractly and out of context with such relationships) that God more and more reveals himself to us. Our new discoveries of the Eternal Goodness are made by us, not *apropos de rien*, but through our human loves—as the greatest of all new discoveries about the Eternal Love was made through the human love of Jesus Christ our Lord."

These two points, that knowledge of God is not inferential but that it comes in, with, and under human relationships and experience, are central to Baillie's argument in *Our Knowledge of God*. The fact that Baillie brings up these ideas in response to Cairns show that they were already part of his theology and suggests that the fullness of his theology was, in some way, shrouded by his deeply Kantian expression. Thus, despite

wanting to change the method and emphasis by which he presented his ideas, Baillie says that he still adheres to his “central position and contention.” It can be surmised that his central position includes these three elements: 1) that God is immediately present, 2) that he is the source of our knowledge of him (that is, it is not a derived knowledge), and 3) that God reveals himself to us in, with, and under (as he will later often describe it) our experience, particularly our experience of moral obligation and personal relationship. These three elements represent the heart and continuity of Baillie’s theology of revelation.

Baillie does not abandon the work he did in *The Interpretation of Religion*; he references it later in *Our Knowledge of God* and throughout his course lectures. As has already been observed in the previous chapter, Baillie describes *Our Knowledge of God* as a journey into familiar territory. He views *Our Knowledge of God* as “a not unnatural development of my findings twelve or fifteen years ago,” though he also acknowledges that “the agreement between the two is far from complete.”⁶⁹ There are four occasions in *Our Knowledge of God* when Baillie references *Interpretation of Religion*. In the first case, he directly quotes a passage he also quotes in his letter to Cairns: “For it is not merely that through our values we reach God or that from them we infer Him, but rather that in them we find Him.”⁷⁰ He uses this passage from *Interpretation of Religion* to make a point that is central to *Our Knowledge of God*, a point in which he clearly

⁶⁹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, vi.

⁷⁰ Baillie, *Interpretation*, 470.

understands himself to have maintained a consistent stance; he writes, “We are rejecting logical argument of any kind as the first chapter of our theology or as representing the process by which God comes to be known.”⁷¹

In the second reference to *Interpretation of Religion in Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie extensively quotes himself in a footnote to show that his criticism of deduction as a means for knowledge of God goes back to his earlier thought. His note begins, “I quote this from Mr. Collingwood; but that his statement does but clarify for me something that had long been in my own mind will be seen from the following sentences taken from the section entitled ‘The Limits of Deductive Proof’ in my *Interpretation of Religion*, published five years before Mr. Collingwood’s book.”⁷²

On a third occasion, Baillie references the careful analysis and criticism he has already made of Rudolf Otto in *Interpretation of Religion*.⁷³ And in the fourth and final reference, Baillie again points the reader to what he has said before in his earlier book, which demonstrates a continuity of thought, but this time acknowledges that “in the context of these passages [in *Interpretation of Religion*] there is much that I would not now express as I expressed it then.”⁷⁴ This comment reflects the admission made to Cairns, namely, that his position was initially somewhat shrouded by his Kantian

⁷¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 132.

⁷² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 140.

⁷³ See Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 241.

⁷⁴ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 245 note 2.

language. The section here referred to is the proposal Baillie makes for what he calls “the logic of faith.” The same basic argument made in *Interpretation of Religion* is summarized, using different and less Kantian language, in *Our Knowledge of God*.

The only argument with which we can properly meet those atheistic representations is therefore one which consists in the demonstration that the recognition of such an unconditional obligation does in fact contain in itself the recognition of a holy God who is its source. This argument would, as I conceive it, consist in the defense of two propositions; first, that no obligation can be absolute which does not derive from the Absolute...; and second, that, since morality is essentially a function of personality, we can feel no moral obligation to an Absolute who is not apprehended by us as a personal being.⁷⁵

This argument is essentially identical to the one in *Interpretation of Religion*; the only real change Baillie makes to it is the way he expresses it.

Reflections on Pedagogy and Ministry

Earlier in the chapter, in the review of articles Baillie wrote leading up to his first manuscript publications, Baillie’s first article on pedagogical reflection was examined.⁷⁶ The purpose of including a special examination of Baillie’s pedagogical reflections is twofold. First, it provides insight into Baillie’s perspective on the world in which he took up the theological task. Second, it provides insight into Baillie’s perspective of his lecture preparation in order to equip students for ministry. Our examination of some of Baillie’s significant course lectures later in the chapter will benefit from this introduction to his view on theological education.

⁷⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 244.

⁷⁶ Baillie, “The Fundamental Task of the Theological Seminary,” (1922).

Almost a decade later after this first pedagogical reflection was published, Baillie published a similar reflection, “The Young Minister and the Modern Situation” (1931),⁷⁷ in which he reflects on both the changing and unchanging nature of the human soul and its need to which the young minister is called to bring an everlasting word of salvation. At the time of this second pedagogical publication Baillie was still in America, although at another institution,⁷⁸ and he presents his perspective as a corrective to the view that the experience of the modern person is significantly and fundamentally incongruous to that of generations before. On the contrary,

If our human nature has not changed, and if our human situation has not changed, then our essential *need* has not changed, since the days when the world was young. Men still need God. They need him every whit as much as their fathers did. They need him in just the same way, for just the same reasons, and at just the same points in their lives. This is one of the things which the young minister will soon discover as he gains more practical experience in the cure of souls. He will learn that most of the changes that make each generation look so unlike its predecessor are only surface changes, like fashions in dress.⁷⁹

The testimony of Baillie’s view of the essential nature of humanity is helpful given his more frequent discussions of the need to contextualize or accommodate the gospel to the modern situation. Despite the confirmation that the deepest part of a person remains the same through the ages, Baillie also affirms that some changes penetrate the surface.

⁷⁷ John Baillie, “The Young Minister and the Modern Situation,” *Methodist Review* 114 (1931): 151-156.

⁷⁸ At the time “Fundamental Task” was published in 1922, Baillie had been at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York; in 1931 when “Young Minister” was published, he was teaching at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.

⁷⁹ Baillie, “Young Minister,” 153.

“What, then, are the most important respects in which the plain man—the ordinary parishioner—has changed during the last generation?” Baillie asks. “No doubt the most revolutionary change of all is that he has been educated. No other single cause has had such momentous consequences for organized religion in Europe and America as the decision of the various governments to provide free education and the passing of Compulsory Education Acts in a large number of countries.”⁸⁰ It is worth noting here that Baillie has focused his attention on “the plain man.” In “The Fundamental Task,” previously surveyed, he was interested to make a distinction between the intellectuals and the masses. Instead of excluding the intellectuals from this discussion, Baillie seems to have conflated the two groups in this later assessment; now he speaks of the educated plain folk, or the intellectual masses. Additionally, Baillie’s return to the insights regarding the religion of the common person based on war time observation of British and American troops is notable.

The most significant change in the contemporary landscape which Baillie connects to the spread of education, particularly the advance of modern scholarship, is a changed view of the Bible. The Bible and its traditional teachings are no longer assumed to be authoritative by the majority of people. Thus Baillie urges the young minister to “bring the everlasting word and gospel of God, yet bring it in a form suitable to the

⁸⁰ Baillie, “Young Minister,” 154. While Baillie also identifies changes in social order and economic conditions as factors shaping the contemporary situation, his focus in the article is on the impact of education on the common person.

exigencies of his own time.”⁸¹ Even as he does this, Baillie presses the point that “beneath a rapidly changing human life he [i.e., the minister] must be able to discern and to appeal to a fundamentally unchanging human nature.”⁸²

In comparing these two pedagogical articles, “The Fundamental Task” and “The Young Minister,” it may be observed that Baillie has deep and lasting impressions of the situation in which he and others are ministering and has equally deep and lasting convictions about the nature of humanity to which their ministry is directed. Baillie’s army experience and the scholarship assessing the religious life of the troops during World War I are clearly significant in shaping his worldview.⁸³ Not only did his war experience inform his view of the nature and situation of people, but it shaped his view of his pedagogical and scholarly tasks. As mentioned before, the context in which he perceives his students to be ministering is also the one in which he sees himself ministering.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Baillie, “Young Minister,” 156.

⁸² Baillie, “Young Minister,” 156.

⁸³ Baillie joined the YMCA and served the British armies in France from 1914-1919. His army experience shaped and motivated his scholarship—Baillie’s first manuscript, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul*, was written as a response to his experience. It is not too strong a claim to make that Baillie’s army experience set him on a path of scholarship in which we find him returning again and again to similar subjects concerning the nature of revelation and the faith that takes hold of it.

⁸⁴ Baillie closes this article with warning of two extremes to which the young minister might err. Baillie writes, “He may, on the one hand, be too heedless of the changed circumstances which affect the life of the church in the present age. Or, on the other hand, he may take the changes far too seriously and be so absorbed by them that he becomes blind to the permanent elements in the situation. . . . Which of the two kinds of contemporary minister is the more completely ineffective, the timid reactionary who is still afraid of the doctrine of evolution and higher criticism of the Bible or his rampaging neighbor who has lost all his moorings in tradition and is altogether the dupe of the passing fashions of his age? I do not know;

The 1934 article, “The Office of the Ministry,” is an especially valuable resource for gaining insight into Baillie’s work for a couple of reasons.⁸⁵ First, it contains significant portions of both the ideas and even expressions found in *Our Knowledge of God*, published five years later.⁸⁶ While Baillie himself says in his preface to *Our Knowledge of God* that he had given lectures as early as 1936 on material that can be found in the book, the date of the article tells us that he was working on these ideas even earlier while at Union Theological Seminary (1930-1934). The strong similarities between the article and the book testify to the continuation and stabilization of Baillie’s ideas concerning the nature of our knowledge of God. It is clear that while the Barth-Brunner debate certainly provided the *occasion* for Baillie to further express and extend his theology of revelation, we should not assume that the debate sparked the ideas we read in *Our Knowledge of God*. In fact, “The Office of the Minister” was published in 1934, the same year the natural theology essays by Barth and Brunner were published.

Second, the fact that an article focused on describing the office of the minister contains so much theology shows that, for Baillie, his theology of revelation is fundamentally linked to practical ministry. While the practical interest of his theology is certainly conveyed in *Our Knowledge of God*, this early expression in “The Office of the

but I know that it should be the aim of every college of divinity to make either type impossible for evermore.” (156) These are the same extremes Baillie himself is seeking to avoid, and in his conscientious effort to do so he has come to be remembered as an irenic mediator.

⁸⁵ John Baillie, “The Office of the Ministry,” *Religion in Life* (1934): 483-490.

⁸⁶ At least fourteen passages in the article clearly show continuity of ideas, if not expression, between it and *Our Knowledge of God*.

Ministry” of the theology found later in the book confirms that practical connection. This point is illustrated well in a passage from the article, in which Baillie writes,

Religion is not to be understood as a phase of human culture, an aspect of human self-expression or a subdivision of human philosophy, but only as the confrontation of all life and all culture and all self-expression and all philosophy by the transcendent reality of God. And the office of the Christian minister is simply to be instrumental in bringing about such confrontation within the bounds of the community in which his lot is cast.⁸⁷

Thus the theology of revelation is defining to the minister both in what she communicates to her congregation and how she communicates it. The minister must know the timeless truth of the gospel and know the distinct culture of her community.

Additionally, the theology of revelation, as Baillie understands it, influences how the minister relates the people to whom he or she brings the gospel; the gospel needs to be communicated in such a way to people that the challenge of God in it is truly felt. The minister’s task is to make transparent the inherent relevance of the gospel; Baillie understood this task to be incompatible with the increasingly common apologetic approach to evangelism. About this trend toward apologetics in ministry, Baillie reflects in his article,

I believe that of recent years we have been far too ready to conclude that the modern man has developed an immunity against the appeal of the gospel. We have approached him apologetically. We have made stammering excuses for our intrusion. We have begun our discourse with him on something like his own

⁸⁷ Baillie, “Office of Ministry,” 483.

plane and have hoped gradually to lead him upwards to Christ's level, but it is seldom that we have succeeded in carrying him very far.⁸⁸

For Baillie, an apologetic approach softens or weakens the challenge of God that is meant to be conveyed in the minister's preaching. The challenge rather becomes a mere set of propositions strung together in an argument that either may or may not appear cogent to a person. An argument distances the hearer from the immediacy of God's personal demand in revelation—the demand to receive God's gift of salvation in Christ. Thus he concludes,

I conceive it, then, to be the great task of the theology of the future so to reformulate the great dogmas of the Christian faith that the direct and challenging reality of them shall be inescapably and even (in view of our sinful loathness) inconveniently clear. The Christian gospel was never intended to puzzle men; it was intended to convict them, and unless we preach it in a form in which it does convict, we are not preaching it as it was meant to be preached.⁸⁹

Again, Baillie here is calling for the minister's theology to be both strong in the truth of the gospel but supple in its application to her congregation.

Almost two decades after writing "The Fundamental Task" (1922), and in his fourth divinity chair, Baillie reflects again on the task of the seminary in preparing ministers and missionaries in his 1939 article, "The Theological Course as a Preparation

⁸⁸ Baillie, "Office of Ministry," 485. Notice the remarkable similarity (in some places word for word) of this passage to what was later written in *Our Knowledge of God*: "During the last several generations we who preach the gospel have been far too ready to assume that the modern man had developed an immunity against its appeal. We have approached him apologetically. We have made stammering excuses for our intrusion. For the old direct challenge we have substituted the language of debate. Where our forefathers would have confronted him with God's commandments, we have parleyed with him over God's existence and over the authenticity of his claims." Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God* (London: Oxford University Press: 1939), 14.

⁸⁹ Baillie, "Office of Ministry," 488.

for the Missionary.”⁹⁰ Similar to his earlier concerns, Baillie asks whether or not a theological education ought to focus on intellectual or vocational preparation, or as he puts it in this article, *episteme* or *tekne*. Here he is concerned to defend the Scottish method of emphasizing *episteme* over *tekne* in general and, specifically, the benefit of this emphasis to the training of missionaries.⁹¹ In short, Baillie defends the task of the seminary to provide rigorous theological training. And it is the task of theology “to raise the life of the Church and the individual’s life as a member of the Church to a higher degree of self-consciousness.”⁹² Thus the seminary course provides for its students a clarified structure of their belief. He is quick to point out, though, that this training in the Christian faith does not make one a better Christian, though he certainly views and

⁹⁰ John Baillie, “The Theological Course as a Preparation for the Missionary,” *International Review of Missions* 28 (1939): 535-548.

⁹¹ Baillie is not uncritical of the Scottish method of education, but the opinion defended in this article comes after long and critical consideration. For example, “After the varied experience I have had of theological curricula I now think that our Scottish system is too rigidly traditional, and I should welcome the inclusion in it of much more serious study of social ethics, educational methods, the history of religions, liturgics and some other subjects. But I think that fundamentally our Scottish method is right and produces the best results. The justification of it is that the kind of knowledge we give our students is the kind of knowledge which they will never acquire if they do not acquire it at this early stage, whereas most of the kinds of knowledge which we fail to give them, and especially the training in the *tekne* of their vocation, are kinds of knowledge which they can acquire after leaving college.” Baillie, “Theological Course,” 537.

⁹² Baillie, “Theological Course,” 538. This line of Baillie’s sounds remarkably similar to a line from Cook Wilson he repeatedly quotes in *Our Knowledge of God*: “The true business of philosophy...seems to be to bring the belief to a consciousness of itself.” Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 240. It would seem the theologian and the philosopher are about much of the same business. It is also worth noting here that the portion of the article discussing the task of theology is very similar to some lectures notes Baillie created for a 1939 Introduction to Theology course. To illustrate, Baillie writes a corresponding line in his lecture: “Fundamentally, the knowledge which you have come here to acquire is continuous with the knowledge that is present in all religion. But what you are called upon to do here is to raise this knowledge to a greater degree of self-consciousness that it normally possess in practical religion.” Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/4 Introduction to Theology, 3.

anticipates that such an education will be a means of grace in students' lives. Even so, "the advantage which the trained theologian has over the saint is not unlike the advantage which the trained anatomist has over the athlete. The anatomist cannot use his body any better than the athlete but he understands it better. The theological student is not a better Christian than the unschooled and unlettered saint but he understands his Christianity better. That then is what we try to do for our students."⁹³

Baillie makes an interesting point in his defense of an *episteme* education that illuminates the context in which *Our Knowledge of God* was written (published in 1939, the same year as this article). He is sensitive to the early usage of the phrase *episteme theologike* by Aristotle, which might imply to someone an affirmation of Aristotle's method of natural theology. Baillie recognizes that there was an earlier medieval endorsement of two ways to study theology—the way of natural theology and the way of revealed theology. Baillie asserts

that this distinction has now long ago been transcended and left behind by the onward movement of theological reflection. I think it is now believed by a large majority of theologians within the non-Roman Churches that God can only be found in His revelation, and that there is therefore no 'scientific' means of investigating the problems of religion apart from the insight of religious faith itself.⁹⁴

Though his theology of mediated immediacy is certainly creative, Baillie's insistence on God's personal self-revelation as the only means of knowing God and the impotence of

⁹³ Baillie, "Theological Course," 539.

⁹⁴ Baillie, "Theological Course," 541.

traditional arguments for God and apologetics sets him, according to his assessment of the situation, squarely in line with the contemporary movement of theology.

Baillie believes that the Scottish method of *episteme* theological education is fitting for training both the minister and missionary and is good preparation for both the modern domestic and foreign fields of service. Both the minister and missionary preach to those inside and outside of ecclesiastical fellowship. Baillie reflects, "I am sure that the two tasks must not be too sharply distinguished from one another. None of us is so securely within that he does not need to be constantly recalled, and perhaps there is nobody whom we have the right to address as if he is a mere outsider. Nothing like a sharp line can be drawn between evangelistic and edificatory preaching."⁹⁵ No longer can we assume that the minister at home in the west is engaging only those who have been raised, to some degree, with a Christian influence. Baillie identifies secularism, in some cases, as having affected both the domestic and foreign fields of ministry. In other cases, he observes a common spread of an anti-rationalistic merging of religious and political devotion. Whichever the case, his point is to show that the world in which ministers and missionaries conduct their service is growing smaller, and for both the *episteme* training they receive remains a vital and relevant preparation for their work in their sphere of ministry.

The value of gaining some knowledge of Baillie's pedagogical perspective is two-fold. First, we are able to read his prepared lectures with this in mind: Baillie's aim in the

⁹⁵ Baillie, "Theological Course," 543.

lecture material he presented was to equip his students to meaningfully and intelligently engage their world with the gospel. Second, we not only know Baillie's perspective of the situation into which he believed his students were heading, but we also have insight into the climate in which he likewise perceived himself to be working when he produced his public lectures and publications. Based on the survey of the four articles, we observe, for example, Baillie's maintained conviction that the gospel is both an unchanging, everlasting truth and a malleable message that must be shared in such a way as to answer modern existential questions. Similarly, the human heart is universally in need of God and his healing fellowship, but humanity's articulation of this need and its attempt to respond to it change with each generation. For Baillie, Christian piety is not identified with theological acumen. Theology is not the ordering of an old orthodoxy which one must confess for assurance of salvation; rather it is the ordering of our reflections on revelation for the sake of meaningfully communicating the gospel to the world.

Having gained insight into some of Baillie's pedagogical perspectives, we will better be able to contextualize his divinity lectures. Our purpose in examining some of these lectures is to discern the development, including the continuity and discontinuity, in Baillie's theology of revelation. Our primary point of comparison will be the theology we have already carefully surveyed in *Our Knowledge of God*; lectures will be identified as having come before or after its publication.

Professor Baillie's Course Lectures

There is a wealth of information available about John Baillie in an archive called The Baillie Project maintained by the Special Collections Department at Edinburgh University Library.⁹⁶ This dissertation seeks to integrate the theology laid out in Baillie's course lectures with the published material available in order to provide a more complete view of Baillie's theology of revelation. One set of valuable lecture notes include those for a course on the Doctrine of God.⁹⁷ This course is identified in the archive as a 1953 course Baillie taught at New College. In fact, in the margins of the lecture notes Baillie wrote, in different places, the years 1952, 1954 and 1955. One can only guess what these dates meant to Baillie. Perhaps he wrote the year in the margin to keep track of where he left off in his lecture in different years. Any professor who uses the same teaching notes for more than one year knows that one never keeps the exact same pace each time. But the idea that these dates in the margin are place holders, so to speak, is only speculation. What we can be fairly confident of is that Baillie taught from these notes during the years of 1952-1955. A strong case can be made, however, that his lecture on the Nature of God within this course includes about ten pages of notes that pre-date the publication of *Our*

⁹⁶ The website introducing the archive can be found at <http://www.baillie.lib.ed.ac.uk/index.html>; this website is a service of the Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Division. The archive contains a great variety of documents that illuminate Baillie's life and work. Before the material was donated to the library, George Newlands was able to examine the material and made significant use of Baillie's diaries in his book, *John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁹⁷ See John Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10 Doctrine of God.

Knowledge of God and which were likely used in its drafting. There are several clues that support this conclusion.

Baillie's lecture, "The Nature of God," in his Doctrine of God course is written out long hand, manuscript-style, as is common with all his archived course lectures.⁹⁸ The notes for "The Nature of God" begin on page 8; this particular lecture is twenty pages long, with pages numbering 8 to 28. Pages 9 – 19 of the lecture all have two page numbers at the top of each page, one of which is crossed out and replaced. This indicates that pages 9 – 19 of the current lecture were taken from some previous set of notes and inserted into this lecture.⁹⁹ Another indicator that pages 9 – 19 were inserted into the current lecture is that the writing on page 8, which introduces the lecture, ends midline and midsentence near the bottom of the page so as to pick up the sentence already begun on the top of page 9. Thus it would seem pages 9 – 19 were taken from previous lecture notes and used here. The inserted notes contain many passages that can be identified either exactly or closely with portions *Our Knowledge of God*.¹⁰⁰ The question is, of course, whether the inserted lecture notes were written before or after the publication of the book. What these inserted notes tell us, at the very least, is that Baillie still felt comfortable enough with the position held at the time of the publication of *Our*

⁹⁸ Included in this manuscript style of creating course lectures, Baillie created course outlines, numbered the pages of each lecture and cited almost all of his quotations.

⁹⁹ Specifically, pages 9 – 19 are originally numbered 6 - 16.

¹⁰⁰ Specifically, material from the notes can be found in the following pages in *Our Knowledge of God*: 109-111, 157-158, 162, 178-179, and 252-257.

Knowledge of God in 1939 that he continued to teach from the same perspective fifteen years later. This indisputable fact helps us gain a clearer picture of the continuity of Baillie's thought.

A very strong case may be made that the notes inserted into Baillie's lecture on "The Nature of God" predate the publication of *Our Knowledge of God* in 1939. Baillie had the practice of cutting and pasting his previously published material into his lectures when such material said what he wanted to teach to his students. There are several examples of this in his manuscript notes. For example, in a lecture titled, "The Denial of the Revelatory Significance of the Challenge," Baillie quotes himself extensively from an earlier inaugural address.¹⁰¹ In an Introduction to Theology course, Baillie makes a note to himself in a lecture on "The Truth and Error of Humanism" to read from his book *And the Life Everlasting* (1933).¹⁰² In another set of notes for an Introduction to Theology course, Baillie cut and pasted several pages of *Our Knowledge of God* to introduce a lecture on "The Nature of Our Knowledge of Persons."¹⁰³ These examples, particularly the latter, show that Baillie had the practice of either cutting and pasting the actual published text into his notes or directing himself to read from his published work in some of his lectures. It can confidently be concluded, then, that where there is notable

¹⁰¹ See Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/12 Divinity Lectures.

¹⁰² See Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/3 Introduction to Theology.

¹⁰³ See Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/4 Introduction to Theology. In this case Baillie cites *Our Knowledge of God*, 201-227.

similarity between his handwritten lecture notes and his published material, the handwritten notes came before and likely served as the basis for what was later published. Thus, the notes numbering nine through nineteen were written before the publication date of *Our Knowledge of God* in 1939.

The date of the notes in question can be further narrowed by taking into consideration the publication dates of the sources cited in the notes. The material Baillie quotes from contemporary authors includes Norman Kemp Smith, *Is Divine Existence Credible?* (1931), Hubert Box, *The World and God* (1934), and W. G. De Burgh, *Towards a Religious Philosophy* (1937). If Baillie made use of a book published as late as 1937, it can be concluded that the ten pages of notes inserted into the lecture on The Nature of God were written sometime between 1937 and 1939.

In his lecture, “The Nature of God,” Baillie explains that before we can study the attributes of God (which is the focus of his next lecture in the course), we must consider how we have knowledge of the nature of God:

We are aware of God as One who seeks to invade our lives at every point—offering us His salvation and demanding our obedience. We are aware of Him at the same time as a Claimant and as a Giver. And now the question before us is, What character in the Claimant is revealed in the claim He makes; and what character in the Giver is revealed in the gift He offers? Theology answers this question in its doctrine of the attributes of God, and to the enumeration and exposition of these individual attributes we shall come in our next section. But first, in this section, we must concern ourselves in a more analytic way with the preliminary question, How do we arrive at our knowledge of these attributes? How do I know that God is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, impassible, etc? Whence do I derive these notions, and how do I come to apply them to God? N.B. that we are not asking *whether* God is infinite or omniscient: we *know* that; but what we are asking is how we know it.

We are analyzing the nature of a knowledge that we possess rather than trying to find our way to a knowledge that we do not possess.¹⁰⁴

In addressing this question, Baillie provides a substantial overview of Aquinas' epistemology and then briefly compares Barth and Kant, who both propose alternatives to the Thomist perspective and are influenced by the Lutheran tradition. Some ways in which Baillie's lecture on "The Nature of God" sheds light on *Our Knowledge of God* in particular and his theology of revelation in general will be examined.

In his third chapter, "Is Our Knowledge of God's Existence Inferential?", Baillie criticizes the western assumption that knowledge of God's existence is a conclusion that we draw, much like we draw conclusions using mathematical equations or the scientific method. As we saw in the last chapter, Baillie identifies the inception of this idea with Plato, but then directs his focus to Aquinas (and the theological tradition that has stemmed from his thought) as having a significant impact in fueling this assumption. Baillie explains in his lecture why he engages Aquinas in the presentation of his own thought. In addressing how we know the nature of God, Baillie says "it is best to begin by having clearly in our mind the orthodox mediaeval teaching on this matter, because all the answers that are before us today are in the nature of dissent from that."¹⁰⁵ The aspect of Aquinas' theology Baillie focuses on at this point, and which is presumably the aspect

¹⁰⁴ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 8.

from which there is so much common dissent, is that we have no *direct* knowledge of God. He writes,

According to St. Thomas, then, we have no direct knowledge of God either by nature or by revelation. Our only direct knowledge is of the world of nature as perceived by the five senses. Our knowledge of everything else, i.e. of all non-sensible and supersensible realities, is discursive in nature, being reached by inference from the things we see and touch. This is true of God. He is known to us—so far as our natural knowledge is concerned—only *per suos effectus* in the world of nature, only *per ea quae facta sunt*, as St. Paul says in Romans.¹⁰⁶

Certainly there were proponents of Thomism and the analogy of being (Hubert Box is quoted by Baillie to represent modern Thomism), but Baillie argues that the Lutheran theology of God in, with and under his creation provides a platform for an alternative epistemology. Baillie gives little attention to Luther himself, but focuses on the fruit of Lutheran theology in Kant and Barth in both his book and lecture notes.

While there is much overlap between the lectures and book, as evidenced by the extensive quoting and paraphrasing of the inserted notes in *Our Knowledge of God*, two aspects of the notes set them apart as helpful to the illumination of Baillie's theology of revelation. First, in this lecture Baillie places a particular emphasis on the problem of anthropomorphism in theology. Anthropomorphism and the attributes of God are discussed in the closing pages of the book, whereas they are central to his lecture.

Second, in his lectures Baillie provides a critique of Barth and Kant, including a direct

¹⁰⁶ Notice the remarkable similarity to the following passage in *Our Knowledge of God*: “We have, according to St. Thomas, no *direct* knowledge of any existence save the world of nature as perceived by the five senses. Our knowledge of all non-sensible realities is discursive in character, being reached by inference from the things we can see and touch. God is of course a non-sensible reality, and hence He cannot be known to us directly or *per se*, but only *per suos effectus*, through His effects in the world of nature, *per ea quae facta sunt*, through the things which He has made.” (*Our Knowledge of God*, 109.)

comparison of the two that is not found in *Our Knowledge of God*. We will include extended sections of Baillie's lectures which have not yet been included in the scholarship and, in so doing, examine these two points unique to the lectures.

As stated above, Baillie begins the lecture summarizing Aquinas' teaching of the *analogia entis* and the *via negationis*, much of which can be found in his section on "The Tradition of Theistic Proofs" in *Our Knowledge of God*. He concludes,

In this way it is possible to arrange created things in an order, ranging from the less to the greater, from the less good to the more good, from the less powerful to the more powerful; and thus we can see in what *direction* our thoughts must travel to reach God. God is, as it were, at the end of the line that leads from the weaker things we know to the stronger, or from the less good men we know to the more good, – when that line is produced *ad infinitum*. Such, then, according to St. Thomas, is the extent of our natural knowledge of God. But St. Thomas believes that we have also a revealed knowledge of Him. This revealed knowledge is essentially, however, of the nature of *authoritatively-received information*. We have God's word for it that He possesses the attributes of infinity, omnipotence, omnipresence, immortality, etc. We have no direct knowledge of God's omnipotence, omniscience etc: but must accept it on the authority of Biblical revelation.¹⁰⁷

The latter half of this passage should not be read as though Baillie is saying that God's testimony to himself and his character is not sufficient, nor is he intending to diminish the authority of the biblical witness. He is making clear the epistemological boundaries laid by Aquinas and the subsequent theology built upon his thought along with the exclusion of the possibility of direct knowledge of God. "According to this Thomist and Roman teaching, then, the source of our knowledge of the divine attributes is twofold a) by

¹⁰⁷ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 10.

analogy, b) by authoritatively communicated information. We have no *direct* knowledge either way.”¹⁰⁸

Baillie argues for an alternative perspective on our knowledge of God in a lengthy section of notes not directly found in his published material.

The right view is, not that we first see goodness in ourselves and then imagine this goodness as being increased to infinity, and ascribe it to God. The truth is the opposite. It is the direct vision of God, and above all the direct vision of God in Christ, that shows us what goodness is: And then we both see our own lack of goodness and our own faint beginnings of goodness, receiving both for what they are in the light of the standard we find outside ourselves in God.

This is the age-old question of the nature of our knowledge of the ideal and the relation of our knowledge of the actual to our knowledge of the ideal. Empiricism which believed, like the Thomists, that all our knowledge begins from the things of sense, taught that our knowledge of the ideal was derived from our observation of the actual; that the laws of correct thinking were derived from our observation of how men actually think; that the moral law was derived from our observation of actual human conduct. But this empiricist view cannot stand. It is impossible to work out its case even plausibly, however plausible it may sound when stated in a general form. The truth is that the laws of thought are derived by us not from the actual course of our thinking, but from a *standard* by which our actual thinking is always to some extent influenced, though it is seldom completely formed by it. We must therefore have some independent knowledge of this standard. It could never be deduced from the way we actually do think. It must be in our minds *a priori*, as the philosophers says [sic]. The same is true of our moral standards or ideals. The whole of Kant’s philosophical enterprise was given to the demonstration, as against the empiricists, that our moral standards are *a priori*. They were not derived from our experience of the actual, but were prior to it and the necessary condition of it. Unless we already knew what ideal goodness was, he contended, we could not know that any individual man or action was better or worse than another. The knowledge of the ideal is not built up (synthetically—as Box had it) from particular moral judgments, but is the condition of our making any such judgments. And you remember how Kant said that the whole of history did not contain a single certain example of observance of the moral law. So far from goodness being something suggested by our

¹⁰⁸ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 10.

observation of human conduct, it was something which *may* never have been seen there—we cannot point with confidence to any example of ‘a good will.’¹⁰⁹

Here in his lecture as well as in his published works, Baillie finds help from Kant in laying a foundation for his own thought. As we saw in the last chapter, Baillie does not agree with the whole of Kant’s philosophy, but he does find some of his insights useful. He embraces Kant’s idea that knowledge of the ideal cannot be *a posteriori* in order to leverage his own view that people can have a kind of direct knowledge of God. Baillie rejects the idea that knowledge of God is derived or, as he puts in *Our Knowledge of God*, inferred. It is noteworthy, too, that Baillie uses moral categories to describe the nature of knowledge of God; to know the ideal of goodness is to know the goodness of God, according to Baillie.

For Baillie, it is knowledge of the ideal of goodness, of God’s goodness, that frames any gradation of goodness in a person’s judgment of self or others. The complexity of Baillie’s position lies in the fact that such knowledge does not, in human experience, come chronologically prior to knowledge of self and others, but in, with and under it. Baillie puts it this way in his lecture:

We must therefore believe that the knowledge of the ideal standards – of truth, beauty and goodness – in the light of which we judge our actual experience and find it wanting though not actually worthless, are known to us *a priori*, i.e. not chronologically before our knowledge of the actual, but independently of it – and in such a connection with it that we could not have the kind of knowledge we

¹⁰⁹ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 14-15.

have of the actual (i.e. we could not know it as a valuational field) if we did not at the same time know the ideal.¹¹⁰

In other words, knowledge of the ideal is a logical priority for knowledge of the actual and any judgment of the actual according to the ideal. Logical priority, does not equate to chronological priority. Baillie is wary of interpreting *a priori* knowledge as a chronology of knowledge (that is, knowing the ideal and then, chronologically speaking, knowing the actual) because such chronology makes room for inference.¹¹¹

Identifying Kant, among others, as an important signpost in an alternative epistemological tradition to that articulated by Aquinas, Baillie then builds on Kant's position that we have *a priori* knowledge of the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness.

Identifying these ideals with the character of God, Baillie draws this conclusion:

Hence the conceptions of eternity, omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence are none of them formed by us merely 'synthetically': they are not extensions of our experience of the actual and of our valuation of it; *they must be revealed to us directly, somewhere else, as a condition of our ability to evaluate the actual. Our view is that they are revealed to us in God, who is Himself directly revealed to*

¹¹⁰ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 15. In his chapter, "Analogy and Symbol," in *The Sense of the Presence of God*, Baillie makes a point almost identical to the one made in the last paragraph of this passage. He writes, "It cannot indeed be too strongly emphasized that God's revelation of Himself cannot be received by us save in the context of our knowledge of finite realities. Only a being who is (a) self-conscious, (b) aware of other selves, and (c) aware of corporeal things can have any knowledge of God. But the point we are at present concerned to make is that the world of created reality cannot be known to us as what we may call a graded valuational field apart from some revelation of the divine perfection. In that sense our knowledge of all ideals is *a priori*; not chronologically prior to our knowledge of the actual, but a necessary condition of our ability to ascribe to the actual such characters as good and bad, just and unjust, wise and foolish." See *The Sense of the Presence of God*, 117-118. A strong case for the continuity and unity of Baillie's thought can be made based on the fact that the lecture notes incorporating a portion that predates the publication of *Our Knowledge of God* are recognizable in his final work.

¹¹¹ Baillie makes this same distinction between logical and chronological priority in *Our Knowledge of God*, 213-214.

us—and not reached by a process of analogical inference or any kind of inference. We know what infinity, eternity, etc are because we see them in God who is directly present to our experience. Man is thus directly conscious of the Infinite. If he were not, he could never guess at it—in advance of its actual presentation of itself to his consciousness!¹¹²

Again, he writes,

Here, then, is an immensely important conclusion at which we have arrived concerning our knowledge of God's nature and attributes. We are forced to the conclusion that our knowledge of them is of such a kind as to make it quite impossible that it could have been acquired by analogical inference from *our own* nature and attributes *or* from the nature and attributes of any other created thing. We must therefore have direct knowledge of them as they are in God Himself. God Himself has been directly revealed to us, in His own nature and clothed in all His attributes. Otherwise they would all be utterly and necessarily beyond our conceiving.¹¹³

These passages, as noted, have strong correspondence to portions published in *Our Knowledge of God*. Though the content is very similar, the lecture notes provide perhaps more emphasis on the immediate nature of knowledge of God. These passages are especially helpful in clarifying that Baillie's position on the direct or immediate knowledge of God does not undermine in any way a strong view of the otherness or transcendence of God. In fact, Baillie's insistence on the requirement of direct

¹¹² Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 14-16. This passage shares a common thought with the following quote from *Our Knowledge of God*: "With reference to each of these ontological predicates, infinity, eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, impassibility, and the rest, it may therefore be shown that they are all first discovered by us in the divine Reality that confronts us, and only then set in contrast to our finite, temporal, changeable, weak, ignorant, and suffering selves, first to our own exceeding humiliation but afterwards to our very great rejoicing." Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 258.

¹¹³ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 17. This point of this passage is echoed in a section of *Our Knowledge of God*: "To say that we gain the conception of perfect being by 'comparing less perfect beings with more perfect' is to forget that such a comparison cannot itself be instituted save by the aid of an already apprehended standard of perfection." Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 253.

knowledge of God (as opposed to inferential knowledge) is a result of his insistence that the nature of God is so far outside of the scope of what humans could ever grasp by reference to their own experience. To Baillie's thinking, an inferential knowledge of God diminishes the nature of God; that is, God's nature is capable of being reached by human speculation. Baillie understands human nature to be so radically distinct (and in a sinful world, so radically diminished) in comparison with the divine nature that knowledge of God must truly be a revelation rather than an inference.

In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie distances himself from the view of Otto and others, including Barth and Brunner, that God is wholly other as a repudiation of the perceived extreme views of divine immanence.¹¹⁴ While there have certainly been abuses of the theology of divine immanence, Baillie does not think that the belief in the nearness of God itself undermines the transcendence of God; rather, his notes clarify what his real concern is—anthropomorphism. The concern of anthropomorphism doesn't surface explicitly until the final pages of *Our Knowledge of God*, but it is a primary concern in Baillie's lecture notes. The way Baillie understands the threat of anthropomorphism helps us understand his opposition to inference as a path to knowledge of God.

In his lecture Baillie states that “the charge of anthropomorphism has often haunted religion; ever since Xenophanes of Colophon, the pre-Socratic, wrote: ‘Men make gods in their own image; those of the Ethiopians are black and snub-nosed, those of

¹¹⁴ See Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 228-239. This section is entitled “Is He Wholly Other?”.

the Thracians have blue eyes and red hair. If horses or oxen or lions had hands and could produce works of art, they would make their gods as horses and oxen and lions.”¹¹⁵

From a modern source, Baillie writes, “Hare put it neatly when he said, ‘God made man in His own image and man made haste to return the compliment.’” Thus Baillie understands anthropomorphism here as the conceiving of God in our image, constructing his nature from our own experience. For Baillie, this can only be viewed as an idolatrous departure from true religion, as evidence by his citation of Deuteronomy 4:15-16 and Romans 1:23, 25. He adds to this support a passage from the Westminster Larger Catechism:

‘Q109 What are the sins forbidden in the second Commandment? A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, *either inwardly in our mind*, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it....’ Here is forbidden the making of a *mental* image of God in the likeness of any created being!¹¹⁶

Baillie’s emphasis that mental images of God are included in what scripture forbids as idolatry brings into sharper focus his concern with the epistemological tradition whereby God is known by the *anologia entis* and the *via negationis*. Nowhere does Baillie condemn adherents to this tradition as idolaters, but his point is that the scriptures teach that any conception we have of God that is constructed out of our own creaturely

¹¹⁵ Baillie provides this citation for this quote: Dials. Fragments 16, 15 loosely translated.

¹¹⁶ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 18.

experience is necessarily false. This cannot be the way we know God. God must make himself known.

In both his lecture notes and in *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie examines the thought of Kant and Barth as it relates to the nature of our knowledge of God. Though he does not wholly agree with either thinker, he genuinely values Kant and Barth for their distinct positions which provide alternatives to the tradition of the *anologia entis*. Baillie's lecture includes a comparison of Kant and Barth that is not found in *Our Knowledge of God* and which is useful in clarifying how Baillie distinguishes his own position in reference to theirs. He appreciates and shares with them an opposition to an epistemology drawn from analogy to human experience. But he believes they go too far in their insistence on the otherness of God. The following passage from Baillie's lecture notes offer fresh expression and insight into his own position.

It is to be noted also that Barth's doctrine of the divine as the wholly other corresponds, on one side of it, very closely to Kant's doctrine of the moral law as wholly foreign to man's desire. The completeness of the Barthian opposition between God and man corresponds to this extent with the completeness of the Kantian opposition between duty and inclination, between what we know we ought to do and what we want to do.

But the *difference* between Kant and Barth lies in the view they take of reason. Barth puts reason on the human side of the opposition – on the side of man and his inclinations, whereas Kant puts it on the divine side – on the side of God and duty. In this difference between the Barthian and the Kantian views of reason there seem, indeed, to be *two* differences involved. *First*, to Kant reason is essentially a divine thing; it is of the essential nature of God to be reasonable, He being the supreme Intelligence; and so reason belongs to the Uncreated world. But to Barth reason is something created by God; by His sovereign Will He determines what shall be reasonable. Barth always speaks of reason as part of our human psychology – as an activity of created spirit. But *second*, Barth regards

reason, along with the rest of human nature, to be totally corrupt; so that to follow our reasons [sic] is to be led only into sin and error. Whereas Kant holds reason to be our only *protection* against sin and error; he agrees with Barth that our human nature is corrupt, perhaps even totally so – but reason is not part of human nature.

...Barth makes the same complete cleavage between divine nature and human nature that Kant makes between reason and desire, between duty and inclination. To Barth man is wholly contrary to God; to Kant man's inclinations are wholly contrary to the moral law of reason. Barth is as anxious to separate anthropology completely from theology as Kant was anxious to separate anthropology completely from ethics.

Are they right in this? Is human nature totally corrupt? Are all our desires completely contrary to our duty? And is God wholly other than man? Barth and Kant valiantly defend us against anthropomorphism; but does their defense go too far? Are they *too* much afraid of anthropomorphism? Is there a justifiable anthropomorphism in theology, and a justifiable anthropology in ethics?¹¹⁷

One can almost discern the outline of *Our Knowledge of God* in the rhetorical questions Baillie asks in the last paragraph quoted above. Based on what he writes in *Our Knowledge of God*, it is clear that Baillie thinks that Barth and Kant do go too far in their understanding of divine transcendence. Baillie's brief study of Barth and Kant illustrates the need to clarify what constitutes human nature (e.g., spirituality, rationality, personality), how far sin extends into and throughout human nature and what its corruption of that nature entails, which he does in *Our Knowledge of God*.

What this extended section from Baillie's lecture notes also clarifies is that the view of God's otherness, as seen defended by Barth or Kant, must be maintained in contrast to the kind of anthropomorphism he identifies with an epistemology based on the

¹¹⁷ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 19-21.

analogia entis. To be clear, Baillie is not using the term “anthropomorphism” here as a biblical literary device, but as a theological term describing a conception of God developed in reference to human nature. His brief reference to theological anthropomorphism in *Our Knowledge of God* depicts it as a violation of the second commandment, which forbids the creation or worship of an image of God. Baillie writes, “What is false [in the *analogia entis*] is the assumption that the comparison moves from man to God instead of from God to man. Such a view, if consistently carried out, is bound to end in anthropomorphism, that is, in a breach of the second commandment.”¹¹⁸

In the notes that follow, Baillie argues that there can be a way that anthropomorphism can be conceived of rightly in that it identifies the likeness and therefore the revelatory point of contact between God and his human creatures. This is, of course, where his position is set apart from that of Barth and Kant. Baillie claims that anthropomorphism, a conception of God developed in reference to human nature, may be justified when one takes into consideration that God has uniquely created humans in the image of God, after his likeness. Some measure of anthropomorphism may only be justified, however, if sin has not completely devastated the image of God in humanity. To defend the idea that the image remains, in some sense, Baillie makes a case based on John Calvin’s view of the image of God:

Calvin says, ‘The image of God extends to everything in respect of which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals.’ (*Institutio* I xv §3). I am sure this is right. What differentiates man from other animals is that he bears

¹¹⁸ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 254.

the image of God. Whatever we say, therefore, of the extent of man's depravity, we cannot say that his likeness to God has totally disappeared; for then he would not be a man at all. His likeness to God consists in the first place in his being a spirit, a personal being.¹¹⁹

This means that the transcendence of God should not be conceived of as the unknowability of God. Nor should the depravity of human nature be conceived of as an obliteration of the divine image. Baillie writes, "In respect of spirituality, rationality, personality, will, God and men *are* alike, and have something in common with God which the rest of His creation has not in common with Him. If this were not so, man could have no knowledge of God. Were we wholly other than He, we could not know Him to be wholly other, because we could not know Him at all."¹²⁰

Due to the fact that out of all of creation only humanity was made in God's image, some support can be given for anthropomorphism. "To this extent," Baillie concedes, "Aquinas and the Mediaevals were right in finding an analogy between God and man." But Baillie goes on, "Where they were wrong was in attempting to construct *an argument of analogy from man to God*. If argument there is to be, it must be the other way around. It will not do to say that, because God's image is in us, therefore by looking at ourselves we can be led to the thought of God."¹²¹ Baillie's objection to the inferential movement from humanity to God is rooted in his conception of human nature as bearer of the divine image. He explains his view:

¹¹⁹ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 21.

¹²⁰ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 21.

¹²¹ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 24.

What does it mean to say that we were made in God's image and after His likeness? It means that we are spiritual, rational, personal beings as He is. But it is not as if we first possessed personality, rationality, spirituality, and then employed these powers to find out God. Rather are these powers a fruit of knowledge of God. So we must say that *Human nature is constituted by the self-disclosure of the Infinite and Eternal Reality which is God to our otherwise merely animal finitude*. Man is made man by the invasion of his otherwise merely animal nature by the divine attributes of personality, infinity, eternity, etc.

It is not because we are spiritual and personal beings that we know God; it is because we know God, because we are disturbed by the divine dimension of things, that we are spiritual and personal beings.¹²²

In other words, because God has revealed himself in human creatures, forming them in his likeness, these creatures have the capacity to know God in return. Put another way, God is a being who has knowledge, and so any being he creates to image himself will also have this capacity. But this is not a static capacity or an ability with mere potential. Instead, being an image bearer initiates the state of affairs in which the image bearer is in actuality a knower of the one whose image is being sustained.

These notes demonstrate that Baillie consistently seeks to mediate the insights of opposing viewpoints. He succinctly puts it this way, "Hence, though I think Barth wrongly denies all analogy between man and God, making God wholly other (so that to that extent I agree with Aquinas against him), I should agree with Barth as against Aquinas in denying the validity of an argument of analogy from man to God."¹²³ He expresses his mediating position, as demonstrated in the survey of *Our Knowledge of*

¹²² Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 24.

¹²³ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 21, 24.

God, by proposing that God reveals himself to us in, with, and under his creation—including his human creatures.

Baillie's argument that knowledge of God cannot be reached by the mere analogy of human attributes seems the most straight forward when one is considering attributes such as omnipotence, omniscience, or omnipresence. His argument requires nuance when other characteristics that would seem more narrowly defined by human experience are attributed to God. In the following portion of lecture notes, Baillie engages the challenge of how such characteristics as the fatherhood of God can be said to be *a priori*, even as divine omniscience is. The attribution of fatherhood, Baillie writes, "seems to be a character first apprehended in man, and afterwards by analogy applied to God. Father is a word whose primary meaning is within the domain of the mammals, the bi-sexual animal species; and especially within the human family. When we call God Father, therefore, we could seem to be applying to Him, with due modification, a conception the meaning of which we have learned in our human family life. It would seem, in a word, to be a metaphor. And it may seem thus to have been regarded in the teaching of our Lord. Did he not use arguments *a fortiori* from human to divine fatherliness. "What man of you, if his son ask him....? How much more shall your heavenly Father....!" And there are such parables as the Prodigal Son. And in the Old Testament such drawing of analogy as in the 103rd Psalm: "Like as a Father pitieth his children, so the Lord...."

Though it would seem that biblical use of the designation of "father" for God is derived from human experience, Baillie finds insight in Barth that would argue otherwise.

In the following passage, Baillie introduces and nuances Barth's perspective on the divine ideal of fatherhood.

... According to Barth, the original, literal, non-figurative and only 'proper' use of the word Father is as applied to the relation of God the Father to God the Son – the intra-trinitarian use. There is a secondary – and legitimate – use of the term as applied to God's relation to the creature (so that Father means Creator). There is a tertiary use of it – also legitimate enough – as applied to the relation of human progenitors to their progeny. And doubtless there is also a quaternary use, when we apply it to the lower animals; this being derived from the tertiary human use. But all these other uses are figurative, metaphorical. When a man says 'God is the Father of God the Son', he is not using the figurative language of metaphor, but when he says 'John Smith was my father', he *is* using the figurative language of metaphor. What are we to say to all this? Ask Class.

... Now there is no doubt that all these names are applied as conscious metaphors. And that means that in applying them to God we are using a human analogy. This is as true of the name *father* as of any other name. Hence we may hold, as against Barth, that the primary application of the word is to the natural relationship of progenitor to progeny within the created world. It is a conception empirically derived from an actual experience; and when we apply it to God, we do so in a secondary and transferred use.

We may ask, Would Barth make the same claim for all the names of God that he makes for the name 'Father'? There is certainly no good reason for admitting the claim in one case and denying it in another. When the Israelites spoke of God as 'Father' and as 'Shepherd of Israel', or even as 'Rock', they were following one and the same procedure. And Marcus Barth, in this class, told us that his father, in the Seminary at Basel, had been asked this question and answered, "Yes, it is the application of the word 'Rock' to God that is primary, and non-figurative.

All this that Barth says seems absurd, but is it really so? I do not think it is. I believe there is an element of profound truth in it, though Barth, here as frequently, is to blame for presenting this truth in so one-sided a form.

To realise this element of truth, we must make a distinction. We must distinguish between a *factual* and an *ideal* element in the application of all such names, and particularly the name Father. When I say, "That man is a father", I may mean (a) he has begotten sons and daughters, or (b) he has behaved towards these sons and daughters as a begetter should behave toward his progeny – as that

I might say, “He’s a *real* father to them”. Now when we say that God is our Father in Heaven, we are using the word in an ideal, not in a factual way. I.e. we are denominating, not a natural relationship in which we stand to God as His progeny or as His creatures, but the fact that He loves us with a perfect love and with the most tender care.¹²⁴

Baillie, then, understands fatherliness as an ideal that originates in God and which has to do with perfect love. Baillie defends this idea by pointing out that we use the designation of father to describe a person who exhibits the kind of “perfect love” and “tender care” God demonstrates to his human creatures. It is only the revelation of ideal fatherliness, Baillie writes, that yields to us “a standard which we can apply to human progenitors, in order to judge how little or how much true fatherliness is in them.”¹²⁵

This discussion of the ideal of fatherliness provides a helpful and nuanced example of how knowledge of God comes in, with, and under knowledge of the world and others. By this expression, “in, with and under,” Baillie means that “though our knowledge of God is not derived from our knowledge of the created world, yet it is given us only in conjunction with the latter. The fatherliness of God is a conception we could not have reached save as we have knowledge of human fathers; but it is not from our knowledge of human fathers that the conception itself is drawn.”¹²⁶ Interestingly, this illustration is not used in *Our Knowledge of God*, but it is clearly one that Baillie returned to throughout his career. Earlier in this chapter in the section, *The Interpretation of*

¹²⁴ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 26, 27.

¹²⁵ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 27.

¹²⁶ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 28.

Religion in Retrospect, Baillie was quoted in his 1930 letter to David Cairns as using this idea of fatherhood to illustrate the way in which something is uniquely known of God through what appears to be a uniquely human experience.¹²⁷ This discussion of analogy illustrated by the designation “father” can also be found in an altered, though readily identifiable, form in pages 120-121 in *The Sense of the Presence of God*, which was written thirty years after his correspondence with Cairns. This demonstrates that, though Baillie did not use this particular illustration in *Our Knowledge of God*, it is included in the lecture notes that were clearly referenced for that book. Thus, there is evidence that Baillie’s theology of revelation understood to be the divine self-communication given in, with, and under human experience of the world and others was formed by 1930 and maintained for the duration of his career.

So far, we have shown that much of the content of “The Nature of God” lectures we have been examining is also found in *Our Knowledge of God*. We have shown that though the notes we have are from 1953, a portion of them were taken from an almost identical course that was likely taught sometime between 1937-1939, prior to the publication of *Our Knowledge of God* in 1939. This means that Baillie maintained his position on the theology of revelation during his tenure at New College. To further

¹²⁷ Baillie denies that “a race of men could receive the insight that God was fatherly *before* they had received the insight that fatherliness is a high, the highest, value in the interrelationship of persons—a view which, it seems to me would be contrary to all our experience of the way in which insights come and of the self-impartment of the Divine Spirit to the spirit of man. *Of course* the *source* of all human insights is God. When we realise the appeal and charm and claim of any high good, it is because the goodness of God is pressing in upon our souls.” Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/17/4.

demonstrate the strong continuity of thought he maintained during the latter years of his scholarship, we find in these same divinity lectures a section of material that likely served as the basis for a section in the Gifford Lectures he was preparing up to the time of his death in 1960 and which were published posthumously in 1962.

Conclusion

To review, there are four major points in Baillie's thought which have been identified and traced through his early writing and teaching prior to the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*: 1) the revelatory presence of God, 2) the universal human moral experience as the context for faith, 3) the defensible logic of faith, and 4) the revelation of God in, with, and under human experience of the world and others. It was demonstrated that, from his earliest published writing, Baillie insisted on linking the revelation of God with the divine presence. Baillie understood the presence of God to specifically intersect human experience on the plane of human morality, which was the focus of his two first manuscripts, *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* and *The Interpretation of Religion*. The universal confrontation of God to all humanity through its moral consciousness provided the basis for what Baillie argued was a defensible logic of faith. This logical argument, however, was never intended by Baillie to function as a source of faith, but as a justification for the reasonableness of faith. The true source of faith, Baillie always claimed, was the presence of God experienced in, with and under human experience of the world and others.

In the next chapter, the contextualization of Baillie's thought as expressed in *Our Knowledge of God* continues in the examination of some of his published articles, manuscripts and unpublished divinity lectures.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Pilgrim's Progress: A Study of Baillie's Mature Theology of Revelation Following the Publication of *Our Knowledge of God*

One of the recurring hallmarks of Baillie's thought is his claim that God reveals himself to all people through his immediate, personal, confronting and continuous presence. In a lecture composed in the mid-1930's, Baillie writes, "Every man is conscious of a claim that is being made upon him, of a Higher Will, that challenges his own will.... Unto all has been given the knowledge that something is expected of him than that which he has already attained."¹ Here, prior to the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie simply states his conviction that all people have immediate knowledge of God's personal presence experienced as a challenge or confrontation. Even at this relatively early date, however, Baillie observes a very specific contemporary challenge to his claim that morality and religion are fused as God reveals himself to all people through a personal demand. The challenge is humanism. "There are some men in the world today," Baillie concedes, "who say, 'Yes, I have these experiences, but I find in

¹ John Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/12. Though this lecture is not archived with a date, there are several clues indicating it must have been written sometime between 1934 and 1939, and most likely around 1935. In the lecture, Baillie cites his "Inaugural Address as Professor in this seminary," by which he likely is referring to his position as the Chair of Divinity at Edinburgh University which began in 1934. He cannot be referring to his 1930 appointment to Union Theological Seminary since he also references in his lectures his "recent work *And the Life Everlasting*," which was published in 1933. It can also be argued that Baillie wrote this lecture before 1939 as there is no reference to *Our Knowledge of God* even though he has a section devoted to distinguishing between mediate and immediate aspects of revelation. The suggestion that Baillie wrote this lecture closer to 1935 simply stems from the observations that he would be more likely to compose an Introduction to Theology course at the beginning of his tenure at a new position, that he would be more likely to reference his own inaugural address when it was relatively fresh, and that he would describe the publication of a manuscript as recent when it was still, in fact, recent.

them no revelation of God. There is indeed a challenge which has been made to me, an obligation laid upon me. I do not deny the facts to which you point, but I deny their revelatory significance.”²

The previous two chapters of this dissertation have shown that Baillie has, from the beginning of his career, aimed to demonstrate that the human moral consciousness is religious in its origin and, as the moral consciousness is universal (and generally acknowledged to be so), so humanity’s religious nature and knowledge is as well. It is not until after World War II breaks out and he writes *Invitation to Pilgrimage* that Baillie addresses humanism head on in one of his manuscripts. Whereas the theology of revelation expressed in *Invitation to Pilgrimage* contains all the familiar elements seen so far in Baillie’s previous works, this publication shows how Baillie would have his theology constructed and applied to the biggest threat against Christianity he perceived in his time.

This chapter will continue the task of the last chapter in examining Baillie’s thought expressed in some of the manuscripts, journal articles and unpublished lectures post-dating the publication of *Our Knowledge of God* in 1939. In so doing, we will identify points of continuity and discontinuity with his earlier thought and will especially be able to introduce some of the nuances of his theology of revelation as Baillie expressed it in his maturity. We will observe the emphasis on the immediacy of our knowledge of God rooted in Baillie’s theology of the continuous divine presence. We

² Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/12.

will also observe his continued explanation of the mediation of God's presence through his creation and the church, thus creating unique and compelling revelatory experiences, and a more strongly expressed concern for the implications of his theology of revelation in the lives of individuals and in the ministries of the church.

Invitation to Pilgrimage (1942)

In seeking to trace the development of Baillie's thought, it is helpful to examine his book, *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (1942).³ Though today it is a lesser known publication,⁴ it is a valuable reference for several reasons. First, as mentioned, the context for the book, to which Baillie makes open reference, is the Second World War and this context appears to have motivated him to write a popular book making a case for the Christian faith. The influence of World War I on Baillie's view of humanity and his theology has been described and highlighted in previous chapters; particularly shaping had been his exposure to the British army working with the YMCA in France from 1914 to 1919. Just prior to the writing of *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie again volunteered with the YMCA for about a year in 1939-1940. Isobel Forrester, Baillie's cousin, recalls that Baillie escaped France, after German invasion in May 1941, and "returned to Scotland with a sure word of faith. Bewildered people turned to him for guidance, and

³ John Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942).

⁴ In a brief memoriam of Baillie published in 1961, Isobel Forrester, Baillie's cousin, notes that *Invitation to Pilgrimage* had just been republished and was known at the time to "a very wide public." The familiarity with *Invitation to Pilgrimage* has since diminished considerably. See Isobel M. Forrester, "Invitation to Pilgrimage: In Memoriam – John Baillie," *International Review of Mission* 50 (April 1961): 191-194.

from many pulpits he preached ‘to their condition,’ simply, realistically and with quiet confidence.”⁵ Once again, the direction of Baillie’s theology was deeply influenced by war-time circumstances.

Second, the popular level on which *Invitation to Pilgrimage* is written provides a valuable insight into how Baillie’s theology of revelation and his pedagogical insights on ministering to the masses were put into practice. Baillie writes in his “Preface to the American Edition” that he had been working on this book and presented lectures based on his work during the Spring of 1941 at Princeton Theological Seminary and later that year, in fuller form, at the Alexander Robertson Lectures in Glasgow. It is clear that, once again, Baillie was influenced by his exposure to the “common person.” And he writes the book for those whom he has identified elsewhere as the “intellectual masses,” for those, he writes, “who, while earnestly seeking a firm foundation for their life, are willing to devote to the quest a certain sustained labor of thought.”⁶

Third, though it is published only three years after *Our Knowledge of God*, the audience and context of *Invitation to Pilgrimage* make it a distinct text from *Our Knowledge of God*; the comparison of the two will further illuminate the progression of continuity and discontinuity in Baillie’s thought.

⁵ Isobel M. Forrester, “John Baillie: A Cousin’s Memories,” in *Christian Devotion*, by John Baillie (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons: 1962), 12.

⁶ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 5.

There are three aims to Baillie's *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. His first aim is to diagnose those elements of modern thought that render true Christian belief difficult. His second aim is to expose the weakness and gaps in modern explanations of reality. And his third aim is to present the gospel in such a way as to overcome intellectual roadblocks and meet people's needs. As part of the review of this book, a brief summary of Baillie's diagnosis and critique of the western worldview will be given followed by an analysis of his application of the gospel to his contemporary context.⁷

While Baillie recognizes that people have always struggled to accept God in Christ, he says there arose a particular stumbling block to Christian belief "in the changed outlook on human life and history which came in with the Renaissance and was reinforced by the *Aufklärung*. This outlook may be very simply described: it was a new realization of the powers and dignity of man."⁸ While such a realization need not necessarily be juxtaposed to Christian faith, since humanity is most certainly elevated by the teaching that it is made in God's image, this realization did in fact generate a humanistic hubris that diminished the felt need of dependence upon God and his salvation.

⁷ It is important to remember that Baillie's view here is exclusively limited to human experience in the western world.

⁸ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 74.

Baillie spends two chapters describing four characteristics of humanistic thought.⁹ His responses to these are especially illuminating of his own position. First, Baillie observes, humanism ushered in the belief that people are able to control their own fate. Given the advances in science, industry and medicine, this confidence is understandable. Even so, Baillie sees this as a false confidence; nothing that humanity invents can diminish its need for salvation in Christ. Humanity's need and the salvation God offers in Christ runs deeper than material need or circumstance.

Second, closely related to the first, humanism is characterized by the increasing comfort with and acceptance of life as it is. When life is made easier by various material and cultural advancements, it is understandable that people would become numb to the urgency of the gospel. Baillie writes, "The appearance of a more optimistic assessment of human nature and a less tragic sense of our fallen and helpless estate is unmistakably the underlying factor in the situation."¹⁰ For Baillie, nothing has changed or will change in human nature that could legitimize its hope in human progress and potential; he

⁹ Both Baillie's assessment of humanism as a roadblock to Christian faith and his method of bringing the gospel into this context provide a valuable illustration of his own theological pedagogy. The brief survey in the last chapter of Baillie's pedagogical articles demonstrated that Baillie believed 1) the gospel is both an unchanging truth and a malleable message that must be tailored to the modern situation, and 2) the human heart is universally in need of salvation but the nature of its awareness of this need may change with each generation. See especially the quote from "Young Minister," 153: "If our human nature has not changed, and if our human situation has not changed, then our essential need has not changed, since the days when the world was young. Men still need God. They need him every whit as much as their fathers did. They need him in just the same way, for just the same reasons, and at just the same points in their lives." Baillie also takes up an examination of humanism in "The Predicament of Humanism," *Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* 22 (1931), 109-118.

¹⁰ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 80.

maintains that, even with such a season of progress, humanity retains its need of salvation.

Even as humanism shapes people's view of humanity, it shapes people's view of history. Baillie's third observation about humanism regards its view of history, where history is viewed as a record of human initiative and this view has elevated the stature of human freedom. To this Baillie responds: "The Christian confession concerning Christ cannot then be made to square with a purely free-will conception of human life and history, but only with the conception of human life and history as undergirded by the prevenient grace of God."¹¹ For Baillie, the description of life shaped solely, or even mainly, by human will and effort simply does not fit his reading of scripture's historical narrative or his own experience. Reminiscent of personal reflection passages in *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie asks, "Can I, looking back on my own life and history, truthfully describe it as an eager quest? Was it I who was all the time seeking an elusive Good, or was I the elusive one, artfully evading the Good that was seeking me?"¹² And of his reading of scripture, Baillie observes that it is God who is the main actor on the stage of history, not humanity.

The fourth characteristic of humanism Baillie identifies is its view of history as progress, a process of continuous ascent fueled by human initiative. Such a view directly

¹¹ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 85.

¹² Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 85. Baillie answers his own question with the words of this hymn he learned in America: "I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew / He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me; / It was not I that found, O Savior true - / No, I was found of Thee."

conflicts with the Christian view of history which has as its center the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ and which anticipates a triumphant consummation of God's kingdom.¹³

Baillie identifies the western world in a state of worldview flux. He describes people as living in a culture that has been shaped by the Christian faith while distancing themselves from its tenets of worship and morality. The rationalistic humanism that carried the eighteenth century with confidence and hope has been deteriorating into naturalism, which can only lead to an epistemological wasteland, according to Baillie. Early on in the book, Baillie puts it this way: "Rationalism, in thus freely following out its own destiny, has seemed to overreach itself, and in overreaching itself to turn back upon itself and pass into something very like its own opposite."¹⁴ Once reason had been celebrated as a means to understand the truth, but since the Enlightenment, it increasingly became the case that the tool of reason was associated with sensory observation. Reason

¹³ That Baillie insists the consummation of history in the triumphant kingdom of God should replace the view of history as continuous ascent does not mean that Baillie denies that there is any progress in history. In a 1940 article reflecting on divine involvement in history, specifically the war, Baillie writes, "That even in this present world we may have some foretaste of the blessedness of the Kingdom is a doctrine that will be accepted by most; but must we not believe that we shall have some such foretaste not only in our individual souls but also in the ordering of our earthly society, and that the Holy Spirit is working in the world not only towards the 'growth in grace' of individuals but also towards a more gracious manner of corporate and social and international life? That such a movement of God's Spirit in history needs to be carefully distinguished from a merely humanistic belief in automatic progress is surely not a sufficient reason for denying its reality altogether." John Baillie, "Does God Defend the Right?" *The Christian News-Letter* 53 (1940), 4.

¹⁴ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 27. In other words, rationalism began as a way to make sense of the world in which we live and our experience of it using the good tool of reason. But rationalism, in its success, came to suffer from such a vanity that it now appears simply to venerate its own conclusions instead of allowing reason to be informed by the whole range of human experience.

became hijacked by a Rationalism that had come to serve the conclusion that God, who is not corporeal, did not exist.¹⁵ The wartime context in which the western world finds itself is, Baillie observes, eroding the confidence, independence and optimism of the humanist perspective on humanity and history.¹⁶ In its place is developing what Baillie describes as an unbelieving and irrational authoritarianism. Baillie is critical of the Christian thinkers who mirror too closely the intellectual climate of the day, seeking “to confront anti-Christian dogmatism with Christian dogmatism, an unreasonable paganism with an equally unreasonable Christianity.”¹⁷

For Baillie, Christianity is superlatively reasonable and is therefore rationally defensible. This conviction is sustained throughout his scholarship, beginning with *Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926), where we find Baillie’s first attempt to explain the logic of faith. Though Baillie does not outline the logic of faith in *Invitation to Pilgrimage* as he has in previous publications, neither does he reject it. His understanding of the reasonableness of Christianity does not lead him to suggest (as

¹⁵ The non-existence of God is the apparent truth, the reasonable conclusion drawn from sense data; therefore, the burden of proof rests on theists. The theists are seen as hard-pressed for proof of God’s existence because, as Baillie admits above, personal experience is interpreted differently. Baillie believed that rationalism had given way to naturalism, and this could only lead to a kind of hopeless nihilism, which he observed shades of in the dogma of the Nazis. See Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 94.

¹⁶ See Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 80. Baillie writes, “May it not be that in the tragic happenings of our time God is ‘dealing with us as with sons’, in order that we may regain our lost knowledge of our own weakness and His power and will to save?” In other words, God is disciplining those impacted by the war in order to reestablish the right relationship between Creator and human creature.

¹⁷ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 32. Specifically, Baillie identifies “the straightest sect” of the Barthian school as those whose understanding of and resistance to human reason is both puzzling and troubling.

many Christian thinkers in the previous century had suggested) that people can be persuaded to Christian belief simply by means of a well-crafted argument for God's existence; Baillie rejects that apologetic in *Invitation to Pilgrimage* just as he had in *Our Knowledge of God*.¹⁸ Even so, Baillie does not seem to view an appeal to the logic of faith as a helpful tactic in this more popular book. It can be recalled that he had once felt he must begin with people's moral experience and make a case for the reasonableness of the Christian faith from that starting point.¹⁹ In the case of his World War II audience, Baillie appeals to people's longing to make sense of their world and discern the truth of the times, insisting reason is the tool humanity has to perceive truth. Baillie defines reason as "the ability to recognize truth when it is presented to us."²⁰ The irrational dogmatism he sees about him is, for Baillie, a kind of blindness cloaking humanity from the truth of God that is, in fact, all around. His urging is to live with eyes wide open to the world, including its suffering and tragedy. Baillie is firmly convinced that God confronts people with his saving grace even in such a broken context, perhaps especially in such a context.

In *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie maintains that humanity is as sinful as it ever was and no milestone of modern progress can diminish humanity's need for salvation,

¹⁸ In fact, Baillie always rejected logical argument as the *source* of Christian faith; this was confirmed in chapter three's analysis of *The Interpretation of Religion* (1928), though he later regretted that he had not expressed this rejection more explicitly.

¹⁹ This is the situation Baillie found himself in with his American students. See the discussion of Baillie's 1930 letter to Cairns in the previous chapter.

²⁰ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 34.

though it may diminish its perception of need. Furthermore, people's rejection of their need for salvation does not have any bearing on their *de facto* need for salvation, but it does force one to look for a way to share the gospel such that it responds to a need that is acknowledged. Baillie writes, "We are *not* allowing the Gospel to do its own work unless we present it to the men of our time in the form in which the profound truth of it is most likely to be evident to them. If we present the Gospel in the form which brought most conviction to the men of the fourth century, or of the thirteenth or sixteenth, we are likely to be presenting it in a form which may actually obscure its relevance to the problems and trials of today."²¹ And how does Baillie present the gospel? He tells his own story of encountering God, describes the way God encounters all humanity, explains why people resist the God they encounter and how instead they can embrace him.

Baillie's story of encountering God begins with his earliest memories – memories to which he has referred to consistently throughout his career to illustrate his theological perspective. He recalls, "I cannot remember a time when my life seemed to me to be my own to do with as I pleased."²² His perception of reality was that he was under the authority of someone else. In telling his own story of encountering the challenge of God that he was not his own, Baillie believed he was expressing a common contemporary experience and feeling. Certainly he knew himself to be under the authority of his parents and

²¹ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 35.

²² Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 37. Compare to *Our Knowledge of God*: "I cannot remember a time when I did not already feel, in some dim way, that I was 'not my own' to do with as I pleased, but was claimed by a higher power which had authority over me." Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 4.

community, but as he grew to observe those around him, he saw that they, too, were under the same authority. “I understood,” Baillie writes, “that my parents were under the same constraint that they were so diligent in transmitting to me.”²³ Interestingly, part of his discovery that it was God whose authority he was under included the discovery of the fallibility of his mother and elders. Such an episode proved not to be a mere conflict of wills (a common enough experience for any parent and child), but a conflict of judgments regarding what was right. In such a conflict Baillie was confronted with these questions: “What then was the ultimate source of the authority which my parents were thus doing their fallible best to administer and under which they stood no less than I? What was this constraint that was laid on us? Whose was this greater will that we were both called upon to obey?”²⁴ Baillie answers that, from the beginning, he knew it to be God whose authority and will constrained both his parents and him.

Baillie’s awareness of God’s authority over him generated in him a corresponding awareness of his resistance to and rebellion against this authority. He refers to this resistance as the “naughtiness” he recalls from a very early point in his life. “I have no hesitation,” Baillie writes, “in saying that its essence lay in the tendency to find the centre of my life in myself, to behave as though I were the centre of my world.... I knew that when I was naughty I was taking the management of things into my own hands instead of allowing myself to be managed by God; and I knew that in so doing I was putting things

²³ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 37.

²⁴ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 39.

badly out of joint. . . . I knew that when I put self in the centre of things, I was putting myself where no man, not even a father, has any right to be. For I knew that at the real centre of things is only God.”²⁵ This particular reflection exhibits not only Baillie’s awareness of God’s presence and demand, themes which can be found in *Our Knowledge of God*, but also of God’s sovereignty in his life – a point of particular emphasis in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. The sovereignty of God is a poignant emphasis given the wartime context of the book and its tackling of the problem of evil. Here, Baillie’s identification as the “orthodox liberal” (so David Fergusson) leans heavily to the side of his Presbyterian orthodoxy. For Baillie, the awareness of this demand placed upon us and our resistance to it marks the starting point of every person’s journey to God. Even the apparent journey away from God or the fruitless search for an evasive God fits, as Baillie understands it, into this paradigm. In a passage reminiscent of *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie writes, “Part of the reason why men cannot find God is that there is that in Him which they do not desire to find, so that the God whom they are seeking and cannot find is not the God who truly is.”²⁶

Baillie rejects the modern notion that such angst is an entirely interior experience created by a tension within one’s own self. He insists that the notion of a moral ideal, the sense of duty to do what is right, even at a cost, is what creates this tension; furthermore,

²⁵ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 39.

²⁶ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 23. Compare to *Our Knowledge of God*: “Part of the reason why I could not find God was that there is that in God which I did not wish to find. Part of the reason why I could not (or thought I could not) hear Him speak was that He was saying some things to me which I did not wish to hear.” Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 55.

this ideal or sense of what is expected comes to a person from outside of herself and hits hard against her awareness of who she actually is. Baillie says it cannot be society which is the external thing burdening its members with ideals, for the society, too, seems to be placed under the same ideals. Though he doesn't explicitly make the argument, it is clear that Baillie is operating according to the logic of faith he has long defended: human moral experience is integral to the experience and knowledge of God and it is our moral experience which illuminates a moral, personal and absolute being.

It is noteworthy that Baillie here seems to suggest that it is not enough that God *is* the source of moral ideals (something he has always affirmed); humanity must also *acknowledge* God to be such. This latter point appears to be an addition to what he has said in earlier writings. Baillie claims “that the moral and spiritual life of man can have no real meaning apart from God. It is out of man's dealings with God that this moral and spiritual life has emerged and, if God is made to disappear from it, nothing at all of it is left – nothing, that is, that is characteristically human.”²⁷ Moral standards come from God, and if people persistently and continually reject the revelation of God in their moral awareness, that moral awareness will diminish just as their awareness of God diminishes. Baillie admits that, just as a vegetable does not wither and die immediately after it has been uprooted, so there is some moral vigor to be found in the atheist who lives with the inheritance of a Christian culture. “There has even been seen in the world,” Baillie observes, “such a thing as a professed and professional atheist manifesting in his own

²⁷ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 46.

deeds the fruit of Christian love. But it would appear that this is likely to be no more than a very temporary phenomenon. It cannot last long, and it may be that it has already passed away.”²⁸

In *Our Knowledge of God* Baillie articulated two sources for unbelief: moral and intellectual. The moral source is identified with willful resistance to God’s call and demand while the intellectual source is identified with honest misunderstanding; the former is identified as sinful while the latter is not. In *Invitation to Pilgrimage* Baillie speaks much more openly about sin and seems to articulate a stronger view of its role in unbelief. Though Baillie still allows for the possibility of someone whose rejection of God is a misunderstanding of the gospel in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, he does not defend the possibility of a sinless ignorance as the source of atheism as he did in *Our Knowledge of God*. He writes in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, “I have no doubt that difficulties of belief are immensely complicated and aggravated by misunderstanding. Of course, they are never due to misunderstanding alone; another factor is always concerned in them, namely, sin; and it is this hopelessly raveled and reticulated tangle of sin and unreason, of wrong motives and wrong logic, coming from a bad heart and a bad head, that creates the real complexity of our task.”²⁹ What accounts for this diminished concern to defend a sinless disbelief? Perhaps audience has something to do with it, but it may also be that

²⁸ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 46.

²⁹ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 11.

the context of a second world war was the cause of a waning optimism in the possibility of a pure-of-heart atheism.

In multiple places in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie describes the foundation of the spiritual life as a knowledge that a transcendent claim is made upon oneself.³⁰ But, according to Baillie, what we know at the bottom of our hearts we most often misunderstand with the top of our minds: “He who stands at the door has come with a gift, but we are so ready to think that He has come for a payment. The knock is a Savior’s knock, but we are so ready to think it is a Taskmaster’s.... We interpret the divine summons merely as a demand for obedient service, and so we try to still the knocking by feverish action. We turn our religion into a code of good conduct, an ideal to be striven for, a law to be obeyed.”³¹ Baillie observes the divine summons to result in the misunderstanding of feverish *moral* action, which confirms his early position that the moral conscience is a central point of contact in divine revelation. But that Baillie insists this divine summons is *not* a summons to moral action reinforces and clarifies a nuance he introduces in *Our Knowledge of God*. There he writes, “Every revelation of God is a demand, and the way to knowledge of God is by obedience.”³² Lest this demand for

³⁰ See Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 48, 54. This can be compared to Baillie’s 1920’s description of the root of religion as the moral consciousness as argued in *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* and *The Interpretation of Religion*. Baillie has not changed his perspective so much as to disagree with his earlier description, but his changed expression of his perspective reflects his move away from Kantian language and the more pastoral approach he takes to his theology in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*.

³¹ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 48.

³² Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 163.

obedience be misunderstood to mean, as Kant would view it, a moral demand that requires moral obedience, Baillie says, “A demand is indeed made, but it is a demand that we should accept a gift.”³³ The gift is simply that, “The righteousness which is demanded of us, and which we are unable to achieve, has been achieved for us and is now freely offered to us. God Himself, in the person of Christ the Son, has satisfied His own claims upon us.”³⁴

In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie discusses the extent of sin insofar as it bears on his theology of the continuity of nature and grace and the image of God. In *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie examines the nature of sin in general and its impact on people’s response to the divine summons to receive the gift of God in Christ. Why, Baillie asks, do people refuse such a gift? He answers that the source of such refusal is pride; specifically, pride that puts self at the center of reality instead of God. Baillie describes this pride in terms of one seeking mastery of her own destiny apart from the one who governs all destiny. It is the misalignment of place wherein the creature seeks to usurp the role and right of the Creator. In other words, this pride amounts to the rejection of God’s right to summon one to obedience, especially when that obedience consists of accepting the righteous work of another in place of one’s own failures.

³³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 163. In parallel terms, Baillie writes in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*: “It is not so much a demand that I should do something as a demand that I should allow something to be done in me. It is not that I am expected to produce something out of myself, or to achieve something in my own strength, but that I am expected to allow Another to work His will with me. The demand is much more fundamentally a demand for surrender than a demand for effort.” Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 49.

³⁴ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 50.

Baillie discusses sin and saving faith differently in *Invitation to Pilgrimage* than he does in *Our Knowledge of God*. He does not talk about sin in terms of pride in *Our Knowledge of God*, and he does not address saving faith in *Our Knowledge of God* nearly to the degree he does in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. These differences certainly make sense given the different audiences and agendas of the books. In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie devotes much more space to clarifying and defending his distinction between belief at the bottom of one's heart and belief at the top of one's head than he does to explaining the nature of saving faith. Of course, such an emphasis fits Baillie's purpose in *Our Knowledge of God*, which is, in part, to defend the continuity of nature and grace. His care to explain a kind of knowledge or belief in God that all people have (which the preacher can assume in her hearers as being part of the image of God retained by all people and which is revelation's point of contact) is part of that defense. In that book he insists that one must be justified by faith to be saved, but he also allows that "an unself-conscious faith may also in its measure be a *fides salvifica*."³⁵ If one only reads *Our Knowledge of God*, however, one might suspect of Baillie such a weakened view of saving faith as to suggest a kind of universalism.

In *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie writes about faith and salvation in much more Reformed theological terms. For example, he says, "Christianity teaches that salvation is not by works but by faith, and that 'justification' is a pre-condition of sanctification and not a result of it. We cannot put ourselves right with God by being good; we can only be

³⁵ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 73.

good when we are already right with Him; and therefore we must be put right by Him and not by ourselves.”³⁶ In both books Baillie uses Jesus’ analogy of the good tree bearing good fruit³⁷ to show that people are recognized by the fruit they bear – not justified based on their fruit, but recognized.³⁸ In both occasions, Baillie uses this analogy to argue that if a person bears “good fruit,” it can be deduced that the person is a “good tree.” Put another way, the fruit that is called sanctification cannot bear forth from someone who is not justified. In both books Baillie is trying to show that one must be in a certain state, presumably a changed state, in order to bear good fruit. In *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie explains more clearly what must take place in a person in order to be a bearer of good fruit: one must be justified by faith in Christ. In terms very different than he uses in *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie writes, “Our salvation consists in trusting and rejoicing in his rightness rather than in trying to put ourselves right. The Christian revelation is that God accepts me ‘just as I am’, and not because I have first become other than I am.”³⁹ It is difficult to see how the trusting Baillie describes here can be anything but self-conscious, particularly if it is a trusting that comes as an expression of humility, as it must if it involves the acknowledgement of someone else’s righteousness given on our behalf. Baillie clearly links justification with the surrender of the pride that is the

³⁶ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 64.

³⁷ “Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.” Matthew 7:17-18.

³⁸ See Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 63 and *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 70.

³⁹ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 67.

hallmark of human sin; this pride is surrendered in the act of acknowledging that in Christ God has provided the righteousness we could not. This justification can be understood to be the making of a “good tree” that will and must yield good fruit. Because Baillie argues that justification and sanctification are organically joined, one can look to the sanctification in one’s life to test, so to speak, the authenticity of one’s justification. Though Baillie in no way indicates that he is crossing anything he said in *Our Knowledge of God*, it is difficult to see how, given the way he describes justification in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, one could be a good fruit bearer having experienced no self-conscious surrender of pride. He writes, “Because Christian sanctification means the progressive defeat of pride, it must mean gradual growth in humility.”⁴⁰ Again, it is difficult to imagine that one could both cultivate a sense of surrender and indebtedness though not having any self-conscious awareness of to whom one was surrendering and indebted.

“Why I Believe in God”

In a brief article published in 1948, Baillie pulls together many of the themes of his theology of revelation in a personal and practical reflection on why he believes in God.⁴¹ This article, though it contributes nothing new to his theology, provides a

⁴⁰ Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 68.

⁴¹ John Baillie, “Why I Believe in God,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 3 (1948), 3-6. “Why I Believe in God” was originally broadcast over the British Broadcasting Corporation.

meaningful summary of some key components of his thought at a more mature stage in Baillie's theological career.

The point has been made that Baillie's theology of the presence of God is central to his theology of revelation. In fact, this article and portions of Baillie's lectures indicate that the divine presence was not a mere piece in a theological jigsaw puzzle, but is the very real context for all he does and thinks. God's presence is so real to him he acknowledges that it would be entirely appropriate for him to speak *to* God rather than *about* God in reflecting on the question of why he believes in God. He concludes, "But if I follow the more usual practice, and speak to you about God in the third person instead of speaking to him in the second person, I must at least not forget (and you must not forget) that He is of our company this evening, and knows and hears what I say."⁴²

Similarly, a few years after this article, Baillie again claims that divine presence carries implications for one's life and work and thought. In a lecture on the attributes of God in a new course on the Doctrine of God, Baillie writes,

The analysis of the nature of God is the boldest piece of analysis that the mind of man ever undertakes; and it must be remembered that it is undertaken in His presence. He whose nature we are analysing is present to us in the very moment of our analysis – analysing us! He will hear all we are going to say about Him. This is a realisation that was before us in our introductory course, but at the present point in our studies we need to remind ourselves of it again. It means that we must be *facing toward God* when we speak about Him; not facing away from Him and merely towards one another, as if He were not there all the time. Therefore our talk about Him must be part of our response to Him; and this means two things: *first*, that it must be *responsible* talk, talk conducted in constant realisation that He of whom we speak is demanding something of us, even as we

⁴² Baillie, "Why I Believe in God," 3.

speak; and *second*, that our speaking about Him must in some sort be a speaking *to* Him. Our theology, that is, must be part of our worship. Our mention, our enumeration, of His attributes must be part of His praise.⁴³

With such a perspective, Baillie casts aside the possibility that the task of theology can be distinct from the work of faith. Theology that attempts to abstract ideas about God from a relationship to God is not theology at all.

That theology (dogma, doctrine) should be inseparable from faith and an acknowledged relationship with God requires Baillie to put certain constraints on his ideas of the nature of one's knowledge of God. True knowledge of God (that is, not mere epistemological acquaintance with but an epistemic embracing of God) stems only from a relationship that already exists. To illustrate, Baillie compares the basis for his belief in the Pythagorean Theorem with the basis for his belief that Wordsworth's poetry is superior to Byron's. Baillie is confident he could persuade one of the rightness of his belief in the Pythagorean Theorem by producing the mathematical proof. As for proving the superiority of Wordsworth to a skeptic, Baillie is not so confident. Though the skeptic's doubt has no power to dissuade Baillie from his belief, he admits "my explanation would leave much to be desired; and however good it was, I should not really expect to convince you of Wordsworth's superiority *unless you are already aware of it.*"⁴⁴ Here Baillie articulates this crucial and clarifying assumption in his theology:

⁴³ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/10, 29.

⁴⁴ Baillie, "Why I Believe in God," 3. Italics mine. Recall that Baillie has employed an analogy of beauty in art to illustrate the perception of revelation before. In "The True Ground of Theistic Belief" (1922), Baillie examines one's inability to persuade another of the superior beauty of a Beethoven

I am far from being able to analyse and set forth the grounds of human belief in God, and of my own belief in God, to my own complete satisfaction.... Here is a region in which you must have the belief before you are able to think out the grounds of it, and in which you will never, however long you live, or however hard you think, be able to think out the grounds completely or to state them perfectly. Here is a region also in which men have not been led to the belief, or are ever likely to be led to the belief, by a prior logical exposition of its grounds.... If men begin by being without all belief in God, it would be quite hopeless to try to convert them by argument. Men will believe in God only when they find themselves unmistakably confronted by His holy presence.⁴⁵

In other words, the grounds for belief in God are so immediate, so basic, that it is impossible to recreate the argument or circumstance by which one came to believe. This is not to say there are no reasons for the belief, but the reasons are not sufficient to recreate the experience by which one comes to faith.

Baillie's skepticism of the utility of argument to persuade people unto faith has been an element of his theology since his earliest publications. Even though, for example, *The Interpretation of Religion* made a strong case for the logic of faith and took care to spell out the rational grounds for faith, it never suggested that faith could be argued into existence. Baillie seeks to preserve a distinction between an argument that constrains one to believe and an argument that justifies the interpretation of certain experiences as revelatory of God in Christ. In a mid-1930s lecture previously mentioned, Baillie writes, "If you tell me that you have had no such experience of a claim made upon your will, and a rebuke offered to your selfishness, or if you doubt the

symphony over a popular show tune, despite reasons that could be given to defend the beauty of Beethoven's compositions.

⁴⁵ Baillie, "Why I Believe in God," 4.

experience to be more than a subjective illusions, then I can offer you no proof of the reality of God. The knowledge of God is given only in the experience of revelation. We cannot first prove the existence of a God who then reveals Himself to us in a fashion more direct.”⁴⁶ This must be the context in which all of Baillie’s expressions of personal belief or defense of the reasonableness of Christian belief is to be received. In the case of belief in God, Baillie does not pretend he can convince one of something they do not already have some awareness of.

Baillie answers the question of belief in God with the same kind of language he has used his whole career. “Why do I believe in God? I believe in God because He confronts me with a demand that brooks no refusal.”⁴⁷ Baillie experiences God’s confronting presence in the form of an undeniable demand placed on him. He says, as he has said elsewhere, that he has been aware of this presence to one degree or another since his earliest childhood memories.⁴⁸ Through the people in his life who taught him about God and told him the story of Jesus, Baillie became deeply aware “that I was ‘not of my own’ and that my life was not my own to do with as I pleased. I have always been aware of this supreme authority under which my life is set.”⁴⁹ Reiterating a point he has made

⁴⁶ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/12.

⁴⁷ Baillie, “Why I Believe in God,” 4.

⁴⁸ For example, Baillie writes, “No matter how far back I go, no matter by what effort of memory I attempt to reach the virgin soil of childish innocence, I cannot get back to an atheistic mentality.” Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 4.

⁴⁹ Baillie, “Why I Believe in God,” 5. Compare this to what Baillie wrote in *Our Knowledge of God*: “I cannot remember a time when I did not already feel, in some dim way, that I was ‘not my own’ to

in both *Our Knowledge of God* and *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie clarifies that “the presence at my heart’s door has not been that of a Taskmaster, but that of a Savior. I know that what God wants of me is not in the first place that I should do something but that I should let something be done for me, and done to me and in me.”⁵⁰ Baillie recognizes that rebellion against this demand takes the form of strategizing to take charge of one’s own life, to live as though there is no demand. But even as he has struggled with this rebellion, he confesses that “deep down within me I have always known that His demand was a rightful demand, and that only in the acceptance of His gift could I ever find a lasting peace and blessedness. It seems to me that this knowledge is much more deeply grounded than any conclusion that could be reached by so-called scientific argument.”⁵¹

Baillie claims that the confrontation he has experienced is universal; this claim is based on his understanding that the divine confrontation is a result of God’s omnipresence. The holy God is near and his nearness meets all humanity with the experience of demand. Part of being human, according to Baillie’s understanding, is

do with as I pleased, but was claimed by a higher power which had authority over me.” Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 4.

⁵⁰ Baillie, “Why I Believe in God,” 5. Compare this to what Baillie writes earlier: “He who stands at the door has come with a gift, but we are so ready to think that He has come for a payment. The knock is a Savior’s knock, but we are so ready to think it a Taskmaster’s.” Baillie, *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, 48. This same idea is found in *Our Knowledge of God*, though not yet expressed as gently: “What we have most fundamentally to do with in religion is not a demand that is being made upon us but a gift that is being offered us. A demand is indeed made, but it is a demand that we should accept a gift.” Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 163.

⁵¹ Baillie, “Why I Believe in God,” 5.

being confronted by the holy presence of God. Thus there is no person who can claim to have no sense at all of God, but only one who thinks he has no experience of God.⁵² Of atheism he writes,

Savages do not know God as it has been given to us to know Him. They do not know the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But they are very far indeed from being atheists. I feel, therefore, quite sure of my ground when I say that if atheism were to become the dominant outlook of our western world, we should be threatened by a far more serious disintegration of human life than any that history has known. What a blessing then it is that men go on believing in God in the bottom of their hearts, even after they have denied Him with their lips! What a blessing it is that God does not always let go His hold on us when we let go our hold on Him!

There are no atheists; no people who genuinely have no knowledge of God. All people are constrained by the presence of God, it would seem, in some way. Particularly in the west, people benefit from cultural mores that have been conflated with Christian practice. It may be recalled that what Baillie identifies as belief in God in the bottom of hearts is simply the way in which a person lives in a Christian way even when she rejects the doctrinal tenets of the Christian faith.

The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought (1956)

Many of Baillie's books are the product of preparing for publication material that was originally delivered as lectures. In the case of *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, Baillie had been invited to deliver the 1954 Bampton Lectures at Columbia University in New York City, which he then revised and expanded for publication two

⁵² See Baillie, "Why I Believe in God," 5.

years later. Baillie admits in the preface to the book, “The task I had set myself in the first instance was the comparatively humble one of attempting to survey the considerable body of recent thought and writing concerning revelation. What I had in mind might be described as an extended review.”⁵³ Modest though it may seem, *The Idea of Revelation* remains a relevant survey of the theology of revelation developed during the first half of the twentieth century. In terms of its value for Baillie scholarship, Baillie’s relatively sympathetic depiction of the current theology of revelation clarifies and confirms who some of the contemporary influences on his thought were.⁵⁴

The Idea of Revelation begins with a brief survey of the theology of revelation characterizing the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the theological shift that took place in the nineteenth century. This narrative of a long-standing rationalist conception of revelation and the swing to a romantic conception is one that Baillie tells in many of his books, including *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul*, *The Interpretation of Religion*, *Our Knowledge of God*, and to some degree *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. It is an essential story for Baillie as it contextualizes twentieth-century thought in an important way. The two-source conception of revelation that had dominated the medieval era

⁵³ John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956).

⁵⁴ Thinkers like William Temple, C. C. J. Webb, Wilhelm Herrmann, H. Richard Niebuhr, and H. H. Farmer are familiar references in both Baillie’s lecture notes and published works. Though he is appreciative of many of the changes in thought introduced by theologians like Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, examination of Baillie’s other writings show that he is not in such complete agreement with them as *Idea of Revelation* might suggest (though of the two, Baillie quotes Brunner with agreement much more frequently).

remained essentially unchallenged until the nineteenth century. The Rationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries maintained the idea of a two-fold source, though it put such emphasis and value on the source of human reason for revelation that the divine source of faith came to be viewed as somewhat redundant. The Romantic period in the nineteenth century reacted to what was perceived as the audacious claims of reason and developed instead bases for theology that were neither reason nor revelation, which for some time had been understood as the authoritative communication of doctrine. The twentieth century then faced the question of revelation standing in an inheritance which had rejected both the unaided intellect as a source to discern divine truth as well as the conception of revelation as a function of the mind to assent to a certain set of doctrinal propositions. The rest of *The Idea of Revelation* examines what recent thought on the idea of revelation has proposed concerning the nature of divine revelation – how it is transmitted and received and what difference it makes to conceive of it in a new way.

Natural theology, the idea that human reason apart from special divine illumination is able to deduce the existence and even nature of God from creation and all its workings, was no longer an unchallenged explanation for revelation in the twentieth century. Baillie reports four key ideas characteristic of the theology of his day that essentially reject the viability of natural theology. First, it was claimed that the apprehending apparatus of revelation is not reason but faith. This switch marks the concern people had to identify God as somehow being a part of the reception process; human reason was often juxtaposed to faith as being an entirely autonomous means by

which to apprehend God.⁵⁵ Second, it was argued that God's self-revelation was not static; that is, God's revelation is not an announcement posted on a bulletin board that one may or may not choose to stop and read. An important change that took place in twentieth century theology of revelation was the conception that divine revelation required both the transmission *and* reception of that transmission to be considered actual revelation. Third, closely related to the second point, revelation was necessarily understood to be an event. If God's revelation is not static and requires that the transmission of God be received by a person, then what is taking place can accurately be described as an event or encounter. Baillie puts it this way, "The receiving is as necessary to a completed act of revelation as the giving. It is only so far as the action of God in history is understood as God means it to be understood that revelation has place at all. The illumination of the receiving mind is a necessary condition of the divine self-disclosure."⁵⁶ The fourth point distinguishing the contemporary thought Baillie surveys is key to its position and its move away from the traditional conception of revelation as the communication of doctrinal propositions; that is, revelation introduces people to God himself. Baillie writes, "God does not give us information by communication; He gives

⁵⁵ Based on his critique of Barth and others in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, we know that Baillie did not agree with such an extreme juxtaposition of reason and faith. He claims the Christian faith is reasonable and even defensible, while still maintaining that faith is the primary receptor of divine revelation.

⁵⁶ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 64.

us Himself in communion.”⁵⁷ These four points are all interrelated and depict the contemporary rejection of natural theology.

As mentioned above, one of the significant shifts in the conception of revelation involved the idea that divine revelation did not constitute a mere transmission, but a transmission *received*. The twentieth-century theology Baillie surveys in *The Idea of Revelation* conceives of this reception of revelation as an exercise of faith. This reception does not utilize reason to detect a static divine revelation; it is faith that responds to an encounter with the divine. According to Baillie, the contemporary consensus is to describe this revelation-as-event in terms of a demand or call.⁵⁸ While Baillie spells out his own conception of this demand in detail in *Our Knowledge of God* and *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, here he simply identifies it as a point of consensus among his contemporaries and one which shapes the modern conception of faith as a response to revelation.

Baillie points out that there is always a logical correspondence to be found in the way revelation and its reception is understood in any given era. For example, if revelation is understood to be the communication of doctrinal propositions, then the primary reception of that revelation would have to take the form of some kind of intellectual assent to those propositions. In the case of divine revelation consisting of a

⁵⁷ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 47.

⁵⁸ Specifically, Baillie cites William Temple, Martin Buber, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth in support of this point. In their own ways, all depict revelation as a demand to which we must respond in faith. See Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 84.

personal encounter with God through his action in history, the corresponding view of faith shifted from intellectual assent to a form of personal trust. Baillie argues that “What is important is that there should be correspondence in all points between our understanding of the revelation that is given and our understanding of the faith that receives it. If what is directly revealed is God Himself rather than truths about God, then faith must be primarily trust rather than assent. If God has revealed Himself in a saving Event, then faith must be a reliance upon the saving power of that Event. If revelation is at the same time an offer and a demand, then faith must be understood as an acceptance of the offer which is at the same time a yielding to the demand.”⁵⁹

In his discussion of faith in *The Idea of Revelation*, Baillie describes the three elements distinguished in faith during the medieval era: understanding (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*). Baillie defends the contemporary conception of faith as trust, being an act of the will, claiming this perspective is an improvement over the traditional view of faith as primarily assent, an act of the intellect. He does not here suggest that faith should be conceived of as trust and not as assent; rather, trust is the primary action in the faith that responds to divine revelation. Baillie asks, “Can there be *fiducia* without *assensus*? Obviously not. A man cannot embrace Christ’s salvation without assenting to the fact that Christ is such as to be able to save.”⁶⁰ In other words, assent is an implicit part of trust. Again, because revelation is conceived of as the

⁵⁹ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 99.

⁶⁰ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 90.

communication of salvation itself and not mere knowledge about salvation, the appropriate response to it is faith understood as something more than an acknowledgment of understanding. And though assent is an implicit part of trust, trust is not an implicit part of assent.

In defining the relationship between assent and trust, Baillie makes two observations about this contemporary view of faith. First, none of the thinkers he surveys, specifically Temple, Brunner and Barth, “desires to extrude the elements of *notitia* and *assensus*, and none would tolerate a formless faith from which these were absent. But they are anxious to establish the primacy of trust as over against assent.”⁶¹ Second, he says these thinkers are also anxious “to affirm that the trust and commitment may be wholehearted before the elements of assent which it implicitly contains are drawn out in a self-conscious way, and even when they are drawn out incorrectly.”⁶² Baillie is among the contemporary thinkers who defends the idea that faith’s assent can exist without being conscious of itself. In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie criticized the Westminster Assembly for insisting that faith’s assent must be self-conscious. To his thinking, this insistence was born of an overly intellectualistic interpretation of Christianity and, in effect, it makes right belief the test of true faith. In response he writes, “There is no reason why we should not extend the distinction between *fides directa* and *fides reflexa* to the element of *assensus* as well as to that of *fiducia*, and speak

⁶¹ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 99.

⁶² Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 99.

of an unconscious assent.”⁶³ Baillie’s view of unconscious faith in *Our Knowledge of God* is clarified by his discussion of it in *The Idea of Revelation*.⁶⁴ This unconscious faith is what he defended as belief in God at the bottom of one’s heart in *Our Knowledge of God*. It is challenging to conceive of what an unconscious assent looks like, but it can be said to be one of Baillie’s characteristic commitments to insist that Christianity make room for a kind of subterranean faith that manifests itself in the good fruit it bears.

Baillie contextualizes his point about implicit assent in a brief discussion of the historical development of doctrine in *The Idea of Revelation*. Instead of leaving it to sound as if there are two different forms of faith by which a person may be saved, Baillie describes the lack of conscious assent this way: “When I trust somebody, or have *fiducia* in him, I am manifestly at the same time believing certain things about him to be true, yet I may find it very difficult to say exactly what these things are – I may even flounder helplessly in the attempt to assign the reasons for my trust. This is why the formal development of dogma, especially of Christological dogma, hardly got under way until the Christian mission had been confronted with the skepticism of the Greek mind.”⁶⁵ In other words, assent to certain facts about God is implicit in one’s trust of him. This context for Baillie’s defense of belief at the bottom of one’s heart or implicit assent is the

⁶³ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 72.

⁶⁴ Baillie also discusses the idea of unconscious faith in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. There is nothing to suggest that his view has changed in *Idea of Revelation*, but his explanation there is the most cogent.

⁶⁵ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 92.

most helpful context for understanding and accepting his idea because it resonates with common experience.

The claim that trust involves implicit assent can be illustrated with familiar human relationships. Take as an example the observation of a mother and her three-year-old daughter at a playground. The child is playing on the equipment only with significant reliance on the mother's help: she crosses the monkey bars and braves the long drop to the ground because the mother is holding her daughter at the waist; she goes down the very steep slide because her mother holds her hand as she slides down; she jumps from a platform twice her height because her mother stands below to catch her. To the observer, it is evident that the daughter trusts her mother to make her exploration of the play equipment safe and enjoyable. But can the three-year-old girl articulate this trust? Would she say *that* she trusts her mother, let alone defend *why* she trusts her mother? Not likely. Even so, the daughter's willing and fearless leap into her mother's arms is the fruit, as Baillie would say, of such trust. And the facts about the mother which the child must surely believe in order to trust her (such as her goodness, her dependability, her strength) are implicit in that trust, though again, not likely to be articulated by a three-year-old.

In another example, take the case of the Christian believer who is cornered by an atheist's well-articulated argument against the existence of God based on the problem of evil. The Christian may not be familiar with the traditional elements of this argument targeting the goodness and power of God and may not know how to challenge the *non*

sequiter conclusion that God must not exist if evil does exist. And insofar as the Christian is unable to defend her faith in this context, it would appear that the Christian does not know what she believes and is easily defeated by her agnostic opponent. Yet, the Christian knows, no matter what argument is made against her belief, that God is and he is good and he has saved her. She may be distressed that she is unable to articulate her faith in a convincing manner, but she remains unshaken in her belief about who God is. She just knows that any attack on his existence and goodness simply is not grounded in reality. The fact that this Christian assents to knowledge she cannot articulate is demonstrated when, after taking some Bible, theology and philosophy courses, she declares, "Now I know better what I believe." Her fundamental belief in God has not changed, but she has learned to identify the implications of her belief in God, to see the logical connections within her belief system, to recognize classical arguments for and against God's existence, and to articulate a reasonable defense of her belief in God. This common scenario illustrates that a person can believe in God with a trust that does not waver despite seeming intellectual defeat. The arguments that might rationally justify such trust are not consciously accessible to the person and therefore cannot be consciously assented to, though they can be said to be implicit to her trust in God's existence and goodness.

The last chapter of *The Idea of Revelation* examines the impact the contemporary view of revelation has had on the understanding of Scripture as revelation. Baillie says there are important implications for Scripture as revelation given the shift in

understanding revelation as involving not only divine transmission but also human reception of that transmission. Baillie says,

We have accepted the view that the completed act of divine revelation consists in the intercourse of event and interpretation. God's revealing activity is recognised by the Christian not only in the mighty acts which He performed for our redemption but in His illumination of the prophetic and apostolic mind. He so chose Israel that He not only led them out of Egypt but also enabled Moses and the prophets to grasp the significance of that exodus. He so loved the world that he not only sent His Son but at the same time enabled the apostles to grasp the significance of that mission.⁶⁶

But should the Bible be viewed as God's revelatory transmission? Is it a record of human reception? Baillie says Scripture should not first be identified as either. "After the illumination was the witness. The illumination was integral to that to which witness was borne, but the witness itself came afterwards. There was indeed a spoken witness before there was a written one.... The Bible is the written witness to that intercourse of mind and event which is the essence of revelation."⁶⁷ In other words, Scripture is not called revelation because it does not, of itself, involve the event and illumination of a mind which is entailed in true revelation. It is a common thing to hear Scripture described as God's revelation, and, according to the view Baillie is surveying and endorsing, Scripture certainly *can be* God's revelation, but it ought not be described as existing in a revelatory state. According to Baillie, nothing exists in a revelatory state; revelation is not static. Rather, Scripture is a witness or testimony of revelation. Of course, Baillie recognizes

⁶⁶ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 110.

⁶⁷ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 110.

that the reading of Scripture may be the event in which God illuminates the mind and stirs the heart to faith; in such an event the witness has become the revelation. As Baillie puts it, “Nothing is the vehicle of revelation for me unless I hear God speaking to me through it.”⁶⁸

As mentioned, the redefinition of revelation as a personal encounter with God himself, as opposed to the communication of doctrinal propositions, other elements related to revelation must be redefined to maintain congruence. The theme of personal encounter with God is the hallmark of the new direction theology of revelation takes in the early twentieth-century and is a point of agreement among the main theologians Baillie engages in his survey of the subject in recent thought. The personal nature of the encounter with God requires that faith is no longer viewed as primarily intellectual assent but as trust in the God encountered in revelation. Likewise, the bible is not described as containing revelation (as if revelation were a set of collected propositions), but as witnessing to revelation (understood as encounter). In other words, revelation is an event.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 119. This is a significant statement from Baillie, since its positivized version would claim that *anything* may be the vehicle of revelation as long as one hears God speaking through it.

⁶⁹ Though Baillie quotes Barth a great deal in his chapter on Scripture, and though they share the idea that revelation is a personal event requiring a response of trust, it should not be presumed that his criticisms of Barth expressed in *Our Knowledge of God* have diminished. It is characteristic of Baillie’s scholarship to embrace the truth expressed through the insight of others with whom he might otherwise disagree.

Baillie briefly addresses the traditional characterizations of Scripture as inspired and infallible. He describes the Bible's inspiration as an enlightenment given by the Holy Spirit to assist the biblical writers in conveying the message of salvation to others.⁷⁰ This inspiration does not bring with it a guarantee of infallibility; rather, "The witness itself is a human activity and as such fallible."⁷¹ Baillie suggests that the only way human involvement could not include error would be if the Spirit overrode human participation completely, and this he denies. Even so, he seeks to preserve the special nature of Scripture. He writes, "The Scriptures are holy because they are the vehicle through which the Gospel is communicated to us. We know nothing of Christ except what comes to us through the Bible, all later communication of Christian knowledge being dependent on upon this original record."⁷² Baillie sets Scripture apart as having a unique role in revelation because of its special purpose in communicating the gospel, rather than due to the fact that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. In fact, "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was not denied to later writers, or to later preachers and teachers."⁷³ It would seem, then, that Baillie seeks to set Scripture apart as preserving the record of the gospel, which is essential to, though distinct from, revelation.

⁷⁰ See Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 111.

⁷¹ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 111.

⁷² Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 117.

⁷³ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 118.

Baillie acknowledges that the Bible can be revelation, but asks to what degree it can be revelation. He accepts

Luther's criterion that the revelatory quality of each part of the Bible is to be judged according to the measure in which it 'preaches Christ' (*Christum treibt*); and whatever some have professed in theory, nobody has ever in practice treated all as on the same level in this regard.... There is no Christian who hears God speaking to him through every passage in the Bible, so that for each of us there are some passages that are not revelatory at all. Nevertheless it is always our duty to ask ourselves whether the defect may not be in ourselves rather than in the text, whether even here it is not we who are not willing to listen rather than that nothing significant is being said.⁷⁴

It would seem, then, that Baillie wants to assert that the whole of the Bible can be revelatory (that is, used by God to illuminate a truth to someone), but that it also has a primary and objective message to which every pericope, in varying degrees, contributes. This situation suggests that perhaps a distinction needs to be made between the Bible as possible medium for revelation and the Bible as providing revelatory content.

Baillie writes an Epilogue, "The Challenge of Revelation," to *The Idea of Revelation* in which he takes the opportunity to move from the abstract discussion of revelation to a more personal point of view. Specifically, he seeks to "consider in as realistic a way as possible the challenge to each one of us individually that is contained in the impingement of the divine upon our daily life."⁷⁵ Though much of Baillie's theology of revelation can be recognized in his survey, some of his unique phrases and anecdotes anchor this last part of the book. What does the challenge of revelation look like for each

⁷⁴ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 119.

⁷⁵ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 134.

person? It is the challenge to listen and obey. Revelation challenges one to respond in faith, and faith is essentially “to listen and to obey, to be alert to whatever God may have to say to us, and then to adjust our lives to what we hear.”⁷⁶ This response fits with what Baillie says earlier in the book about trust being the primary activity in belief; trust is both harkening to and heeding the call of God.

Baillie is sympathetic to the resistance commonly found in response to the challenge of revelation. The complaint that God ought to provide an unmistakable and undeniable sign of his existence and lordship is one that Baillie himself wrestled with during his university years, an experience that kept him sensitive, over the years, to others’ struggles. In this book he tells again of a wintry walk home after a philosophical discussion on the existence of God and, pausing to look at the stars, “hurled [his] despairing question, but it seemed to hit nothing, and no answer came back.”⁷⁷ In retrospect, Baillie discerns that the hollow silence that followed his question did not reflect God’s absence but Baillie’s own inattentiveness. He describes himself as being “conveniently deaf” to what God was saying to him: “Much of the trouble in the days when I could not hear God’s voice was that I was not really listening.... And why did I not thus hearken? It was that there were certain things I did not want to hear.”⁷⁸ Reflecting his perspective in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie suggests that he, as others

⁷⁶ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 135.

⁷⁷ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 138.

⁷⁸ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 140.

are today, was influenced by the spirit of the age and the philosophical ideas in vogue. In other words, the intellectual climate of the day (specifically, the humanism Baillie wrote about in the 1940s) is making it “difficult to achieve, or to recover, that naked contact of our minds with the confronting reality out of which true wisdom can alone be born.”⁷⁹ In other words, Baillie says, one must respond to God’s challenge like a child – “only the innocent and childlike mind can hearken diligently.”⁸⁰ Two brief questions close Baillie’s reflection on the challenge of revelation and function themselves to challenge his readers. First, he asks, “are you sure there is not something which [God] is plainly saying to you, and to which you are not giving ear?”⁸¹ And second, “If you have listened, have you obeyed?”⁸²

In his 1959 Eugene William Lyman Lecture, “Liberalism in Theology,” Baillie provides further reflection on the changed view of Scripture in contemporary theology. Here he defines theological liberalism as “a movement towards greater freedom from the fixity of the traditional interpretation of the faith.”⁸³ Baillie suggests that the momentum for such a movement is started by one’s realization that the tradition surrounding a belief is in need of “adjustment or re-interpretation before it can be accepted or before its true

⁷⁹ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 141.

⁸⁰ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 141.

⁸¹ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 141.

⁸² Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 145.

⁸³ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 7.

significance can be grasped.” Baillie continues, “Partly he is concerned with the problem of communication, as we now call it; but he is concerned no less so to adjust or interpret the tradition that he himself can give credence to it and understand its true relevance. The reason why he feels this process to be necessary is that the tradition was formed in a by-gone age whose intellectual climate was very different from that in which he and his contemporaries now live.”⁸⁴ In this article Baillie seeks to provide a mediating perspective on theological liberalism. What he identifies as a “pre-1914 version of liberalism,” that is, pre-war Protestant Liberalism, has come to be viewed as having gone too far in its re-interpretation of the Christian gospel.⁸⁵ But the anti-liberalism of post-war theology, specifically any sympathetically Barthian theology, does not, in fact, reject the tenets of liberalism as absolutely as it might think. He insists that the adjustment and reinterpretation of the truth of scripture is something that continues to be the focus of contemporary theology and that this is still a characteristic of liberalism. Baillie observes, “We are nowadays very much in revolt against nineteenth-century liberalism..., but I do not think we are in revolt against its changed concept of revelation, its new

⁸⁴ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 8.

⁸⁵ Baillie writes of this overreaching re-interpretation: “In the changed intellectual climate that followed the 1914-1918 War, many began to find the new teaching even more difficult of belief than the old. For example, the doctrines of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man had been the twin pillars of recent liberalism, but the bath of blood through which they had now passed led many to say that it was only when these were accompanied by the doctrines of the Deity of Christ and His atoning sacrifice that they could be believed at all.” Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 15.

outlook on the Biblical literature, or its new sense of the element of uncertainty in all historical evidence. These are matters in which we are all equally liberals.”⁸⁶

For Baillie, then, the preserved insight of liberalism lies in its “effort to distinguish the substance of the received teaching from its accidents, the kernel from the original or traditional husk, the unchanging truth from its time-conditioned setting.”⁸⁷

This characteristic of liberalism can be observed in Baillie’s perspective on scripture as revelation in *The Idea of Revelation* in which he insists that “there is that in the Bible to which we must hold fast in a way to which we cannot hold fast to its pre-Copernican, even pre-Ptolemaic, cosmography of an ‘up-and-down’ and ‘three-storey’ universe; yet to do so is precisely to disentangle the essential revelation from the contemporary thought-form in which alone it could at that time be received.”⁸⁸ Putting aside for the moment important questions like what criterion one might use to disentangle essential revelation from a particular context or how one might recognize what is essential to revelation and what is not, it may be observed that Baillie’s primary concern is the preservation of the gospel. In his Lyman lecture, Baillie recognizes that the gospel is characteristically a stumbling block. But he says, “While the Gospel, if it is truly presented, must always be a stumbling-block to the rational man, we must nevertheless be careful that the

⁸⁶ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 12. It is not clear who Baillie includes in his use of “we” here, since not all Christian theologians embraced these changes introduced by Protestant Liberalism. See the brief survey in Chapter One regarding the dispute between American fundamentalism and modernism during the 1920s and 30s when Baillie held teaching positions in the United States.

⁸⁷ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 8.

⁸⁸ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 124.

stumbling-block which we exhibit in our preaching of it is the real stumbling-block and not an adventitious one.”⁸⁹ Elsewhere Baillie has expressed concern that the preacher must present the gospel in such a way as to be understood to be addressing a universal need, that the gospel is intrinsically relevant to all people, but it is the preacher’s job to show that it is relevant. *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, for example, was one of Baillie’s significant attempts to relevantly convey the gospel to his peers. He framed the gospel in terms of God’s challenge to each person, a challenge that can be recognized if we but pay attention to the disquiet in our lives.

On the matter of the gospel being a stumbling block, Baillie again addresses the matter of honest intellectual doubt (which he seems to juxtapose to culpable moral doubt). In addition to the characteristic nature of the gospel to be a stumbling block, Baillie remarks that he has long felt that there is an additional, accidental stumbling block that has come to be associated with the Christian gospel. “In our generation,” he writes, “there are many men of an integrity such as would put most of us Christians to shame, who are seeking the light with an eagerness of which we cannot all boast, yet who cannot without intellectual dishonesty, such as is itself a form of the love of darkness, accommodate their minds to much that the tradition contains.”⁹⁰ Baillie goes on to say that such people stumble at the trappings of revelation – those historical-cultural assumptions that for the original hearers of scripture would have not made an impression

⁸⁹ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 19.

⁹⁰ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 19.

since they would have been part of their “common sense outlook” or worldview. “Only to a very limited extent, then, is it true that the Gospel preaching met in those days with honest intellectual difficulty of the kind it so often meets with to-day.”⁹¹ Baillie goes on to observe that “there is no doubt that our problem goes deeper than theirs, as having its root in changes of outlook which are in no way specific to a particular philosophy but which to-day are shared alike by all philosophies and by those who have none. Now I venture to think that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was never intended to be intellectually baffling in this way. This is not the authentic stumbling block, but an adventitious one, which it is our duty to remove from before men’s feet as best we can.”⁹² What Baillie writes here is valuable, for it would appear this is the first place in his writings that he identifies the problem of honest intellectual doubt as a largely contemporary problem. Baillie introduces the idea of honest intellectual doubt in depth in *Our Knowledge of God*, twenty years before this lecture is given, and returns to it consistently throughout his writings as a contrast to the more common culpable moral rejection of the gospel. This makes sense of why he defends it in *Our Knowledge of God* despite his admittance that the Apostle Paul does not seem to acknowledge anything like Baillie’s honest (non-culpable) intellectual doubt in his descriptions of humanity’s rejection of the gospel. He observes the common person to be enmeshed in the prevailing humanistic worldview and the impact this has on how the gospel is understood and heard and felt. The challenge of

⁹¹ Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 20.

⁹² Baillie, “Liberalism in Theology,” 20.

the gospel becomes muffled by its encasement in its own worldview assumptions and is thus received as irrelevant. This is the unnecessary stumbling block to the gospel Baillie aims to do away with.

Swansong: The Sense of the Presence of God (1962)

Baillie died on September 29, 1960. He was scheduled to deliver the 1961-1962 Gifford Lectures, and though many were disappointed that he would not be able to deliver them himself, his lectures were so thoroughly prepared and edited prior to his death that they were published as Gifford Lectures in 1962. John McIntyre, who read through the manuscript to assess its possibility for publication, writes in the Foreword that these lectures “show how to the very end of his life [Baillie] actively maintained his concern with contemporary problems, and how clearly he continued to state the great certainties of the faith in the context of a changing intellectual environment. There could scarcely be a finer conclusion to a life of such academic brilliance, theological literary achievement and profound Christian devotion.”⁹³

The Gifford Lectures were designed to give special opportunity to those theologians and philosophers who would, with enthusiastic endorsement, take up the subject of natural theology. Baillie was not the first lecturer who could not bring such enthusiastic endorsement to the lectures. What he did provide, characteristically, was a mediating position on the nature of our knowledge of God. As he had many years before

⁹³ John McIntyre, “Foreword,” in *The Sense of the Presence of God* by John Baillie (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1962), vii.

in *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie rejects the idea of a natural theology that depends solely on inferences made from empirical experience of the world. Instead he endorses John Calvin's idea that there is a sense of the divine all people experience. What Baillie insists on, though, is that this sense is not a static, innate body of knowledge implanted in all humanity, nor was it once given and has since deteriorated through the generations. Consistent with his career-long teaching of the active presence of God, Baillie insists this sense of the divine comes from the divine in fact engaging with humanity. Thus in his reflection on the world's religions through history, Baillie writes, "If there is any measure of true insight into things divine, however limited, within the great ethnic systems of religious thought; if there is any element of truth, mixed with however much error, in the thinking of Gautama Buddha, the Bhagavadgita, Lao-tse, the Greek tragedians, Socrates, or Epictetus; it came through no 'unaided' exercise of human wit but from the working of the Holy Spirit of God. What is true in any religious system is from God; what is false is of our own imagining."⁹⁴

An important implication of Baillie's view of God's continuous presence is that the arena of human knowledge is broader than what many thinkers of Baillie's day were willing to concede. Specifically, in *The Sense of the Presence of God*, Baillie challenges what he claims to be the limiting assumptions of logical positivists, those he labels "reductive naturalists," and other narrow-minded empiricists. Though his engagement with these various perspectives and their representatives remains gracious throughout the

⁹⁴ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 187.

book, Baillie allows himself the rare opportunity to vent his frustration in his

“Retrospect” chapter. Here he writes,

In the early chapters I argued at considerable length with the school of logical or conceptual analysis which has recently dominated the philosophical thinking of Oxford and Cambridge, has spread to the provincial English Universities, and is increasingly invading the American Universities and Colleges. I have made many concessions to this school, have accepted no small part of what it puts forward, and have learned much from it. But when I am asked to swallow it whole, I become angry, and the more of the recent books I read by its representatives, the angrier I become.⁹⁵

Baillie’s anger comes from a deep pastoral concern. He is concerned that the advocates of the recent philosophical trend are finding it acceptable to function without the virtues of love and humility; Baillie calls such people “half-men.” And “it is with the half-men who know nothing but analysis, and leave us nothing but the reductive naturalism in which it issues, that my present argument has been concerned; and I confess that in my heart of hearts my impatience with them knows no bounds.”⁹⁶ Baillie’s honest expression of anger and impatience is notable since he does not write this way in his other works. Did he grow intemperate with age? Or did his cancer, the pain of which he worked through while writing this manuscript, bring his frustrations to the surface? Or perhaps both his age and illness simply clarified what was most important to him: the fellowship of love, as he puts it his swansong manuscript.

⁹⁵ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 251.

⁹⁶ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 254.

Despite the newer philosophical terrain in the 1950s, *The Sense of the Presence of God* essentially defends the ideas found in *Our Knowledge of God* written twenty years prior. The new context draws out some different features and emphases in Baillie's thought; for example, the idea of the fellowship of love and the communal aspect of God's revelation are central to his argument. The familiar features include, as mentioned, the continuous presence of God and the idea that God comes to humanity in, with, and under other elements of creation. In fact, it is in his argument that God's presence meets humanity in, with and under creation, including other people, that Baillie makes his case that the arena of human knowledge is greater than just the material world. Analogous to humans having senses designed to apprehend the material world, humans also have the capacity – the sense – to apprehend the divine. Such senses “enable us to perceive something not otherwise perceptible; to perceive it, I say, and not merely to conceive it as a concept to which we are led by argument.”⁹⁷ Interestingly, though the scope of human knowledge goes beyond the corporeal, this “beyond” is only detected *through* the corporeal.

As formerly in *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie is concerned to defend knowledge of God as immediate. The inherent connection between one's sense of the presence of God and one's sense of the material world might mislead one to think that the presence of God is inferred from some magnificent display in nature. Baillie is very clear that the immediacy of sensory knowledge of the material world is part of the analogy of sensory

⁹⁷ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 53.

knowledge of God. Knowledge of God in, with, and under the natural world is immediate, meaning that it is not inferred from any other experience. Thus the nature of knowledge of God being a mediated immediacy becomes again clear: it is knowledge mediated through all God has created, but not inferentially mediated. Knowledge of God is immediate because it entails direct perception, and this direct perception is the faculty of faith.

Baillie describes faith as the sensing faculty by which one perceives God and not as a product of religious experience. Faith is not, for Baillie, a conclusion one draws having reflected on a spiritual encounter; it is a gift. Baillie puts it this way, "Faith is experience, but like all veridical experience, it is determined for us and produced in us by something not ourselves. We cannot make ourselves believe and we should not try. If it is veridical at all, faith is the gift of God."⁹⁸ In another passage, Baillie writes, "Faith does not deduce from other realities that are present the existence of a God who is *not* present but absent; rather is it an awareness of the divine Presence itself, however hidden behind the veils of sense."⁹⁹ Baillie describes other persons as being a vital mediation of

⁹⁸ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 65.

⁹⁹ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 89. Baillie describes reality as that which "I 'come up against', what takes me by surprise, the other-than-myself which pulls me up and obliges me to reckon with it and adjust myself to it because it will not consent simply to adjust itself to me." Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 33. This description of reality is clearly fitting for the encounter between one's toe and the leg of the table in the middle of the night, but it also aptly describes one's encounter with other persons.

the reality of God's presence: "The way to God passes through my relation to my neighbour, and the way to my neighbour passes through my relation to God."¹⁰⁰

Baillie also describes faith in terms of commitment; faith is not only a mode of apprehension, but an expression of commitment or obedience.¹⁰¹ This dual action of faith makes sense when faith is understood to be the mode of apprehending God in, with, and under fellow humans. Baillie notes that one's interaction with another human being naturally generates a sense of responsibility, to some degree, for that person. "In the ethico-religious sphere," Baillie writes, "where we have to do with personal relations, we do but evade the realities presented to our apprehension if we face them otherwise than responsibly."¹⁰² This perception one has of responsibility for another person is not a distinct apprehension of the faculty of faith but it illustrates two interesting points. First, that just as one is not meant to perceive another person with disinterest, so one is not meant to perceive the divine being with disinterest. In both cases, the faculty of perception carries with it a mode of response. Second, faith's perception of God through perception of another person and all the moral trappings that come with that human relationship is an essential means by which God directs the response of faith. That is, the faithful response to God is to love one's neighbor. According to Baillie, "We can reach God only through our neighbour. We cannot love him except in loving our neighbour.

¹⁰⁰ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 37.

¹⁰¹ See Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 90.

¹⁰² Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 90.

Nor does God reach us or manifest his love to us save through our neighbour – that is, save in our togetherness with him. Christianity is in its very essence a matter of fellowship.”¹⁰³

Though Baillie is careful to delineate the nature of faith as the mode of apprehending God in *The Sense of the Presence of God*, he writes of faith in much more philosophically epistemological terms (as opposed to biblical or salvific terms) than in either *Our Knowledge of God* or *Invitation to Pilgrimage*. This can certainly be explained by the audience and venue to whom and in which Baillie anticipated giving these lectures. But just as he added an Epilogue to *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* in which he could reflect on the matters of revelation more personally and practically, so he closes his argument in *The Sense of the Presence of God* with a practical and pastorally minded summary of what faith looks like in the life of a Christian. The chapter is titled, “Grace and Gratitude,” and Baillie argues that the reality with which people are confronted with in God’s presence and which is apprehended by faith is ultimately the reality of God’s grace. And the response of faith, the appropriate commitment or obedience of faith to that reality is gratitude. Baillie writes, “Gratitude is not only the dominant note in Christian piety but equally the dominant motive of

¹⁰³ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 139. Here and in several places in *The Sense of the Presence of God* (e.g., 141, 244), Baillie references the passage of Matthew 25:37-40 to show the connection between love of God and love of neighbor. “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mind, you did for me.’”

Christian action in the world. Such gratitude is for the grace that has been shown us by God.”¹⁰⁴ In *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, Baillie observed that the key character of sin is pride, and that salvation is the humility that receives what God has done in Christ on our behalf. Picking up these same themes, Baillie says that gratitude must be the motive for Christian action because it is the only motive consistent with the grace shown to sinners. “Our best service is no more than a token,” he writes, “and even then it is not a token of repayment, but only a token of gratitude. We must never try by anything we do to put ourselves right with God. ‘It is God who puts us right’ ... and it is out of the confidence that we are thus already right with him that our sense of gratitude is born”¹⁰⁵ Thus faith apprehends God’s grace and responds with the obedience of gratitude.

Conclusion

In the introductory chapter to this dissertation, the question was raised, generally, why some people believe in God and some do not. The point was made that any theology of revelation must grapple with this question. It has been demonstrated that Baillie did indeed take up this question throughout his career, but the brief survey of some key texts in Baillie’s later years suggest that this question was especially in the fore of his thought. And in these later years, the question of belief and unbelief was not a mere academic question to him, but one he passionately and persistently engaged.

¹⁰⁴ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 236.

¹⁰⁵ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence*, 241.

Baillie's insistence that his theological explanations and explorations of the theology of revelation have personal impact can be demonstrated by both his Epilogue to *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* and his closing chapter in *The Sense of the Presence of God*. In both these closings to scholarly contributions to the theology of revelation, Baillie allows himself the opportunity to follow through on what the theology looks like when it is lived. After surveying contemporary trends in revelation theology in which God's self-revelation is described as personal encounter with the divine, Baillie's Epilogue to *The Idea of Revelation* addresses what must be our response to such an encounter: to listen and obey. Similarly, Baillie turns the podium into a pulpit at the close of his Gifford Lectures to admonish his listeners to live a life of grace as an expression of gratitude to God for the grace shown in his saving self-revelation.

Though Baillie acknowledged even in *Our Knowledge of God* that theology is a task performed in the presence of God, it appears that this conviction manifests itself more in his later years. Baillie's view of theology as worship and dialogue is a feature of his later thought that distances him somewhat from his earlier thought. In an earlier "Introduction to Theology" course, predating both *The Roots of Religion* and *The Interpretation of Religion*, Baillie defines theology as the science of religion.¹⁰⁶ He changes his way of defining theology in a later Introduction to Theology course (this one

¹⁰⁶ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/2, 1.

drawing on *Our Knowledge of God* instead of *The Interpretation of Religion*).¹⁰⁷ There is the practical reason that the term “science” can be somewhat misleading; Baillie writes, “Is theology properly to be spoken of as a science? In my *Interpretation of Religion* I adapt this usage, but now I have some doubts about the wisdom of it...I think it may be wise to avoid speaking of theology as a science at all.”¹⁰⁸ Though he never meant it in this way, Baillie wants to move away from theology as a science, with its connotation of studying God using a scientific method of disengaged observation and deduction.

Instead,

Your theology then is part of your religion, part of your worship of God. In this classroom you will all the time be worshipping God, but you will be worshipping Him in a special way—in a way in which only few men are called upon to worship Him. You will be doing nothing here but developing into a stronger growth one side of your religion, namely the intellectual side of it; which it is not necessary for all to develop to anything like this extent; and without developing which (to this extent) religion can be at its very highest and purest, as the cases of many of the greatest saints show.

But now, if theology is ‘nothing but the experience of religion’ itself raised to a higher degree of intellectual self-consciousness, a very important consequence follows: namely, that the theologian always takes up his standpoint within the religious experience which it is his business to explicate. He is never looking at religion (or Christianity) from a point outside of it. He is never examining God’s dealings with man from the point of view of one with whom God has no dealings, but always from the point of view of one with whom, in the

¹⁰⁷ This course can be identified as later for two reasons: Baillie quotes from *Our Knowledge of God* and he writes the dates 1954, 1955 and 1957 in the margins of the notes, suggesting the course was taught during these years.

¹⁰⁸ Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/4, 9.

very moment of his study, God is having that very dealing which is being studied.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps Baillie's keen awareness of the presence of God and its revelatory impact in his mature years led him to realize that not only was he expressing his theology as a dialogue with God,¹¹⁰ but that others were reading or hearing it in God's presence and it therefore could be used by God as an occasion to mediate his presence to a person's conscience. From the earliest articles of his career to his last work, Baillie knew the presence of God had revelatory significance, and increasingly he sought to teach this concept with clarity and live out its implications with authenticity.

One of the themes that emerges in Baillie's later thought is the identification of humanism as a serious contemporary threat to the understanding and acceptance of the gospel message. *Invitation to Pilgrimage* is an important attempt on Baillie's part to articulate how humanism has eroded a worldview that was once more hospitable to the gospel message. Humanism is the culprit, according to Baillie, behind the diminished perception of God working in, with, and under all things to reveal himself. Humanism anesthetizes humanity's sense of the presence of God.

Of course, Baillie is not naïve to think that prior to the rise of humanism in the west people were free to accept the salvation of God in Christ without any stumbling block. Baillie speaks more of sin in the latter half of his career than he did before, and he

¹⁰⁹ Baillie, BAI 1/4/2/4, 11.

¹¹⁰ This point was also emphasized, as mentioned, in Baillie's opening to his radio broadcast-turned-article, "Why I Believe in God."

maintains that human sin is at the heart of disbelief in God. Baillie does discuss sin in *Our Knowledge of God* and in some earlier works, but it is notably marginalized as a feature of his theology of revelation in the early years. In the works surveyed in this chapter, Baillie writes about sin and salvation with a more reformed theological bent than before. In *Invitation to Pilgrimage* and *Sense of the Presence*, Baillie emphasizes more of the sovereignty of God in salvation. Yes, God is present to all people, but faith, which Baillie identifies with the perception of God, is a gift. The gift nature of faith is a biblical¹¹¹ idea that the Reformed theological tradition particularly emphasizes and which is understood to correspond to the sinfully depraved nature of humanity who stands in need of some kind of intervention to change its course as the enemy of God.

In closing this two-chapter survey of Baillie's thought leading up to and following the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*, it can be noted that though Baillie lived and worked through two world wars on two different continents, his thought continued along a remarkably steady course. From the beginning, he understood that God's presence had revelatory significance. He believed there is a logic to faith that can be defended, but cannot compel belief in God. He observed the organic connection between morality and theology and believed the universal human conscience was a point of contact for divine revelation. He believed humanity, though bearing the image of God, was broken and stood in need of divine salvation and that this salvation began with the initiative of God. What changed over the years was his emphasis and expression of these ideas. As this

¹¹¹ See Ephesians 2:8-9.

chapter has shown, Baillie's observation of the influence of humanism on western worldview and the crisis of a second world war drove him to articulate his theology in a more transparently pastoral way. Baillie was always a scholar, and though he was ordained from his youth, it may be said that he became more of a pastor in his role as professor and scholar.

In the next chapter, we will introduce the tenets of Reformed epistemology, a late twentieth-century development in the area of philosophy of religion, and will examine in particular the thought of Alvin Plantinga's significant work, *Warranted Christian Belief* (2000). By comparing Plantinga's main epistemological proposal, as articulated in *Warranted Christian Belief*, with Baillie's theology of revelation as surveyed in this dissertation, it will be shown that Baillie's thought finds echoes in Reformed epistemology and is relevant to today's contemplation of the nature of God's self-revelation.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Common Pilgrimage: A Comparison of Baillie's Theology of Revelation and Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology

In the first chapter of this dissertation, it was shown that though enough scholarship focused on John Baillie since his death in 1960 has continued to justify his being the subject of current study, there is arguably a need to justify the contemporary relevance of his theology of revelation for the ongoing task of theology. Certainly Baillie makes for an interesting figure for historical theological purposes, but can he meaningfully contribute to modern systematic theology?

Baillie himself is a fine example of the good thinking that can be produced when a theologian is attentive to and conversant with trends in philosophical thought. One of the more important developments in the area of philosophy of religion since Baillie's death is the emergence of a movement that has come to be known as Reformed epistemology. This chapter will show that many of the key characteristics of Reformed epistemology, especially as expressed by Alvin Plantinga, parallel Baillie's own thought. The demonstration of this parallel validates the relevance of Baillie's thought for today's theology as his perspective can provide a good starting point for a contemporary discussion of the theological application of Reformed epistemology. In this chapter, a brief summary of Reformed epistemology will be given and some key points of commonality between Baillie and Reformed epistemology will be identified. Special attention will be given to Alvin Plantinga's thought, particularly as it is expressed in

Warranted Christian Belief (2003), in order to make a more acute comparison of the common ground between a specific articulation of Reformed epistemology and Baillie's theology of revelation. This chapter will show that John Baillie's theology of the mediated immediacy of our knowledge of God shares meaningful kinship with the modern movement of Reformed epistemology and on this basis should be engaged as a valuable partner in contemporary studies in the theology of revelation.

Summary of Reformed Epistemology

The beginning of Reformed epistemology can be marked by the 1983 publication of a collection of essays, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*,¹ which captured the yearlong thinking and conversation of scholars from a variety of disciplines around the subject of a Reformed view of faith and reason.² Three leading scholars in the area of Reformed epistemology today, Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and the late William P. Alston, took part in this initial project and contributed essays to *Faith and Rationality*. In his introduction to the anthology, Nicholas Wolterstorff identifies several

¹ Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, eds., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

² The Calvin Center for Christian Studies, a program of Calvin College, focused on the topic "Toward a Reformed View of Faith and Reason" during the academic year 1979-1980. See Wolterstorff, "Introduction," in *Faith and Rationality*, edited by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 9. Dewey Hoitenga, who was also an attendee at Calvin College's Christian Studies program that year, notes, "The term *Reformed epistemology* itself does not seem to have existed before Alvin Plantinga introduced it in 1980, in the paper he read for the American Catholic Philosophical Association, 'The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology.'" (Dewey J. Hoitenga, Jr., *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), ix.

themes that serve to unify the essays; a brief review of three of these themes will provide a helpful introduction to the essential character of Reformed epistemology.

Reformed epistemology was conceived in the intellectual climate in which scholars recently had been challenging the epistemological structures which had supported western thought for centuries. Classical, or modern, foundationalism³ – the epistemology that fueled the Enlightenment and the modern devotion to rationalism that followed – was believed to have had collapsed. In the 1970s scholars were returning to the epistemological drawing board, so to speak, and were questioning not only the type of foundationalism that had long characterized epistemological structures in the West, but even foundationalism itself. Reformed epistemology, then, is characterized by its embrace of the collapse of the classical type of foundationalism. Put another way, Reformed epistemology rejects the boundaries laid by classical foundationalism. Specifically, what is rejected in classical foundationalism is its assumption that a properly basic belief, that is, a belief which justifiably serves as the basis or foundation for other beliefs, must be self-evident and incorrigible, where self-evidence is often, but not exclusively, identified with what may be observed using the senses.⁴

³ Foundationalism, simply put, maintains that human beliefs are structured such that some beliefs are immediate, basic, or foundational and some are mediated by and built upon other beliefs. In such a structure, it is deemed rational to hold mediated beliefs only if the supporting beliefs do, in fact, support them.

⁴ See Wolterstorff, "Introduction," 3. Plantinga, in *Faith and Rationality*, adds that properly basic beliefs, according to classical foundationalism (which he calls modern foundationalism) must also be evident to the senses. While it is helpful to include this third element, it is ultimately included in what may be either self-evident or incorrigible and so does not change the discussion.

Embedded in the framework of classical foundationalism is the assumption that reason is the singular guide to knowledge of reality. Since the Enlightenment, this assumption has prevailed. The discernment of truth and the justification for beliefs concerning reality have been governed by evidentialism, that is, the position that a belief is rational (and therefore justified⁵) only if it is supported by evidence. What characterizes Reformed epistemology is not the rejection of reason or evidence or the call for justified beliefs,⁶ but the rejection of a rationalistic evidentialism governed by the limits of classical foundationalism. So a second characteristic of Reformed epistemology is its engagement with the evidentialist challenge to religious belief.⁷ Evidentialism has tried to show that the evidence required to rationally justify Christian faith, according to classical foundationalism, cannot be produced and therefore Christian faith is irrational and thus wrong to maintain. Christians have responded to this challenge in a variety of ways, from arguing that the evidence requirement has, in fact, been met (e.g., B.B. Warfield), to rejecting the legitimacy of the challenge altogether (e.g., Karl Barth). Reformed epistemology is unique in that it takes on the challenge by arguing that the

⁵ The justifiability of beliefs indicates that beliefs have moral standing. To hold a belief that is unjustified can also be described as holding a belief that one ought not to hold. If a belief can be shown to be justified by evidence and argument, then it is assumed that one *ought* to adopt that belief; indeed, one may be said to be *wrong* to reject it.

⁶ Wolterstorff distances himself and his *Faith and Rationality* collaborators from those who have concluded that the collapse of classical foundationalism was also the end to the concept of knowledge (Richard Rorty) or the distinction between rational and non-rational beliefs (Paul K. Feyerabend). See Wolterstorff, "Introduction," 4.

⁷ See Wolterstorff, "Introduction," 5.

nature of the evidence and the rules of justification are no longer governed by classical foundationalism.

A third characteristic of Reformed epistemology is that it corresponds to the Reformed or Calvinist theological tradition in its view on the immediate nature of our knowledge of God. In his Preface to *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga*, Hoitenga says Reformed epistemology identifies with the epistemological claims of Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; to illustrate, he quotes these well-known lines:

There is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity.... This conviction, namely, that there is some God, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow.... It is not a doctrine that must be first learned in school, but one of which each of us is master from his mother's womb and which nature itself permits no one to forget, although many strive with every nerve to this end.⁸

Though several of the scholars identified with Reformed epistemology do, in fact, come out of a Reformed theological context, including Alvin Plantinga, such personal theological affiliation is not necessary. Furthermore, Reformed epistemology and the Reformed theological tradition both share a common perspective on the relationship between faith and reason – a perspective that recognizes reason is not infallible and faith can be a source of knowledge.

In summary of Reformed epistemology, then, three characteristics may be identified: the embrace of the collapse of classical foundationalism, fresh engagement

⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1955), 43, 46.

with the evidentialist challenge to religious belief, and correlation with the Reformed theological tradition. In what follows, Baillie theology will be briefly assessed in light of these three characteristics in order to demonstrate the affinity between his thought and Reformed epistemology.

Baillie and Reformed Epistemology: Making the Connection

Baillie may not have been part of the generation of thinkers observing and engaging the collapse of classical foundationalism, but the collapse of any structure that has stood long and loomed large does not happen suddenly. Baillie's thesis of a knowledge of God, a revelation of God, characterized as a mediated immediate sense of the presence of God and its strong parallels to some of the defining characteristics of Reformed epistemology decades later suggests there had been cracks in the edifice of classical foundationalism for quite some time. Previous chapters reviewing the history of Baillie's thought shows that he had long sought to navigate between the extreme influences of Rationalism and Romanticism, between reason and intuition.

The anti-evidentialism of Reformed epistemology is not itself what sets it apart as a noteworthy movement in recent decades. As has been noted, the Reformed theological tradition has long been taking up an anti-evidentialist position. What makes Reformed epistemology unique is its proposal that the belief in God, in particular, is a properly basic belief.

In claiming the basic nature of theistic belief, Plantinga does not mean to say that belief in God lacks rational grounds. In an important section of his essay, “Reason and Belief in God,” Plantinga explains that belief in God has reasonable grounds though it may not be based on evidence.⁹ Plantinga commonly turns to the illustration of perceptual beliefs; for example, on this October day I see that the leaves on the tree outside my office window are orange and, occasioned by my perception of the orange leaves, the belief “The leaves on the tree outside my office window are orange” is formed. The perceiving is the basis for the belief, but not in an evidentiary way. A belief formed on the basis of perception is an immediate belief, caused by the encounter of the subject with some perceptible thing, and as an immediate belief it is also basic.

There are two important consequences for theistic debate implied by the thesis that belief in God is properly basic. First, the thesis suggests that the evidentialist assumption that the burden of proof in theistic debate lies with the theists is no longer valid. The debate changes from its atheistic starting point, from which the theist must produce evidence to persuade the skeptic of God’s existence, to a legitimately theistic starting point, from which the theist must rather show that her belief in God is reasonable, with no goal to persuade the skeptic to share her belief in God. In other words, it is no longer the mark of rationally justified belief that it is intended to result in the persuasion of the skeptic. And this state of affairs introduces the second important consequence of

⁹ See Plantinga, “Reason and Belief in God” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 78-82.

the thesis that belief in God is properly basic. This thesis upsets the ideal of Rationalism, which is the philosophical assumption that, given the use of the right method of reasoning, one can expect substantial and perhaps universal agreement on a conclusion. The disruption of this ideal means the association of a justified belief with the truth of that belief is no longer a necessary association.

In the case of defending the belief that God exists, Plantinga suggests that the proposition, "God exists," is not itself the belief about God that is properly basic for the theist. Rather, based on various experiences and perceptions a person has in relation to God (e.g., God is speaking to me, God forgives me), a person concludes that God exists.¹⁰ Likewise, based on certain experiences in which a person perceives God is absent or unwilling or unable to give his aid in hardship, for example, a person may conclude God does not exist. The point is that experience and perception can yield opposing but properly basic beliefs. And demonstrating the justifying grounds for those opposing beliefs does not and cannot indicate which belief is true. In other words, reason alone does not lead one into all truth.

It is interesting to note that though Baillie did not benefit from the intellectual climate produced by the collapse of classical foundationalism, he pursued avenues of thought similar to Plantinga and other Reformed epistemologists. Baillie, too, claimed that arguments for the existence of God were not what produced belief in God. He, too, claimed that though belief in God was not produced through rational argument, it did not

¹⁰ Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 81.

mean that it was not rational to believe in God. Baillie, too, argued that belief in God was immediate, that it was not mediated by inference of any kind. He, too, described the immediacy of belief in God in terms of perception and experience. A more detailed comparison of Baillie and Plantinga will be made in a following section of this chapter.

As Wolterstorff states in his Introduction to *Faith and Reason*, the Reformed theological tradition, especially the Continental Reformed tradition, has long taken an anti-evidentialist position in the faith and reason debate. Though the anti-evidentialism characteristic of Baillie's thought is not a necessary position for an adherent to Reformed theology, Reformed theology surely provides an amenable cognitive context for anti-evidentialism.¹¹ So, in sharing the common theological ground of the Reformed tradition, Baillie and Plantinga likewise share a certain kind of view of the world. Notably they share a strong view of God's sovereign involvement in overcoming the sin-caused damage that alienates humanity from God. The Reformed view of sin, which describes sin in terms of both the human inability and hostility toward the good God wills for his image bearing creatures, necessitates the action of God to enable humans to both will and do the good. Baillie was not only deeply influenced by his Reformed upbringing but continued throughout his life to use such Reformed plumb lines as the Westminster Confession of Faith and the writings of John Calvin to engage his own and others' thought.

¹¹ B. B. Warfield, also a Presbyterian, is a good example of a Reformed thinker who engaged the evidentialist challenge by playing according to its rules.

Both Baillie and Plantinga also engage Karl Barth as a participant in the Reformed tradition whose alternative approach to the evidentialist challenge found in natural theology invites dialogue and critique. Both agree that Barth's absolute rejection of the evidentialist challenge is not an adequate response. In assessing other people's ideas, Plantinga exhibits, like Baillie, the willingness to listen carefully to a position, set aside what is not profitable, and retain what is useful. For example, though Plantinga does not think Barth's reasons for rejecting natural theology are persuasive, he values Barth's alignment with other theologians in the Reformed tradition who maintain it is perfectly rational to believe in God without the support or evidence of other beliefs (i.e., that belief in God is properly basic).¹²

One reason why it is interesting to compare Baillie and Plantinga, as a representative of Reformed epistemology, is that by doing so the comparison is also introduced between Baillie and other Dutch Reformed theologians cited to support Plantinga's arguments.¹³ Specifically, in his essay, "Reason and Belief in God" in *Faith and Reason*, Plantinga cites nineteenth-century Dutch Reformed theologian Herman

¹² Plantinga writes, "Barth joins Calvin and Bavinck in holding that the believer in God is entirely within his rights in believing as he does even if he does not know of any good theistic argument (deductive or inductive), even if he does not believe there is any such argument, and even if in fact no such argument exists. Like Calvin, Kuyper, and Bavinck, Barth holds that belief in God is properly basic – that is, such that it is rational to accept it without accepting it on the basis of any other propositions or beliefs at all." See Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 72-73.

¹³ Such a comparison is not the focus of this dissertation, but there is certainly much study that could be done to compare and contrast Baillie and Herman Bavinck, for example, whose four volume *Reformed Dogmatics* include significant reflection on matters of revelation and epistemology. Another excellent comparison could be made between Baillie and the Dutch theologian, churchman, and statesman, Abraham Kuyper, whose *Concise Works of the Holy Spirit* and *Principia* would likewise provide excellent points of comparison.

Bavinck to illustrate one of the many arguments against natural theology to be found in the Christian tradition.¹⁴ There is no evidence in Baillie's work, either published or unpublished, to suggest that he was familiar with the Dutch Reformed theological tradition.

Plantinga's Warranted Christian Belief

Alvin Plantinga has spent much of his career addressing two kinds of objections to the Christian faith, which he explains in the preface to *Warranted Christian Belief*.¹⁵ One objection targets the truth of the Christian faith and the other targets the reasonableness of the Christian faith. Plantinga refers to the former as the *de facto* objection, one of the most common expressions of which is some version of the argument of the problem of evil. The latter objection he refers to as *de jure*, which claims that, regardless of the truth of the Christian faith, it is unjustifiable, irrational or even immoral to entertain Christian belief.¹⁶

In *Warranted Christian Belief*, Plantinga ultimately takes up both questions, explaining that in determining the warrant of Christian belief, the *de jure* question is found to entail the *de facto* question. Plantinga describes the state of affairs he believes must exist in order for a belief to have warrant. He writes, "A belief has warrant for a

¹⁴ See Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," 64.

¹⁵ Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁶ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, viii-ix.

person S only if that belief is produced in S by cognitive faculties functioning properly (subject to no dysfunction) in a cognitive environment that is appropriate for S's kind of cognitive faculties, according to a design plan that is successfully aimed at truth. When a belief meets these conditions and does enjoy warrant, the degree of warrant it enjoys depends on the strength of the belief, the firmness with which S hold it."¹⁷ Plantinga proposes what he calls the Aquinas/Calvin model (A/C model), so called because of Aquinas and Calvin's teaching that all people are born with a natural capacity to know God. This model describes a view of the world in which the conditions of his definition of warranted belief are met by Christian belief.¹⁸ The A/C model introduces warranted *theistic* belief, and drawing more deeply from his theological sources, especially John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, Plantinga delineates the "extended A/C model," which proposes warranted *Christian* belief. The A/C model in its extended form will be used in the comparison with Baillie.

Plantinga observes agreement in Aquinas and Calvin regarding a kind of natural knowledge of God that humans possess. "There is," Plantinga explains, "a sort of instinct, a natural human tendency, a disposition, a nusus to form beliefs about God under a variety of conditions and in a variety of situations."¹⁹ Even objections to God serve as a kind of testimony about him. Calvin calls this basic idea the *sensus divinitatis* which, in a

¹⁷ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 156.

¹⁸ Plantinga calls it the Aquinas/Calvin (A/C) model because it is built on teaching common to both theologians.

¹⁹ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 171.

wide variety of circumstances, produces in people beliefs about God. According to Plantinga, “These circumstances trigger the disposition to form the beliefs in question; they form the occasion on which those beliefs arise. Under these circumstances, we develop or form theistic beliefs—or, rather, these beliefs are formed in us; in the typical case we don’t consciously choose to have those beliefs. Instead, we find ourselves with them, just as we find ourselves with perceptual and memory beliefs.”²⁰ All people have the capacity for this knowledge of God and were originally designed by God to attain this knowledge, to some degree, by way of the *sensus divinitatis*.

Plantinga outlines several features of the A/C model which provide a helpful summary of the model and will form the structure of comparison with Baillie’s theology of revelation in the next section. First, theistic belief produced by the *sensus divinitatis* is basic and enjoys proper basicity with respect to both justification and warrant. Thus a person is justified in holding her theistic belief as properly basic because she has not accepted it on the evidential basis of other propositions.²¹ Similarly, a person is also warranted in her belief in God when such belief has come from the *sensus divinitatis* understood to be “a belief-producing faculty (or power, or mechanism) that under the right conditions produces belief that isn’t evidentially based on other beliefs.”²² To this point, Plantinga writes,

²⁰ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 172.

²¹ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 177.

²² Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 179.

According to the A/C model, this natural knowledge of God is not arrived at by inference or argument (for example, the famous theistic proofs of natural theology) but in a much more *immediate* way....It isn't that one notes some feature of the Australian outback – that it is ancient and brooding, for example – and draws the conclusion that God exists. It is rather that, upon the perception of the night sky or the mountain vista or the tiny flower, *these beliefs just arise within us*. They are occasioned by the circumstances; they are not conclusions from them.²³

In other words, beliefs about God's existence occasioned from nature are not governed by the faculty of reason. Plantinga is describing another faculty at work, one identified by theologians as the *sensus divinitatis*. This spiritual-sense faculty which enables a person to recognize a divine other is just as natural and universal as the human sense of sight that enables a person to recognize a human other.

Second, the operation of the *sensus divinitatis* in the A/C model is a *natural* operation, meaning it is part of their purpose and design for human beings to know God through the proper functioning of their original cognitive equipment.²⁴ The fact that this natural operation fails to function properly does not at all undermine the claim that the *sensus divinitatis* is a universally human faculty. No one could justifiably argue that visual blindness or impairment proves that vision is not a natural part of being human. Blindness only proves that the properly functioning faculty of vision may be impaired, even to such a degree that it ceases to function. The extended A/C model takes into consideration the damaged state of the *sensus divinitatis* and describes the work of the

²³ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 175. Emphasis added.

²⁴ See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 180.

Spirit upon our minds by which humanity's broken epistemic equipment and environment is overcome in order to once again be revelatory; Plantinga is mindful that this spiritual work is "part of a special response to the fallen condition into which humankind has precipitated itself," while the *sensus divinitatis* is part of our original epistemic endowment.²⁵

Plantinga says the *sensus divinitatis*, a natural operation of humankind, functions similarly to perception or sight in that it generates the kind of experience that occasions a properly basic belief. The description of the *sensus divinitatis* as perception or sight must be analogical. The physical eye is designed to perceive material things; since God is not in himself a material being, he cannot be immediately perceived by the human eye. But God is present, though he is invisible. The *sensus divinitatis* is a perceiving faculty understood as a spiritual-sense designed to perceive the presence of the divine other.

One of the important distinctions Plantinga makes throughout the book is between *de jure* and *de facto* objections. He makes an effort to show that *de jure* objections to belief in God, that is, objections appealing to the laws of reason, are fundamentally flawed in their effort to disassociate from the question of the reality of God and the nature of belief in God. Plantinga puts it this way:

What you properly take to be rational, at least in the sense of warranted, depends on what sort of metaphysical and religious stance you adopt. It depends on what kind of beings you think human beings are, what sorts of beliefs you think their noetic faculties will produce when they are functioning properly, and which of their faculties or cognitive mechanisms are aimed at the truth. Your view as to

²⁵ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 180.

what sort of creature a human being is will determine or at any rate heavily influence your views as to whether the theistic belief is warranted or not warranted, rational or irrational for human beings. And so the dispute as to whether theistic belief is rational (warranted) can't be settled just by attending to epistemological considerations; it is at bottom not merely an epistemological dispute, but an ontological or theological dispute.²⁶

Thus Plantinga concludes the *de jure* question is not independent of the *de facto* question; the reasonableness of a thing, with regard to warrant at least, cannot be discussed apart from the truth of a thing. Plantinga's A/C model proposes that all humans have a spiritual-sense faculty which, properly functioning in its proper environment, perceives the presence of God and makes God known. The extended A/C model addresses 1) the fact that the *sensus divinitatis* is not working properly and does not dependably and universally produce knowledge of God and 2) what God has done to restore human knowledge of himself.

So Plantinga affirms humans are capable of natural knowledge of God, but not in their current sin-affected state. Thus a third feature of the A/C model claims the natural knowledge of God available from the *sensus divinitatis* is impeded by human sin and its consequences. Of the many consequences of human sin in the world, Plantinga focuses on sin's serious noetic effect on human knowledge of God. The seriousness of this cognitive impairment lies in the fact that, according to Plantinga and the A/C model, failure to know God skews knowledge of ourselves, others, and the world we live in. "Were it not for sin and its effects," Plantinga writes,

²⁶ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 190.

God's presence and glory would be as obvious and uncontroversial to us all as the presence of other minds, physical objects, and the past. Like any cognitive process, however, the *sensus divinitatis* can malfunction; as a result of sin, it has indeed been damaged. Our original knowledge of God and his glory is muffled and impaired; it has been replaced (by virtue of sin) by stupidity, dullness, blindness, inability to perceive God or to perceive him in his handiwork. Our knowledge of his character and his love toward us can be smothered: it can even be transformed into a resentful thought that God is to be feared and mistrusted; we may see him as indifferent or even malignant.²⁷

If the effect of sin is to diminish our natural knowledge of God to the point that we really must say we have no functional natural knowledge of God, then the explanation of human origin, identity and purpose provided by the deliverables of the *sensus divinitatis* is no longer available and some other narrative can and does (and likely must) take its place.²⁸ The Christian story depicts sin as damaging both our minds and hearts so that not only is our *perception* of the deliverables of the *sensus divinitatis* diminished, Plantinga explains, but our *desire* for these deliverables is redirected. If we cannot know God, then we cannot love him and want him as we ought; instead, we continue to seek insight into our nature and purpose as humans and, in so doing, end up loving and wanting things that are insufficient replacements of God and ultimately only intensify our insatiable search. Such is the compound nature of sin.

A fourth feature of the A/C model is that the revelation of God given in scripture and through the Spirit produces knowledge of God in a sinner by way of faith. Given our

²⁷ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 214.

²⁸ To illustrate, Plantinga shows how philosophical naturalism and its corresponding narrative of evolution can attempt to fill the epistemological void left by the impaired *sensus divinitatis*.

sin-affected state, God designed and put into motion a way of salvation from our sin and alienation from God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God. He also designed and put into motion a process of revelation, which Plantinga calls a “three-tiered cognitive process,” by which this salvation is secured in particular persons.²⁹ The three pieces in this process include, 1) God’s arrangement for the production of scripture, 2) the Spirit’s repair of the damage caused by sin, and 3) the exercise of faith to accept God’s salvation. Plantinga summarizes, “What is really involved in a believer’s coming to accept the great things of the gospel, therefore, are three things: Scripture (the divine teaching), the internal invitation or instigation of the Holy Spirit, and faith, the human belief that results.”³⁰ Though Plantinga distinguishes between the scriptures, the Spirit and the faith given by God to people, it is the Spirit who is active in both the production of scripture and its acceptance by faith. To be clear, then, Plantinga says knowledge of God comes to us in a sin-altered world only through the Holy Spirit and not through any one of the natural cognitive faculties with which humans were originally created.³¹ Beliefs concerning God, Plantinga writes, “don’t come just by way of the normal operation of our natural faculties; they are a supernatural gift.”³²

²⁹ What Plantinga calls a “three-tiered cognitive process” can also be called, using more theological terminology, the process of divine revelation. This process is viewed by Plantinga as really more of a main way by which salvation is secured; he allows for God’s choice to use alternative methods in bringing people to salvation through Jesus Christ. See *Warranted Christian Belief*, 243 and note 4.

³⁰ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 249.

³¹ See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

³² Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 245.

Including scripture in the cognitive process of salvation means for Plantinga that there is a propositional object to faith, which he identifies as God’s plan of salvation as made known in the Bible and as it applies to one personally. The experience of faith involves what Plantinga calls a “doxastic experience,” which is the experience accompanying the formation of belief in which one feels the “rightness” of the belief.³³ So when one has some encounter with the biblical message of the gospel in which the Spirit produces faith, one has the experience that “what is said simply seems right; it seems compelling; one finds oneself saying, ‘Yes, that’s right, that’s the truth of the matter; this is indeed the word of the Lord.’”³⁴ Plantinga recognizes that this process of faith may “go on in a thousand ways,” but it will always include the proposal and acceptance of the gospel.

Plantinga aims to defend the claim that faith is a kind of knowledge, as it is described by Calvin in his definition and in the definition of faith given by the Heidelberg Catechism.³⁵ Faith is a special knowledge in at least two ways: the *content* of faith is of

³³ Plantinga admits to the difficulty in describing doxastic experience – that feeling one has when holding a belief – but interestingly, his description of it occasions, I think, the very experience he is trying to describe. It is, he says, the experience one has when a belief “seems right, acceptable, natural; it forces itself upon you; it seems somehow inevitable (the right words are hard to find)...it feels different from what you think is a false belief.” (See *Warranted Christian Belief*, 110). Baillie labored to describe something like this experience as well – he described it as the truth of a thing “coming home.”

³⁴ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 250.

³⁵ Calvin describes faith as “a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.” *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.ii.7. In Question and Answer 21, the Heidelberg Catechism defines faith as “not only a certain knowledge by which I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in the Word, but also a wholehearted trust which the Holy Spirit creates in me

unique importance and the *process* by which one believes that content is also unique. Plantinga defends faith as a kind of knowledge in that it is a belief-producing cognitive process involving cognitive faculties, just like memory or perception; faith differs from these other faculties only in that it also involves the direct action of the Holy Spirit.³⁶ What is required for knowledge, Plantinga explains, “is that a belief be produced by cognitive faculties or processes that are working properly, in an appropriate epistemic environment (both maxi and mini) according to a design plan that is aimed at truth, and is furthermore *successfully* aimed at truth.”³⁷ The *sensus divinitatis*, without damage caused by sin, meets these requirements; however, the sin-damaged *sensus divinitatis* cannot yield knowledge because sin damages the cognitive faculties of the knower. Sin introduces distortion into the environment that would otherwise be a means of knowledge, of truth; a malfunctioning *sensus divinitatis* and a corrupted epistemic environment do not successfully arrive at truth.

Plantinga identifies the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit as the way in which all that is damaged, broken and malfunctioning is made right. “Regeneration heals the ravages of sin – embryonically in this life, and with ever greater fullness in the next.”³⁸

through the gospel, that, not only to others, but to me also God has given the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, out of sheer grace, solely for the sake of Christ’s saving work.”

³⁶ See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 256.

³⁷ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 256. Belief may or may not be considered knowledge depending on how strong the belief is in reference to these three components of knowledge. A belief is warranted if it simply meets these three elements to some degree.

³⁸ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

Plantinga says that the Spirit *repairs* the *sensus divinitatis* (as opposed to formulating some new means by which we can know God). This repair enables people to once again “see God and be put in mind of him in the sorts of situations in which that belief-producing process is designed to work.”³⁹ Regeneration helps people to see God, to see his loveliness and, correlatively, to see one’s own wretchedness apart from God – and not only to see God rightly, but to desire and love him.

Thus, the A/C model Plantinga outlines is designed to propose a plausible scenario in which Christian belief may (and indeed is claimed to) enjoy warrant. Four key features of the model have been briefly surveyed in order to summarize the model and provide meaningful points of comparison with Baillie’s theology of revelation. In the discussion that follows, it will be shown that Plantinga and Baillie share significant common ground.

A Comparison of Baillie and Plantinga

One of the challenges of comparing any two people’s thought is the matter of vocabulary. It is the aim of this section to show that Baillie’s theology of revelation is at least compatible with and in some areas similar to Plantinga’s theological application of his religious epistemology and in this way to make a link between the scholarship of Baillie and Reformed epistemology.

³⁹ See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 280.

It has been shown in previous chapters that the presence of God is central to Baillie's theology of revelation. God's holy presence itself confronts broken people, disturbing them with some kind of awareness that the way things are is not the way things are supposed to be. God's presence agitates his sin-marred image-bearers, creating a longing or nagging sense that something is missing, and it is this point of contact between creator and creature Baillie identifies as revelatory. There is no indication from Plantinga in *Warranted Christian Belief* that would suggest Baillie's idea of the divine presence would be incompatible with his own thought. Plantinga simply does not write about God's presence with any emphasis. He does, however, emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in his epistemology, and the Spirit is the presence of God. But Plantinga writes about the Spirit in terms of his specific role in faith. This role is a targeted, focused work of the Spirit on a particular individual at a particular time, whereas Baillie's theology of the presence of God has drawn out the epistemological implications of God's continuous presence to all people at all times.

Plantinga's description of the properly functioning *sensus divinitatis* shows that he believes God is present and epistemologically accessible to all people at all times, given the right epistemic conditions. According to Plantinga's model, it seems it was the *sensus divinitatis* that served as the apparatus by which humans knew God before sin entered the world, that sin broke this apparatus and that the Holy Spirit repairs it in the work of regeneration. Regeneration heals what sin has broken and makes it possible for people to see God, says Plantinga. Plantinga uses the language of knowledge of God to

refer exclusively to that restored capacity to know God through the faith that comes only with the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration. Knowledge comes, we can recall Plantinga saying, when a belief is "produced by cognitive faculties or processes that are working properly, in an appropriate epistemic environment (both maxi and mini) according to a design plan that is aimed at truth, and is furthermore *successfully* aimed at truth."⁴⁰ For Plantinga, there can be no knowledge of God apart from repaired cognitive faculties.

So do Plantinga and Baillie disagree on the nature of our knowledge of God? In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie clearly argues that all people have some kind of knowledge of God, even if it is buried deep at the bottom of their hearts. Here it is important to try and compare what Baillie and Plantinga are really saying and not just the terminology they employ. According to Plantinga's definition of what constitutes knowledge of God in a sin-broken world, no one has knowledge of God prior to or apart from regeneration. But Baillie maintains that even the person who has not received the healing intervention of the Holy Spirit's regeneration has some knowledge of God, though admittedly diminished. For Baillie, the challenge to the wayward soul created by the continuous presence of a holy God constitutes a kind of knowledge. Whereas Plantinga requires that one's cognitive faculties be functioning properly according to a design plan aimed at truth in order for there to be knowledge, Baillie claims the malfunction of cognitive faculties affected by sin in a context and design plan aimed at

⁴⁰ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 256. Belief may or may not be considered knowledge depending on how strong the belief is in reference to these three components of knowledge. A belief is warranted if it simply meets these three elements to some degree.

truth create such cognitive and affective tension that the disturbance itself operates as a revelatory point of contact, an open door, a readiness to receive, a gaze captured but not yet focused.

A key element in Plantinga's A/C model is that the knowledge of God is given in Scripture and that by the work of the Spirit in tandem with Scripture, a person comes to have faith – knowledge of God. Plantinga's requirement that a person know God by Scripture might, at first glance, appear to be a point of distance between Plantinga and Baillie, but upon closer examination, this is not the case. Plantinga's view of how scripture functions in a person's knowledge of God is congruous with Baillie's theology of revelation. Baillie, as it has been shown, opposed the idea that knowing God was merely the exercise of knowing the right set of propositions concerning God. He was wary of any approach to scripture by which scripture was simply the prescription of stories to which one must give assent and that somehow in doing so, one could claim to know God. Plantinga is clearer and more insistent than Baillie about the role Scripture plays in the formation of religious belief, but how he describes scripture's role can be harmonized with Baillie's theology. For Plantinga, our experience with scripture is *not* "that the Holy Spirit induces belief in the proposition *the Bible* (or the book of Job, or Paul's epistles, or the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians) *comes to us from the very mouth of God*. Rather, upon reading or hearing a given teaching – a given item from the great things of the gospel – the Holy Spirit teaches us, causes us to believe that *that*

teaching is both true and comes from God.”⁴¹ What Plantinga describes here is the typical use of Scripture by the Holy Spirit to occasion belief in God. He puts it this way: “So the structure here is not: what is taught in Scripture is true; *this* (e.g., that in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself) is taught in Scripture; therefore, this is true. It is rather that, on reading or hearing a certain teaching *t*, one forms the belief that *t*, that very teaching, is true and from God.”⁴² Similarly, Plantinga writes, “The belief in question is, instead, immediate and basic, an immediate response to the proclamation.”

What Plantinga describes here is consistent with Baillie’s theology of mediated immediacy on several points. First, it recognizes the presence of God, specifically the Holy Spirit, as being essential and foundational to the divine self-revelation. Second, it acknowledges that God reveals himself through media, but that he does so directly. In other words, God himself confronts a person in the reading or hearing of scripture (or of the message of scripture). In the case of such a direct encounter, a person’s response is not to assent to certain propositions or arguments about God, but to acknowledge the divine person being revealed – to trust *him*, so that what a person experiences primarily is not assent but trust.⁴³

Baillie describes knowledge of God in terms of relationship. Faith is not simply knowledge of information, but knowledge of a person. This is not to suggest that trust

⁴¹ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 260.

⁴² Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 260.

⁴³ Recall here the discussion in chapter 4 of this dissertation that assent is an implicit, though not necessarily self-conscious, act that occurs concurrently with the act of trust.

comes temporally before assent in the activity of faith or that assent plays an insignificant role in faith. Rather, trust and assent are experienced together. Still, priority must be given to trust since mere intellectual assent to biblical propositions does not depict the faith of relationship and salvation both Baillie and Plantinga advance. Trust in response to God's message of hope creates a bond between sinner and savior, creature and creator, child and father.

Furthermore, Baillie's concept of a pre-regenerative knowledge or awareness does not mean there is not also a need for divine initiation in knowing God. As Baillie says, God is on both sides of the relationship. "When I respond to God's call, the call is God's and the response is mine; and yet the response is God's too; for not only does he call me in His grace, but also by His grace brings the response to birth within my soul. *His Holy Spirit is the real author and originator, not only of His address to me, but of my address to Him.*"⁴⁴ Again, this perspective on the nature of our knowledge of God can be attributed to Baillie's epistemological application of God's omnipresence. God is not just in, with, and under beautiful sunsets and breathtaking mountain views, but he is in, with, and under every human being. Though sin has set human will over against God, it has not and cannot set human *being* against God – that is, it cannot change the fact that humans remain creatures of God.⁴⁵ Baillie asks, "How can God be only over against me,

⁴⁴ John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 234. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ More specifically, Baillie argues against Barth, sin does not eradicate the fact that humans are *image bearing* creatures of God.

if all the good I do is wholly His and yet most truly done by me, if all the truth I think is wholly His and yet most truly thought by me, and if I am never so truly myself as when He does in me what He wills and thinks in me what He would have me think?"⁴⁶ Baillie is here capturing the mystery of God's concurrent activity with our own. God's authorship of salvation does not mean only that he provided the means for humans to be reconciled to God through the obedient life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Also authors the human response to such reconciliation.⁴⁷

A surface reading of Baillie and Plantinga might lead one to think they actually oppose one another in their proposals of how one knows God. As it has been shown, Baillie's entire career assumes the epistemological impact of the presence of God and he increasingly makes use of the language of sensory perception as an analogy for how God may be known. Plantinga compares himself to Alston, a fellow scholar in the area of Reformed epistemology, and says that though there is much harmony between their projects found in *Warranted Christian Belief* and Alston's *Perceiving God*, there is also difference. Plantinga is not arguing that Christian belief is warranted by means of human perception or experience of God's presence or properties. He does not deny that people experience God, nor does he deny that there are some who perceive God. But Plantinga wants to make a distinction between the phenomenological experiences that can

⁴⁶ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 237.

⁴⁷ Baillie wrestles to express the concurrent activity of God and humans in salvation, but he is in good company - the apostle Paul also penned some challenging lines in an effort to express the activity of God and humans in salvation: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." Philippians 2:12b-13.

accompany the formation of belief and the belief-formation experience *itself*, which he calls the doxastic experience.

To illustrate, Plantinga briefly cites John Wesley's phenomenological description of his faith formation in which Wesley reluctantly attends an event at which he hears Martin Luther's preface to the Romans, to which he describes having both a phenomenological and doxastic experience: his heart felt warmed and he felt personally assured by the message of salvation in Christ.⁴⁸ Plantinga makes an important distinction in his assessment of what is happening to Wesley; he writes, "Here what Wesley comes to believe, or believe more profoundly, is just what the Heidelberg Catechism sees as the content of true faith: that the divine scheme of salvation applies to oneself personally.

Several observations ought to be made about how Plantinga makes use of Wesley's testimony in the context of his argument. First, as mentioned, he makes the distinction between the doxastic experience of faith and the experiences occasioning that faith. The doxastic experience of faith may be described as my trust and assurance that the good news of the gospel is true and extends to me personally. This experience of trust and assurance is distinguishable from hearing the message of the gospel and the physical feeling described as one's heart being warmed.

⁴⁸ This is the passage Plantinga cites: "In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death." From *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 66.

Second, though Plantinga elsewhere describes faith as a process including scripture, it is notable that what Wesley was hearing was not scripture proper but the preface to a commentary on scripture. This means that Plantinga does not assume the very words of the Bible are essential to the formation of faith, but its message more generally.⁴⁹

Third, Plantinga makes clear that he does not understand the kind of experience Wesley had as the experience of *perceiving* God. He and Alston agree that perception of God can and does occur, but that it is a different kind of experience than the experience of faith. Plantinga puts it this way:

Consider also the apostle Paul's vision on the way to Damascus: no doubt he then did perceive Jesus, and furthermore perceived that he said that he was indeed the Christ. So it is certainly possible to perceive Jesus the Christ and perceive that he is *saying* that he is the Christ; still, can we perceive that Jesus actually *is* the Christ? That he actually is the second person of the trinity? I'm inclined to doubt it. And the more ordinary cases where someone's belief in the great things of the gospel comes by way of faith (i.e., Scripture/internal instigation of the Holy Spirit/faith) seem even less properly thought of as cases of perception.

Accordingly, there is indeed such a thing as perceiving God; furthermore perceiving God plays an important role in the religious and spiritual lives of many Christians, in particular, Christians who have been blessed with considerable progress in the spiritual life. Indeed, we might think, following Edwards, that perceiving God – perceiving that he is lovely, amiable, holy, glorious, and the like – is an essential element in the full-blown, well-rounded Christian life. I agree,

⁴⁹ Distinguishing the teaching or message of scripture from scripture itself as being sufficient for faith formation has significant implications for what kinds of circumstances and stories can occasion saving faith. This is a distinction Baillie would appreciate; in a passage in which he reflects on the way God reveals himself through biblical history, he extends this concept to include God's revelation through story in general. He writes, "Other tales of later days were told me, and in them the same Presence seemed to be speaking to me something of the same word. Were this Presence and this word in every tale I was told? I think not.... The stories that had Presence in them for me, though they were by no means always Bible stories, were somehow of a piece with the Bible stories." See *Our Knowledge of God*, 186.

furthermore, that these perceptual beliefs can have warrant. The central Christian beliefs, however, are not perceptual beliefs; they come, not by way of perception of God, but by way of faith. The warrant those beliefs have is not perceptual warrant; it comes rather by way of faith.⁵⁰

For Plantinga, then, perception of God seems to be an experience relegated to the sphere of the mature Christian life. It does not describe the kind of experience a person has moving from disbelief to belief in the gospel. For him, some other kind of cognitive activity is going on – one he calls faith, which incorporates the message of scripture, the work of the Holy Spirit and trusting faith in the gospel.

It is interesting that Plantinga takes up the classical term “*sensus divinitatis*,” the sense of the divine, but resists the language of sense perception in his depiction of faith. Plantinga ascribes to all people the sense or perception of God in their *sinless* state (the *sensus divinitatis* being the natural knowledge of God), but denies that sinners, even redeemed ones, universally retain this perception. For Plantinga, “perception of God is an important part of the mature Christian life, but maturity in the Christian life isn’t attained by most of us; and even for the fortunate few who do achieve maturity, the warrant their central Christian beliefs enjoy does not come by way of perception.”⁵¹ It appears, then, that Plantinga distinguishes the cognitive activity of faith from the cognitive activity of perceiving God; in other words, perception of God may be included in but is not necessary to faith.

⁵⁰ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 288.

⁵¹ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 289.

Baillie uses the term “perception” somewhat differently than Plantinga. Baillie’s context includes a modern epistemology that is based mainly on empiricism – experience of the corporeal world as revealed to us by our bodily senses. Baillie observes that when one assumes that experience of the corporeal world is the only kind of experience available to humans, it follows that there can only be one kind of knowledge available as well.⁵² In opposition to this position, Baillie contends that humans have “what can properly be called sense experience of other things” than what may be experienced by the five senses that perceive the material world.⁵³ According to Baillie, the language of perception is an accurate way of describing the “certain subtler senses or sensitivities which go beyond the bodily senses.”⁵⁴ Among the sensitivities Baillie says are common to human experience is what has been described as the sense of the holy, the sense of the divine, or the sense of the presence of God.

In contrast to Plantinga, Baillie places perception of God at the heart of what it means to be human. It is identified with the image of God, but is not a wholly lost part, and so cannot be exclusively identified with the *sensus divinitatis* broken in the fall. The ability to perceive God, Baillie claims, is part of the image of God that is not altogether

⁵² Once again it is clear that one’s beliefs about the existence of God, or at least of an incorporeal reality, set the interpretive grid through which one engages reality and reflects on personal experiences. If one believes there is no God, God’s knowable presence cannot be an available experience or an acceptable interpretation of experience.

⁵³ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence of God*, 52.

⁵⁴ Baillie, *Sense of the Presence of God*, 52. Perhaps reading Baillie’s use of “sense” as “sensitivity” may be helpful and will help to distinguish his use of “sense.”

lost, though its light is dimmed. What remains is the *anknupfunkspunt* and it is precisely what is at work in the activity of faith. The point of contact for revelation – for the good news scripture teaches, for the work of the Spirit to open eyes – is essentially the point of discontent and restlessness that all persons at all times experience. And this discontent and restlessness, as we’ve noted already, is generated by the continuous confrontation of the sinful person with the perfect holiness of God. It is the gnawing aggravation that comes from the awareness, to some degree, that I am not my own despite my desire to live as though my life is mine alone.

While Plantinga’s distinction between faith and perception would seem to create a significant gap of incongruity between Baillie and himself, a closer look at Plantinga’s “testimonial model,” an aspect of the extended A/C model, suggests there may be more actual agreement between the two. Probably the most important common ground shared by Baillie and Plantinga is their integration of redemption history into their epistemological proposals. Both understand that the nature of our knowledge of God has undergone change in the course of human history. As creatures uniquely made in God’s image, humanity was capable of and privy to knowledge of God like no other creature was. Baillie links knowledge of God with being image-bearers, the divine image opening the way for relationship, understanding and communication between humans and God. Plantinga identifies the *sensus divinitatis* as the natural capacity for knowing God available to all people before the introduction of sin into the world. Both Baillie and

Plantinga, then, recognize that a natural means of knowing God was part of God's gift to humanity and was something that sin undid.

Both Baillie and Plantinga also view redemptive history as an epistemic history. As we have seen, there was a particular way of knowing God for which humans were designed and created – a way that has been lost in sin and which God's salvation in Christ restores. At the heart of the image of God in human creatures is their capacity to know and relate rightly to God. In sharing a Reformed theological heritage, Baillie and Plantinga also share a perspective on the way sin has an impact on knowledge of God. Sin does not only interrupt and disable a properly working epistemic mechanism, it warps the will so that what was once loved is now loathed. As the apostle Paul puts it, "The sinful mind is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."⁵⁵ As Baillie describes it, there is a moral element to belief in God.

Plantinga examines the impact of the will on the epistemic situation created by sin. Sin does not simply introduce a state of unknowing, but a condition of misdirected desire. In his engagement with Jonathan Edwards, Plantinga observes, "Sin is fundamentally a matter of failing to have the right affections and having the wrong ones; it isn't (in the first instance, anyway) a failure of knowledge. It is less a failure to see something than to feel something. The hard-hearted person fails to love the right things; he lacks the virtuous affections of love for the Lord and neighbor and for the great truths of the gospel; he also lacks the hatred and sorrow for sin, gratitude for salvation, joy,

⁵⁵ Romans 8:7.

peace, and all the rest that flow from a proper love of God.”⁵⁶ This distinction between intellect and the will in faith is significant because it reinforces the distinction between the activities of assent and trust in faith described above. If in sin a component of the problem is that one does not desire God (because he is holy and we are not, because he is Creator and we are not, because he is provider and we are not, etc.), then the answer cannot simply be that previously unknown information be provided.⁵⁷

Again, though the language is different, what Plantinga refers to as the distinction between the cognitive and affective elements of unbelief mirrors Baillie’s distinction between intellectual and moral doubt. Both identify an intellectual component to faith that is necessary, but which is not alone sufficient for true knowledge of God. Knowledge of God must also include the embracing of who God reveals himself to be, as opposed to being repulsed by him. It may be recalled how Baillie repeatedly told the story of his being confronted with God’s will but not wanting to have anything to do with it, of claiming to be unable to hear God when in fact he did not want to hear what God was saying to him – this is the moral doubt or unbelief that parallels the misdirection of the affections described by Plantinga.

Because Baillie and Plantinga link religious epistemology to soteriology, the description of salvation is also a description of restored knowledge of God. Plantinga

⁵⁶ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 297.

⁵⁷ Both Baillie and Plantinga appeal to James 2:19 to support the distinction between the intellect and will in faith: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” James 2:19. See Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 66 and Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 291.

describes regeneration, that initial saving work of the Holy Spirit, as “curing the will, so that we at least begin to love and hate the right things; it also includes cognitive renewal, so that we come to perceive the beauty, holiness, and delightfulness of the Lord and the scheme of salvation he has devised.”⁵⁸ There are several observations to be made of Plantinga’s description of regeneration. First, it depicts salvation in notably epistemic terms. Second, it depicts salvation as having a moral and perceptual component. Regeneration does not simply enable sinful humans to love, but to love the *right things*. And regeneration likewise does not simply provide information, but reinstates the capacity to perceive God – and in perceiving him, to know him. Third, it regards the work of making knowledge of God possible as a work of God himself – specifically, a work of the Holy Spirit. These qualities of Plantinga’s description of regeneration complement Baillie’s own theology.

Certainly the epistemic, moral, and perceptual components of regeneration as described by Plantinga dovetail with the theology of Baillie previously surveyed. The idea that the capacity to perceive and love God is itself an act initiated by God is also

⁵⁸ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 304. Plantinga’s description of regeneration is interesting; apart from his inclusion that one be able to perceive the beauty of the gospel, it might seem like he is describing a grace common to all humanity. According to his description of regeneration, one need only *begin* to love and hate the right things. Are not all people functioning with some proper alignment of their affections? The man who lovingly and patiently rocks his colicky infant, the child who demands her friends stop throwing rocks at a cornered stray cat, the woman who remains respectful and kind to a reproachful mother-in-law – these are recognizably human activities, fallen though we may be. And if perception of the Lord is characterized by the experience of longing in the face of beauty, then such perception is not exclusively the experience of Christian believers.

something that finds agreement in Baillie's theology.⁵⁹ An important application of Baillie's theology of omnipresence includes the idea that God himself is working in people to perceive and love God. Baillie writes, "*God appears in some sort to be present on both sides of the relationship.* When I respond to God's call, the call is God's and the response is mine; and yet the response is God's too; for not only does He call me in His grace, but also by His grace brings the response to birth within my soul. His Holy Spirit is the real author and originator, not only of His address to me, but of my address to Him."⁶⁰

Baillie understood the address of God to be both direct and mediated. Though this is a unique expression of the nature of God's self-revelation, we will see that Plantinga's model includes several shared or compatible perspectives. It will be recalled that Baillie maintained that God is known *with* the world, not *through* the world (as though God's existence might be deduced from the world). "Nature is not an argument for God, but it is a sacrament of Him."⁶¹ Baillie does not reduce "nature" here to mean only the natural world of mountains and rivers and deserts, but also the world of human relationships, activity and history. In addition to the knowledge of God that comes in,

⁵⁹ Agreement at this point is no small thing considering the influences of liberalism on Baillie. The doctrines of total inability and dependence on God for a person's saving belief are hallmarks of historical Reformed theology, and often some of the first doctrines to be jettisoned in attempts to find common theological ground. It is striking that "the orthodox liberal" retains this element of his Reformed heritage, even if expressed in non-traditional terms.

⁶⁰ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 234.

⁶¹ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 178.

with, and under nature, humans and history, knowledge of God comes in Scripture. Despite Baillie's opposition to the idea that knowledge of God can be reduced to propositions for assent, he insists Scripture is vital for knowledge of God because the story it tells is essential to know God.⁶² The main point is that God uses a variety of media to reveal himself; in this sense knowledge of God is mediated. It is immediate, however, in that what all these things mediate is not knowledge *about* God but God *himself*. The media become occasions or vehicles by which God is directly encountered.

Plantinga's discussion of the cognitive and affective aspects of knowledge of God culminates in an interesting exploration of the typological significance of *eros*. Plantinga describes a kind of spiritual experience that comes in, with, and under a phenomenological experience. The spiritual experience of longing that comes in, with and under erotic longing involves the perception that there is some greater, more consuming longing organically connected to but surpassing the physical experience. Baillie's concept of a sacramental universe in which God is revealed in his creation, broadly understood, dovetails nicely with Plantinga's illustration of typology as revelation.

Plantinga reflects on the Westminster Catechism's first question and answer which teaches that it is all people's chief purpose in life to glorify God and enjoy him forever. He understands this glorification to involve our perceiving, appreciating, and

⁶² In fact, he writes that "the Christian knowledge of God is not given to any man save in conjunction with the telling of an 'old, old story.'" Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 180.

delighting in God along with our expression of that perception and delight. And the enjoyment he identifies as a kind of union with God which we are able to experience in varying degrees.⁶³ Plantinga describes sexual eros, with its yearning and longing, as “a sign and foreshadowing of the longing and yearning for God that will characterize us in our healed and renewed state in heaven; and sexual satisfaction and union, with its transports and ecstasy, is a sign and foreshadowing of the deeper reality of union with God – a union that is at present and for the most part obscure to us.”⁶⁴ Not only sexual longing and satisfaction typify human love for God and our passionate desire to be united with him – confrontation with *any* thing of transcendent beauty or grandeur or poignancy triggers a similar reaction.⁶⁵

Eros is not only a type of human love and longing for God, but is a type of God’s love for humanity. It depicts his searching, suffering, saving, sustaining love. When humans love one another with erotic love, a love that is devoted to the union and communion with the other, we deepen the image of God in us and occasion, for ourselves and others, a view to God himself.

⁶³ See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 317.

⁶⁴ Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 317.

⁶⁵ Plantinga once again works to articulate something both experientially familiar and linguistically elusive. Other words he uses to describe this longing include yearning, nostalgia, homesickness, the desire to be absorbed into the thing, the insatiability of the desire, and more. See *Warranted Christian Belief*, 318.

Conclusion

In order to demonstrate the relevance of Baillie's theology of revelation for contemporary theology, this chapter introduced the field of reformed epistemology as a valuable arena for dialogue. Specifically, Plantinga's epistemological model in *Warranted Christian Belief* was a focus for comparison with various components of Baillie's theology of revelation.

In the concluding chapter, a summary of the dissertation's thesis and its supporting chapters will be given, highlights in Baillie's theology of revelation will be reflected upon, and some potential avenues for future Baillie studies will be proposed.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

It has been the aim of this dissertation to show that John Baillie's unique contribution to the theology of revelation in the idea of the mediated immediacy of God's presence plays a formative role in the rest of his theology and is valuable for a Reformed theological engagement of twenty-first century theology. To support this thesis, the first two chapters of this dissertation are devoted to an introduction to John Baillie, his context and a careful summary and assessment of his central work, *Our Knowledge of God*. To review, the first chapter surveys the scholarship on Baillie and shows that he has continued to be a figure of interest both for his characteristically mediating and irenic contributions to the field of theology and for his trans-Atlantic career. The second chapter provides a thorough summary and brief assessment of Baillie's first and most carefully argued proposal of divine revelation as the mediated immediacy of God's presence as found in *Our Knowledge of God*. In this chapter the theme of God's presence and its epistemological implications is introduced as a unifying theme in Baillie's scholarship.

Chapters 3 and 4 survey notable journal articles, manuscripts and divinity lectures written before and after the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*. These chapters show that Baillie's concept of God's presence was a defining point of his theology from his first published article to his posthumously published Gifford Lectures. They also trace

how the idea of God's revelation as both mediated and immediate emerged out of his early thought and was an idea to which he circled back in his later years.

The fifth chapter makes the case that engagement with Baillie's theology of revelation is a relevant task. The brief introduction to Reformed epistemology shows that the movement that began in the early 1980's shares some concerns and conclusions with the theology Baillie had articulated decades before. And particularly, a comparison between Baillie and Alvin Plantinga's Aquinas/Calvin model in *Warranted Christian Belief* shows that Baillie's theology of revelation shares some common ground with Plantinga's proposal. The point of demonstrating this common ground is to show the relevance of Baillie's theology for contemporary theological study.

The Guides of Experience, Scripture and the Christian Tradition in Baillie's Theology of Revelation

One purpose of this concluding chapter is to critically reflect on some of the notable characteristics and insights of Baillie's thought introduced in previous chapters. At the beginning of this dissertation, it was suggested that a meaningful understanding of the nature of our knowledge of God should reflect the central teachings of Scripture, employ the insights of the Christian tradition, and make sense of human experience. Such an understanding should help to provide answers to the questions, also posed at the open of this dissertation, and which get at the heart of God's self-revelation. To review, these questions are: How is it that an infinite Creator God can make himself knowable and, in fact, known to his finite creatures? What capacities or opportunity do humans

possess that uniquely enables us to perceive and to know God? Why do some people appear to exercise this capacity while others do not? Are some people privileged with the opportunity to know God while others are not? In short, how do we know God and why do we know God?

Baillie's theology of revelation, as articulated in *Our Knowledge of God* and supported by other manuscripts and writings during his lifetime of scholarship, does meet these three criteria and therefore should be considered a valuable perspective in ongoing theological discussion and reflection on the nature of divine revelation. The survey of Baillie's work made in this dissertation shows Baillie to be deeply concerned that his theology both employ the insight of experience and make sense of common human experience of God. It is a familiar characteristic of his scholarship that he reflects and draws upon his personal experience to illustrate his ideas.¹ It was also shown that his interest in the question of our knowledge of God was piqued by his experience working with British soldiers in World War I – he longed to understand the relationship between morality and the manifestation of Christian faith.² His concern to make sense of his observation of human experience motivated his attempt to distinguish belief in God occurring at the top of one's head and at the bottom of one's heart.

¹ In fact, the survey of Baillie's work in this dissertation shows there were several stories he repeated in various writings, indicating both their formative significance and his view that they clearly illustrated his theology.

² *Roots of Religion* (1926), Baillie's first published manuscript, provides this insight.

Baillie also used the themes of creation, fall, redemption and consummation found in Scripture to give shape to his theology of revelation. As our brief comparison with Alvin Plantinga's Aquinas/Calvin proposal showed in the last chapter, religious epistemology can alternatively be understood and discussed in terms of soteriology. And though framing epistemology in soteriological terms is not unique to Baillie's thought, his particular care to show the relationship between these four components in Scripture's narrative is a good model to build on.³

According to Baillie, God created humanity with the capacity to know its creator. Because God created humans in his image, humans are capable of relationship – certainly with each other but also with the God. Baillie views God's presence to his image-bearing creatures as a continuously relationship-forming, revelation-producing presence. Because God's presence has epistemological significance, not even sin is able to utterly disrupt God's self-revelation and sever the relationship between God and his human creatures. Sin garbles people's reception of and response to God's presence so that the experience produced by confrontation with God is a tension between God's holy presence and sovereign right and one's wayward willfulness. Because people still stand in relationship to God and retain enough of an awareness of God to be disturbed by his presence, Baillie argues that sin does not obliterate human capacity for revelation. In

³ Barth, for example, understood religious epistemology in soteriological terms. According to him, sin had so severed a person's capacity to know God that any knowledge of God was utterly and entirely dependent on God's regenerative act of giving faith. Baillie understands the relationship between creation, fall and redemption differently.

other words, what remains in the state of sin is not knowledge of God understood in terms of fellowship, but an awareness of brokenness – an experience of disquiet that comes from sensing that things are not the way they are supposed to be. And Baillie uniquely counts this as a kind of revelation; it is a revelation unto rejection rather than a revelation unto fellowship.

Despite Baillie’s efforts to distinguish a belief at the top of one’s head from the bottom of one’s heart, he insists that faith, which involves agreement that one cannot make right what sin has made wrong and acceptance of what God has done in Jesus Christ to right the relationship between Creator and creature, is a gift from God. In other words, God does not only provide a means of salvation for humanity in Jesus Christ, whose obedience in life and death remain the only possible payment for sin, but he also is responsible for applying the benefits of that salvation to individual persons.

One of the ways Baillie makes use of the richness of the Christian theological tradition is to claim that we do not have to await the final purge of death in order to enjoy immediate knowledge of God. He rejects the Thomistic epistemology which relegates direct knowledge of God to a postmortem beatific vision. Instead, he looks to alternative proposals by Anselm and Bonaventure to support his view that there is an element of directness in the knowledge of God believers can enjoy even now.⁴ For Baillie, this

⁴ Recall Baillie’s challenge to the tradition supporting the inferential character of our knowledge of God in chapter three of *Our Knowledge of God*. Specifically, he writes, “Even in our earthly communion with God there is something of the substance of beatitude. It can never indeed be more than an

directness exists because God's presence engages us continuously. We do not infer his existence from a world in which the Creator has left his signature mark, but from a world which is his temple. God may be known in, with, and under his creation – a knowledge that is both mediated and immediate. Again, we see that Baillie's theology of the divine presence is central to his theology of revelation; because God's presence has epistemological impact, the knowledge one has of God through faith can be described as beatific. In other words, the divine presence as a source for knowledge of God provides continuity between knowledge of God in a redeemed state (that still, however, suffers from the impact of sin and the consequences of brokenness) and the final state of consummation.

Baillie's use of an alternative perspective on the progress of our knowledge of God promotes an alternative perspective to the nature of our knowledge of God. We know that the finitude that limits our full vision of God is not an epistemological factor that changes in death. Human creatures, whether in states of sinful brokenness or consummated perfection, remain finite. The epistemological limits placed on us by our finitude when it comes to knowing an infinite being are necessary and unchangeable. Our physical nature, to the degree that it shapes and limits our knowledge of God who is spirit, is not something we escape at death. Jesus Christ, whose resurrection precedes our

earnest, a fragmentary foretaste of that which is to come, yet it too is in its measure an enjoyment of the presence of God." Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 171.

own and who exists as the incarnated second person of the trinity today, reminds us that we are meant to know God in our material state.⁵

Thus, our finitude and materiality are not barriers to our knowledge of God. God created human beings in his image for fellowship with himself but the limits of being finite material creatures are not sinful limits or limits that must somehow be overcome. God has designed us to know and fellowship with him and has placed us in an environment designed to mediate that relationship. If finitude and materiality are not what keeps humans from knowing God, then it must only be sin. And if it is sin that limits our knowledge of God, clouding our vision, causing us to see through a glass darkly, then to the degree that humans are able to enjoy freedom from that sin prior to the purging sanctification of death, they are also able to enjoy immediate knowledge (understood in terms of relationship) with God before death. The beatific vision, to put it eschatologically, is both already enjoyable and not yet consummated. Though Baillie does not articulate this position exactly, it is rooted in his theology and is a small example of the kind of perspective Baillie's theology stimulates.

Epistemological Implications of the Divine Presence Considered

It has been shown that the idea of God's presence has had a formative role in Baillie's theology from the beginning of his academic career, and we have attempted to show how he has sought to draw out the epistemological implications of God's

⁵ Since finite beings are not necessarily also physical beings (e.g., angels), it is helpful to distinguish human finitude from human materiality.

omnipresence. His effort to wrestle with these implications has produced in Baillie's thought some interesting insights that are valuable for our theology today.

The reality of God's presence anchors Baillie's theology of revelation. His theology of revelation has elsewhere been described in this dissertation as immediate, continuous, personal, and confronting. Each of these descriptors stems from the fact that God is present. It is the nature of presence to be immediate. One's physical presence in a place indicates nearness; one may be observed, one may be engaged in conversation, and it may be assumed that one is equally mentally present in order to socially connect with another person.

Baillie's understanding of God's presence accounts for the immediacy in his theology of revelation. God is immediately known; his presence is sensed, as he puts it in his final work. God in his self-revelation is so near, so present, so immediate and direct that Baillie absolutely rejects any theology of revelation in which God's reality is inferred. A theology of inference would suggest that God is actually more distant than Baillie understands him to be; it would suggest that there is some way in which people's knowledge of God is somehow independent of God's direct confrontation with them.⁶ Baillie recognizes that describing this immediacy is difficult. He relies on the analogy of our common experience of the immediate presence of another person to illuminate the

⁶ On the one hand, the presence of God is not sensed in a non-cognizant way, such that the experience of encountering God should be described as a feeling or that it is part of some kind of subconscious awareness we have. God's presence is not intuited. It was shown that Baillie rejected this approach to revelation from the very beginning of his career. On the other hand, the presence of God is not something that can be overly intellectualized, that is, something that can be solely derived by piecing together clues left to us.

immediate nature of our knowledge of God. When a friend stands nearby in the same room with me, I perceive with my senses that he is there and am ready to trust the reliability of those senses to accurately indicate to me the reality of my friend's proximity.

Another key characteristic of the presence of God is, according to Baillie, its continuousness. The continuousness of the divine presence marks an important departure from the analogy of human presence because the divine presence never loses proximity. When a friend leaves the room, though I may believe her to still exist and be present wherever she is, her presence has left the reach of my senses and my capacity to perceive her presence is effectively useless. In such a case, I may grant the presence of my friend, but I must do so on different grounds than immediate perception and experience. Because God is omnipresent, however, his presence is continuous. There is never a situation in which I must believe God to be present apart from experiencing his immediate presence.

The personal nature of God's presence is also essential to Baillie's theology. Perception of God's presence is not perception of a force, the way we feel the "presence" of the wind or the "presence" of torque. Although the material world certainly can and does mediate our immediate perception of God's presence, this presence is not intrinsically attached to any material thing. For example, though one may experience a sense of holiness or transcendence or sacredness when sitting quietly in an ancient cathedral, the cathedral itself is not a portal of the divine presence. Baillie's best and

most consistent description of the personal nature of the divine presence is that it meets us in the form of an address. Wind and torque do not address us personally; any such language used to suggest that an impersonal force or thing addresses us is utilizing the metaphor of personification. But God is believed to be personal, to have a mind, will and character that can be communicated to another through word and deed. Even though this divine address always comes to us through some element of the created world, whether something external to us or internal, it is perceived directly and is perceived as an address by an other.

Baillie describes the presence of God in terms of a confrontation. The experience of being confronted or challenged, the feeling of the weight of demand upon oneself comes from the one's encounter with the holy God. The demand is not to accept a list of righteous tasks but to accept a humble state of being as one who is the recipient of a gift. In *Our Knowledge of God*, Baillie frames the demand this way: "The Source of the obligation is Himself [God] directly revealed to us and that it is in this vision of His glory and His holiness that our sense of obligation is born. It is His perfection that rebukes us; it is His love that constrains us."⁷ And as Baillie has faithfully argued, all people receive and experience this personal address by God because 1) God is omnipresent and 2) all people retain, even after the fall, the capacity to perceive God's presence experienced as address. God's presence is experienced as a demand, a confrontation that must be addressed. Humanity encounters God not abstractly or theoretically, but concretely in the

⁷ Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, 162.

midst of relationship – and always initially as a broken relationship. The confrontation of a broken relationship, the failure to live a holy life before a holy God, can seem daunting; it can be something we want to avoid or escape or deny. And this willful avoidance and denial is the natural and initial response of broken humanity to God's holy presence. As Baillie explored in *Invitation to Pilgrimage*, sinful humans are not initially interested in (nor are they naturally disposed to) the humble response required by the demand of God, that is, the humility to receive God's gift of a righted relationship through the perfect love and obedience of Jesus Christ.⁸

It is important to remember two significant motivations behind Baillie's insistence on his somewhat difficult distinction between knowledge of God at the top of one's head and the bottom of one's heart. First, Baillie understands faith as trust in response to a person and not as mere intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions. As he articulated so carefully in *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, one's view of faith must correspond to one's view of the nature of revelation. Since Baillie views revelation in terms of an encounter with God himself – as personal communion instead of communication of information – he views faith more in relational rather than cognitive terms. Second, Baillie's own humility and piety finds frequent expression in his hesitance to draw lines in the sand with regard to who is and is not a recipient of God's grace. He is never comfortable categorizing others in their faith journeys. He very

⁸ To be clear, what is natural for sinful humanity could also be viewed as unnatural from the perspective of how humans ought to be.

carefully assesses his own pilgrimage of faith, and on multiple occasions confesses that his own resistance to God was not born of honest intellectual doubt but was an act of resistance to that which he saw in God and did not wish to be confronted with. We can be sympathetic to these motivations for making a distinction between knowledge of God at the top of one's head and the bottom of one's heart. But the case could be made that this distinction is less of an asset and insight in Baillie's theology and more of a stumbling block.

It is difficult to discern how faith can retain its relational status, being the key to communion with God, while remaining so dormant in a person's psyche that she can honestly confess she has no belief in God whatsoever. What ought to be valued about Baillie's proposed theology is that he is seeking to articulate a theological explanation of reality, of his common, everyday experience. And what he is confronted with, as we are today, is the fact that there are notably generous, compassionate, kind people who lay down their lives for others but who confess nothing of the Christian faith. Are we to dismiss such goodness simply because it is not accompanied by a proper doctrinal statement of faith? Is God not at work in such a good life? As we have seen, Baillie is unwilling to demarcate the presence of God that yields the fruit of the Spirit in this way. His answer is that wherever there is the fruit of the Spirit, there is the Spirit himself, and this communion only comes through faith. In other words, God's presence, with its experience of demand, has been met, on some level, in such a person with some level of

acceptance and submission so that his life bears testimony to his bottom-of-the-heart faith though his lips may not.

But is Baillie's proposal to make sense of our experience the most reasonable and biblical option? What elements of his thought are helpful and what elements only lead us to more questions? I think Baillie is correct on several points. First, he is right that we must take seriously the biblical text that testifies to the fact that all people are culpable for knowledge of God. This concern occupied the whole first section of *Our Knowledge of God* as Baillie developed a theology of the image of God and the revelatory point of contact distinct from the positions of Barth and Brunner. There he said that human nature is formed by being in relationship with God. In other words, the impact of God revealing himself to humanity through his immediate, continuous personal and confrontational presence is that it has made humanity personal and capable of being in relationship with God.

Baillie insists, most clearly in *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*, that God's effort at self-revelation must be apprehended as such in order for revelation to have taken place.⁹ In other words, the transmission of God's self-revelation must be received by our apprehension for it to be considered a true revelation at all. Though God may be utilizing something historical to communicate himself, the fact remains that revelation is an event that necessarily takes place in the present moment. We should be careful to clarify what sort of response is sufficient here. For example, has God revealed

⁹ Baillie, *Idea of Revelation*, 105.

himself only when someone receives his self-revelation with fellowship-restoring faith? Or do we say God has equally revealed himself to the person who perceives the divine self-revelation but rejects it completely? Are we to conclude that God revealed himself to Moses but not to Pharaoh based on their responses to God's self-revelation? Should we make a distinction between revelation unto fellowship and revelation unto condemnation? A brief look at just a couple of biblical examples will illustrate that the answer to why some accept and some reject the revelation of God is rooted in the mystery of the divine will even though all people are held responsible for their responses to God's personal, confronting presence. The examples chosen are from the Gospels, for Jesus is considered to be the clearest revelation of God in all history. In the Gospel of Luke's story of Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the end of his ministry, we read that Jesus wept over the city he approached. He grieves over the people's response to the revelation they have received and the consequences their blindness will bring. Jesus says, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – *but now it is hidden from your eyes*. The days will come on you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, *because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.*"¹⁰

What is challenging about this brief passage is that Jesus seems to maintain two, seemingly opposing perspectives. First, Jesus wishes the people of Jerusalem knew the

¹⁰ Luke 19:42-44. Emphasis added.

way of peace, but he acknowledges that it has been hidden from their eyes. Did they exceed some kind of statute of limitations, running out of time to embrace the right view? We don't know, but what is clear is that what could have been known and would have brought peace is now no longer available and is hidden from their eyes. This would seem to support the idea that we are not all culpable for revelation transmitted – how would it be fair to be held responsible for a transmission that is hidden from me? The second challenging part of the passage is the last line that suggests that the responsibility for the upcoming judgment lies with the same people who were seemingly unable to recognize the time of God's coming. In other words, these people *ought* to have recognized Emmanuel, God with us, but because they did not, *whatever the explanation*, their lack of recognition was judged a rejection.

The Gospel of John also records the event of Jesus having entered Jerusalem amidst a throng of fans. Those who had witnessed Jesus' raising of Lazarus from the dead were following him and spreading the word of this miracle. The new crowd in Jerusalem also witnessed a voice thundering from heaven, affirming what Jesus spoke. But there were many skeptics in the crowd, and the text says that "even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him."¹¹ How is it that people did not believe in Jesus – whose reputation as a miracle-working rabbi preceded him, whose claim to glorify the Father was confirmed by a voice from heaven, whose other miraculous works were performed among this crowd and testified to by

¹¹ John 12:37.

others? The author of the gospel interprets this lack of belief as a fulfillment of prophecy. He writes, “For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes nor understand with their hearts, nor turn – and I would heal them.’”¹²

This passage begins with the blame for unbelief put on the people who had received so much revelation and had refused to embrace its testimony. But then the narrative explains that this unbelief was a result of God’s unwillingness that they would believe in Jesus, which in turn seems to come from his unwillingness to heal them. Again, we see that people who were in the presence of Jesus and witnessed his miraculous signs and who did not believe in him were held accountable for this unbelief though they are also portrayed as having had something kept from them.

In these examples we are confronted with some challenging biblical imagery that deserves attention. In both cases there is the language of vision used to depict revelation—a common metaphor used in both biblical and theological literature. In the Luke passage, the people were described as having failed to recognize what they saw. Again, in the John passage, the people were described as having personally witnessed Jesus and his signs but with blinded eyes. So it would seem there is some way in which the crowds *saw* a revelation, which they were clearly held accountable for having seen, and some way in which they were *blind* to a revelation, which was clearly understood in terms of a culpable rejection of what had been revealed. How are we to make sense of an event that

¹² John 12:39-40; See also Isaiah 6:8-10.

seems to be, at the same time, revealing and concealing? Here Baillie's idea of the mediated immediacy of divine revelation is useful. The medium of revelation is the scenario people witness with their physical senses; it is the fact of the circumstances of the revelation that all parties can agree upon. The immediacy of revelation has to do with the meaning or value of the witnessed fact and depends on how one perceives the divine presence. To illustrate this distinction, we may look at John 12:27-29. In these verses, the Bible records Jesus speaking aloud to the Father and the Father answering him audibly, "for your benefit, not mine," Jesus says to the crowd.¹³ But the Bible also testifies that a Father's reply is not what most people heard – some said the sound was a rumble of thunder while others attributed it to angels. The agreed on fact in this case is that there was a noteworthy sound that appeared to be a kind of response to Jesus' prayer. Where there lacked consensus was regarding the meaning or value of the sound. Though the account tells us that God spoke aloud, he apparently did not speak for everyone to understand him.

Distinguishing as Baillie does between the medium of God's self-revelation and the revelation itself (his immediate, personal presence), shows that any one object or person or story or event can be the means of divine revelation and that nothing is or must intrinsically be revelatory. For example, in one of Baillie's repeated stories of having left a philosophy discussion late one night during his student days in Edinburgh, he tells of looking up at the starry night and finding it cold and speechless. He remarked that he

¹³ John 12:27-29.

could not recite with integrity the lyrics of Joseph Addison's hymn: "What though in solemn silence all / Move round the dark terrestrial ball/ What though no real voice nor sound / Amidst their radiant orbs be found? / In Reason's ear they all rejoice / and utter forth a glorious voice / forever singing as they shine / 'The hand that made us is divine.'" For Joseph Addison, the starry heavens had "spoken" to him of God's existence; he "saw" the divine hand in what he beheld. For Baillie, on that one evening as he wrestled with doubt, he looked upon the same sky and neither heard nor saw anything that assured him of God's existence. Put another way, for Addison, there had been something that had come to him in, with, and under his study of the night sky – revelation of God – that did not come to Baillie in, with, and under the same sky.

Revelation as mediated immediacy preserves the understanding of revelation as an event. If nothing in the material world is intrinsically, in and of itself, revelatory, then revelation is not static. It is rather dependent on God's presence and therefore determined by him alone. What is not clear from Baillie is why, exactly, some people receive the revelation from God and some people don't. It is clear, as we have briefly shown above, that the same event can yield different receptions of revelation. But is this because God, who is clearly in control of utilizing his creation for revelatory purposes, chooses to provide two *different but simultaneous* transmissions of his self-revelation? For example, in the case of the John 12 passage recording God the Father speaking from heaven – did God both conjure up human speech and rumbling thunder and then specifically direct the two separate transmissions to whom he will? Or was there a single

transmission of God speaking that either was or was not discernible to people depending on their capacity to receive God's self-revelation? Even for people who seemed to have a restored capacity to receive the revelation of God (for example the disciples of Jesus), there are still many instances where the Bible indicates that these devoted followers failed to grasp what Jesus was teaching. This again is a reason to value Baillie's insight that revelation is an event; there is nothing static about it. It would seem that neither in terms of the transmission of revelation or the reception of it does illumination function independently of God's intimate, moment-to-moment activity. Thus, our journey to God is always a journey to the God who is here.

Next Steps in Baillie Studies

Four areas for further engagement with Baillie's scholarship have been introduced, to some degree, by this dissertation and may be recommended. First, the Baillie Project introduced by the Special Collections department of Edinburgh University Library in 2003 includes many kinds of documents relevant to John Baillie's life and career. Personal correspondence with his brother Donald, his wife, Jewel, and a variety of scholar friends would provide interesting insight and information about Baillie's life and perspective. His lectures, which read as manuscripts, would benefit from further evaluation with regard to their sequence and relationship to his published works.

A second area for future Baillie scholarship would include a study of Baillie's theology of revelation from a pneumatological perspective. The swell of theological

interest in pneumatological studies in the twenty-first century prompts one to view Baillie's theology in this light. Reading Baillie's theology, with its strong emphasis on the revelatory significance of the presence of God, can help us think creatively about the revelatory work of the Spirit, who is God with us today.¹⁴

Third, there is more work that can be done to continue Baillie's conversation with the Reformed epistemology movement. For example, William Alston's book, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (1991), and Nicholas Wolterstorff's book, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (1995) both provide interesting proposals on topics Baillie addressed in his writings. A comparison between Baillie's idea of the mediated immediacy of divine revelation and Alston's idea of perception would make for an excellent study. And Wolterstorff's ideas about the nature of divine address could be used in a study of Baillie's ideas of the perimeters of scripture's revelatory function.

Finally, there has been an increase in interest in both Hermann Bavinck and Abraham Kuyper in American theological studies, evidenced by The Abraham Kuyper Center for Public Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary and The Bavinck Institute at Calvin Theological Seminary.¹⁵ It would appear Baillie did not have knowledge of or

¹⁴ See John 14:15-21.

¹⁵ The Kuyper Center was started after Princeton's special collections 1999 acquisition of more than 30,000 volumes related to Kuyper studies. The Bavinck Institute began in 2009 after Calvin Seminary hosted a Bavinck conference, the excellent attendance of which was due, in part, to the relatively recently published English translation of Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*.

engagement with the thought of these Dutch reformed theologians.¹⁶ Both theologians wrote extensively in the area of prolegomena, and as we engage in continued reflection and dialogue concerning the theology of revelation, consideration of these theologians alongside of Baillie will only enrich our perspective and deepen our insight into the nature of our knowledge of God.

¹⁶ Bavinck and Kuyper were contemporaries who died (1921 and 1920, respectively) at the beginning of Baillie's career.

APPENDIX A

Baillie's Pre-1926 Lecture on the Scope of Theology

*The following excerpt is taken from John Baillie's lecture on the scope of theology prepared for a pre-1926 theology course.¹ As noted in chapter 3 of the dissertation, this lecture, along with other portions of this course, were likely the foundation for both *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul* (1926) and *Interpretation of Religion* (1928).*

The lecture has been transcribed from Baillie's hand-written notes and retains the original format, including spelling, paragraphing, capitalizing, abbreviating, and underlining. Where portions of this and other hand-written document have been quoted within the body of this dissertation, the underlined words have been changed to italicized words in order to maintain a uniform style throughout the dissertation. Where the hand writing was illegible, a bracketed question mark has been inserted following the word in question.

Lecture III

The Scope of Theology

We have described the business of theology as the analytic and systematic presentation of religious belief. But the question may be put whether we should not rather say Christian belief: or, if any of us are Jews or Buddhists, the Jewish or Buddhist belief. Some will take this view. They will say that there is in the world no such thing as religion, but only religions: and that therefore all we can do is to systematise the beliefs of our own religion.

This, indeed, is the traditional view of Protestant Theology. Notice how it came about. In the Middle Ages theology was an attempt to combine into a single system all that was known, or could from any quarter be discerned, about God and the things of the soul. Two sources of knowledge were recognised –speculative philosophy and the Christian revelation. The Reformers tended, in varying degrees, to minimise; the contribution of speculative philosophy (= natural theology); so that the Protestant text-books of theology were simply attempts to give an account of the Christian revelation, i.e. to state in orderly and systematic form the doctrines of the Christian religion. So for instance Melancthon's book was called Loci communes rerum theologicarum and Calvin's Intitutio religionis christianae; later books being called 'Dogmatics' or

¹ Baillie, John. Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/4/2/2.

‘Systematic Theology’. This ‘theology’ took no notice of any non-Christian faith, and it was supposed to cover the whole field of theological study.

Schleiermacher

was the first Protestant theologian who realised the unsatisfactory nature of this view. He follows the Protestant tradition in believing that a separate science of theology “must be formed in connection with every determinate mode of faith”. But he is remarkable as having thought out the implications of this position as none of his predecessors had done. For the question arises as to what variety of the Christian faith the theologian is to set forth? The Christianity of what sect? And of what epoch? Schleiermacher’s answer is that the theologian’s business must be with the Christianity of his own sect and his own time, his aim being faithful to report the type of Christianity there represented.

“Theology is the science which systematises the doctrine prevalent in a Christian Church at a given time.”

What he conceives himself to be doing is to be presenting an orderly exposition of the faith actually operative within German Protestantism in his own day, i.e. a century or so ago.

One result of Schleiermacher’s influence has been that what the Middle Ages called Theology and the Reformers Christian Theology, is now commonly (on the Continent) called ‘Protestant Dogmatics’.

Ritschl

follows Schleiermacher in insisting that the theologian must take his stand within his community’s faith and that he must never allow his attention to wander outside the bounds of his community’s faith. He excludes even Judaism. Where he differs from Schleiermacher is in not thinking it necessary to limit his attention to “a particular Christian Church at a given time”. That is, Ritschl limits the theologian to his own ‘religion’, but not to his own age or sect. His reason for this is that he believes Christianity to be essentially one thing, at heart always and everywhere the same: based on a common experience.

Which is right, Schleiermacher or Ritschl?

Schleiermacher was more consistent, but Ritschl was nearer the truth. The trouble with Ritschl is that he did not go far enough in his departure from Schleiermacher’s position. The Ritschlians make much lighter than did Schleiermacher of the spiritual fissures which divide the different sects and ages of Xnity; but of the fissures that divide Xnity of every age and sect from all other religion, they make as much as can be made. The former, they say, are mere surface cracks; the latter goes clear down to the bottom.

This latter judgment, however, is entirely unhistorical.

- (a) This is clearly seen as to Judaism. The present-day theologian will want to include Hebrew, as well as distinctively Christian religion, with the purview of his study.
- (b) But he cannot stop there. If he includes Hebrew religion, he must include Greek religion too: for just as he as a part in the one, so he has a part in the other: and just as the one has made an integral contribution to his Christian faith, so also has the other. The Christian religion which we now possess and preach is not, as we used to believe, the result of a unilinear development.

“Our civilization is a tree which has its roots in Greece, or, to borrow a more appropriate metaphor from Clement of Alexandria, it is a river which has received affluents [?] from every side; but its head waters are Greek. The continuity of Greek thought and practice in religion and religious philosophy is especially important.” The religion of Hellenism “passes into Christian theology and cultus without any real break.”—Dean Inge in Legacy of Greece, pp. 28, 27.

Nor has this new family connection been forced on us by historical science against our will. We like to think, do we not, that not only Moses and Daniel and Jeremiah, but also Socrates and Plato and Plotinus, Zeno and Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, belong in a large [Page 3] sense, to some spirited fellowship as ourselves?

- (c) Next, it is as arbitrary and as difficult to stop with the Greeks as it was with the Hebrews. Indeed we cannot stop anywhere short of the whole religious experience of our race. Schleiermacher was right in his contention that once it advances beyond its safe entrenchment in the purely historiographic presentation of the doctrine current in a given ecclesiastical organisation at a given time, theological science can call no halt until it has reached the widest [?] limits of our human traffic with the Eternal World.

So what the theologian has to study is no one variety of religion but religion itself: for after all, deeply regarded, human religion is but a single phenomenon. It has always stood for the same thing—for the same great outgoing of the finite towards the Eternal, for the same burning light of conviction about the hidden meaning of life. We may indeed say that in the last analysis all the faiths in the world are but one faith. It is always possible to penetrate behind all the vast and various divergences of the religions of the world to a deep-seated something which they all have in common, and which may serve as a basis for the adjustment of the differences between them.

It is quite true that at first sight we do seem to be confronted with a large number of different “religions”, each standing for a fundamentally different view as to the meaning of life. But there is no doubt that deeper knowledge dissipates this impression.

“If one persists in the study of the science of religion, one does find at last order coming out of chaos. One finds it possible, and then necessary, to classify the religions in certain ways, and, finally, a clear connection resulting that there is one great motive running through them all”.—D.S. Cairns, Reasonableness of the Christian Faith, p. 20.

And it is time: sympathetic historical study of the other religions is more and more enabling us to realise the elements of identity in world religion, and the fact that it is the same impulse that has led all men everywhere to seek God and the same kind of insight that has led them, in varying degrees, to find Him.

Various lines of study have converged with this result.

A. There is the discovery of the remarkable resemblance of the religious beliefs and practices of the various primitive races all over the world. It is now almost universally agreed that primitive religion should be treated as a single phenomenon; [Page 4] and that the points of identity are more notable than the points of divergence.

“Recent researches into the early history of man have revealed the essential similarity with which, under many superficial differences, the human mind has elaborated its first crude philosophy of life”.—J.S. Frazer [?], Golden Bough, Abridged Ed. p. 2.

“Religion in the lower culture takes many forms, but, speaking broadly, they rest upon a common interpretation of the world”.—J. Estlin Carfeki [?], Comparative Religion, p. 101.

EXAMPLES.

B. Historical study has more and more tended to blur the sharp lines that used to divide the more advanced religions from one another. It is now impossible to mention and ‘religion’ that is regarded as a self-contained unit by the historian. Every known religion is a complex phenomenon, a synthesis of previous historical entities, many or all of which have entered also as elements into these partially different combinations which we call the other ‘religions’.

“There have been and may yet be new religious institutions; but there has not been a never can be a new religion, any more than a new language. Each is a bifurcation of some branch that is itself a bifurcation; and all can trace their origin to a common stem that has grown out of a root idea—the idea of religion”.—Tyrrell, Christianity at the Cross-Roads, p. 252.

In the vocabulary of the modern historian Christianity is the name of a long development which took its rise in a new synthesis and incarnation of elements that themselves were not new.

We have recently come to feel that the significance of Christianity lies even more in its inclusiveness than in its uniqueness.

“The Gospel of Christ is not a religion, but religion itself, in its most universal and deepest significance”.—Outspoken Essays, 1st Series, p. 229.

Do we ever get from the Gospels the impression that Jesus came to teach a new religion? And did Buddha come to teach a new religion?

APPENDIX B

Baillie's 1930 Letter to David Cairns

The following excerpt is taken from a personal letter John Baillie wrote to David Cairns on October 14, 1930.¹

The excerpt has been transcribed from a hand-written document and an effort has been made to retain the original format, including spelling, paragraphing, capitalizing, abbreviating, and underlining. Where portions of this and other hand-written documents have been quoted within the body of this dissertation, the underlined words have been changed to italicized words in order to maintain a uniform style throughout the dissertation.

I am sure that a great deal of what you say in criticism is justified. As I have stated in the Preface, the last words of the book were written 5 ½ years ago in March 1925: so that although the book did not appear until the end of 1928, it really represents the thinking of my first years in Auburn. My thought has moved on since then, and I feel (it is no doubt a feeling which most authors have) that I could make the book very much better, were I to begin to write it now afresh. Yet I think the difference would be more in method of approach and in presentation than in fundamental view—though many emphases would not doubt be changed. But what I feel is that by using a different method of approach, and avoiding certain false emphases, and bringing out certain aspects of truth which I had previously rather neglected, I could make my central position and contention (to which I still fully adhere) much more acceptable than I have actually succeeded in making it.

Your first doubt is whether I am right in making “our consciousness of moral obligation the one spring of religion”—whether in the constellation of faith there are not other elements, especially “that immediate awareness of God and of Christ of which the story of Christian biography is so full.”

Well, I have never for a moment held that morality was the whole of religion, as you well know. My point rather is that, when a corroding unbelief threatens to destroy the religious outlook in which we have grown up, it is always upon our moral certainties that we are thrown back, as upon our spirit's last entrenchment. Our moral certainty we cannot doubt, even if we doubt all else. This is really why I begin from our consciousness of moral obligation—because, as a matter of fact it is the only point where many of my students will let me begin, the only thing they will accept as a prime and

¹ Baillie, John. Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/17/4 1930 Letter to Cairns.

initial certainty on which further certainties may be built. There are many senses in which it would be false to speak of morality as the one spring of religion. In the deepest sense—in the ordo essendi--rather is religion the one spring of morality. That is, it is only because God is in our hearts that we have a moral consciousness. But the main sense in which it would be true to say that morality is the one spring of religion, is that it is the one unshaken πύ στῶ from which, upon which, a disturbed faith may be rebuilt. To me, morality is not a thing separate from religion, but a part of it.

And my contention would be that “the consciousness of moral obligation” is not a “merely moral” but is a deep religious experience, indeed the very type of deep religious experience. There are indeed some moralists who, by robbing it of its depth and richness and reducing it to its barest elements or equating it with mere “desire”, present it in what appears a quite non-religious form. But I have never been able to accept these reduced accounts of it. To me (as I put it on p. 462 of my book) “In the experience of moral obligation there is contained and given a knowledge, not only of a Beyond, but of a Beyond that is in some sort actively striving to make itself known to us and to claim us for its own.” Of course the experience of obligation is not the only moral experience in which I find the direct impingement of the Spirit of God upon my own spirit. There is the sense of vocation—of being sent, of being called to do a particular job—a sense which your colleague Robertson has finely analysed in Part III of his book on the subject. There is the sense of guilt. There is the strong impulse, when one has sinned to repent and to confess (as to one whom we have offended). And deeper and lovelier than the mere sense of obligation is the strong attraction which goodness and purity and honourable dealing and even self-sacrificing help of others have for us: and what is that but gratia irresistibilis dei making itself felt within our souls? Now all these are in a sense typical moral experiences, treated of (in a bare and barren way!) in every text-book of ethics. But I believe that in all these experiences we are in direct touch with the Spirit that orders the universe. These, to me, are all personal experiences. And when you ask whether besides the moral experiences there are not in the constellation of faith other elements, notably “an immediate awareness” of God, I reply that the awareness which I have here, and the touch with God which I have here, is to me as immediate and direct and even personal as any that can be conceived. If you want an awareness of God more immediate than this one, you are (I should feel) doing less than justice to the immediacy of this one.

I admit that in my book I have sometimes expressed myself in too Kantian a way as if we merely reached God at the end of an argument which started from our moral experiences. My growing freedom from this error is due to my brother, who long “strafed” me for it. But my real position has always been rather that God is actually and immediately present to us in our moral experience: and in many places in my book I insist on that, as on the last page: “For it is not merely that through our values we reach God or that from them we infer Him, but rather that in them we find Him. Love is not merely an outward mark and symbol of this presence, but is His very self in action in our

world” (p. 470). It is well-known that Kant himself, in his opus postumum tended to modify his original view in this direction. And the same point is insisted on in that good little book of H.H. Farmer’s—Experience of God—e.g. p. 76: “Unless the conviction of God is given in and through the moral life, it cannot be reached by logical inference from the fact of that moral life.”

If therefore the words “our moral experience” be used in the widest and largest (which is, to be sure, the only proper) sense, I should say that our moral experience is but a name for the presence of God in our souls and the touch of God in our lives. And for the whole presence, and all the touch. God does not come to us except in the context of duty and the pure love of goodness. There is no kind of seeing of Him that is not conditioned by purity of heart. Only the pure in heart can know him. There is no part of religion that is separate from the attrait of goodness, or that has (as it were) a separate door of entrance into our souls.

But although no part of religion is independent of morality, of course religion goes beyond morality. The moral outlook, or what is usually called such, is not enough. Heart’s desire is not satisfied until we are lifted out of that coil of rights and duties, of commandments and prohibitions, of continual striving to be that which we are not. Perhaps in my book I have (in my anxiety to get the other point home) not sufficiently stressed the all-important respects in which religion goes beyond morality—though that is really nearer to my own heart. Still I have stressed it—e.g. pp. 331 foot – 332. There is a deep sense in which religion carries us beyond the opposition of good and evil (which is the heart of morality) and a sense in which it is this release that is the secret of religious joy and peace. We escape from the continual straining after what ought to be to a satisfied resting in what eternally is. The “merely moral” point of view is transcended and all its categories left behind. Now this can only be true, if the presence of God in our souls is from the beginning something ampler and larger than a mere “consciousness of obligation”. The “consciousness of obligation” is rather the plainly-visible fringe (though to many secular moralists the only reality) of a far richer and more mysterious cohabitation of the Divine Person with our own human personalities. Yet what I feel so strongly is that there is no presence of God in the soul which is alongside our sense of obligation as something separate from it, and independent of it.

As for the sense of Beauty being a separate source of religious experience, I deny that; because I cannot follow the moderns in their easy parallelism of the true, the beautiful and the good as three different classes of value. The good is either everything (as Plato thought) or nothing. But I have said this on pp. 305-307 of my book, and my brother on pp. 177-182 of his.

You write: “Is not the point that religions advance is always through prior moral development overstressed? It seems to me that if communion with God is real, God must be able immediately to communicate new and creative moral and religious ideals in a human spirit. I would hesitate to say that the road here is closed.” Well, the only road I close is the road by which (for example) a race of men could receive the insight that God

was fatherly before they had received the insight that fatherliness is a high, the highest, value in the interrelationship of persons—a view which, it seems to me would be contrary to all our experience of the way in which insights come and of the self-impartation of the Divine Spirit to the spirit of man. Of course the source of all human insights is God. When we realise the appeal and charm and claim of any high good, it is because the goodness of God is pressing in upon our souls. But this pressure is first consciously realised by us as a demand made upon us, consequently as a moral insight in that sense. The conscious realization that the demand comes from God and is thus revelatory of God's nature, so that our existing ideas of God must be revised in the light of it—that seems to me usually to come somewhat later. What my view amounts to then is simply that it is in the context of human interrelationships (and not abstractly and out of context with such relationships) that God more and more reveals himself to us. Our new discoveries of the Eternal Goodness are made by us, not apropos de rien, but through our human loves—as the greatest of all new discoveries about the Eternal Love was made through the human love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

APPENDIX C

Baillie's Unpublished Book Proposal

The following outline introduces a manuscript Baillie had prepared for possible publication.¹ Attached to the typed manuscript (available at the Edinburgh University Library's Special Collections Department), is a note asking his brother, Donald Baillie, and H.R. Mackintosh to review the project and help him assess its warrant for publication. The outline of the manuscript and the note are included in this appendix to illustrate the process Baillie undoubtedly went through numerous times in the publication of his many books. This manuscript, like many of Baillie's published works, relies heavily on material prepared for his course lectures, and though it was clearly a subject valued by Baillie, it was evidently not one he was advised to pursue for publication.

The personal note following the manuscript outline has been transcribed from a hand-written document and an effort has been made to retain the original format, including spelling, paragraphing, capitalizing, abbreviating, and underlining.

Introduction

Part I—Revelation

1. The Pre-Critical Theory of Religion, p. 1
2. The Pre-Critical Theory among the Indo-Germanic Peoples, p. 8
3. The Pre-Critical Theory among the Semites, p. 13

Part II—Nature

Chapter I—The Rise of the Theology of Nature Among the Pre-Socratic Thinkers

4. The Rise of the Critical Attitude, p. 1
5. The Search for Physis, p. 3
6. Xenophanes and his Predecessors, p. 9
7. Heraclitus, p. 15
8. Theology in the Final Period of Pre-Socratic Science, p. 22

Chapter II—The Influence of the Sophists on the Development of Theology

9. The Antithesis of Nature and Law, p. 1
10. The Theology of the Sophists, p. 15

Chapter III—Socrates and the Socratic Dialogues of Plato

11. The General Teaching and Method of Socrates, p. 1
12. The Doctrine of Forms, p. 9
13. The Theology of Socrates, p. 13

¹ John Baillie, Edinburgh University Library, Special Collections Department, BAI 1/13/1.

- 14. Theology and the Doctrine of Forms, p. 22
- Chapter IV—The Theology of Plato’s Later Dialogues
 - 15. The Later Dialogues, p. 1
 - 16. The Tenth Book of the Laws, p. 5
 - 17. The Cosmogony of the Timaeus, p. 23
 - 18. Summary of Plato’s Theory of Religion, p. 27
- Chapter V—The “Theological Science” of Aristotle
 - 19. Aristotle and Plato, p. 1
 - 20. The Province of Theological Science, p. 4
 - 21. The Method and Results of Theological Science, p. 13
 - 22. The Relation of Aristotle’s Theological Science to Actual Religion, p. 27
- Chapter VI—Theology in the Painted Porch
 - 23. A New Age in Athens, p. 1
 - 24. The Cynics: their Theology and their Influence on Zeno, p. 4
 - 25. The Stoic Rule of Life, p. 7
 - 26. The Stoic Creed: Physis is Logos, p. 11
 - 27. The Relation of Law to Nature, p. 17
 - 28. Law and Nature in Religion, p. 24
 - 29. The Stoic Theory of Knowledge, p. 32
 - 30. The Source of Religious Knowledge, p. 34

The following chapters trace the history of theological theory from its beginnings up to, and including, the earlier Stoics. They are, in the first instance, notes made for a course of lectures on “Theology in Ancient Greece” which I delivered last year, and am repeating this year, to an advanced class. I threw my notes into book form, rather than lecture form, however, in the first instance, because I thought it possible that I should one day publish them as part of a larger work, viz “A General Sketch of the History of Theological Theory”—from its beginning until, say, 1850, Ritschlianism etc. There have been good histories of Ethical Theory written for the guidance of students of Moral Philosophy: why should there not be a History of Theological Theory for the guidance of students of Theology?

If I do decide to complete the work, it would be divided into five books as follows:

Part I—Revelation

Part II—Nature (up to Neo-Platonism and Marcus Aurelius)

Part III—Nature and Revelation in Harmony (Philo and St. Paul up to the 15th and 16th centuries)

Part IV—Nature and Revelation in Conflict (the beginning of Modern Rationalism in the 16th cent. up to and including the *Aufklärung*)

Part V—The Antithesis of Nature and Revelation Transcended (modern theology since Kant and Schleiermacher)

...Only Part I and about three-quarters of Part II of the above scheme are included in the present MSS. I have, however, delivered a course of lectures covering Part IV, and have that material in the form of rougher notes (which, however, would have to be completely rewritten on the basis of some further study of the period). I have a fair degree of familiarity with the thinkers to be covered in Part V, and the writing of it would not be very arduous.

The matters on which I would like an opinion are these:--

1. Do you think there is need for a work of this kind? My own feeling is that there is no more important part of a student's theological training than an exact knowledge of the history of his subject: and that there is no commoner cause of weakness in our current theological literature than an ignorance of our theological past.
2. Do you feel that there is justification for a book on the scale I suggest? It would of course be far less detailed than the big histories of Christian dogma, covering a much larger period as well as casting its glance over a much broader historical area.
3. Does the sample I herewith offer seem sufficiently fresh, in its material or in its mode of presentation or in its point of view to justify publication? Don't hesitate to say it doesn't, if you don't think so: because what I have written was primarily for my lectures.
4. What criticisms of detail have you to make?

APPENDIX D

John Baillie: A Brief Biographical Timeline

- 1886: March 26: Born to Reverend John and Annie (Macpherson) Baillie in Gairloch, Ross-shire, Scotland.
- 1890: Father John Baillie died. Annie Baillie, mother, moved the family to Inverness, where John, Donald, and Peter Baillie studied at the Royal Academy.
- 1904-1908: Studied at Edinburgh University.
- 1905: Annie Baillie moved to Edinburgh when brother Donald started at the university.
- 1908-1912: Studied at New College, Edinburgh.
- 1909: Summer study in Jena, Germany.
- 1911: Summer study in Marburg, Germany.
- 1912: Assistant minister at Broughton Place Church in Edinburgh.
- 1913: Assistant to the Professor of Moral Philosophy in Edinburgh.
- 1914: Brother Peter died in India.
- 1914-1919: Joined the YMCA and was stationed with British armies in France.
- 1916: Met Jewel Fowler in Boulogne, France.
- 1919: Married Jewel Fowler.
- 1919-1927: Chair of Christian Theology at Auburn Theological Seminary, New York.
- 1921: Baillie's son, Ian, born.
- 1926: Published *The Roots of Religion in the Human Soul*.
- 1927-1930: Chair of Systematic Theology at Emmanuel College, Toronto.
- 1928: Published *The Interpretation of Religion*.
- 1929: Published *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*.

- 1930-1934: Roosevelt Chair of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, New York.
- 1933: Annie Baillie died.
- 1933: Published *And the Life Everlasting*.
- 1934: Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree conferred on Baillie by Yale.
- 1934-1956: Chair of Divinity in University of Edinburgh.
- 1936: Published *A Diary of Private Prayer*.
- 1939-1940: Served with YMCA, going to France to take charge of educational and religious work for the troops.
- 1939: Published *Our Knowledge of God*.
- 1940-1945: Served as convener of a commission of the Church of Scotland to interpret God's will in the crisis of WWII: "Commission for the Interpretation of God's Will in the Present Crisis."
- 1942: Published *Invitation to Pilgrimage*.
- 1943-1944: Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.
- 1948: Visited New Zealand as representative of Church of Scotland, then lectured in the United States.
- 1950: Appointed Principle of New College and Dean of the Faculty of Divinity.
- 1950: Published *The Belief in Progress*.
- 1954: Appointed one of the six World Presidents of the World Council of Churches at Evanston.
- 1956: Published *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*. Retired from the Chair of Divinity at Edinburgh.
- 1957: Appointed Companion of Honor to the Queen. Served on the joint Committee of Anglicans and Presbyterians which produced the controversial "Bishop's Report."
- 1959: Lectured in the United States.

1960: Died September 29 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

1962: Postmortem publication of *The Sense of the Presence of God*, Baillie's undelivered Gifford Lectures, and *Christian Devotion*.

1963: Postmortem publication of *A Reasoned Faith*.

APPENDIX E

Theses

Theses Related to Dissertation

1. John Baillie's unique contribution to the theology of revelation in the idea of the mediated immediacy of God's presence plays a formative role in the rest of his theology and is valuable for a Reformed theological engagement of twenty-first century thought.
2. We see in *Our Knowledge of God* that the Barth-Brunner debate concerning nature and grace occasioned Baillie's articulation of the insights that have come to be celebrated and criticized as Baillie's theological legacy.
3. There are at least four major points in Baillie's thought which can be identified and traced through his early writing and teaching prior to the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*: 1) the revelatory presence of God, 2) the universal human moral experience as the context for faith, 3) the defensible logic of faith, and 4) the revelation of God in, with, and under human experience of the world and others.
4. Baillie's observation of the influence of humanism on the western worldview and the crisis of the Second World War drove him to articulate his theology in a more transparently pastoral way in the twenty-five years of his scholarship following the publication of *Our Knowledge of God*.
5. Many of the key characteristics of Reformed epistemology, especially as expressed by Alvin Plantinga, parallel John Baillie's own thought. The demonstration of this parallel validates the relevance of Baillie's thought for today's theology as his perspective can provide a good starting point for a contemporary discussion of the theological application of Reformed epistemology.

Theses Related to Course Work

6. Friedrich Schleiermacher's treatment of the divine attributes of God in *The Christian Faith* is consistent with his epistemological ground established by the feeling of absolute dependence.
7. John Baillie's theology of the image of God provides a solid basis for thinking about the *Anknüpfungspunkt* and the continuity of nature and grace.
8. The soundest conclusions to be made regarding theological epistemology and language can only be yielded from a soteriological context that recognizes the epistemological bondage left in the wake of sin and the resulting need of the direct and personal work of the Holy Spirit.
9. The inauguration of the eschaton marked by the advent of Christ and the Spirit has created an existential tension prompting Christians to ask ethical questions.
10. Augustine's *Confessions* can be viewed as a cohesive whole when his chapter on memory is used as an interpretive key to the organization of its content.

Theses Related to Personal Interest

11. Abraham Kuyper's theology of the Holy Spirit's work in the church needs to be re-articulated for a contemporary Reformed pneumatology.
12. The covenant of works is essential to answering the question why God became a human being.

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