‘SOLVED BY SACRIFICE’ : AUSTIN FARRER, FIDEISM, AND THE EVIDENCE OF FAITH

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A thesis submitted to the School of Divinity

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The saints confute the logicians, but they do not confute them by logic but by sanctity. They do not prove the real connection between the religious symbols and the everyday realities by logical demonstration, but by life. *Solvitur ambulando*, said someone about Zeno's paradox, which proves the impossibility of physical motion. It is solved by walking. *Solvitur immolando*, says the saint, about the paradox of the logicians. It is solved by sacrifice.

—Austin Farrer

ABSTRACT

1. A perennial (if controversial) concern in both theology and philosophy of religion is whether religious belief is 'reasonable'. Austin Farrer (1904-1968) is widely thought to affirm a positive answer to this concern. Chapter One surveys three interpretations of Farrer on 'the believer's reasons' and thus sets the stage for our investigation into the development of his religious epistemology.

2. The disputed question of whether Farrer became 'a sort of fideist' is complicated by the many definitions of fideism. Chapter Two thus sorts through these issues so that when 'fideism' appears in subsequent chapters a precise range of meanings can be given to it, and the 'sort of fideist' Farrer may have become can be determined more accurately.

3. Although Farrer's constant goal was to develop 'a viable and sophisticated natural theology,' an early moment of philosophical illumination involved recognising the *limits* of reason. Chapter Three begins with a sketch of Farrer's life, looks at his undergraduate correspondence where some 'fideistic' themes are first articulated, and then focuses on his classic text of 'rational theology,' *Finite and Infinite* (1943).

4. In subsequent years, Farrer became increasingly open to placing a greater emphasis on faith. And yet, he continued to press the question: 'Can reasonable minds still think theologically?' Chapter Four argues that, stimulated by Diogenes Allen's doctoral dissertation and citing it explicitly, Farrer's *Faith and Speculation* (1967) attempts to blend Allen's more fideistic position with a continuing concern for legitimate philosophical critique.

5. The fifth chapter evaluates the significance of Farrer's final position in the context of contemporary religious epistemology and the current wide-spread interest in spirituality. In conclusion, Farrer finally seems to locate theistic evidence not primarily in nature or reason, but in holy lives and our own attempts to live by faith: 'It is solved by sacrifice.'

DECLARATIONS

I, Robert Carroll MacSwain, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 100,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student and candidate for the degree of Ph.D. in October 2004; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out beginning at the University of Durham and completed at the University of St Andrews between October 2004 and December 2009.

Date

Signature of Candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions for the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of PhD in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

Date

Signature of Supervisor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This doctoral dissertation was begun with the Revd Professor David Brown at the University of Durham in 2004 and completed with him at the University of St Andrews in 2009. David has been an ideal supervisor: patient, astute, generous, and knowledgeable, asking searching questions and a having keen eye for both the overall shape of the argument (as it gradually emerged) and its relation to broader contexts in theology, philosophy, and Anglican studies. His questing faith, rational rigour, intellectual breadth, and commitment to revitalising Christian theology are constant inspirations, and I would not have reached this point without him.

Although Professor Brown conveniently shares my interest in Austin Farrer, this was originally kindled by the Revd Professor Diogenes Allen at Princeton Theological Seminary; encouraged by the Revd Professor Fergus Kerr OP at New College, Edinburgh; and further nurtured by Professor Timothy Sedgwick at Virginia Theological Seminary. I am thus indebted to all *four* of these scholars, and hope the final shape of this dissertation bears witness to at least some of what I have learned from each of them. I am also deeply grateful for the tutorial friendships of Professor Stanley Hauerwas, Professor Ann Loades, the late Revd Professor Victor Preller OGS, and Professor Eleonore Stump. They have each enriched my life in many ways beyond formal instruction.

The circle of Farrer scholars is rather small, but—in addition to Professors Allen, Brown, and Loades—for published work and conversations on Farrer's life and thought I am most indebted to the Revd David Attfield, the Revd Dr Jeffrey Eaton, Professor David Hein, and Professor Edward Henderson. Professor Henderson's interpretation of Farrer's epistemology has obviously influenced my own, and he also

offered very helpful comments on an earlier draft of the dissertation, as did Dr Eaton. Professor Allen kindly engaged in some extensive and detailed correspondence regarding his doctoral studies at Yale and his time studying with Farrer in Oxford during 1963-64, as well as an official interview on these topics in Princeton on 10 April 2005. Perhaps most importantly of all, he also provided photocopies of Farrer's unpublished letters to him, transcribed in the Appendix (the originals are now in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford), and gave me permission to cite and transcribe them. Mr Nick Newton of the Farrer Estate and Mr Colin Harris of the Bodleian allowed me access to the Farrer papers (which provided essential and sometimes surprising information for charting the development of Farrer's thought), and also gave me permission to publish extracts from these documents. And Professor Basil Mitchell generously responded to a letter seeking clarification on a point of interpretation and historical accuracy.

Dr Paul Murray at Durham supervised me for two terms in 2005 while Professor Brown was on research leave; and Dr Sian Lewis and Professor James Davila at St Andrews were most helpful as I negotiated the unexpected transition from the Palatinate of Durham north to the Kingdom of Fife. The divinity postgraduate community of the Roundel in St Andrews was an unexpected blessing, in particular the Revd Bruce Baker, the Revd Paul Blair, and my fellow inhabitants of the Duncan Room. Friends whom I must thank for reading the manuscript in draft form are Mr James Leigh, Ms Sarah Nohavicka, and Mr Jonathan Shillland. And my new colleagues at the School of Theology, University of the South, have been exceptionally gracious and welcoming, especially as I put the finishing touches on the dissertation in my first semester!

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And, of course, it goes without saying, but still must be said, that I am most of all enormously grateful to my wonderful extended family (MacSwains, Gainos, Joneses, and others) who patiently endured and encouraged and supported me—always emotionally, and sometimes financially!—during the more than *twenty years* between the start of my undergraduate degree (August 1988) and the eventual submission of my doctoral dissertation (December 2009). It's been 'a long and winding road,' with many stops and detours along the way. But, as the musician Jeff Johnson once wrote in a similar context, my family gave me 'the benefit of the doubt, even when the benefit seemed doubtful.' This work in your hands—despite all of its regrettably many faults and limitations—is dedicated to them.

Robert MacSwain

17 December 2009

NOTE ON REFERENCES

Due to the 'globalisation' of academic publishing, presses now often list multiple cities spread all over the world as their places of publication. In the pages which follow, I will initially cite books by author, title, publisher, and year of publication *only*, and subsequent citations within the same chapter will be either author and title, or just author, as appropriate. I provide place(s) of publication *in situ* only in the very rare cases of mentioning a book as an internal or second-hand reference. Articles will be initially cited by author, titles of article and journal, volume number, and year of publication, subsequently by author and article title, or just author. Each chapter is self-contained, so that the more detailed references are always initially given, even for texts cited in previous chapters. For full references, including the physical location(s) of book publishers and the issue number and month of articles, please see the Bibliography.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Although primarily historical in nature, this dissertation in philosophical theology also has modest constructive ambitions. Historically, it traces, analyses, and contextualizes the development of the religious epistemology of Austin Marsden Farrer (1904-1968). Constructively, it concludes by defending an interpretation of at least one phase of this development as still worthy of serious consideration. Historically, it argues that Farrer's thinking on the proper relation between faith and reason oscillated over a forty-year span between rationalistic and fideistic poles, finally to stop at the time of his early and unexpected death in what may be called a 'moderate methodological fideism'. Constructively, it argues that such moderate methodological fideism is not to be despised, particularly in light of the postmodern chastening of 'reason' and the increased contemporary interest in what is now often called 'spirituality'.

While Farrer was constantly rethinking his philosophical and theological commitments on a wide range of issues—and so may well have continued to change and develop had he lived longer—his *biographically* final position was at least approximate to some of his earliest statements made in correspondence with his father while still an Oxford undergraduate in the late 1920s. So while there was oscillation there was also continuity. And while Farrer continually sought to fuse his philosophical, doctrinal, and devotional convictions into a single perspective, he was (inevitably) imperfectly successful in doing so, with one or another voice normally being dominant. However, in his final epistemological position we see an intensified drive toward a unified balance and harmony of all three.

The motivation and goal of this dissertation may perhaps best be seen by considering a review of the last major monograph published on Farrer, Charles Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, written by Jeremy Morris.[1] Morris begins by noting that although Farrer has 'received relatively little serious scholarly attention,' he remains 'a fascinating figure, who cannot be bracketed easily in the European tradition of systematic theology, and yet whose *oeuvre* embraced almost the whole spectrum of Western theology, from metaphysics and philosophical theology to biblical studies and devotional writing.'[2] Farrer's singular and provocative work across a broad range of disciplines thus both deserves and needs further study.

Morris then turns to Conti's book by highlighting its central question: 'how was it that the austere metaphysics of [Farrer's first book] *Finite and Infinite* (1943) had mutated into the much more personalist and (to some critics) fideist stance of the later works, especially [Farrer's last book] *Faith and Speculation* (1967)? Conti's central assumption is that, despite a change of emphasis, there was absolute continuity in Farrer's theological method: he sought to demonstrate the conceivability of theism by uncovering the metaphysical presuppositions of being.'[3] But Conti's continuity thesis, however plausible it may prove to be, is *prima facie* challenged by the great difference between these two books. As Morris puts it, in *Faith and Speculation* Farrer 'was read—by Basil Mitchell, initially, amongst others—as having transformed himself in effect into a fideist, renouncing the possibility of his earlier rational theology in favour of a defence of the believer's subjective experience of God.'[4]

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[1] Jeremy Morris, Review of Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism: An Analysis of Austin Farrer's Theistic Metaphysics* (Clarendon Press, 1995), in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 47 (1996), 792-796.

[2] Ibid., 793.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 794.

Morris confesses that he himself tends—or, at least, tended—toward this fideistic interpretation of the later Farrer.[5] 'But,' he continues, 'the great merit of Conti's book is that it roots *Faith and Speculation* very firmly in the context of Farrer's lifelong theological project, and demonstrates how its principal aim was not to subserve a subjectivist view of religion with a metaphysical apologetic—a view the "fideist" reading assumes—but instead to defend the intelligibility of religious language and the rationality of religious belief by demonstrating the identity of the metaphysical presuppositions of human being and divine being.'[6] Thus, on Conti's reading, Farrer's method remained primarily metaphysical and traditionally rational.

But Morris also notes that, while Conti argues for a fundamental continuity of method between the early and later Farrer, he is equally concerned to establish the precise nature of the unquestioned change in emphasis between 1943 and 1967. Specifically, Conti argues that while Farrer's *method* remained metaphysical, he revised his *metaphysics* from a classical to a neo-classical position. As Morris puts it, in Conti's view, 'Farrer was awakened to the deficiency of his earlier, static conception of God by his reading of process theology, especially Charles Hartshorne. Farrer received, and acknowledged, Hartshorne's criticism of the unattainability of the Scholastic idea of God….[T]hus, Conti argues, Farrer's later philosophical theology fitted in much more closely with a process "Becoming" model of God than with a static, Scholastic "Being" model.'[7] Conti even has a very specific candidate to credit for this process influence on Farrer, namely John Glasse of Vassar College, New York, who engaged Farrer in correspondence and wrote a very significant essay on his

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[5] Ibid. See Morris's essay, which will be considered further in Chapter Five of this dissertation, 'Religious Experience in the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer', in *The Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994), 569-592.

[6] Ibid., 795.

[7] Ibid.

work which Farrer read and commented on in manuscript prior to its publication.[8] Farrer does indeed cite Glasse in the preface to *Faith and Speculation*, and Conti provides samples of correspondence from Farrer to Glasse in an appendix that confirms aspects of his argument.[9]

However, while accepting some elements of Conti's thesis, Morris nevertheless thinks 'it is possible that Conti rather overstates the similarity [between Hartshorne and Farrer], leaning too heavily on what seems to be largely his own importation of the language of "Becoming"'.[10] In other words, Conti may have exaggerated the influence of Hartshorne's process theology on the later Farrer. Another reviewer of *Metaphysical Personalism*, Charles Taliaferro, registers a similar concern, observing that Conti's text 'reflects the enthusiasm of a partisan' and 'seems decidedly aimed at the process camp.'[11] And it is an entirely separate question, which I cannot begin to enter into here, whether Conti's process perspective on the 'static' 'Being' model of so-called 'classical theism' is at all fair to that tradition; many would argue that it is not.[12] But both Morris and Taliaferro acknowledge that, while Conti's own commitment to process thought may well have coloured his judgement, he does not in fact argue that Farrer went all the way into the process camp himself, however much Conti may possibly wish that Farrer had.

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[8] Ibid., 794 and 795. See John Glasse, 'Doing Theology Metaphysically: Austin Farrer', in *Harvard Theological Review* 39 (1966), 319-350. Like Morris in 1996, Glasse wrote exactly thirty years earlier that, although Farrer's brilliance was widely recognised, 'little sustained examination of his work has appeared.' (319) The situation remains much the same in 2009.

[9] Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (A. & C. Black, 1967), vi; and Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, Appendix 2 (265-269).

[10] Morris, Review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, 795

[11] Charles Taliaferro, Review of Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, in *The Journal of Religion* 78 (1998), 143-144 (these two citations from 143).

[12] See, out of very many examples, Fergus Kerr's defence of a 'dynamic' and 'active' Thomism against standard critiques in *After Aquinas: Version of Thomism* (Blackwell, 2002).

Having summarised the themes and arguments of Conti's book, Morris then wonders whether *any* kind of metaphysical argument, however revised, is sufficient to establish the rationality of religious belief in the way that Farrer—on Conti's reading—apparently still thought that it both could and must. That is, the whole project of building philosophical theology on metaphysical foundations, process or otherwise, may well be a mistake. Morris begins the last paragraph of his review by stating that 'Conti's book makes large claims for the importance of Farrer's work in healing the breach between philosophy and theology, and the continuing interest that some evince in it demonstrates how fertile [Farrer's] approach may be. But it is significant in itself that [Farrer] remains, nevertheless, a minority interest in contemporary theology, and this reviewer at least regrets that the depth and complexity of Farrer's metaphysical achievement did not result in a dogmatic structure of like richness and coherence.'[13]

More germane to the focus of this particular dissertation, Morris also worries that Farrer's work implies 'a reliance on a view of rationality that cuts little ice in a theological world dominated by the play of critical theory, hermeneutics, and contextual theologies.' Morris thus concludes that Conti's decision to focus his book on Farrer's metaphysics 'deprives the reader of what could be a very revealing analysis of Farrer's admittedly slender dogmatic theology and its relation to his philosophical theology.' Granting that Conti's text 'no doubt will become the standard guide to its subject and remain so for many years,' Morris nevertheless holds that to 'demonstrate convincingly the continuing relevance of Farrer's approach would require a book rather different in scope from the one under review.' [14]

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[13] Morris, Review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, 795-796. Morris's preference for a 'rich' dogmatic theology is indicative of the contemporary dominance of, e.g., Barth and von Balthasar.

[14] All citations in this paragraph from ibid., 796.

As stated above, Morris's review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism* is perhaps the best way to introduce the motivation and goal of this dissertation. First of all, it accurately summarises the argument of the last significant monograph on Farrer's philosophical theology and so helps to establish the state of play in contemporary Farrer interpretation. Second, Morris well expresses some of my own reservations about Conti's book, particularly its preoccupation with metaphysics as the controlling category through which to interpret Farrer's thought, and its over-emphasis on the influence of Hartshorne's process theology on the later Farrer. I could add several other concerns of my own, not the least being that I believe Conti reverses the personal dynamic driving Farrer's academic work. That is, Conti seems to see Farrer as a professional philosopher seeking somewhat awkwardly to make room for Christian faith (very oddly described by Conti as 'a religion of [Farrer's] youth'), whereas I tend to read Farrer as a Christian priest seeking to make room for philosophy.[15] Third, Morris notes that while these metaphysical questions are indeed highly pertinent, they do not address all of the problems facing contemporary philosophical theology, leaving crucial epistemological and dogmatic issues untouched. Fourth, Morris raises the exegetical question—associated with Basil Mitchell—as to whether Farrer's later work exemplified a 'sort of fideism'. Fifth and finally, Morris's review brings to the fore an important aspect of Conti's argument, namely the role of Vassar's John Glasse in bringing Hartshorne to Farrer's attention.

In this dissertation, I address most of these issues identified by Morris as either problematic or germane to Conti's interpretation of Farrer. In particular, I wish to move Farrer studies away from its metaphysical bias. Conti is hardly alone in this approach, as the only other major monograph on Farrer—Jeffrey Eaton's *The Logic of*

[15] See Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, vii. Taliaferro's review also notes Conti's reluctance to acknowledge Farrer's respect for and basic commitment to orthodox Christian doctrine (144).

Theism—is also metaphysically focused, as are most other treatments of Farrer's philosophical theology.[16] Farrer was undoubtedly a great metaphysician, and it may well be that in historical terms his most significant original contributions will be seen to belong to that field. But as Morris and others have noted, despite the enthusiasm of devotees such as Conti and Eaton, expositions of Farrer which focus on his metaphysics have been singularly unsuccessful in convincing the wider theological and philosophical community to pay any attention to him. Of course, this may well be because in theology the anti-metaphysical tendency has only intensified in the past four decades, while in philosophy the discipline has undergone such a radical transformation that Farrer's work is difficult for contemporary metaphysicians to appropriate. Whatever the explanation, the obvious failure of the metaphysical approach to Farrer to convince others of his value itself warrants another strategy.

I thus propose to approach Farrer from an epistemological rather than a metaphysical angle. In particular, I begin with the issue raised by Basil Mitchell and noted by Morris: namely, 'did Farrer become a fideist?' This question, I believe, is of greater value in the present theological and philosophical climate than the far more frequently canvassed discussions of Farrer's theory of 'double agency,' or 'Farrer's shift away from essence-existence arguments to activity-existence arguments.'[17] That there is indeed great value in these metaphysical questions I do not for a moment deny, and my intent here is not to disparage the work previously done by John Glasse, Jeffrey Eaton, Charles Conti, and many others. But it is work that has already been done, and the time is ripe for another interpretative strategy. This dissertation is thus

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[16] See Jeffrey C. Eaton, *The Logic of Theism: An Analysis of the Thought of Austin Farrer* (University Press of America, 1980); Glasse's essay cited in note 8 above; and many other works that will be cited in due course.

[17] Morris, Review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, 795. The Aquinas-inspired 'double agency' is perhaps the concept most associated with Farrer in contemporary philosophical theology.

meant to complement, rather than replace, these earlier studies. As will be seen in due course, I am hardly the first person to consider Farrer's epistemology, but I believe this is the first full-length study primarily concerned with epistemological questions and which makes them the starting point and hermeneutic grid through which Farrer's thought and significance is assessed.

This dissertation also seeks to complement Conti's book in one other very specific way. As noted above, Conti argues that John Glasse of Vassar College convinced Farrer to take Hartshorne more seriously, and was thus instrumental in the transition from the 'early' to the 'later' Farrer. Farrer did indeed cite Glasse in the preface to *Faith and Speculation*, and Conti indeed provides corroborating samples of Farrer's correspondence with Glasse in an appendix to *Metaphysical Personalism*. There is, I think, little reason to doubt the basic accuracy and significance of this account—but it tells only half the story. For in fact Farrer cites *two* figures in this preface:

> Among the many philosophical friends who have given me food for thought I will mention Dr Diogenes Allen of Princeton [Seminary], and Professor John Glasse of Vassar. The latter persuaded me to do the rethinking of scholastic positions which runs through my seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters; the former I have plundered in my first.[18]

And in this first chapter, 'The Believer's Reasons,' Farrer also does something he almost *never* does in *any* of his academic work: he provides a *footnote*, specifically to Allen's article 'Motives, Rationales, and Religious Beliefs': 'For a careful exposition of the believer's sufficient reasons, see…'[19]

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[18] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, vi.

[19] Ibid., 10. Allen's article was published in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1966), 111-127, and will be discussed further in Chapter Four. Farrer's commentators frequently bemoan the lack of references, notes, and indexes in his books. His biographer, Philip Curtis, says that 'in writing he seldom refers to others by name—perhaps only Wittgenstein quotes less' ('The Rational Theology of Doctor Farrer', *Theology* LXXIII [1970], 249). And in his contribution to Curtis's biography—a

It is thus indeed striking that Conti does not mention Allen or Allen's influence on Farrer even once in *Metaphysical Personalism*. This is particularly striking when one realises that—in addition to the evidence in *Faith and Speculation* itself—Conti also had access to Farrer's correspondence with Allen, correspondence which specifies the extent of Allen's influence on the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*.[20] While one may indeed wonder at this omission, there is a very simple possible explanation: Allen's influence on the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation* does not fit into the metaphysical story Conti wants to tell in the aptly named *Metaphysical Personalism*. For Allen's influence, while having metaphysical implications, is primarily epistemological. Nor, again, is Conti alone in neglecting Allen's influence here—it is strangely, inexplicably, almost universally absent from Farrer scholarship, despite (like Poe's purloined letter) being hid in plain sight. Indeed, after a thorough survey of the secondary literature, aside from a passing mention in Allen's Festschrift and a footnote in Eaton's *Logic of Theism*, the only discussion of it that I have seen is not in a study of Farrer at all but in a general work by the late Baptist theologian James McClendon. All other treatments of Farrer's philosophical theology—its changes and influences—that I have read proceed as if Farrer had not publicly confessed to 'plundering' Allen in *Faith and Speculation*.[21]

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chapter titled, 'Farrer the Biblical Scholar'—Michael Goulder writes, 'Farrer contemned [sic] the footnote. He wrote with authority and not as the scribes, and the scribes did not appreciate this' (in Philip Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows: A Biography of Austin Farrer* [SPCK, 1985], 193). Diogenes Allen has, in fact, helped to remedy the lack of indexes by providing them for eight of Farrer's books in philosophical theology: see 'Indexes to the Main Works of Austin Farrer' in Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T. & T. Clark, 1990), 230-281.

[20] See the 'Study Notes' to Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Charles C. Conti (SPCK, 1972), where Conti cites this correspondence twice, on 223 and 224.

[21] See the introduction to Eric O. Springsted (ed.), *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 3; Eaton, 68 note 126; and James Wm

If for no other reason than this mysterious neglect over the past four decades, the story of Allen's influence on *Faith and Speculation* needs to be told, and I do this in Chapter Four. Indeed, like Conti's publication of Farrer's letters to Glasse, I also provide an Appendix in which Farrer's unpublished letters to Allen are for the first time made available for a wider audience. But Allen's influence is significant here for two other reasons. First of all, it fits into my general desire to approach Farrer from an epistemological angle. By influencing 'The Believer's Reasons'—the *first* chapter in *Faith and Speculation*—Allen helped Farrer move to the possibility of a *non-metaphysical* foundation for philosophical theology, indeed perhaps to a *non-foundational* position altogether. Thus, the starting point of Farrer's last book may be perceived to shift, and the undoubtedly metaphysical chapters that follow may then be seen in a different light and serving a different function than either Conti or Morris assume. This has immense implications for both the question of Farrer's possible fideism and for the rationality of religious belief.

Second, Allen later provided his own interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology, an interpretation that is important in its own right, but perhaps doubly so once Allen's influence on Farrer is given due regard.[22] Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson, two of Farrer's most distinguished commentators, observe that 'Allen does not claim here to give us a complete theological epistemology, of course.

McClendon, Jr (with Nancey Murphy), *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Abingdon Press, 2000), 278-281. I am very grateful to Diogenes Allen for bringing McClendon's discussion of his work and his influence on Farrer to my attention, as I am sure I would not have found it otherwise. My conviction that Allen's influence was both important and neglected in Farrer studies was formulated prior to reading McClendon, but McClendon's brief analysis of it provided both confirmation and insight. It will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

[22] Allen's interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology is provided in his book *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), and his essay 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity', in Hebblethwaite and Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action*, 197-210. I discuss these texts further in Chapter One.

But inasmuch as his and Farrer's Augustinian view appears importantly different from classical foundationalism, from the Wittgensteinian view that belief in God is a form of life, and from [Alvin] Plantinga's view that belief in God is properly basic, the effort to develop the idea in the context of a larger epistemology would seem well worth making.'[23] Hebblethwaite and Henderson's comment thus neatly moves us from an exclusive concern with Farrer interpretation into the wider world of contemporary religious epistemology, and thus from the historical to the constructive ambition mentioned in the first sentence of this introduction. In the final chapter of this dissertation I seek to address this constructive aim by briefly exploring the coherence and strength of Farrer's final position on 'the believer's reasons' in relation to the other perspectives mentioned above. I conclude that one major advantage of Farrer's position is the place it provides for a living spirituality and for the epistemic value of 'saints.'

Morris says of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism* that to 'demonstrate convincingly the continuing relevance of Farrer's approach would require a book rather different in scope from the one under review.' Morris's own clear preference is for a book that takes greater account of Farrer's 'admittedly slender dogmatic theology and its relation to his philosophical theology.'[24] While I indeed plan to take up that particular challenge in another, complementary research project, I hope that the present work, with its rather different scope from all previous monographs on Farrer, will at least 'demonstrate convincingly the continuing relevance of Farrer's approach' to religious epistemology—if not yet to anything else.

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[23] Hebblethwaite and Henderson, 'Introduction' to *Divine Action*, 18. Hebblethwaite does not, in fact, agree with Allen's interpretation, either as a reading of Farrer or as a viable position in religious epistemology, as I will soon demonstrate in Chapter One.

[24] Morris, Review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, both citations from 796.

CHAPTER ONE: 'THE BELIEVER'S REASONS'

A perennial concern in both theology and philosophy of religion is whether adherents of a specific religious tradition have sufficient justification, evidence, or warrant to hold their beliefs 'reasonably'. The Anglican philosophical theologian Austin Farrer is widely thought to defend an affirmative answer to this concern, but three contemporary figures associated with his legacy raise significant questions over the correct interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology. Basil Mitchell wonders whether Farrer may have become a fideist; Brian Hebblethwaite argues against such a possibility; and Diogenes Allen defends a 'moderate fideist' reading of Farrer's final position. This chapter both contextualises and surveys these three interpretations of Farrer on 'the believer's reasons' and so sets the stage for our investigation into the development of Farrer's thought on the correct relation between faith and reason.

I. Mitchell's Concern

Basil Mitchell (b. 1917) is perhaps the leading contemporary figure most closely associated with the legacy of Austin Farrer.[1] In his first major academic appointment, from 1947 to 1967, Mitchell was Fellow and Tutor in Philosophy at Keble College, Oxford. As Farrer was Warden of Keble from 1960 until his early and

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[1] See Mitchell's autobiographical essay, 'War and Friendship', in Kelly James Clark (ed.), *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers* (InterVarsity Press, 1993), 23-44; Brian Hebblethwaite, 'Basil Mitchell: Anglican Philosopher', in *Theology* CXII (2009), 260-269; and the Festschrift for Mitchell edited by William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer, *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell* (Clarendon Press, 1987). Hebblethwaite's article was published a year after I wrote the first draft of this section: it covers many of the same details of Mitchell's life, career, and relationship with Farrer, and thus provides a helpful corroboration of my independent findings.

unexpected death in 1968, Mitchell worked directly with and under him for seven years in the same college (dedicated to one of the founders of the Oxford Movement). However, their association went back much further than that, to 1946, when the young Mitchell—aged twenty-nine, just beginning his philosophical career, and struggling to define his personal religious beliefs—taught for one year at Christ Church, Oxford. There he was drawn into an informal philosophical and theological discussion group called 'The Metaphysicals'.

Originally convened by Eric Mascall, then Student of Christ Church, this group shared 'a common dissatisfaction with the restrictions which tacitly governed philosophical discussion at a time when "metaphysical" was the rudest word in the philosopher's vocabulary. In an atmosphere thick with inhibitions, [they] wanted to be free to ask what questions [they] liked, even if some of them turned out to be "ultimate questions" of an allegedly unanswerable and, indeed, unaskable sort.'[2] In addition to Mascall and Mitchell, over the course of this group's long history its members included such distinguished figures as I. M. Crombie, Michael Foster, R. M. Hare, J. R. Lucas, Iris Murdoch, Dennis Nineham, Helen Oppenheimer, Ian Ramsey, G. C. Stead, O. P. Wood—and Austin Farrer.[3]

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[2] Basil Mitchell, 'Introduction' to Basil Mitchell (ed.), *Faith and Logic: Oxford Essays in Philosophical Theology* (George Allen & Unwin, 1957), 1. Mitchell states that the group began in 1946 (his first year teaching philosophy): see his 'Staking a Claim for Metaphysics,' in Harriet A. Harris and Christopher J. Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis: The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 21.

[3] This list is drawn from the table of contents in *Faith and Logic*, cited above, some additional names provided by Mitchell in his introduction on page 8, and page 21 of 'Staking a Claim for Metaphysics,' also cited above. In addition to these texts, Mitchell discusses the Metaphysicals further in his autobiographical essay, 'War and Friendship,' cited in note 1, and in his introduction to Brian Hebblethwaite and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary* (SCM Press, 2006), 1-13. Eric Mascall, the founder of the Metaphysicals and a Priest of the Oratory of the Good Shepherd, culminated his career as Professor of

A. 'The Reasonable Man'

Writing much later, Mitchell says that Farrer was 'the central figure' of the Metaphysicals, adding that 'a major reason for the rest of us in the early days to go on meeting was to make sure that Farrer continued to work seriously in philosophy and not spend too much of his time in New Testament exegesis.'[4] Indeed, he says, 'Farrer was conspicuous among us for actually doing the sort of metaphysical theology whose possibility we wished to vindicate.'[5] Clearly the young Mitchell and the other Metaphysicals greatly respected Farrer's philosophical acumen and desired it to inform not only their own discussions but also the broader, rather brittle conversation—or non-conversation—between philosophy and theology in post-World War II Britain.[6] In a Festschrift for Mitchell, Oliver O'Donovan wonders whether his

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Historical Theology at King's College, University of London. For brief surveys of his life and work, see John Macquarrie, 'Mascall, Eric Lionel (1905-93)', in Alister E. McGrath (ed.), *The SPCK Handbook of Anglican Theologians* (SPCK, 1998), 170-172, and Brian Hebblethwaite, 'Mascall, Eric Lionel (1905-1993)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 37* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 136-138. Mascall's own contribution to natural theology will be discussed briefly in Chapter Three.

[4] Mitchell, 'Staking a Claim for Metaphysics,' 25. On page 21 of this essay, Mitchell says that the group continued to meet until 1984, the year he retired, in which case it lasted for 38 years. In *The Divine Trinity*, David Brown reports that he owes a debt 'to colleagues who have been subjected to previous versions of sections at various seminars,' including the Metaphysicals. As Brown's book was published in 1985, this material would have been among their final discussions. See David Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (Duckworth, 1985), vii.

[5] Mitchell, 'War and Friendship,' 42.

[6] According to Gilbert Ryle in the 1950s, 'In our half century, philosophy and theology have not been on speaking terms' (cited by Mitchell on page 2 of his introduction to *Faith and Logic*). For a somewhat more theological perspective that considers the relation between these two disciplines from the middle of the 20th century to the contemporary scene, see Daniel W. Hardy, 'Theology Through Philosophy', in David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Blackwell, 1997), 252-285. And for an extremely useful (and witty) survey of 20th century philosophical and theological trends on both sides of the Atlantic that relates them explicitly to Farrer's work, see Julian Hartt, 'Austin Farrer as Philosophical Theologian: A Retrospective and Appreciation', in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity:*

emphasis on the ideal Aristotelian 'reasonable man,' even in his more secular work in ethics, was inspired by 'the memory of a model who was of especial importance to Mitchell at a time when he was discovering what it meant to be a Christian thinker—that of Austin Farrer?'[7]

When Mitchell first met Farrer in 1946, Farrer was forty-two, Chaplain and Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, and primarily known for a brilliant but formidably idiosyncratic and intellectually challenging work of theistic metaphysics, *Finite and Infinite*, published three years earlier.[8] In this text, which will be considered in greater detail in the third chapter of this dissertation, Farrer set out to deal with four interrelated tasks essential to the successful practice of what he called, not 'natural theology' or 'philosophy of religion,' but 'rational theology'—which he defined as the study of God through 'philosophical enquiry and not something else'.[9] Or, spelled out more explicitly, 'a reflective cognitive activity appropriated to the knowledge of God from universal grounds.'[10] The four tasks of rational theology are:

(1) 'To state the whole mechanism of the mind in working with the scheme of the Analogy of Being or, as I have called it, the Cosmological Idea.'

(2) 'To show the involvement of theology with an at least implicit doctrine of finite substance, and to re-state the doctrine explicitly.'

New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer (Pickwick Publications, 1983), 1-22. Loades covers this period herself with biographical attention to many of the figures mentioned above in 'The Vitality of Tradition: Austin Farrer and Friends', in David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified: The Practical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T. & T. Clark International, 2004), 15-46; and also with a more conceptual focus in 'Philosophy of Religion: Its Relation to Theology', in Harris and Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis*, 136-147.

[7] Oliver O'Donovan, 'The Reasonable Man: An Appreciation,' in Abraham and Holtzer (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief*, 12.

[8] Austin Farrer, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (Dacre Press, 1943).

[9] Ibid., v.

[10] Ibid., vii.

(3) 'To show how far down in our common thinking the question of faith enters.'

(4) 'To show what the traditional arguments for God's existence are, and are not; to classify them in an intelligible manner and to find a principle for distinguishing between valuable and absurd types.'[11]

In a revised preface for the second edition of this book, Farrer says that when he wrote *Finite and Infinite* he 'was possessed by the Thomist vision, and could not think it false'.[12] Charles C. Hefling, Jr describes it as 'a classic in metaphysical theology, three hundred pages of unrelentingly difficult—and equally brilliant—philosophical theism.'[13] And no less of a philosopher than Anthony Kenny says that when he first read *Finite and Infinite* in 1952 as a student at the Gregorian University in Rome it provided him 'a rich and stylish introduction to the discipline of natural theology.'[14] Likewise, the young Basil Mitchell read and learned much from this book about the enterprise of rational theology and the relation between theology and philosophy.

It seems, however, that the work of Farrer's that had the greatest impact on Mitchell in this period was not *Finite and Infinite*, but Farrer's 1948 Bampton

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[11] Ibid., vi-vii.

[12] Austin Farrer, Revised Preface for the Second Edition, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (Dacre Press, 1959), ix. Farrer's relation to Thomism will be considered further in Chapter Three.

[13] Charles C. Helfling, Jr, *Jacob's Ladder: Theology and Spirituality in the Thought of Austin Farrer* (Cowley Publications, 1979), 127.

[14] Anthony Kenny, *The Unknown God: Agnostic Essays* (Continuum, 2004), 1. In his autobiography, *A Path From Rome* (Oxford University Press, 1986), Kenny provides more detail regarding his first encounter with Farrer's work as a student at the Gregorian, his correspondence with Farrer on the content of *Finite and Infinite*, and their amused / anguished exchange about the different pedagogies of the Gregorian versus Oxford (see pages 48-50). Commenting that his 'provincial seminary' (Upholland, near Liverpool), was 'an enlightened intellectual regime' compared to the 'academic monstrosity' of the Gregorian, Kenny reports that one of Farrer's previous students from Oxford 'wrote to his former tutor to lament the hardships of studying in a university ruled by *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* [1931]. The Pope, replied Farrer, "should be persuaded to write a new encyclical: *Deus Artium Magister*"' (50).

Lectures. Delivered just five years after *Finite and Infinite* in the University Church of St Mary the Virgin on the theme of divine inspiration and revelation—what Farrer called 'the form of divine truth in the human mind'—these lectures represented a radical shift in both genre and style.[15] If *Finite and Infinite* was defiantly and exclusively metaphysical, Farrer famously announced in the preface to *The Glass of Vision* that he actually had three abiding—and interacting—intellectual interests rather than simply one:

> the sense of metaphysical philosophy, the sense of scriptural revelation, and the sense of poetry. Scripture and metaphysics are equally my study, and poetry is my pleasure. These three things rubbing against one another in my mind, seem to kindle one another, and so I am moved to ask how this happens.[16]

Describing the transition from *Finite and Infinite*, with its reformulated Aristotelian-Thomistic metaphysics and highly abstract treatment of substance, will, and agency, to *The Glass of Vision*, with its 'remarkable theology of imagery,' Peter Sedgwick writes that 'Farrer changed direction dramatically. His rational theology was not repudiated for a moment, but it was now seen to be the prolegomena to an investigation of biblical symbolism and imagery.'[17] These lectures made a profound impression on Mitchell—as well as many others. In an autobiographical essay written forty-five years later, Mitchell says:

> If there was a moment in my new life at Oxford at which I experienced a conversion, or rather realized that a conversion had occurred, it was while listening to Austin Farrer's Bampton Lectures, given in St Mary's Church for the Michaelmas term 1948 and published under the title *The Glass of Vision*. The restrained delivery, the precision of utterance, the controlled imagination, together with the capacity, without apparent alteration of pace or emphasis, to raise the discourse to the most intense level of religious contemplation without

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[15] Austin Farrer, *The Glass of Vision* (Dacre Press, 1948). The quotation expressing the theme of the lectures comes from page 1.

[16] Ibid., ix.

[17] Peter Sedgwick, 'Anglican Theology' in David Ford with Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third Edition (Blackwell, 2005), 183.

> loss of philosophical substance, were unlike anything I have ever experienced before or since.[18]

In his address at Farrer's memorial service in Keble College Chapel on 1 February 1969, Mitchell said of these lectures that 'surely St Mary's had seen and heard nothing like it since John Henry Newman occupied that pulpit.'[19]

Several months before Farrer's death in 1968, Mitchell was appointed as the Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion, Oxford University, and Fellow of Oriel College, a position he held until his retirement in 1984. During this time he published his own major contribution to the philosophy of religion, *The Justification of Religious Belief*, and established himself as one of the world's leading figures in this discipline.[20] Also during this time, Mitchell published four essays or

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[18] Basil Mitchell, 'War and Friendship', 38-39. Mitchell places the delivery of the lectures in the Michaelmas (or Autumn) term of 1948, but the book's preface, Farrer's correspondence, and his biographer all agree that they were delivered earlier in the year. See *The Glass of Vision*, xi; Philip Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows: A Biography of Austin Farrer* (SPCK, 1985), 133; and Oxford University, Bodleian Library, MS Eng. Lett. c. 272, folios 71-73. In folio 71, in an undated letter, Farrer tells his father that he has just finished writing the Bamptons and that the first will be given on 8 February; and in folio 73, he writes to his mother on 8 March 1948 to say that he has now given three lectures (out of eight), and that the number of those attending have remained high. Farrer's correspondence with his parents, particularly with his father, contains a wealth of interesting information that sheds much light on his philosophical and theological development. Although Curtis provides extensive citations in his biography, his transcriptions are occasionally inaccurate. In subsequent chapters I will cite from the original letters and provide page numbers from Curtis when possible.

[19] Basil Mitchell, 'Austin Marsden Farrer,' in Austin Farrer, *A Celebration of Faith*, edited by Leslie Houlden (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 16. The date of Farrer's memorial service is given in the editor's preface on page 9. Curtis also notes the excitement and crowds generated by these lectures, which he says made Farrer 'famous.' See page 125, 127, and 133 of *A Hawk Among Sparrows*.

[20] Basil Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief* (Macmillan, 1973). See also the multi-author anthology *The Philosophy of Religion* in the Oxford Readings in Philosophy series—long a standard, widely-used source-book—which Mitchell edited (Oxford University Press, 1971). Mitchell's other major contribution to religious epistemology was published after he retired, *Faith and Criticism* (Clarendon Press, 1994). William J. Abraham and Robert W. Provost also edited a post-retirement collection of some of Mitchell's shorter, or less academic, or unpublished essays, curiously titled *How*

articles related to Farrer that cemented Mitchell's reputation as the pre-eminent British advocate of Farrer's legacy:

- his address as Farrer's memorial service, published as 'Austin Marsden Farrer' in the first posthumous collection of Farrer's sermons, *A Celebration of Faith*, edited by Leslie Houlden (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 13-16;
- 'Austin Farrer', in P. G. Wignall (ed.), *The Anglican Spirit* (Ripon College, Cuddeston, 1982), 41-44;
- 'Austin Farrer: The Philosopher', in *New Fire*, Volume 7, Number 57 (Winter 1983), 452-456;
- and 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion', in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity: New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer* (Pickwick Publications, 1983), 117-190.[21]

Of these, the third, on Farrer the philosopher, is of considerable interest for understanding Farrer's philosophical background, assumptions, and methodology, and will be considered further in due course. But the most immediately interesting text is the fourth one, on 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion.'

B. Did Farrer Become a Fideist?

This essay, published in the very first collection of essays on Farrer's work, raises the question that the rest of this dissertation will seek to answer: namely, did Farrer—'the reasonable man'—abandon rational theology and become a fideist? Although written in 1983, the essay begins with an anecdote from around 1965 or

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to Play Theological Ping-Pong and Other Essays on Faith and Reason (Hodder & Stoughton, 1990). Some of this material will be considered shortly.

[21] As indicated in note 3 above, Mitchell has since written another significant essay on Farrer, the introduction to *The Human Person in God's World*. This will be considered further in Chapter Three.

1966, when Farrer was still alive and had not yet published his final book, *Faith and Speculation*.[22] Mitchell writes:

> When Austin Farrer lent me the MS of *Faith and Speculation* and asked me for my criticisms, I am ashamed to say that I returned it to him without comment. I cannot remember what excuse I made, but in retrospect I think I can detect the reason why I was so very unhelpful. I had expected an improved version of the sort of rational theology that Farrer had first developed in *Finite and Infinite* and revised and corrected in various of his occasional writings. Instead, in the opening chapter of the new book [‘The Believer’s Reasons’], he appeared to deny the need for precisely the kind of justification of religious belief that I had been looking for…. Farrer, it seemed, had become a sort of fideist, content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer’s sense of being nourished by the tradition in which he had been raised.[23]

This statement is of considerable interest for at least three reasons. First, it provides direct evidence for how one of Farrer’s closest friends and philosophical colleagues initially viewed the contrast between the Farrer of *Finite and Infinite* with the Farrer of *Faith and Speculation*. Despite two decades of intense intellectual discussion on the basic questions of the philosophy of religion, decades in which Farrer was undoubtedly the senior and more influential figure in the relationship, and indeed decades in which Farrer at least still *seemed* to Mitchell to be charting more-or-less the same course, Mitchell nevertheless found himself completely bewildered by and out-of-sync with Farrer’s latest manuscript, which seemed to him to abandon any attempt to rationally justify religious belief in favour of embracing fideism. The argument in *Faith and Speculation* is often structured in a dialogue form, and in the opening chapter to which Mitchell refers—‘The Believer’s Reasons’—the dialogue takes place between a ‘philosopher’ defending reason and a ‘believer’ defending faith. Mitchell writes, ‘At the time I found myself in complete agreement with the

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[22] Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (A. & C. Black, 1967).

[23] Mitchell, ‘Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,’ 177.

protestations of the philosopher in the little dialogues with the believer that occur throughout the chapter.'[24]

As the phrase 'at the time' indicates, Mitchell goes on to state that in the intervening years between 1965 and 1983, apparently due—at least in part—to the work of the 'Reformed epistemologists' Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, he concluded that the case for Farrer's later approach 'seems to me now much stronger than it did when I first read *Faith and Speculation*.'[25] It is extremely interesting to note how long it took Mitchell to arrive at this conclusion, and under which influences. The subsequent body of the essay is an extended comparison between the 'two approaches to the philosophy of religion' of the title: namely, the 'rationalist' approach—exemplified by Richard Swinburne's *The Existence of God*—and the 'fideist' approach—exemplified by Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*.[26] Although by 1983 Mitchell is now more open to the 'fideist' approach, he still says, 'I am as reluctant as I ever was to give up on the first ['rationalist'] approach entirely.'[27] Rather oddly, he does not take this opportunity to deal directly and at length with the text that caused the initial offence and confusion for him, the first chapter of Farrer's *Faith and Speculation* (which would have been most illuminating), but primarily deals with Wolterstorff instead. Farrer's 'The Believer's Reasons' will be considered in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

But if Mitchell responded to Farrer's text in this self-professed 'unhelpful' way circa 1965, it is not difficult to imagine that less sympathetic contemporary

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., 178.

[26] (Clarendon Press, 1979) and (Eerdmans, 1976), respectively; both authors subsequently issued second editions of these books. Further discussion of Swinburne, Plantinga, and Wolterstorff will occur in due course.

[27] Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' 178.

readers would have been even more impatient and even hostile—as indeed some were.[28] In seeking to come to grips with Farrer's religious epistemology in *Faith and Speculation*, particularly as expressed in 'The Believer's Reasons,' it is important not to forget or underestimate that, despite the 'official' collapse of logical positivism, even in the late 1960s rigid empiricism and logical rigorism were still deeply entrenched in philosophy on both sides of the Atlantic. If *Faith and Speculation* seems less purely 'fideistic' to some in the present context (including Mitchell himself) than it did to Mitchell in 1965, that is because vast changes in our intellectual landscape have moved us in the direction of Farrer's argument.[29]

Second, Mitchell's description of his initial response to *Faith and Speculation* raises interesting questions about memories of influence and actual influence, particularly as these memories shift according to various contexts and criteria. The sixty-six year-old Mitchell in 1983 remembering the forty-eight year-old Mitchell in 1965 emphasises that when he read Farrer's manuscript he 'had expected an improved version of the sort of rational theology that Farrer had first developed in *Finite and Infinite* and revised and corrected in various of his occasional writings.'[30] As this event occurred just three years before Mitchell became Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion, and just eight years before Mitchell published his own book on *The Justification of Religious Belief*, and as this retrospective

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[28] Reviews of *Faith and Speculation* will be cited in Chapter Five.

[29] Those changes are many and various and cannot be fully discussed here. But one way to illustrate this shift is to compare *Faith and Speculation* with another book published the very same year by another Christian philosopher dealing with the relation between philosophy and religious belief: not Wolterstorff's *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (1976), but Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Cornell University Press, 1967). This specific comparison will be made briefly in Chapter Four.

[30] Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' 177.

description was written while Mitchell still held his chair and was deeply engaged with such questions, such an expectation and concern is not surprising.

However, this epistemological focus on the rational theology of *Finite and Infinite* is rather different from how the seventy-six year-old Mitchell in 1993, writing a spiritual autobiography, remembered what the thirty-one year-old Mitchell in 1948 had found most helpful about his first encounter with Farrer's work. And this was not primarily related to *Finite and Infinite* but to *The Glass of Vision*, particularly the way in which those lectures managed 'to raise the discourse to the most intense level of religious contemplation without loss of philosophical substance'.[31] And this more religious and contemplative concern is likewise not surprising when one considers that the thirty-one year-old Mitchell had long been on a personal spiritual quest that involved the serious study and attempted practice of both Sufi and Hindu mysticism, and had only very recently re-identified himself as a practicing Christian and member of the Church of England.[32] As he stated about hearing Farrer's Bampton Lectures in 1948, this was the moment in which he 'experienced a conversion, *or rather realized that a conversion had occurred*'.[33] But it is striking that, after describing how Farrer's lectures so perfectly fused religious contemplation with philosophical substance, Mitchell then added: 'Here at last was the mystical vision to which Sufi teaching at its best had inclined me, but a vision that acknowledged and enhanced the reality of the created order and the significance of human history and was intimately involved in the lives and loves of individual persons.'[34] Leaving aside, for the moment, how remarkable it is that the work of any Oxford philosopher or Anglican

[31] Mitchell, 'War and Friendship', 39.

[32] See ibid., 24-30 and 36-39 for more details. Mitchell was involved with the International Sufi Movement, founded by Hazrat Pir-o-Murshid Inayat Khan (1882-1927), not traditional Sufi Islam.

[33] Ibid., 39 (emphasis added).

[34] Ibid.

theologian in the 1940s could be compared (even remotely!) with Sufi mysticism, it is, again, unsurprising that Mitchell wrote these words after he had retired from professional philosophical work and had entered a more ruminative phase of life—the earlier, more profound layers of influence perhaps now emerging more clearly.

The third point of interest in Mitchell's statement about *Faith and Speculation* in 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion' is that it expresses a particular understanding of the nature of fideism: 'Farrer, it seemed, had become a sort of fideist, content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer's sense of being nourished by the tradition in which he had been raised.'[35] Although the precise definition(s) of fideism will be discussed extensively in Chapter Two, this comment highlights that the purpose of the previous four paragraphs has not been to engage in speculative amateur psychology on the mental and religious history of Professor Basil Mitchell, but rather to draw out and identify a number of issues implicit in his statement from 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' issues that will occupy subsequent chapters of this dissertation. These include: the shifting contexts and criteria of philosophical and theological reason in 20th century Britain and America; the philosophical justification of religious belief; the nature of fideism; the relation between 'religious contemplation' and 'philosophical substance'; and the extent to which religious belief might be grounded in a 'mystical vision'—or, less dramatically and more mundanely, what today is often called 'spirituality'.

C. Neutrality and Commitment

Mitchell read the manuscript of *Faith and Speculation* before it was published in 1967, but returned it to Farrer without comment. A case can be made, however, that Mitchell's inaugural lecture as Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the

[35] Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' 177.

Christian Religion at Oxford—delivered on 13 May 1968 and titled 'Neutrality and Commitment'—constitutes (among other things) Mitchell's initial reply to Farrer's first chapter, 'The Believer's Reasons.' Mitchell may not have commented on Farrer's text, but he was certainly troubled by it and was arguably moved to respond, if only implicitly or subliminally, in this lecture. As stated above, the argument in *Faith and Speculation* is often structured in a dialogue form, and in the opening chapter the dialogue takes place between a 'philosopher' defending reason and a 'believer' defending faith. And, as already cited, when Mitchell first read this chapter he found himself siding with the 'philosopher' against the 'believer.' It is thus striking that, when formulating his own argument in 'Neutrality and Commitment,' Mitchell invokes the same two *personae* found in the same (compromising) position. Given that Farrer did not die until 29 December 1968, he almost certainly attended Mitchell's lecture.[36]

The issue Mitchell explores in this lecture is clearly expressed in the title: the (perceived) problem of reconciling the conflicting demands of neutrality and commitment in the attempt to philosophise or think reasonably about religious belief—the problem, that is, of being a professional philosopher *of religion*. 'Philosophers suspect that the philosopher of religion cannot achieve proper philosophical neutrality. Theologians suspect that he cannot maintain necessary

[36] In a personal letter to me, dated 16 June 2009, Professor Mitchell states that he 'cannot remember if Austin came to my inaugural lecture, but he must have done. We never discussed it and it was not intended as a comment on *Faith and Speculation*.' However, as I argue below, the lecture does indeed address the precise issue Farrer deals with in 'The Believer's Reasons,' and it expresses worries about a view at least approximate to Farrer's, worries that are similar to the concerns that Mitchell later confessed in 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion' about Farrer's last book. So, even if 'Neutrality and Commitment' was not a specific, if indirect, response to the manuscript of *Faith and Speculation*, it at least provides a clear example of Mitchell's own thinking about the relation between faith and reason in this period.

Christian commitment.'[37] Mitchell continues—in terms reminiscent of Farrer's 'The Believer's Reasons'—that this particular problem

> arises only when the philosopher of religion is himself a believer. As such, it would seem, he is committed to certain beliefs which, in his religious life and thought, are not put in issue. But, as a philosopher, he cannot be so committed, for a philosopher proceeds, as Plato puts it, 'by destroying assumptions'. It is hard, then, to see how a man can be genuinely a philosopher, if some questions are not open for him.[38]

As will be seen in more detail in Chapter Four, this is precisely the dilemma Farrer considers in the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*. In Farrer's own words: 'when philosophical criticism develops it will torture every assumption it has the ability to isolate or define. Meanwhile, the believer, convinced of the reality of what he handles, is entitled to the confidence that his gold will never be proved dross by logical acid.'[39] As stated above, the similarity of Mitchell's and Farrer's language is striking, as well as their identical formulation of the dilemma, if not their solution to it. Thus, in 'Neutrality and Commitment,' Mitchell concedes: 'There is, I think, a genuine problem here—and probably more than one.'[40]

However, before presenting his own solution to this dilemma (which may or may not differ from Farrer's, depending on one's interpretation), Mitchell considers an alternative position (which again may or may not differ from Farrer's, depending on one's interpretation). Mitchell disarmingly admits that he may have 'totally misconceived the character of both philosophy and theology, and that, given a proper understanding of the role of philosophy and religion, a conflict of the sort I have tried to analyse cannot conceivably occur. Broadly speaking, the argument would be either

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[37] Mitchell, 'Neutrality and Commitment,' 119. Originally published in pamphlet form as *Neutrality and Commitment* (Oxford University Press, 1968), reprinted in Basil Mitchell, *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong*, 113-131. I will cite from this version.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 12-13.

[40] Mitchell, 'Neutrality and Commitment,' 119.

(or both) that philosophy is innocuous or that religion is invulnerable.'[41] From both philosophical and theological directions, this position is equivalent to fideism. But Mitchell accepts neither this view of philosophy, nor this view of religion, which he associates with certain followers of Wittgenstein.[42]

Although he specifically refers here to what has widely come be to known as 'Wittgensteinian fideism,' Mitchell could just as well have Farrer's 'The Believer's Reasons' in mind when he maintains that 'it will not do to maintain *either* that the religious believer's account of his faith is sacrosanct and that no philosophical critique can touch it by way of analysing its concepts or assessing its arguments, *or* that it is open to philosophers to go through religious claims and check their adequacy without making a serious and sympathetic attempt to consider the arguments by which they are supported.'[43] Whether or not this is an accurate reading of Farrer remains to be seen, but based on his comments in 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' this does indeed seem to be what Mitchell took him to be saying at the time. But, explicitly rejecting such Wittgensteinian (or Farrerian?) fideism, Mitchell insists that religious belief 'is not inherently invulnerable to philosophical criticism, and therefore

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[41] Ibid., 126.

[42] See page 127 for the reference to 'thinkers under the influence of Wittgenstein, reinforcing a fideist strand in theology itself' who urge that 'faith can only be judged by criteria intrinsic to religion,' which forms its own 'language game' and 'form of life.' Mitchell does not name any specific figures, but as Kai Nielson's (in)famous essay on 'Wittgensteinian Fideism' was published the previous year, in *Philosophy* 42 (1967), and since D. Z. Phillips had already published *The Concept of Prayer* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) and *Religion and Understanding* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), it is not difficult to guess whom Mitchell has in mind. The question of whether this is an acceptable interpretation of either Wittgenstein or his followers is extensively debated in Kai Nielson and D. Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (SCM Press, 2005), which also includes Nielson's original article. The *locus classicus* remains Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief*, edited by Cyril Barrett (Basil Blackwell, 1966).

[43] Mitchell, 'Neutrality and Commitment,' 130 (emphasis in the original).

the individual who is committed to a religious faith incurs a risk of possible refutation'.[44] The lecture concludes as follows:

> To avoid discussion with intellectual rigor of controversial issues about morality, politics, and religion, about which individuals are or ought to be committed, is likely to lead to one or the other of two undesirable consequences: a reluctance to commit oneself at all; or a refusal to think about or allow others critically to discuss the causes to which one is enthusiastically committed. Rather than aim at a neutrality which is, perhaps in theory, and certainly in practice, unattainable, we should register our commitment to conventions of free, fair, and disciplined debate.[45]

Not the fideism of either 'innocuous' philosophy or 'invulnerable' religion but 'commitment to free, fair, and disciplined debate' is what Mitchell insists upon in religion no less than in other contested fields such as ethics and politics. He is keenly aware that strict neutrality may well be impossible—and indeed even undesirable—but this does not eliminate the requirement to abide by the 'conventions' of rationality.[46]

D. The Justification of Religious Belief

Mitchell's most developed defence of his own approach to the justification of religious belief may be found in a book of that very title.[47] Denying that God's

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[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 131.

[46] Mitchell spends more time than I have thus far indicated in sympathetically exploring what Burke calls 'prejudice with the reason involved,' citing Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): see page 121. In this lecture and subsequent writings, particularly *Faith and Criticism* (1994), Mitchell emphatically, extensively, and persuasively insists that strict neutrality is impossible and that firm commitment to our beliefs, as well as to the tradition and community in which they are embedded, is in fact a necessary intellectual virtue, even when the evidence may seem to run against such beliefs. Indeed, in many ways Mitchell comes close to the hermeneutical position associated with Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). But he still rejects the overtures of fideism: such non-neutral commitment must still be held rationally and can never be invulnerable to critique.

[47] Cited in note 20 above. For another articulation of Mitchell's approach to religious epistemology, written a few years before 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' see his 'Faith and Reason: A False Antithesis?', in *Religious Studies* 16 (1980), 131-144; reprinted in *How to Play Theological Ping-Pong*, 132-150.

existence can be either conclusively proved or disproved, Mitchell suggests that religious epistemologists should move away from both isolated formal deductive arguments and attempts at *strict* probability and instead embrace a cumulative case approach. 'On this view,' he says, 'the theist is urging that traditional Christian theism makes better sense of all the evidence available than does any alternative on offer, and the atheist is contesting the claim.'[48] This less formal approach, Mitchell states, is closer to the standard methodology used in the critical exegesis of literary texts and historical interpretation. However, he argues that this approach is in fact also the best way to adjudicate competing claims for the rationality of rival metaphysical systems and world-views, including specific religions.[49]

And here, perhaps surprisingly, Mitchell draws on the well-known work of Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to argue that, at least when it comes to evaluating *major* theoretical frameworks such as classic Newtonian physics versus Einsteinian relativity theory (Kuhn's 'paradigms'), this is the standard pattern of actual scientific reasoning as well.[50] Mitchell contends that the most fruitful way forward for literary, historical, scientific, metaphysical, and religious thinking is basically the same: the careful consideration of cumulative evidence and argument.

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[48] Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief*, 40. For a discussion of the significance of Mitchell's work in reviving such arguments in contemporary religious epistemology, see William J. Abraham, 'Cumulative Case Arguments for Christian Theism,' in Abraham and Holtzer (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief*, 17-37.

[49] For an interesting historical study arguing that the sort of probabilistic, cumulative case reasoning defended by Mitchell and Abraham in philosophy of religion is distinctive to the English intellectual tradition more broadly, see Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1983).

[50] See T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962). Kuhn published a second enlarged edition in 1970. David Brown also notes Mitchell's appeal to Kuhn in *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 37.

Although he acknowledges that there are 'peculiarities of the religious case which prevent us from assimilating it to the others,' the analogies are still sufficiently strong to save religion from the charge of irrationality. Thus, 'the same sort of disagreement as occurs between theists and atheists is also found between proponents of rival scientific paradigms and rival philosophical theories.'[51]

However, considering the critiques of Kuhn made by Imre Lakatos and others, Mitchell denies that choosing between such rival paradigms and theories is itself an irrational or—perhaps better—non-rational, 'sociological' act. In short, Mitchell rejects any form of conceptual relativism or intellectual imprisonment within certain frameworks or systems of thought.[52] Although such frameworks and systems are real, their boundaries are permeable and thinking agents can, albeit with difficulty, decide between them, even if this means leaving one firmly held paradigm for another. Mitchell tentatively concludes that, in religious disagreements no less than in science and philosophy, 'although the disputes which arise cannot be settled by appeal to strict proof or inductive probabilities, nevertheless it is in principle possible for one side or the other to be rationally preferred because it makes better sense of all the available evidence.'[53] The interim conclusion of his overall argument is thus that

> in its intellectual aspect, traditional Christian theism may be regarded as a world-view or metaphysical system which is in competition with other such systems and may be judged by its capacity to make sense of all the available evidence. It has been argued that it is an error to hold that such expressions as 'make sense of' can only be understood in terms of particular systems, for this is to presuppose what I have been contesting, that reasoning is always to be construed as following rules, whose character may to some extent vary from one system to another.[54]

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[51] Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious Belief*, 75.

[52] See especially Chapter 5, 'Rational Choice between Scientific Paradigms,' 75-95.

[53] Ibid., 75. In this precise quotation Mitchell is actually raising the possibility rather than drawing the conclusion, but this is the position he finally reaches at the end of the book.

[54] Ibid., 99.

Having reached this point, however, Mitchell then turns to consider the previously admitted 'peculiar' character of religious belief that strains the analogies with literature, history, science, and philosophy. And this returns him to the subject-matter of 'Neutrality and Commitment,' for it is precisely the distinctive character of religious *commitment* that sets it apart from these other forms of belief. Unlike beliefs in literature, history, science, philosophy, or even politics (the closest analogy yet), religious faith is often thought to be *completely* unconditional, held without (or even in spite of) any reference to reason or evidence. One does not commit oneself to God by degree: it's all or nothing.[55] To this, Mitchell replies in classic philosophical fashion by making a distinction. He writes: 'these claims cannot be gainsaid. There is a sense in which Christian faith is unconditional. The only way out of this impasse is to conclude that the sense in which faith is unconditional is a different one, which is indeed peculiar to a theistic religion.'[56] This unconditional sense of 'faith', which he defines as 'trusting reliance upon God' (*fiducia*) is 'analogous to faith in a person, which is a necessary condition of any stable and profound personal relationship, and must go beyond the evidence that is ordinarily available to justify it.'[57]

However, Mitchell then makes the crucial comment that such unconditional faith *nevertheless presupposes that God does, in fact, exist.* 'Thus,' Mitchell argues,

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[55] For an extended popular expression of such a view, one which seems completely untouched by current discussions in either philosophy of religion or philosophy of science, see Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, revised and updated paperback edition (Transworld Publishers / Black Swan, 2007). According to Dawkins, faith is 'belief without evidence' (232) and, as such, evil. Faith 'is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument.' (347) While such a view of faith is certainly fideistic, it is likewise certainly not what Mitchell and most other philosophers of religion and / or theologians mean by faith. See my review of *The God Delusion*, along with contributions from Graham Kemp, Sarah Nohavicka, and Nicolas Helm-Grovas, in *Foundation: The Journal of the St Chad's College Foundation* V (2008), 64-75.

[56] Mitchell, *The Justification of Religious* Belief, 139.

[57] Ibid.

> although there is a Christian duty to trust in God, this does not imply a duty, let alone an unconditional duty, to go on believing that there is a God. Indeed, once it is admitted to be a genuine possibility that there is no God and that the case against his existence might become cumulatively overwhelming, it is pointless to maintain that that one ought to go on believing nevertheless that there is a God, even when the belief could be seen to be false.[58]

In other words, 'the requirement of unconditional faith is one which has its place within the system of theistic belief and cannot be properly interpreted as an obligation to continue to embrace the system itself.'[59] Just like any other metaphysical paradigm, the system of theistic belief must be rationally accepted or rejected on the basis of its 'capacity to make sense of all the available evidence.' Only once the system has been adopted, on rational grounds, does the duty of unconditional trust in God come into play.

In his later book *Faith and Criticism*, Mitchell reiterates this precise argument, but then explicitly attributes it to Farrer as well: 'As Austin Farrer once put it, "God cannot be trusted to exist".'[60] Although he does not provide a citation, Mitchell is perhaps referring to the first chapter of Farrer's 1964 book *Saving Belief*, titled 'Faith and Evidence.' And here, although Farrer does not write those precise words as given above, he does indeed express a similar position to Mitchell's. Farrer writes: 'The difficulty of religious faith may be put in a nutshell. How can an attitude of trustfulness, evidently appropriate to God if he exists, be appropriate to a decision whether he exists or not? I can trust him if he exists, how can I trust him to exist?'[61]

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[58] Ibid., 139-140.

[59] Ibid., 140. According to Dawkins, this is precisely what religious people fail to recognise.

[60] Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism* (cited in note 20 above), 65.

[61] Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 15. 'Faith and Evidence' was reprinted in Ann Loades and Robert MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart: Austin Farrer and His Writings* (Canterbury Press, 2006), 168-184, and this passage may be found on page 171. Farrer makes an almost identical claim in his later book, *A Science of God?* (Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 9-10.

However, two important questions emerge at this point: (1) is the epistemological perspective Farrer articulates in 1964's 'Faith and Evidence' indeed identical to Mitchell's; and (2) does it differ from the position Farrer takes three years later in 1967's 'The Believer's Reasons' (the text Mitchell found so unsatisfactory)? I will argue in Chapter Four that even 'Faith and Evidence' is more fideistic than Mitchell would like, and that Farrer's putative shift from 1964 to 1967 is subtle but genuine.[62]

Returning to Mitchell's 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' which begins by admitting his initial unhappiness with Farrer's *Faith and Speculation*, and then compares and contrasts Swinburne's 'rationalist' approach with Wolterstorff's 'fideist' one, it is vital to note that Mitchell's aim in that essay is not purely exegetical, but an attempt to 'reconcile' both rationalistic and fideistic approaches—both Swinburne and Wolterstorff—into a single *via media*.[63] And his investigation finds that, in fact, 'under examination, both positions needed to be modified, in each case in a direction that brings it closer to the other.'[64] It is this *intermediate* position that Mitchell identifies and claims as his own. He also hopes it was Farrer's. Thus, Mitchell concludes that he personally 'should want to remain a *theoretical* rationalist but a *practicing* fideist,' and 'should like to think that this was Farrer's viewpoint too'.[65]

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[62] Douglas Hedley discusses Mitchell's *Faith and Criticism* and its relation to Farrer's own religious epistemology at some length in 'Austin Farrer's Shaping Spirit of Imagination' in Hebblethwaite and Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World*, 106-134, especially 106-113. While I agree that Farrer was a great influence on Mitchell (see Section I.A above), for reasons that will become clear as we go along I am less confident than Hedley that we can describe *Faith and Criticism* as 'in part, a creative instance of Farrer's rich legacy in philosophical theology' (106) without *also* acknowledging the ebb and flow of Farrer's own thought. Mitchell's work in general and *Faith and Criticism* in particular is perhaps a more legacy of the 'early' Farrer than of the 'late' Farrer.

[63] Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' 178.

[64] Ibid., 186.

[65] Ibid., 190 (emphasis added).

II. The Case Against (All) Fideism

After Basil Mitchell, the British figure most associated with Farrer's philosophical legacy is Brian Hebblethwaite (b. 1939). A Life Fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, Hebblethwaite was Dean of Chapel at Queens' from 1969 to 1994, University Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion in the Faculty of Divinity at Cambridge from 1973 to 2000, and Canon Theologian of Leicester Cathedral from 1983 to 2001. Although perhaps more accurately described as a 'philosophical theologian' than a 'philosopher of religion,' Hebblethwaite is a widely respected and influential scholar working at the intersection of philosophy and theology.[66] Through a combination of exegetical and constructive publications, and also by co-editing two of the most important essay-collections on Farrer, Hebblethwaite has—even more explicitly than Mitchell—taken on the specific task of interpreting and defending Farrer's work on a range of issues and incorporating his voice into contemporary discussions in systematic theology and philosophy of religion. And, even more than Mitchell, Hebblethwaite has been concerned to rebut any charge of fideism from Farrer's religious epistemology.[67]

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[66] See Hebblethwaite's basic biography at http://www.giffordlectures.org/Author.asp?AuthorID=245 (the Gifford Lectures website, accessed on 18 April 2008). See also the recent Festschrift, Julius J. Lipner (ed.), *Truth, Religious Dialogue, and Dynamic Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Brian Hebblethwaite* (SCM Press, 2005).

[67] Hebblethwaite's work on Farrer has covered a thirty-year span: see the recent collection of most of these essays in his *The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (Peeters, 2007), and my review in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11 (2009), 365-367. The two essay collections, both of which are essential volumes for Farrer studies, are Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T & T Clark, 1990) and Brian Hebblethwaite and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary* (SCM Press, 2006). See Charles Taliaferro's review of the earlier volume in *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993), 119-123, and my review of the later volume in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 (2007), 471-473.

A. The Grounds of Theistic Belief and the Rationality of Revelation

This exegetical and constructive concern on Farrer's behalf is part of Hebblethwaites's broader apologetic project to present the rational basis of theism in general and Christianity in particular. In the face of what he sees as a strong (and disturbing) tide of fideism in contemporary Christian theology, over the course of his career Hebblethwaite has held out for a firmly rationalist 'natural theology' position on the essential compatibility between faith and reason. He regards his defence of natural theology and the role of reason in religious belief as characteristically Anglican. Given that Farrer 'has been the predominant influence on [his] own work in philosophy of religion and philosophical theology,' it is obviously important to Hebblethwaite that Farrer's religious epistemology not be stained with any taint of fideism.[68]

Hebblethwaite sets out his own position most fully in *The Ocean of Truth: A Defence of Objective Theism*.[69] Here he argues that 'belief in an objective God…is possible, despite the impact of modern science and historical criticism—and indeed not only possible but highly plausible, given *all* the data of science, history and experience.'[70] The central chapter of this work—'The Grounds of Theistic Belief'—deploys the traditional cosmological, teleological, anthropological, and axiological arguments for the existence of God and contends that, despite centuries of powerful

[68] Hebblethwaite, *The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, vii. For his view of Anglicanism's alleged 'penchant for unashamed natural theology,' see 'The Anglican Tradition' in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Blackwell, 1997), 178. But also see Chapter Two, Section I.B. of this dissertation for doubts about Anglicanism's enthusiastic commitment to natural theology, at least as Hebblethwaite seems to construe it.

[69] (Cambridge University Press, 1988). Hebblethwaite has provided a more recent and up-to-date articulation of his apologetic project in *In Defence of Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2005), which I will consider further below. I begin, however, with *The Ocean of Truth* as I think it the more substantial work, at least in regard to Hebblethwaite's version of natural theology.

[70] Ibid., x.

criticism, these arguments still provide a better rational explanation for the world's existence, order, and nature (particularly including human nature) than the primary intellectual alternative on offer, namely naturalism. Note, however, that even Hebblethwaite does not here mean by 'argument' a strictly deductive logical proof, or even a formalised inductive argument with a specific probability attached; he instead intends something more modest such as a plausible line of reasoning leading towards a particular conclusion. Hebblethwaite is thus not presenting or analysing theistic arguments at the formal, technical level of Alvin Plantinga or Richard Swinburne but rather setting forth what might be called a more intuitive or 'common sense' approach to natural theology.

According to Hebblethwaite, the difficulty for any 'purely naturalistic view' is that it 'leaves the very existence of the world quite unexplained.'[71] Hebblethwaite grants that 'an absolutely necessary being is self-explanatory in a way no other being is, even if we cannot see the inner logic, so to speak, of its self-explanatoriness.'[72] Hence, the naturalist claim that the universe itself is such a necessary being—or, less strongly, just an arbitrary brute fact—is at least logically possible. However, the evident complexity and contingency of the universe undermine the rationality of this view, rendering it extremely implausible. For this reason, a 'back up' naturalist theory is the 'multiverse' postulate, which suggests that there are in fact an infinite number of universes, of which ours is just one. In that case, its particular nature—while perhaps unique within this range of infinite possibilities—is not so anomalous as if it were the only universe there was. Hebblethwaite responds: 'Perhaps the infinite totality of universes is the absolutely necessary being which our quest for explanation seeks. But it is far from clear that the postulation of an infinite number of

[71] Ibid., 88.

[72] Ibid.

existing universes is a more plausible or more simple explanation than attributing this universe to the deliberate creation of an absolutely necessary God.'[73] Thus, the cosmological argument provides a better explanation of the world's existence than any naturalistic theory.

However, although Hebblethwaite accepts the cosmological argument (thus construed), he also holds that the design argument is actually more persuasive. He does not have in mind Paley-style arguments from a specific instance of alleged design such as the human eye. Hebblethwaite accepts that such complexly 'curious adapting of means to ends' (Hume) can, at least for the most part, be explained by neo-Darwinian theories of biological evolution through natural selection. But such isolated examples only allow for 'scientific explanation within a given system. What is not explained is the system itself and its power to produce such things as life and mind.'[74] The evident 'fine-tuning' of the universe, no less than its very existence, provides evidence of intention and design. 'For even if the stuff of the world goes through an endless series of permutations, it still possesses the capacity, sooner or later, to combine in such a way as to produce life and mind. It is this capacity which remains entirely unexplained' by naturalism.[75] So, again, the teleological argument is upheld against naturalism as a superior explanation of the world's order.

In conventional natural theological fashion, Hebblethwaite freely grants that, 'by this route alone we can hardly claim to discern the God of religion, still less the God of Christian faith.'[76] Even as arguments for generic theism, the cosmological and teleological arguments are individually insufficient, and so must be held and

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[73] Ibid., 89.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 91.

[76] Ibid.

presented together. And both arguments are open to critique from the problem of evil, which must therefore meet with an adequate response before religious belief can be held rationally. While such a response may involve the 'free-will defence,' which seeks to explain at least human moral evil due to 'the possibility of wrong choice' which tragically lies in 'the essence of finite personhood,' it must also go beyond such a defence to account for the very 'building up of finite life and personhood from below, in and through a regularly structured physical universe, which explains the susceptibility of finite persons both to accident (including disaster) and to temptation.'[77]

But the rational case for theism goes far beyond such cosmological and teleological arguments for God's existence and refutations of the problem of evil. As Hebblethwaite puts it, 'It is very difficult to account, on purely naturalistic terms, for man's freedom, his openness to the future, his self-transcendence and creativity, and his perception and espousal of aesthetic, moral, and religious values.'[78] Not only that, but the very properties of value, goodness, beauty, and even truth itself seem to have no place in a naturalistic world. And yet through the centuries humans in every culture have believed themselves to be not just percipients of but also participants in such transcendent properties. Just as the world's existence and order need to be rooted more deeply than in the world itself, so likewise these transcendent properties and our human interaction with them cry out for a transcendent explanation—and that explanation is God.

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[77] Ibid., 93. Hebblethwaite is here alluding to Farrer's work of theodicy, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (Doubleday, 1961 / Collins, 1962). Hebblethwaite explores these themes further in 'Freedom, Evil and Farrer', *New Blackfriars* 66 (1985), 178-187, and 'God and the World as Known to Science', in Hebblethwaite and Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World*, 65-84, both of which are reprinted in *The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*.

[78] Ibid.

And God, moreover, makes Godself known, in at least two ways: (1) religious experience (which still remains within the sphere of natural theology) and (2) revelation (which, naturally, takes us into the realm of revealed theology). Hebblethwaite writes:

> To anyone persuaded of even some probabilistic force in the accumulation of these rational arguments, the fact of religious experience, interpreted as experience of God, will hardly come as a surprise. Indeed it stands to reason that if there is, as these arguments suggest, a transcendent source of the world's being and nature and of the values that have emerged in the course of the long cosmic process, then we should expect that transcendent reality to be encounterable experientially by human subjects who are the products of the world process. Indeed it is only reasonable further to expect some revelation from the mind and will behind the process.[79]

Thus, while religious experience itself may be considered a proper subject of natural theology, it also forms the bridge to revelation and revealed theology as expressed in a particular religious tradition such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, or Hinduism. And it is these *particular* traditions that 'give some specificity and knowability to the God of religion. Revealed theology fills out natural theology's concept of necessary ground, designer, and source of value, with, for example, the concept of the trinitarian God of love, allegedly revealed through Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit.'[80]

Even revealed theology, however, still displays an 'inner rationality' subject to normal human cognitive processes and criteria. As Hebblethwaite puts it elsewhere, 'it is surely a mistake to regard the logic of theological rationality as something wholly internal to the perspective of faith.'[81] Revelation and faith cannot simply introduce warranted irrational beliefs into the rational system sketched out by natural theology; revealed truths must be at least vaguely comprehensible to us and

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[79] Ibid., 96-97.

[80] Ibid., 97.

[81] Hebblethwaite, *In Defence of Christianity* (cited in note 69), 59. Here he sides with Wolfhart Pannenberg against the views of Bernard Lonergan and Thomas Torrance, at least as Hebblethwaite construes them.

compatible with what we know on the basis of reason. Thus, as Hebblethwaite sees it, from a properly Christian perspective on faith and reason,

> there is no clash between the God of philosophy and the God of religion. It is the very same God, dimly apprehended through the philosophical arguments of natural theology as the source and goal of all there is, who is also self-disclosed in Christ as the God of love evoking the religious response of gratitude and dedication. Alternatively, it might be better to say that there is no such thing as the God of philosophy. There is only the God of religion.[82]

In his later book *In Defence of Christianity*, Hebblethwaite lays great stress on the basic rationality of revelation and of faith. After an opening chapter that covers much the same ground as 'The Grounds of Theistic Belief,' but taking account of developments in the intervening two decades, Hebblethwaite then devotes an entire chapter—'The Rationality of Revelation'—to the 'inner rationality' mentioned above that he finds even within theological discourse committed to revealed truths and the religious life itself. As he puts it here, there 'really is no sharp distinction to be drawn between natural and revealed theology.'[83] But whereas in *The Ocean of Truth* he wished to assimilate natural theology to revealed theology, as seen above, now Hebblethwaite seems rather more inclined to assimilate revealed theology to natural theology: both are equally dependent on reason.[84]

Likewise, Hebblethwaite explicitly states that philosophical theology is *not* limited to 'faith seeking understanding' (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Even the apologist, says Hebblethwaite, 'in defending and commending Christianity, does not necessarily presuppose faith. As in all serious dialogue, the apologist endeavours to put himself or herself in the unbeliever's shoes and, using the shared techniques of critical rationality (of which much more will have to be said), to build up a cumulative

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[82] Hebblethwaite, *The Ocean of Truth*, 99.

[83] Hebblethwaite, *In Defence of Christianity*, 33.

[84] Ibid., 34.

case for Christianity.'[85] Hebblethwaite is of course well aware that, in the contemporary postmodern, post-foundationalist, self-consciously hermeneutical philosophical climate, to assume any such 'shared techniques of critical rationality' or a 'common rationality' is an extremely doubtful undertaking.[86] And he does indeed duly acknowledge those such as Alasdair MacIntyre who consider 'the question of incommensurability between different tradition-constituted modes of enquiry, and [who challenge] the Enlightenment paradigm of a single universal critical and practical rationality, shared by all educated people, whatever their background.'[87] We will return to this question in Chapter Two. Meanwhile, however, it is sufficient to note that, according to Hebblethwaite, even MacIntyre acknowledges 'that some traditions succeed better than others in coping with failures and offering more constructive solutions to the problems of moral and political life. These criteria of relative success and failure are suggestive of a more universal rationality after all.'[88] Indeed, Hebblethwaite explicitly pledges his allegiance to the conventional rational standards of analytic philosophy, which he regards as 'by far and away the most important strand in contemporary philosophy of religion. I admire it for its clarity and logical acumen and for the help it gives to anyone interested in pursuing, in depth but without obfuscation, the search for meaning and truth in the world of religion.'[89]

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[85] Ibid., 36.

[86] Ibid., 38.

[87] Ibid., 57. Hebblethwaite is referring in particular to MacInytre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988). See also David Brown's somewhat similar discussion of MacIntyre's shift from *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981) to *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* in *Tradition and Imagination*, 35-37 (cited in note 50 above).

[88] Ibid.

[89] Brian Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* (Blackwell, 2005), 9. See Section 1.5, 'The Analytic Tradition,' 9-12. For a gentle critique of Hebblethwaite's commitment to such a view of reason, see David F. Ford, 'Incarnation, Rationality, and Transformative Practices', in Lipner (ed.), *Truth, Religious Dialogue, and Dynamic Orthodoxy* (cited in note 66), 187-202. The

B. The Believer's Reasons: Hebblethwaite's Version

Given these epistemological convictions and concerns, and his deep, long-standing interest in Austin Farrer, Hebblethwaite was moved to write an essay on the correct interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology. Titled 'The Believer's Reasons' (no doubt intentionally and provocatively after the first chapter of Farrer's *Faith and Speculation*), this essay is a friendly but firm critique of an alternative reading of Farrer provided by Diogenes Allen, which will be considered in the subsequent section of this chapter.[90] Hebblethwaite says that while he personally tends 'to read Farrer in a more Catholic spirit, discerning elements of both natural theology and belief in the general intelligibility and intellectual power of Christian doctrine,' Allen, by contrast, 'gives a more fideistic interpretation of Farrer's philosophical theology.' Perhaps bearing in mind Mitchell's concern that Farrer had moved towards fideism in the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*, Hebblethwaite generously concedes that part of 'the interest of Farrer's work is that it can be read either way in the dispute over the accessibility of the believer's reasons,' but he naturally still maintains that his own interpretation is 'best'. In other words, although Hebblethwaite is well aware that the evidence in this case is somewhat ambiguous, and proper exegesis consequently rather doubtful, his goal is to clear Farrer's name from the stain of fideism raised by Mitchell. He thus comes to Farrer's defence

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merits and demerits of analytic philosophy of religion are debated extensively in William J. Wainwright (ed.), *God, Philosophy, and Academic Culture: A Discussion between Scholars in the AAR and the APA* (Scholars Press, 1996) and Harris and Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis* (cited in note 2).

[90] See Section III.B below. Originally published in a Festschrift for Allen—Eric O. Springsted (ed.), *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 37-48—Hebblethwaite's 'The Believer's Reasons' has now been slightly revised and reprinted in his *The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, 27-40. I will cite from this more recent version; all citations in this paragraph are from page 28.

against Mitchell's concern by specifically arguing against Allen's interpretation. This debate illuminates not only the specific question of whether Farrer might have been 'a sort of fideist,' but also the broader question about the nature of fideism itself.

To begin with, as indicated in Section II.A above, Hebblethwaite notes a widespread disagreement in contemporary religious epistemology regarding what he here calls 'the general accessibility of the believer's reasons.' As he sees it, contemporary thinkers in both theology and philosophy of religion 'differ over how far faith is a necessary condition for the appreciation of the rationality of Christian belief.'[91] This epistemological divide, he stresses, is not simply over the admittedly controversial project of natural theology, but over *any* use at all of reason within religion, even within the study of allegedly revealed theology. Both the *justification* and the *intelligibility* of religious beliefs are at stake. He thus asks, 'Might the sympathetic or even the curious unbeliever be able to entertain the content of alleged revelation hypothetically and assess the rationality of a theistic or Christian worldview based on it? Or is the rationality of Christian theology peculiar and internal to the circle of faith and thus inaccessible to outsiders?'[92] In other words, is Christianity inherently fideistic?

Hebblethwaite continues that, traditionally, 'Roman Catholics and Anglicans have tended to favour the theoretical accessibility of the believer's reasons, both in the external (natural theology) sense, and in the internal (general intelligibility) sense, while Protestants, both Lutheran and Calvinist, have tended to favour the fideist's view of faith as the precondition of Christianity's intelligibility.'[93] Placing Anglicans on the Roman Catholic side of this division—at least without qualification—is a

[91] Hebblethwaite, 'The Believer's Reasons,' 27.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid.

controversial claim, both epistemologically and historically, and perhaps difficult to sustain.[94] It is also striking that here Hebblethwaite sees such Protestant fideism as undermining Christianity's very intelligibility rather than merely its justification. But clearly Hebblethwaite aligns himself with what he sees as the traditional Catholic / Anglican side of this confessional / epistemological division, wanting to affirm what the Protestants apparently deny: namely, that the reasoning involved in both natural theology and revealed theology is *not* specifically 'Christian reason' or dependent upon some prior faith commitment. Reading between the lines, Hebblethwaite is also rejecting some currently powerful philosophical perspectives, such as that reason is enclosed within a 'form of life,' or bound to a particular tradition, or relative to a given culture, or is gender-specific, or merely masks the will to power, or is radically incompetent, and so forth and so on. Rather, he insists that the reason or rationality employed in Christian theology is open and accessible to all, believers and un-believers alike—to anyone with a 'genuinely open mind.'[95]

Acknowledging that the traditional epistemic divide between Christian confessions is not as neat as it used to be, Hebblethwaite still maintains that a good example 'of the mainstream Protestant tradition, that of affirming the priority of faith where the believer's reasons are concerned, may be found in the work of Diogenes Allen.'[96] Thus, in a recent survey of contemporary analytic philosophical theology, Hebblethwaite conveniently pauses to contrast Basil Mitchell's *Faith and Criticism*

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[94] See Chapter Two, Section I.B for more details.

[95] Hebblethwaite, 'The Believer's Reasons,' 27. Although he does not mention specific names here, it is likely that Hebblethwaite is concerned about the current influence of Barth, Wittgenstein, MacIntyre, Radical Orthodoxy, and various other 'postmodern' movements. See Chapter Two, Section II for further comments about the postmodern questioning of reason's scope and competence.

[96] Ibid., 27-28. For counter-examples of figures acting contrary to their confessional stereotypes, Hebblethwaite notes that the Roman Catholic Hans Küng tends toward fideism and the Lutheran Wolfhart Pannenberg tends toward evidentialism.

with Allen's *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*.[97] Mitchell's book, according to Hebblethwaite, 'contains an excellent defence of the interdependence of faith and criticism,' and in particular how reason can cross boundaries between specific religious traditions, such as Hinduism and Christianity. *Faith and Criticism* appeals to 'standards of critical rationality intelligible to any careful inquirer,' and precisely in this respect it is to be preferred to Allen's text. Hebblethwaite writes:

> In many ways, [Allen's *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*] is an extremely useful book. Allen shows how elements in all the schools of philosophy, from Plato to the present day, can be, and have been, used in order to appreciate more deeply the meaning of virtually every major Christian doctrine. But, for Allen, this is entirely a matter of faith seeking understanding. This is not just a question of the theological agenda controlling the selection and use of philosophical concepts. *Faith* is the precondition of the whole enterprise. One learns from philosophy, but only from a standpoint already adopted within the Christian religion and its theology….Allen, apparently, does not agree with Mitchell's conviction that such insights can be shared across the borders of the different religions and across the borders of belief and unbelief.[98]

And according to Hebblethwaite this is not only true in regard to Allen's own work: Allen also offers an equally Protestant and fideistic interpretation of Farrer.

Although Hebblethwaite never specifically *defines* what he means by 'fideism,' by drawing these various statements together we can fairly say that Hebblethwaite *understands* fideism as follows: **the affirmation that *faith* is a necessary precondition for appreciating the *rationality* and/or *intelligibility* of religious belief**. This understanding of fideism shares features with both 'extreme' and 'moderate' fideism, as will be discussed further in Chapter Two. For now, note that extreme fideism 'holds that religion requires the acceptance of doctrines actually absurd or contrary to reason,' whereas in moderate fideism 'reason is not

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[97] Mitchell's *Faith and Criticism* was first cited in note 20 above and discussed in Section I.D. Allen's *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* will be discussed further below, in Section III.A.

[98] Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine*, all quotations from page 13 (emphasis in the original).

antithetically opposed to faith, but plays an auxiliary role in formulating or elucidating what must first be accepted by faith.'[99] In extreme fideism, faith is contrary to reason; in moderate fideism, faith precedes reason.

Hebblethwaite initially classes Allen as a moderate Protestant-style fideist in his statement above: Allen affirms 'the *priority* of faith where the believer's reasons are concerned'.[100] But it seems that Hebblethwaite's real worry is not that, in fideism, faith *precedes* reason in terms of justifying religious beliefs, but rather that fideism calls in question those 'standards of critical rationality intelligible to any careful inquirer,' to any 'genuinely open mind.'[101] It either doubts that there are such standards, or that there are such individuals. In other words, for Hebblethwaite, the deeper problem is that, in addition to denying reason's role in establishing the external *justification* of religious beliefs, fideism also undermines their internal *intelligibility*. It seems then that Hebblethwaite's understanding of fideism would also charge Allen—and Allen's reading of Farrer—with something close to extreme fideism. Thus, while Allen—and Allen's Farrer—may not actually commit themselves to believing something positively absurd, they would not know it if they did, because for them the criteria of rationality (and hence absurdity) are only determined within the circle of faith.[102]

But, of course, Hebblethwaite rejects both Allen's alleged fideism and any such fideism as an authentic interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology. As

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[99] *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, editorial consultant, Anthony Flew (Pan Books, Second Revised Edition, 1983), 120.

[100] Hebblethwaite, 'The Believer's Reasons,' 28 (emphasis added).

[101] Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine*, 13; 'The Believer's Reasons,' 27.

[102] In addition to *The Ocean of Truth* and *In Defence of Christianity*, considered above, Hebblethwaite discusses these general matters in more detail in Chapter 1 of *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine*, particularly section 1.4 'Problems of Accessibility' (7-9) and 1.6 'Faith and Reason' (12-13).

Hebblethwaite says, he reads 'Farrer in a more Catholic spirit, discerning elements of both natural theology and belief in the general intelligibility and intellectual power of Christian doctrine.'[103] Hebblethwaite lays out his positive interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology in two essays: the one I have been citing so far, 'The Believer's Reasons,' and an earlier essay titled, 'The Experiential Verification of Religious Belief in the Theology of Austin Farrer.'[104]

In both essays, Hebblethwaite's basic claim is that Farrer 'holds together the rational arguments for theism, the public appeal to the figures of Christ and the saints, and what [Hebblethwaite calls] the private appeal to one's own experience, namely the way in which, for the believer, the reality of God's will is found, experientially, by one who lets that will take effect in his or her life.'[105] Throughout his career, Farrer actively engaged in both 'negative apologetics' in seeking to refute criticisms of Christian belief based on, say, the problem of evil, and 'positive apologetics' through his reformulation of the cosmological argument and defence of crucial concepts such as human free will and divine agency. In no case does Farrer avoid 'the criteria of general logic or intelligibility,' or appeal to 'a purely internal logic that presupposes the horizon of faith.'[106]

In the earlier essay, Hebblethwaite maintains that

> Farrer's reliance on genuine spirituality is very great in his overall apologetic, but it is not detached from the rational considerations and indeed is itself to be subjected to rational scrutiny. Moreover at the point where our own experience seems implausibly to have to carry too much weight, attention is

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[103] Hebblethwaite, 'The Believer's Reasons,' 28.

[104] Originally published in Eaton and Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity*, 163-176, now slightly revised and reprinted in Hebblethwaite, *The Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer*, 11-26. I will cite from this version.

[105] Hebblethwaite, 'The Believer's Reasons,' 39. We will return to Farrer's epistemic 'appeal' to the saints, noted by Hebblethwaite in both essays, in the conclusion of Chapter Five.

[106] Ibid., 30.

> shifted to the public evidence of the saints and of Christ himself. Thus, the rational arguments, the appeal to Christ and the saints and the appeal to our own experience are held in creative tension.

He concludes, 'The great merit of Farrer's apologetic lies in the way in which experiential verification and rational theology are held together.'[107] And his conclusion to the later essay is much the same: for Farrer, 'while it is indeed the assumptions of the believing mind that provide the data for our scrutiny, that scrutiny proceeds by arguments whose rational force is, in principle, accessible to all.'[108]

In other words, despite some admitted evidence to the contrary, Farrer 'never in fact moved over into the fideist camp. For him the believer's self-understanding finds rational support in the cosmological argument, which carries some weight as an argument independently.'[109] Thus, according to Hebblethwaite, Farrer is not a fideist. For Farrer, faith is *not* a necessary condition for appreciating the rationality *or* intelligibility of religious belief. Mitchell's concern is thus without warrant, and Allen's interpretation is tendentious.

III. The Case For (Moderate) Fideism

John Hick's successor as the Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary, Diogenes Allen (b. 1932) began his academic career at York University in Toronto in 1964, taught at Princeton Seminary from 1967, became Stuart Professor in 1976, and retired as Emeritus Professor in 2002. Initially ordained as a Presbyterian minister, he was recently also ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church of the United States. An expert on Leibniz and Simone Weil, Allen has been

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[107] Hebblethwaite, 'The Experiential Verification of Religious Belief in the Theology of Austin Farrer,' both quotations from 26.

[108] Hebblethwaite, 'The Believer's Reasons,' 40.

[109] Ibid., 39.

one of the leading figures in the attempt to bring theology and spirituality back into conversation with one another.[110] As will be discussed further in Chapter Four, although Allen received his doctorate in philosophy from Yale University, where he previously studied with several of the originators of 'Yale School' theology, he also spent a year in Oxford being supervised by Farrer himself (1963-64). Through the incorporation of Farrer's arguments in his own constructive work, essays specifically focused on Farrer, and perhaps most of all through teaching a regular seminar on Farrer at Princeton Seminary over many years, Allen joins Mitchell and Hebblethwaite as constituting perhaps the three most prominent figures associated with Farrer's name in contemporary philosophical theology, as well as being the one North American in the trio.[111]

A. Faith Seeking Understanding

As we have seen above, however, Hebblethwaite registers strong disagreement with Allen's interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology. Hebblethwaite's critique focuses on one essay, published in 1990 and titled 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity.'[112] However, before turning to Allen's interpretation of Farrer, it is important to consider Hebblethwaite's characterisation of Allen himself as a

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[110] See the Festschrift cited in note 90, to which Hebblethwaite contributed, Eric O. Springsted (ed.), *Spirituality and Theology*. Both Springsted's introduction (1-9) and Daniel W. Hardy's chapter (133-147) contain information about Allen's biography, as does page 278 of James Wm. McClendon Jr's *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Abingdon Press, 2000). Allen has also written a spiritual autobiography, but is it more thematic than concerned with biographical details: *Steps Along the Way: A Spiritual Autobiography* (Church Publishing Incorporated, 2002).

[111] Although it is probably fair to say that there has been more interest in Farrer in the United States than in the United Kingdom—particularly at Yale Divinity School, Princeton Theological Seminary, and Louisiana State University—there is no collective 'Farrerian school' on either side of the Atlantic.

[112] In Hebblethwaite and Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action* (cited in note 67), 197-210. Note that Allen's essay was published in a volume co-edited by Hebblethwaite, and that Hebblethwaite's critique occurs in a Festschrift for Allen! Allen's essay is also in part a reply to Hebblethwaite's 'The Experiential Verification of Religious Belief in the Theology of Austin Farrer'.

Protestant fideist, particularly in relation to Allen's *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*.[113] It is both striking and revealing that Hebblethwaite uses the motto famously associated with Saints Augustine and Anselm (*fides quaerens intellectum*), and hence with moderate fideism, both to describe Allen's position on faith and reason and to distinguish it clearly from his own: 'for Allen, [the relation between philosophy and theology] is entirely a matter of faith seeking understanding…. *Faith* is the precondition of the whole enterprise.'[114] And therefore, according to Hebblethwaite, Allen would not agree with Mitchell that reason can cross boundaries between specific religious and non-religious traditions. But is this true?

Obviously, the very title of Allen's book calls to mind both *fides quaerens intellectum* and *credo ut intelligam*, and this is certainly intentional. In the first chapter of this book—'The Foundation of Christian Theology: The World Was Created'—Allen articulates his basic understanding of where and how philosophy fits within the theological enterprise. According to Allen, the two primary sources of Christian theology are 'the Bible and hellenic culture, especially Greek philosophy.'[115] However, despite their fundamental differences on ontological and epistemological matters, Christian theology does not simply hold these two sources in

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[113] (John Knox Press and SCM Press, 1985). I will cite from the original version, but note that the book has recently been published in a revised Second Edition, co-authored by Eric O. Springsted (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). For a condensed version of Allen's perspective, see his entry on 'philosophy' in Adrian Hastings, et. al. (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 535-539.

[114] Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine*, 13 (emphasis in the original). See Chapter Two of this dissertation for the association of Augustine and Anselm with 'moderate fideism'.

[115] Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 1. This text is primarily aimed at theological students without a background in philosophy. See also the companion volume, Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted (eds.), *Primary Readings in Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Gracewing and Westminster / John Knox, 1992), which contains relevant extracts of major philosophers from Plato to Wittgenstein.

tension or as entirely separate, non-integrated spheres. Rather, Christian theology is a *fusion* of these two distinct traditions. Indeed, Allen goes further and says that Christian theology is 'inherently hellenic.' It is inherently hellenic because 'it could not exist as a *discipline* without the kind of intellectual curiosity which was unique to ancient Greece.'[116] Thus, the discipline of Christian theology first emerged not in the pages of Scripture itself, but only later in the work of the early Church Fathers. And Allen insists that more than the use of particular philosophical concepts is at play in Christian theology: it also depends upon a certain mental attitude. He writes:

> An essential part [of this hellenic influence] is a mental make-up, an attitude of mind, an outlook that prizes coherence, that presses as a matter of principle the question, 'Why and how is that so?'—one that searches for principles to organize diverse things, and that seeks to discover the basis or ground for every claim that is made. There would have been no such discipline as Christian theology without the Bible and without a believing community. But likewise we would not have the discipline of theology without the hellenic attitude in Christians that leads them to press questions about the Bible and the relations of the Bible to other knowledge. Thus when people call for purging Greek philosophy from Christian theology, unless they are referring to specific ideas or concepts, they are really calling for the end of the discipline of theology itself, though they may not realize it.[117]

Although Christian theology is thus inherently hellenic, its biblical inheritance nonetheless sets certain limits on the discipline. This is because, as Allen puts it elsewhere, according to biblical teaching 'God is above the power of the mind to comprehend'.[118] We can reason about God, but when we do so 'we are reasoning about a reality who is in a different category from the gods of ancient Greek and Roman religion, the various conceptions of ultimate reality in ancient philosophy, and the universe itself because God, as the self-sufficient source of all, is not a member of

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[116] Ibid., 4 (emphasis in the original).

[117] Ibid., 5

[118] Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992), 148.

our universe.'[119] Thus, theology 'must recognize that however much it may want complete comprehension, the ontological status of deity is such that God exceeds our comprehension.'[120] Or, put differently, 'we do not know what God is in essence. That essence, God's very being, is unknowable.'[121] Again: 'The essential unknowability of God…springs from God's inherent nature—its inexhaustible fullness—and not simply from the *specific* limitations of our faculties.'[122] And again: 'mystery penetrates and is part of *every* doctrine about God.'[123]

So Allen, more than either Mitchell or Hebblethwaite, insists on the inherent limits of human cognition in regard to the irreducible mystery of the divine nature. Despite our best efforts—indeed, due to the finite contours of humanity—God ultimately remains outside our epistemic grasp. And, as shall be seen in a moment, this apophatic tendency does indeed cause Allen to place more emphasis on faith than either Mitchell or Hebblethwaite. Precisely because God is above our comprehension, 'we recognise the appropriateness of faith.'[124]

These ontological and epistemological claims lead Allen to consider the project of natural theology, and like Hebblethwaite he also notes the traditionally different attitudes of Protestants and Roman Catholics to this enterprise. Allen's two primary comments on natural theology are: (A) one can deny that the traditional arguments of natural theology work as strict philosophical demonstrations or 'proofs in the technical sense' and yet still maintain that 'the created world bears marks of its dependence on God'; and (B) such natural theology, 'either in the sense of rigorous

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[119] Ibid., 153.

[120] Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 6.

[121] Ibid., 9.

[122] Ibid., 12 (emphasis in the original).

[123] Ibid., 12-13 (emphasis in the original).

[124] Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 148.

proofs or in the sense of traces of God in the universe, is not to be identified with all of philosophy.'[125] (A) leads to questions about the clarity and persuasiveness of these alleged marks: 'Are they so strong that it would be irrational not to believe in God? Are they merely such that they give a person who already believes in God because of special revelation, additional grounds?'[126] In *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, Allen leaves these questions unanswered. But (B) opens the intriguing possibility that philosophy may have another role in theology besides simply supplying it with such justifying grounds. Allen's focus in the rest of *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* is thus a development of (B), namely a historically-structured survey of the philosophical concepts necessary to understand Christian doctrines such as Creation, Providence, Trinity, Incarnation, and so on. It is, as the title indicates, precisely an exercise in philosophy for *understanding*—rather than *justifying*—theology.

But several years later Allen took up the questions surrounding (A) in his *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction*.[127] In this book, Allen develops a positive case for Christian belief based on precisely such questions raised by the apparently non-demonstrative character of natural theology noted above. From a strictly philosophical perspective, Allen does not regard the traditional arguments of natural theology as necessarily compelling assent from all reasonable people. As demonstrations or proofs they are unsuccessful, partly because they rely on the Principle of Sufficient Reason. And this principle, while possibly true, is one of philosophy's great contested questions: 'No one has yet been able to show that everything must have a reason for its existence in a way that has won the

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[125] Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, 7 and 8.

[126] Ibid., 7.

[127] Cited in note 118.

approval of the philosophical community at large.'[128] However, in Allen's view the postmodern collapse of the Enlightenment consensus on 'reason'—which I will discuss more fully in Chapter Two—has re-opened the discussion of the rationality of religious and specifically Christian belief. The foundational convictions of the Enlightenment that (i) God is entirely superfluous to explanations of the universe, (ii) that morality and society can be securely built on secular foundations, (iii) that progress is inevitable, and (iv) that knowledge is inherently good, have all been seriously undermined in our contemporary postmodern context. The essentially non-demonstrative character of natural theology is thus no longer an insuperable obstacle to *rational* belief and faith in God. Although we cannot *prove* the existence of God, or even establish the *obvious* rational superiority of theism over naturalism, it remains the case that the order and existence of the universe point to the possibility of God, our religious needs motivate our search for God, and the experience of divine grace can convince us of the reality of God.[129]

Thus, for example, in regard to the cosmological argument, even without the benefit of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, we still 'do not know either scientifically or philosophically that the world "just is." There might be a reason for its existence, and God might be the reason. God is a possible answer to the question posed by nature's existence.'[130] But God being just a 'possible answer' to this question is not somehow epistemically second-class, since one 'of the achievements of philosophy in

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[128] Ibid., 77. Allen appeals at this point to William L. Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[129] See the introduction, 'The End of the Modern World: A New Openness for Faith' (1-19), and the summary of the book's argument on 19. These various points are explored in more detail in the five chapters that constitute Part I: 'The Book of Nature'. Note that Allen, like Mitchell, accepts a modified version of Thomas Kuhn's paradigm theory in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

[130] Ibid., 77.

[the 20th] century has been to show that there are no claims which are true by necessity in any area of inquiry, including science.'[131] Allen thus joins his voice to the chorus of cumulative case arguments for the rationality of religious belief.

As noted above, however, Allen places far more emphasis than either Mitchell or Hebblethwaite on the essential epistemic role of faith in Christian belief. Following Pascal, Allen holds that the paradoxes of even our human nature—let alone God's—baffle and finally defeat our reason. It is precisely by entering deeply into the travails of reason that 'we are pressured by our reason to become open to what is above reason's ability to discover or demonstrate as true.'[132] Faith, while not *contrary* to reason, is still *above* it. So, distinctive Christian doctrines such as our creation in God's image, our fundamentally fallen state, and our redemption by Christ

> are not demonstrable by reason….The proper response to Christian claims is indeed faith but only after we have recognized with our minds the incomprehensibility of our nature and our own wretchedness. Then we can see by reason the coherent picture of ourselves which Christian truth gives us as it enables us to understand those paradoxes which perplexed us and left us in our wretchedness without hope of remedy. Even though faith is not produced by reason, our faith is reasonable because Christian claims illumine the mind on matters that otherwise baffle us.[133]

When it comes to the well-known phrase 'the leap of faith,' Allen notes that this is 'usually taken to mean that since all the available evidence falls short of

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[131] Ibid., 134. Allen adds in a footnote that propositions 'in formal logic and pure mathematics do not constitute counter examples because they are not propositions about the world' (note 6 on page 227). Thus, the question of God's *possibly* necessary existence can be and still is pursued by certain philosophers (such as Alvin Plantinga and Robert Merrihew Adams), but from a modally logical approach to metaphysics which is very different than the rigorous but still less formal philosophical method practised by Allen. However, in a review of *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, James E. Taylor contests Allen's claim above, stating that he 'has overlooked scientific essentialism, the view that propositions such as "water is H_2O" are necessarily true and about an essence of the world.' This view, defended by Hilary Putnam and Saul Kripke, 'remains the subject of lively debate.' See James E. Taylor's review in *Zygon* 30 (1995), 643-646 (citations from 646).

[132] Ibid., 142.

[133] Ibid., 143.

establishing the truth of Christianity, we must leap the gap between evidence and truth.' This, however, is a serious misunderstanding, as it treats both faith and reason 'as belonging to the same order.' On the contrary, Allen insists that 'Christian faith is not a leap *within* the order of the intellect, a leap which violates the very essence of that order. The leap of faith is a leap *from* the order of the intellect to the order of the heart.'[134] Again, however, following Pascal, Allen argues that the 'order of the heart'—that is, the domain of value—is not subordinate but superior to the intellect. While this claim cannot but be heard as a form of fideism to many, that is not Allen's intent. We are, as he puts it, 'to reason with the heart.'[135]

Although Allen rejects Enlightenment views of reason, and places a high value on faith, he also rejects what he understands as fideism. Allen understands fideism as the attempt 'to retain the language of traditional Christianity but at the price of repudiating in various degrees the need to take into account knowledge from any other domain.' Such fideism

> neglects the long historical development of the Bible and of Christian doctrines. Their development has always involved human reasoning. Fideism, often without realizing it, treats some specific interpretation of Scripture or a particular doctrinal formulation as though it sprang directly from the mind of God into human minds, rather than also requiring the use of the best estimates of knowledge that existed in various historical eras.[136]

Although Christian faith is a matter of the heart it is not *only* a matter of the heart for (take note) 'a commitment should be given up should the mind not be convinced of the truth of Christianity from an examination of nature, history, human nature, and the gospel.'[137] Thus, faith is 'an essential but not the only ingredient in making Christian

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[134] Ibid., this and previous quotations in this paragraph from 145 (emphasis in the original).

[135] Ibid, 154. For a more developed treatment of Pascal, see Diogenes Allen, *Three Outsiders: Blaise Pascal, Søren Kierkegaard, Simone Weil* (Cowley Publications, 1983), 15-51.

[136] Both quotations from Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 7.

[137] Ibid., 15.

claims. Reason is used, not only to examine the grounds for Christian claims [i.e., justification] but also to understand them better [i.e., intelligibility]. Those with faith seek understanding.'[138] Fideism, by contrast, is 'blind faith.'[139]

The crucial point here is that Allen clearly *accepts* that Christian theology must admit the deliverances of reason and knowledge from domains outside the circle of faith. If his view is faith seeking understanding, the understanding faith seeks must both recognise and incorporate knowledge discovered outside of faith. In light of Hebblethwaite's claims above it is also important to mention that, ironically, Allen's *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* explicitly incorporates insights drawn from Mitchell's *Faith and Criticism*, and that Part III of this book takes up the question of engaging with other religious traditions—particularly Hinduism![140] In short, although Allen's configuration of the relation between faith and reason is rather different from Hebblethwaite's in placing greater emphasis on the positive epistemic role of faith in Christian belief, and although Allen is more sympathetic to the postmodern critique of 'reason' than Hebblethwaite and consequently more cautious in his endorsement of any kind of natural theology, I nevertheless conclude that, especially if one takes account of *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* in addition to *Philosophy for*

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[138] Ibid., 16.

[139] Ibid., 128.

[140] Ibid., 7, 19, 128, 136, 217, 221, 227, and Part III: Chapter Ten, 'A Christian Theology of Other Faiths' (185-196) and Chapter Eleven, 'Incarnation in the Gospels and in the *Bhagavad-Gita*' (197-211). To be precise, Allen's dependence on Mitchell's *Faith and Criticism*—which was published five years later—is not on the book itself but on the text of some of the lectures that then went into it, namely the Nathaniel Taylor Lectures at Yale University in 1985 (see Mitchell's preface in *Faith and Criticism*). In particular, Allen uses Mitchell's analogy of Christian doctrine in the contemporary intellectual climate as a barge with cargo trying to navigate a difficult river, seeking to avoid various dangers such as Hume, Kant—and fideism. For Mitchell's own articulation of this analogy, see *Faith and Criticism*, Chapter 4: 'Faith and Reason: A Problem in Navigation,' 67-87, particularly 72-74; for Allen's appropriation of it, see 6-9 and 128 of *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*.

Understanding Theology, Hebblethwaite has exaggerated the fideistic element in Allen's own thought. If Allen is a fideist, he is at most a moderate fideist, not an extreme one.

B. The Believer's Reasons: Allen's Version

I turn now to Allen's interpretation of Farrer. Allen begins his essay on Farrer's religious epistemology by saying that

> [p]hilosophers of religion are prone to ignore or to dismiss faith in their assessment of the truth of falsity of Christian theism. They usually consider the existence of the universe, the operations of nature, religious experience, and perhaps the events of history to see what support these provide for theism in general and for Christian theism in particular. The typical philosopher of religion does not find much support for either.[141]

But, Allen claims, Austin Farrer was not a typical philosopher of religion. According to Allen, from the time of Farrer's 1964 book *Saving Belief*, 'Farrer takes the believer's faith to be essential for a proper assessment of the grounds of Christian theism.'[142] Thus, in Farrer's case,

> the usual relation between faith and evidence is reversed. Rather than examining nature, history and religious experience *first* to see whether they support theism, as is usually the case in the philosophy of religion, one is *first* to have faith in order to be in a position to recognise the manifestation of divine activity in nature, history, and individual lives. If faith is indeed a necessary condition for the proper assessment of the grounds of Christian theism, then philosophers of religion will have to take far more seriously the familiar theological procedure employed by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas who examine Christian theism *with faith* as they seek to understand it and display its grounds.[143]

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[141] Allen, 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity,' 197. Allen also discusses Farrer's religious epistemology in some detail in the introduction to *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 11-16, covering much of the same material as the essay being considered. I will thus cite from this introduction as well as from the essay in *Divine Action* to present Allen's interpretation of Farrer.

[142] Ibid., 198. Allen is referring to 'Faith and Evidence,' the first chapter of Farrer's *Saving Belief*, cited in note 61.

[143] Ibid. (emphasis in the original). Again, see Chapter Two of this dissertation for another expression of the view that Augustine, Anselm, and even Aquinas might exemplify 'moderate fideism'.

But if one is first to have faith in order to recognise the existence of God or the truth of Christianity, then how does one come to have faith? Although Allen discusses at length how reason must exercise its proper function to see its own limitations, the simple answer is that one must open one's heart to God.[144] Allen thus states that in Farrer's last book, *Faith and Speculation*, when Farrer 'describes "the believer's reasons"…all that he mentions is that the believer embraces the gospel, and in embracing it finds himself or herself blessed. The blessings the believer experiences are the *reasons* the believer continues to embrace the gospel.'[145] These blessings are not unusual religious experiences or mystical ecstasies, but rather more 'prosaic' events such as 'finding oneself judged and accepted, nourished and strengthened. Having a broken and ensnarled life healed is more dramatic but still rather common.'[146]

Allen then makes an important distinction. He claims that, for Farrer, these blessings 'are said to give sufficient reason to be a believer, even though they are not evidence for the truth of the gospel.'[147] For such evidence, we must look away from the felt blessings of the believer to the more objective criteria preferred by typical philosophers of religion: for example, the existence and order of the natural universe. This is where the intellect has its rightful place. But even here faith is necessary to properly perceive and interpret this evidence. Without faith it cannot be rightly understood. As Allen puts it in *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 'Nature cannot be a witness to God's existence and goodness to a person with a closed

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[144] Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 13.

[145] Allen, 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity,' 202 (emphasis added).

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 203.

heart.'[148] The evidence is there, but it cannot be seen. In his essay on Farrer, Allen says:

> The problem with the experience of divine blessings as part of the basis of belief is not that individual experiences are private nor that the blessings are too paltry to be evidence for Christian theism, but that the blessings are the result of opening one's heart. If one's heart were open, one might be able to experience the blessings of the gospel. Then one might be able to recognise and respond to the evidence provided by the natural world's existence and evolving order[.][149]

In other words, both (i) the blessings of the gospel which provide one's *reason* to be a believer, as well as (ii) the faith which allows one to perceive evidence for the *truth* of the gospel, are themselves the result of a prior condition, namely (iii) a Pascalian 'open heart' (note: an open *heart*, not Hebblethwaite's 'open mind'). Allen acknowledges that to 'speak of the heart may seem remote to a philosophical defence of theism and Christian theism,' but he argues that such considerations are required by any attempt to properly interpret Farrer's own thought as well as by the actual realities under discussion.[150] Allen cites with approval Farrer's claim that the very idea of God unsettles us, throws us off balance, and draws us either for or against it: in Farrer's words, the concept of God contains 'built-in attitudes.' Thus, Allen states, 'neutrality is a fiction.'[151]

But because neutrality is a fiction, does that mean there is no room for reason at all? As seen above in Section III.A, Allen resists this conclusion: the intellect has

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[148] Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 14.

[149] Allen, 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity,' 203.

[150] Ibid. For examples of two other philosophers of religion taking account of 'the heart,' see William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Cornell University Press, 1995), and James R. Peters, *The Logic of the Heart: Augustine, Pascal, and the Rationality of Faith* (Baker Academic, 2009).

[151] Ibid., 209. The discussion of 'built-in attitudes' is in 'Faith and Evidence,' cited in note 61 above. As was made clear in the discussion of Mitchell, although he does not place the same emphasis on faith as Allen does, Mitchell would also firmly agree that 'neutrality is a fiction' and insist on the rightful place of commitment even in fully rational belief.

its proper role to play as well. Citing an early essay of Farrer's, Allen insists that our mental activity in fact runs in two streams: both credulous and critical. Faith and reason are not mutually exclusive opposites, but co-exist in the same cognitive agent, often unhappily and incompatibly. Thus, Allen says, it is precisely because 'our minds function in *two* ways that a believer investigates philosophical questions that are relevant to Christian claims, and also considers historical questions, since [quoting Farrer] "we must have no bogus history".'[152] In principle, it is entirely possible that such investigations will erode and even destroy faith. Thus, Allen says that full 'faith or commitment does not imply that there is no intellectual work to be done. Quite the contrary.'[153] Moreover, such intellectual work must produce results supportive of faith if faith is to endure. So, although Allen admits that it is 'not at all clear how much divine agency must be manifest in nature and history for us to continue to have faith,' and grants that 'Farrer does not tell us how much of the divine agency we must be able to detect for Christian theism to be true or plausible,' the very fact that these considerations are raised indicates that, on Allen's reading of Farrer, the twin issues of (1) *continuing to have faith* and (2) the *truth and plausibility of Christian theism* remain open questions.[154]

So, does Allen present a fideistic interpretation of Farrer's religious epistemology, as Hebblethwaite charges? Recall that Hebblethwaite describes fideism as the affirmation that faith is a necessary precondition for appreciating the

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[152] Ibid., 208 (emphasis in the original). This essay, 'On Credulity,' was originally published in *Illuminatio* 1 (1947), 3-9; reprinted in Austin Farrer, *Interpretation and Belief*, edited by Charles Conti (SPCK, 1976), 1-6; and is now also available in Loades and MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 190-195. Farrer's rejection of 'bogus history' is found on page 6 of *Interpretation and Belief* and page 195 of *The Truth-Seeking Heart*.

[153] Ibid., 209.

[154] Ibid.

rationality and/or intelligibility of religious belief. As thus stated, on first glance there is indeed good reason to classify Allen's interpretation as fideistic, although he never applies that term to himself or Farrer. According to Allen, 'Farrer takes the believer's faith to be essential for a proper assessment of the grounds of Christian theism.'[155] What could be more explicitly fideistic than that? However, things are somewhat more complicated than they first appear.

To begin with, it seems that Hebblethwaite and Allen mean different things by 'faith.'[156] For Hebblethwaite, 'faith' seems to mean 'uncritical commitment' or the opposite of 'rationality.' He seems to view faith *negatively* as the absence of reason, rather than something *positive* which may in its own right provide some justification for belief. Hence his strong claim that even Christian philosophical theology is not simply faith seeking understanding.[157] So when Allen says that 'Farrer takes the believer's faith to be essential for a proper *assessment* of the *grounds* of Christian theism' (emphasis added), it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Allen means something very different by 'faith.' Faith, for Allen, carries positive epistemic weight. Thus he says (with those such as Hebblethwaite in mind) that in 'the typical examination by philosophers of religion of the grounds for religious belief, faith is a pale substitute for evidence', but that on the contrary for Farrer 'faith is a response to the good promised to us by God, preeminently in Christ.'[158]

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[155] Ibid., 198.

[156] 'Faith' is, of course, itself an enormously complex and contested concept that will not receive the attention it deserves in this dissertation, although it is implicitly discussed throughout in contrast to 'reason' and in relation to 'fideism'.

[157] Ironically, here Hebblethwaite seems to agree with Richard Dawkins's understanding of faith (see note 55 above).

[158] Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, 15-16. Conversation and correspondence with Professor Allen about the difference between his and Hebblethwaite's view of faith has helped me to make these distinctions, for which I am grateful.

Second, as stated above, Hebblethwaite's criticism of Allen strongly implies that Allen's reading of Farrer is actually guilty of the extreme fideistic position that denies reason any place at all within the life of faith—for either justification *or* clarification. Faith, on this view, is immune from any criticism, and so faith may lead one to believe the actually absurd or irrational. But this is clearly false, as Allen explicitly states that questions raised by philosophy and history must be addressed if faith is to be maintained. To use a term in contemporary epistemology, reason can and must deal with 'defeaters' if faith is to be maintained with integrity. It is *not* invulnerable. Faith may provide the initial grounds for believing in Christian theism, and may also enable one to read the both the universe and human nature rightly, but faith is not hermetically sealed from rational inquiry. Allen does not use the term 'fideism' for either himself or for Farrer, and indeed clearly rejects it as an apt description of acceptable Christian practice. But, as noted above, will be discussed in Chapter Two, and defended further in Chapters Four and Five, Allen's (and Farrer's) position may well be considered under the rubric of 'moderate fideism'.

IV. Conclusion

This chapter began with Basil Mitchell's concern that in his final book, *Faith and Speculation*, Austin Farrer—'the reasonable man'—had abandoned rational theology and had become 'a sort of fideist'. It continued with Mitchell's critique of something like Farrer's alleged fideism in 'Neutrality and Commitment,' and considered Mitchell's own religious epistemology in *The Justification of Religious Belief* and *Faith and Criticism*. It then surveyed Brian Hebblethwaite's endorsement of natural theology in *The Ocean of Truth* and *In Defence of Christianity*, followed by his firmly non-fideistic reading of Farrer in his own 'The Believer's Reasons.' And

finally it looked at the rather different formulation of the Christian philosophical enterprise in Diogenes Allen's *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* and *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World*, followed by Allen's 'moderate fideist' interpretation of Farrer in 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity.'

Within the broad range of extant positions in contemporary philosophy of religion and religious epistemology, Mitchell, Hebblethwaite, and Allen are not themselves that far apart. They all accept the cumulative case approach, and they are all concerned to defend the rationality of religious belief. However, subtle but significant differences are certainly still manifest among these three prominent followers of Austin Farrer. Hebblethwaite is the most rationalistic of the three, holding that the traditional arguments of natural theology provide theism a clear rational advantage over naturalism, and denying that reason is compromised by various postmodern critiques. Allen's position—protests to the contrary notwithstanding—does verge on the fideistic, as that term is commonly understood, although Allen rejects extreme fideism and insists on the capacity of reason to both support and undermine religious belief. Unlike Hebblethwaite, however, Allen's non-demonstrative understanding of the character of natural theology commits him only to the view that theism is permitted by the available evidence, and hence rational, rather than being obviously more plausible than naturalism. And Mitchell seems somewhere between the two, closer to Hebblethwaite on the rational justification of religious belief, but likewise closer to Allen in insisting on the essential role of commitment, tradition, and community in formulating all beliefs whatsoever, religious and otherwise.

These personal differences are reflected in their interpretations of Farrer: Hebblethwaite denies that Farrer ever 'in fact moved over into the fideist camp,'

Mitchell hopes that Farrer remained 'a theoretical rationalist but a practicing fideist,' and Allen holds that—at least from *Saving Belief* (1964) onwards—'Farrer takes the believer's faith to be essential for a proper assessment of the grounds of Christian theism.' Although he denies the term, this view is equivalent to moderate fideism. In Chapters Three and Four I will trace the development of Farrer's religious epistemology and, in so doing, defend Allen's interpretation of Farrer against Hebblethwaite's. However, in Chapter Two, we must first consider the complex history and multiple definitions of fideism itself.

CHAPTER TWO: 'A SORT OF FIDEIST'

The contested question of whether Austin Farrer may or may not have become 'a sort of fideist' is further complicated by the diverse definitions of fideism found in contemporary theology, philosophy, and religious studies. Thomas D. Carroll has recently argued that attributions of fideism are almost always inaccurate, ahistoric, and pejorative, and thus urges that we greatly restrict use of the term. The denotation and connotation of 'fideism' vary considerably between Roman Catholic and Protestant usage, and 'Anglican epistemology' is arguably identical with so-called 'semi-fideism' (or 'soft rationalism'). Postmodern questionings of reason's competence have recently undermined the traditional 'faith / reason' dichotomy that gave fideism its particular significance as a controversial option in religious epistemology. Academic discussions of fideism itself are largely confined to reference works: it is a neglected topic, and yet still a widely used and apparently essential term when discussing the rationality of religious belief. This chapter thus sorts through these various issues so that when 'fideism' appears in subsequent chapters a precise range of meanings can be given to it, and so the 'sort of fideist' Farrer may or may not have become can be determined more accurately. (Sections I and II are mostly concerned with citation and exposition; Sections III and IV are more analytic and critical.)

I. The History and Definitions of Fideism

Basil Mitchell is not the only scholar to wonder whether Farrer, for all of his undoubted philosophical brilliance and early focus on rational theology, might have ended up as 'a sort of fideist'. For example, in an essay on Farrer's theodicy, Simon

Oliver states that, although in dealing with the problem of evil Farrer 'appears to reject the rationalism of philosophical theodicy in favour of a dogmatic theology, the present article will argue that this does not, as has sometimes been supposed, render him a type of fideist.'[1] Oliver then cites two essays by J. N. (Jeremy) Morris and Edward Henderson which defend a more fideistic reading of Farrer, and which will be considered in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.

However, recent scholarship has made it increasingly difficult to use the term 'fideism' with the insouciance with which philosophers and theologians have long been accustomed, and so it is important to pause in this second chapter to consider what this term might actually mean. As stated twice in Chapter One, in 1983 Mitchell wrote: 'Farrer, it seemed, had become a sort of fideist, content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer's sense of being nourished by the tradition in which he had been raised.'[2] But using 'fideist' in this context may beg the question—and, indeed, more than one. Is such a cognitive state properly identified with fideism? Are 'tradition' and 'nourishment' so closely associated with faith and so sharply contrasted with reason? If so, is such 'fideism' good, bad, or indifferent? Is it rational or irrational? A term of praise or blame? Where does this term come from, and what does it mean? And—perhaps most important of all—does 'fideism' mean different things to different communities and individuals, and in different cultures, periods, and languages?[3]

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[1] Simon Oliver, 'The Theodicy of Austin Farrer,' *The Heythrop Journal* XXXIX (1998), 282.

[2] Basil Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity: New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer* (Pickwick Publications, 1983), 177.

[3] I am grateful to Ann Loades for helping me articulate some of these questions, especially the first two.

A. The Religious History of 'Fideism'

In asking these questions, we are stepping from the rather austere and insular world of Oxford philosophy and Anglican theology into a complex and interconnected set of historical and ecclesial considerations. In an article aptly titled, 'The Traditions of Fideism,' Thomas D. Carroll observes that despite the widespread use of the term 'comparatively little has been written on fideism itself'—that is, on its specific history and definition(s).[4] He further observes that the term is often used pejoratively and ahistorically, without any regard for its actual origins in 19th century French theology, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. He thus says, 'The diverse and sometimes conflicting individual definitions of fideism call out for some philosophical housekeeping if the term is to be useful academically. This preliminary investigation into the genealogy of fideism shows that the meaning of the term is not at all clear in either philosophical or theological discourse.'[5] My own initial research into fideism's 'genealogy,' although not as detailed and deeply historical as Carroll's, had independently drawn similar conclusions to his: specifically, that the term originated in a religious rather than a philosophical context; that it is often used pejoratively; that it can mean different things to philosophers and theologians; that it *certainly* means different things to Protestants and Roman Catholics; and that fixing on one specific contemporary definition is thus difficult if not impossible. Fideism is a highly context-dependent concept.

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[4] Thomas D. Carroll, 'The Traditions of Fideism', *Religious Studies* 4 (2008), 2. More poignantly, Craig B. Brush wrote back in 1966, 'Most religious encyclopedias or dictionaries of philosophy…are conspicuously silent or distressingly vague on fideism.' The situation has changed very little since then. See Craig B. Brush, *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the Theme of Skepticism* (Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 19 footnote 1. Brush's work will be discussed further below. Due to the lack of extensive scholarly attention to fideism, many of the citations in Section I of this chapter will be drawn precisely from such 'religious encyclopedias or dictionaries of philosophy'.

[5] Ibid.

As Carroll and others have noted, the word *fidéisme* emerged in France in the middle of the 19th century, and first appeared in English in 1885. Although the term's invention is normally attributed to Protestants, in fact it seems to have been coined entirely independently by the Roman Catholic Abbé Robitaille in 1854 and then later by the Parisian Lutheran theologian Eugène Ménégoz in 1879: by Robitaille to refer to the thought of Lamennais and by Ménégoz to refer to his own system. It was also used by the Roman Catholic philosopher Léon Ollé-Laprune in 1880. Carroll writes:

> Neither Ménégoz nor Ollé-Laprune gives any indication of awareness of the term's having already been in use. Both authors appear to take themselves to be coining or otherwise appropriating the term (in both cases, placing it in italics). It is a testament to how cut off from one another Protestant and Catholic theologians in France were that Ménégoz did not discover the Catholic use of the word until three decades later when the 1907 encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* was written.[6]

He later adds, 'Within a few decades after its appearance in French, the term "fideism" appears in English and other European languages, and enters more fully into Catholic and Protestant theological conversation. Eventually, it would find a place in philosophical discourse.'[7]

Ménégoz (1838-1921) and his colleague Auguste Sabatier (1839-1901) developed their view—sometimes called 'symbolo-fideism'—as a positive programme of post-Enlightenment Protestant theology, seeking to take account of modern science and historical-critical interpretations of Scripture.[8] Seeing themselves as the heirs of Luther, Calvin, Kant, Schleiermacher, and Ritschl, they were also

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[6] Carroll, 'The Traditions of Fideism,' 10-11. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* was published by Pope Pius X on 8 September 1907 'on the doctrines of the Modernists'. An on-line English translation may be found on the Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_x/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_19070908_pascendi-dominici-gregis_en.html (accessed on 13 April 2008). For the original Latin text, see Henrici Denzinger, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, edited by Peter Hünermann (Herder, 1991), §§3475-3500.

[7] Ibid., 11.

[8] Ibid.

keenly aware of the new challenges to faith and theology raised by both Darwin and historicism. Summarising their work, Carroll writes:

> In depicting the faith alone that is to be the essence of religion (and Christianity supremely)—fideism—Ménégoz first circumscribes the region in which it lies by delimiting the regions in which the essence of faith does not lie: ancient metaphysics, ancient sacred texts, science, and philosophy. Christian faith also does not lie in any particular historical expression of itself: it lies in the experience of transcendence that the believer has through contemporary religious symbols.[9]

Thus, 'fideism' in this context means the very specific school of thought developed by Ménégoz and Sabatier and their followers in the Protestant theology faculty in Paris—it was a positive self-designation.

Like 'the morning star' and 'the evening star,' however, within Roman Catholicism 'fideism' differs in sense, if not in reference, to its use in Protestantism. As Carroll notes, 'Protestants occasionally use the term to describe their own views, whereas Catholics treat fideism as a charge to be avoided.'[10] More significantly, however, the term also seems to have a rather different *meaning* in Catholic discourse, so both sense *and* reference may be different.[11] In what Nicholas Wolterstorff

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[9] Ibid., 15. See pages 11-15 of Carroll's article for more detail. Very little has been written on either Ménégoz or Sabatier: Carroll's article seems to be the first piece of scholarship on them, at least in English, for several decades. Sabatier is the more well-known figure of the two and shows up in various reference works and discussions of symbolism, whereas Ménégoz seems largely forgotten, despite being senior to Sabatier in Carroll's presentation. See, for example, the entry on 'Fideism' in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition (Oxford University Press, 1997), 609, and Alistair Mason, 'Fideism,' in Adrian Hastings, et. al. (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 240-241.

[10] Carroll, 10. And not only Catholics. Most Protestants would rather not be explicitly associated with fideism, either. See Steven G. Smith, 'Karl Barth and Fideism: A Reconsideration', in *Anglican Theological Review* (Volume LXVI, Number 1, January 1984), 64-78.

[11] See G. M. Sauvage, 'Fideism,' in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church, Volume VI* (Caxton Publishing Company, 1909), 68-69; Paul Poupard, 'Fideism,' in *Sacramentum Mundi: An Encyclopedia of Theology, Volume Two* (Burns and Oates, 1968), 335-337; and most especially S. A.

describes as an 'authoritative Catholic treatment of fideism,' the Roman Catholic philosopher and theologian S. A. Matczak says, 'By fideism Ménégoz meant *sola fides* that consists of the movement of oneself to God, independently of the adherence to certain beliefs or to revealed truth; such faith is justifying faith.'[12] Thus, as Matczak understands him, Ménégoz's primary concern was soteriological rather than epistemological. However, Matczak says, 'Catholic usage of the term fideism, particularly in the teaching of the traditionalists, gives the opposite meaning to this term; fideism means the acceptance of the fundamental truth on the authority of God; hence faith becomes a criterion of truth.'[13] Whether or not Matczak understands Ménégoz correctly, or whether or not 'Catholic usage' is 'opposed' to Ménégoz's, with Matczak's discussion of fideism we now shift from Protestant soteriology to the far more epistemologically-oriented realm of Roman Catholicism. And perhaps even more significant than epistemology is the great interest and direct involvement of the Magisterium, papal encyclicals, and Vatican Council decrees on this matter.

While Ménégoz and Sabatier may have eventually influenced some Modernist currents of late 19th and early 20th century Roman Catholic thought, 'fideism' in Roman Catholic use is primarily associated with 'traditionalism' and Abbé Louis Eugène Marie Bautain (1796-1867).[14] As Matczak explains it, traditionalism held

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Matczak, 'Fideism,' in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume 5* (Thomson Gale in association with the Catholic University of America, 2003), 711-713.

[12] S. A. Matczak, 'Fideism,' 711. Poupard, another Roman Catholic, also notes that 'the word has a special meaning when used in French Protestant theology' ('Fideism,' 336). For Wolterstorff's comment, see his article 'Faith' in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volume 3* (Routledge, 1998), 544. Wolterstorff is referring to Matczak's entry in the first, 1967 edition of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, but it appears unchanged in the second edition of 2003.

[13] Ibid.

[14] For traditionalism, see S. A. Matczak (again), 'Traditionalism,' *The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume 14*, 138-140, and the entry on 'Traditionalism' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the*

that 'the principal truths of a metaphysical and moral nature can be attained by man through God's revelation alone. According to traditionalism, human reason by itself is not capable of coming to these truths; it needs external instruction—in the last resort, divine revelation.'[15] Traditionalism is thus a species of fideism. Matczak then technically defines fideism, from a Roman Catholic perspective, as

> a philosophical and theological doctrine or attitude that minimizes the capacity of the human intellect to attain certitude and assigns faith as a criterion of the fundamental truths. Thus, God's existence, the immortality of the soul, the principles of morality, the fact of divine revelation, and the credibility of Christianity cannot be proved by reason alone, but must be accepted on authority.[16]

Traditionalism may differ from fideism *simpliciter* in that it specifies tradition as the authority on which such beliefs must be accepted.

Although several other figures were involved with the traditionalist movement—L. G. A. de Bonald (1754-1840), the famous F. R. de Lamennais (1782-1854), A. Bonnetty (1789-1879), G. C. Ubaghs (1800-1875), and the so-called 'Louvain school of traditionalism'—as far as fideism is concerned, Bautain is regarded as the classic exemplar and *cause célèbre*.[17] Ordained in 1828, Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Strasbourg from 1838, Vicar-General for the Archbishop of Paris from 1849, and Professor of Moral Theology at the Sorbonne from 1853 to 1863, Bautain enjoyed a brilliant academic and ecclesial career.

Christian Church, Third Edition, 1635-1636. For Bautain, see Paul Poupard (again), 'Bautain, Louis Eugène Marie,' *The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition, Volume 2*, 161.

[15] Matczak, 'Traditionalism,' 138.

[16] Matczak, 'Fideism,' 711.

[17] Poupard, 'Fideism,' 336; see Matczak, 'Traditionalism,' 138, for the reference to the 'Louvain school.' 'Traditionalism' and 'fideism' are used almost although not quite interchangeably in these various reference articles, with Poupard associating Bonald and Lamennais primarily with traditionalism and Bautain and Bonnetty primarily with fideism, but with the latter two 'in close liaison' with the former two (336). Matczak acknowledges that accurately distinguishing and classifying the various figures is difficult ('Traditionalism,' 138).

However, both traditionalism and fideism were eventually condemned by the Church as incompatible with Catholic dogma, and between 1834 and 1840 Bautain was twice forced by his authorities to assent to six statements that explicitly repudiated his teaching and published work.[18] In particular, Bautain was required to *affirm* the following two theses, *contrary* to fideism:

- 'Human reason is able to prove with certitude the existence of God; faith, a heavenly gift, is posterior to revelation, and therefore cannot be properly used against the atheist to prove the existence of God.'
- 'The use of reason precedes faith and, with the help of revelation and grace, leads to it.'[19]

Moving to the present day, Carroll notes that 'probably the most widely read text to mention fideism explicitly'—whether Catholic or Protestant—is Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.[20] For example, in Paragraph 52 of Chapter

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[18] Sauvage, 'Fideism,' 69; Poupard, 'Fideism,' 336, and 'Bautain, Louis Eugène Marie,' 161; Matczak, 'Fideism,' 711. Carroll covers this period in 15-17 of 'The Traditions of Fideism.'

[19] Cited from Denzinger in Sauvage, 'Fideism,' 69: *Theses a Ludovico Eugenio Bautain iusse sui Episcopi subscriptae* (8 September 1840). The original text (in French rather than Latin) may be found in Denzinger §§2751-56. The first thesis cited above (number 1 from, in fact, the 1835 theses rather than the 1840 version) reads, 'Le raisonnement peut prouver avec certitude l'existence de Dieu. – La foi, don du ciel, est postérieure à la révélation; elle ne peut donc pas convenablement être alléguée vis-à-vis d'un athée en preuve de l'existence de Dieu.' (§2751) And the second thesis cited above (number 5 of the six 1835 theses) reads, 'L'usage de la raison precede la foi, et y conduit l'homme par la révélation et la grace.' (§2755) As we will see further in Chapters Three and Four, Austin Farrer denied the substance of both theses.

[20] Carroll, 5. *Fides et Ratio* was published on 14 September 1998. I will cite from Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (eds.), *Restoring Faith in Reason: A New Translation of the Encyclical Letter* Faith and Reason *of Pope John Paul II together with a commentary and discussion* (SCM Press, 2002). This edition contains a valuable commentary on the encyclical by James McEvoy, as well as responses by various scholars such as Nicholas Lash and Robert Sokolowski. Janet Martin Soskice's '*Fides et Ratio*: The Postmodern Pope' (292-296) considers the document's treatment of fideism on page 295, stating that John Paul II sees fideism as 'a form of nihilism.' The official English translation as well as the original Latin text may also be found on the Vatican website at: http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0216/_INDEX.HTM (accessed on 12 April 2008) and http://www.vatican.va/edocs/LAT0381/_INDEX.HTM (accessed on 13 April 2008).

V, 'The Judgements of the Magisterium Upon Philosophy' ('De Re Philosophica Magisterii Iudicia'), the Pope surveys precisely the period and figures just mentioned. Acknowledging that 'the voice of the Magisterium was heard more frequently in the nineteenth century' than in some previous periods, he explains that these interventions were due to the philosophical ferment and confusion caused not only by the welter of non-Christian thought, but also by well-meaning but misguided Catholic philosophers seeking to respond to these challenges on behalf of the Church. He thus writes:

> In those days the Church's Magisterium was compelled to make sure that these [Catholic] philosophical views did not in their turn assume false or negative forms. Consequently censure was imposed equally on *fideism* and *radical traditionalism* because of their distrust of the natural faculties of reason; on the other hand *rationalism* and *ontologism* were also censured because they assigned to natural reason what could only be known by the light of faith. Whatever was validly contained in these discussions was included in the decree *Dei Filius*, in which the First Vatican Council gave solemn expression to the relationship between revelation and faith. The teaching which is contained in that document had a profound and healthy effect upon the philosophical investigations of many of the faithful, and even today stands out as a point of reference for which we should aim if we wish to arrive at a fair and appropriate Christian exploration of these issues.[21]

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[21] Hemming and Parsons (eds.), *Restoring Faith in Reason*, 87 (italics in the original). The official Latin text (on page 84 and 86) reads: 'Tunc autem Ecclesiae Magisterium omnino coactum est ad vigilandum ne hae philosophicae doctrinae vicissim in formas falsas et negatorias transgrederentur. Sunt idcirco censura aequabiliter affecti hinc *fideismus* et *traditionalismus radicalis*, propter eorum diffidentiam naturalium rationis facultatum, illinc *rationalismus*, et *ontologismus*, quandoquidem rationi naturali id tribuebant, quod solummodo fidei lumine cognosci potest. Quae valida in his disceptationibus continebantur Constitutione dogmantica *Dei filius* recepta sunt, qua primum Concilum Oecumenicum quoddam, Vaticanum scilicet I, sollemniter inter Revelationem ac fidem necessitudinem pertractavit. Doctrina quae in documento illo continetur penitus et salubriter philosophicam complurium fidelium inquisitionem affecit atque hodiernis quoque temporibus quiddam perstat praeceptivum ad quod tendere debemus ad iustam congruentemque christianam hac de re inquisitionem consequendam.' Interestingly, the translation of the Hemming / Parsons edition omits the specific claim in the Latin above that, as the official English translation puts it, 'for the first time an Ecumenical Council—in this case, the First Vatican Council—pronounced solemnly on the relationship between reason and faith.' The official translation continues: 'The teaching contained in this document strongly and positively marked the philosophical research of many believers and remains today a standard reference-point for correct and coherent Christian thinking in this regard.'

After mentioning fideism (*fideismus*) the text cites in a footnote the condemnation of Bautain discussed above: *Theses a Ludovico Eugenio Bautain iusse sui Episcopi subscriptae* (8 September 1840) and *Theses a Ludovico Eugenio Bautain ex mandato S. Cong. Episcoporum et Religiosorum subscriptae* (26 April 1844).[22] Whatever was 'validly contained in these discussions,' the Pope says, 'was included in the decree *Dei Filius*' from the First Vatican Council, which 'even today stands out as a point of reference for which we should aim if we wish to arrive at a fair and appropriate Christian exploration of these issues.' In other words, according to Pope John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, the contemporary mind of the Roman Catholic Church on what it understands as 'fideism' is apparently still to be found in the decrees of the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870.[23]

And in those decrees, from Chapter 2, 'On revelation' ('De revelatione') in Session III, 'Dogmatic constitution on the catholic faith' ('Constitutio dogmatica de fide catholica'), we read that the Church 'holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason' (citing Romans 1.20).[24] And Chapter 4, 'On faith and reason' ('De fide et ratione') states: 'Even though faith is above reason, there can never be any real disagreement between faith and reason, since it is the same God who reveals the mysteries and infuses faith, and who has endowed the

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[22] Denzinger, §§2751-56 and §§2765-69. *Fides et Ratio* also discusses 'the seductive attractions of fideism' ('proclivita ad fidem blandimenta') in Chapter V, Paragraphs 53 and 55.

[23] Although the exact title does not appear as such in Tanner (see below), Session III, promulgated on 24 April 1870, is known as *Dei Filius*. Although I will cite these documents from Tanner, *Dei Filius* may also be found in Denzinger §§3000-45.

[24] Norman P. Tanner SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils: Volume Two (Trent to Vatican II)* (Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990), 806: 'Eadem sancta mater ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse'.

human mind with the light of reason. God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever be in opposition to truth.'[25] Thus, the famous canon: 'If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of reason: let him be anathema.'[26]

Now, much can be and has been said on the epistemological implications of *Dei Filius* that cannot detain us here, and I will return to this question in Chapter Five.[27] However, it is important to briefly comment on three matters. First, Carroll points out that although John Paul II clearly takes *Dei Filius* to be condemning fideism, the word itself does not appear in the documents of Vatican I. According to Carroll, the word 'fideism' does not appear in a papal encyclical until *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* of 1907.[28] That may be less significant than Carroll thinks, in that *Dei Filius* ends with a general warning to avoid all 'such wrong opinions, though not expressly mentioned in this document, [that] have been banned and forbidden by this

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[25] Tanner, *Decrees*, 808-809: 'Verum etsi fides sit supra rationem, nulla tamen unquam inter fidem et rationem vera dissensio esse potest: cum idem Deus, qui mysteria revelat et fidem infundit, animo humano rationis lumen indiderit; Deus autem negare seipsum non possit, nec verum vero unquam contradicere.'

[26] Tanner, *Decrees*, 810. This is the first canon from the second set of canons, 'On revelation' ('De revelatione'): 'Si quis dixerit, Deum unum et verum, creatorem et dominum nostrum, per ea, quae facta sunt, naturali rationis humanae lumine certo cognosci non posse: a. s.'

[27] Regarding the epistemological commitments of Vatican I, Denys Turner explores this issue at length in *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), seriously considering 'the possibility that the Bishops of the First Vatican Council were right—and, after all, they might be.' (xi) See also the general discussion of natural theology in Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Blackwell, 2002), 35-51, and especially 37-38 where he considers Vatican I. On 60-63 he discusses the alleged 'scriptural authority' for natural theology provided by the common citation of Romans 1.20, as seen above. As Kerr puts it, for Thomas Aquinas, at any rate (and so, perhaps, for Vatican I as well), Romans 1.20 means that 'it has been divinely revealed that the existence of God can be demonstrated from reasoning from the existence and nature of the world. It is a matter of faith that God's existence can be discovered from reason.' (60)

[28] See Carroll, 6 and 16-17. *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* is cited in note 6 above.

holy see.'[29] Carroll's main point, however, is that in contexts such as *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* and *Fides et Ratio* 'the meaning of "fideism" is presumed to be understood—and to be understood as a term of reproach.'[30]

Second, *Dei Filius* (24 April 1870)—as well as, more immediately, *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (8 September 1907)—set the stage for the Anti-Modernist Oath, or Oath Against Modernism, which was issued by Pope Pius X on 1 September 1910 and officially remained in effect until 1967.[31] To be sworn by all clergy, pastors, confessors, preachers, religious superiors, and professors in theological seminaries, the oath begins as follows:

> I, _____, firmly embrace and accept all and each of the things defined, affirmed and declared by the inerrant Magisterium of the Church, mainly those points of doctrine directly opposed to the errors of our time. And in the first place I profess that God, beginning and end of all things, can be certainly known, and therefore also proved, as the cause through the effects, by the natural light of reason through the things that have been made, that is, through the visible works of creation.[32]

Obviously, the second sentence is a direct reference to the passages from *Dei Filius* cited above. Hence the very first profession of the oath entails the rejection of fideism, as understood by the Roman Catholic Church. Epistemological concerns are 'front and centre.'

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[29] Tanner, *Decrees*, 811.

[30] Carroll, 6.

[31] Denzinger §§3537-3550. It is also reproduced in English as the Appendix of Fergus Kerr's *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Blackwell, 2007), 223-225. See Kerr's discussion in a section of his first chapter ('Before Vatican II'), aptly titled 'Reason under Oath,' 1-3. For an on-line version of the Oath, in both Latin and English, see http://www.traditionalcatholic.net/Tradition/Prayer/Modernism_Oath.html (accessed on 14 April 2008).

[32] In Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 223. As cited in Denzinger §3538, the Latin of the second sentence reads: 'Ac primum quidem: Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali rationis lumine "per ea quae facta sunt" [*Rm 1,20*], hoc est, per visibilia creationis opera, tamquam causam per effectus, certo cognosci, adeoque demonstrari etiam posse, profiteor.'

Third and finally, it is important to note that both *Dei Filius* and the Oath insist that belief in God's existence is not simply rational, or supported by arguments and evidence, but that God's existence can be 'certainly known, and therefore also proved' ('certo cognosci, adeoque demonstrari etiam posse'). God 'can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason' ('naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse'). Thus, at least according to the standard reading of these two documents, certain *proof* and hence *knowledge* of God through human reason is the traditional epistemological standard to which the Church summons the faithful.[33]

B. 'Semi-fideism': An Essential Excursus

And not just the existence of God, but the immortality of the soul, the principles of morality, the fact of divine revelation, and the credibility of Christianity—all of this can and must be, not just supported, but *proved* by reason alone. Matczak helpfully clarifies this traditional Roman Catholic epistemological standard by introducing the sub-category of *semi-fideism*. Semi-fideism 'holds that man reaches truth by reason, but with probability only and not with certitude.'[34] Although semi-fideism is less irrational and thus less objectionable than fideism

[33] Kerr questions this conventionally rationalistic reading of Vatican I in his *After Aquinas*, seeing it as overly indebted to the Leonine Thomism instigated by Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris* (see note 35 below). Stating that the Council 'sought to steer a way between the twin errors of fideism and rationalism,' when read rightly in this context 'the claim for the possibility of knowing God with certainty from the world, by the natural light of reason, is not as ambitious as Roman Catholic apologists have often hoped and Barthian theologians always feared….The emphasis is entirely on the claim that reasoning of some kind from the existence of the world to the existence of God is possible, without appealing to faith' (38). I am sympathetic to this interpretative strategy, if not necessarily persuaded. Denys Turner, at least, takes the more ambitious reading for granted. In comments on an earlier version of this chapter, David Brown pointed out that Kerr's rather more modest interpretation is at least allowable in the ambiguous Latin of Vatican I, if not supported by the conventional reading of it.

[34] Matczak, 'Fideism,' 711. Matczak uses the term without a hyphen, but I follow Brush in adding it, and adapt quotations from Matczak accordingly.

simpliciter, it too is an unacceptable position in the eyes of the Church. Matczak writes: 'The Church's rejection of semi-fideism can be deduced from its insistence, in the above cited decrees [e.g., the theses against Bautain, various papal encyclicals including Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, and Vatican I], on the proofs with certitude of God's existence, of the spirituality of the soul, and of the credibility of divine revelation. The particularly important decree for this certitude is that of Vatican Council I'.[35]

The term 'semi-fideism' in Catholic theological discourse—at least in English—seems both to originate with and be limited to Matczak's article in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*. So far, I have found no other use of the term in Roman Catholic reference works or theology texts, although with the second (2003) edition of *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Matczak's original (1967) article is still current, widely read, and—as Wolterstorff says—'authoritative' (in the scholarly sense that it accurately summarises traditional Catholic teaching on this issue). Carroll does not discuss semi-fideism as such or by name. On-line searches in English, Latin, and French reveal very little use of the term at all: contemporary academic discussion seems to associate it not with Roman Catholicism *per se* but with the thought of the French Protestant Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), and this association seems to have originated in Bayle studies with Craig B. Brush, *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on*

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[35] Ibid., 712. Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni Patris*, 'On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy' (Denzinger §§3135-40), published on 4 August 1879, was an immensely influential text, instigating the renewal of the study of St Thomas Aquinas throughout the Church, and thus the development of so-called neo-Thomism and neo-scholasticism in pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism. While it is thus also highly relevant for the Roman Catholic understanding of fideism, it cannot be considered further here. For an on-line English translation see the official Vatican website: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/ encyclicals /documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_04081879_aeterni-patris_en.html (accessed on 14 April 2008).

the Theme of Skepticism.[36] But, as this text appeared the year before Matczak's article was first published, it is very unlikely to have influenced his terminology. Brush himself seems to be relying on what he calls a 'conservative Catholic' text by Herman Janssen, published in 1930, and has apparently appropriated an apt Catholic term to describe Bayle's religious epistemology. Thus, according to Brush, 'To hold that [the existence of God, the fact of divine revelation, and God's trustworthiness] are demonstrated only probably, and not conclusively, is semi-fideism.'[37]

But the specific category (of error) that Matczak, Brush, and perhaps Janssen call semi-fideism was certainly recognised by the Church beforehand, with or without a particular term to describe it, as the decrees and encyclicals and council documents cited above indicate. G. M. Sauvage, writing over half a century earlier than Matczak in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1909, does not use the term 'semi-fideism'. However, he still writes:

> As to the opinion of those who maintain that our supernatural assent is prepared for by motives of credibility merely probable, it is evident that it

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[36] (cited in note 4). See, for example, Karl C. Sandberg's review of Brush's book in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 8 (1970), 103-104; and Sean O'Cathasaigh, 'Skepticism and Belief in Pierre Bayle's *Nouvelle Letteres Critiques*,' *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984), 421-433. A text that uses the term without reference to Brush is D. E. Curtis, 'Pierre Bayle and the Range of Cartesian Reason,' *Yale French Studies* 49 (1973), 71-81.

[37] Brush, 19. In footnote 1 on page 19, Brush says, 'The definition of fideism adopted here is the conservative Catholic one used by Herman Janssen in his *Montaigne fidéist* (Nijmegen and Utrecht: Dekker and van de Vegt and van Leeuwen, 1930),' although he also depends on Sauvage's article on 'fideism' in the 1909 *Catholic Encyclopedia*, which he cites at length (as do I, on the following page). So Janssen may well be Brush's source for the term 'semi-fideism,' particularly as he describes it as a 'technical term' when applying it to Bayle's position on the rationality of religious belief (300). Brush correctly realises, however, that he is using both 'fideism' and 'semi-fideism' anachronistically in applying either one or the other to Bayle or anyone in his era: fideism is 'a nineteenth century name' (18); 'the word, originally coined by French Protestant theologians, varies in its usage' (19 footnote 1); 'One must remember that that concept of fideism is a modern one, and that many precise philosophical distinctions familiar to the modern world were unknown in the greater part of the sixteenth century' (19 footnote 1). Carroll would approve of his historical sensitivity.

> logically destroys the certitude of such an assent. This opinion was condemned by Innocent XI in the decree of 2 March, 1679 [Denzinger §2121], and by Pius X in the decree 'Lamentabili sane' [§3425]: 'Assensus fidei ultimo innititut in congerie probabilitatum' (The assent of faith is ultimately based on a sum of probabilities). Revelation, indeed, is the supreme motive for faith in supernatural truths, yet the existence of this motive and its validity has to be established by reason.[38]

Matczak says rather dismissively that semi-fideism 'is accepted mainly by some scientists.'[39] However, for those attuned to certain currents in recent Anglo-American philosophy of religion, semi-fideism sounds rather familiar: it is, in fact, identical to the cumulative case, or probabilistic, approach to religious epistemology discussed in Chapter One, which is precisely concerned with a *congerie probabilitatum*.[40] And this probabilistic strategy has, moreover, been identified as particularly characteristic of Anglicanism. Without using the term 'semi-fideism,' William J. Abraham states that the cumulative case approach 'constitutes a fascinating alternative to the prevailing options in philosophy on the rationality of religious belief. Thus, in a characteristically Anglican fashion it seems to chart a *via media* between the classical proofs of the natural theologians and the voluntarism of the fideists.'[41] Here, in distinguishing the cumulative case approach from *both* natural

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[38] Sauvage, 'Fideism,' 69. I have updated Sauvage's older Denzinger references with the current numbering system. *Lamentabili sane*, Pope Pius X's 'Syllabus Lamenting the Errors of the Modernists' (Denzinger §§3401-66) was published on 3 July 1907 and so several months before his similarly-themed encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (cited in note 6). *Lamentabili sane* seems not to be on the Vatican website, but an English translation may be found on-line at http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius10/p10lamen.htm (accessed 14 April 2008). The proposition cited by Sauvage to be 'condemned and proscribed' is Number 25 (Denzinger §3425), given in both Latin and English above, and translated slightly differently on this website as: 'The assent of faith ultimately rests on a mass of probabilities.'

[39] Matczak, 'Fideism,' 711.

[40] See William J. Abraham, 'Cumulative Case Arguments for Christian Theism,' in William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell* (Clarendon Press, 1987), 17-37.

[41] Ibid., 18-19.

theology *and* fideism, Abraham argues that these are not the mutually exclusive options they are often advertised to be, but that between them one may find a *via media*, a *tertium quid*. Elsewhere, Abraham is more specific about why he sees this approach to religious epistemology as rooted in or associated with Anglicanism:

> It is surely no accident that cumulative case arguments become the hallmark of religious epistemology in the Anglican tradition. One thinks immediately of a line of great figures: Richard Hooker, William Chillingworth, John Locke, Bishop Butler, John Henry Newman, [F. R.] Tennant, J. R. Lucas, Basil Mitchell, and Richard Swinburne. Just as there is a distinctive Reformed epistemology and a distinctive Roman Catholic epistemology, there is also a distinctive Anglican epistemology. The full sweep of this tradition awaits careful historical exposition which would attend to its continuities and diversity.[42]

The fact that that Basil Mitchell (though not Austin Farrer) is included in that list may be taken as a hint to the reader that this chapter's journey through the history of fideism does have a purpose and will eventually join up with the main argument of the dissertation.[43] For now, let me simply note that, to the extent that it demurs from

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[42] William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 212 footnote 50. This note occurs in a chapter titled 'Canonical Synthesis: The Anglican *Via Media*' (188-214). Abraham, a Northern Irish Methodist, is not entirely sanguine about this allegedly Anglican epistemology and goes on to raise a number of critical concerns. It should be noted that, in his list of great Anglican epistemologists, Newman of course became a Roman Catholic and Swinburne is now Orthodox—and yet each continued to hold his previously constructed 'Anglican' epistemology. It should also be noted that instead of the obviously intended *F. R.* Tennant (1866-1957), the English philosophical theologian, Abraham accidentally included *William* Tennant (1784-1848), a native of Anstruther, Fife, sometime Professor of Oriental Languages at St Mary's College, University of St Andrews, and author of a Scots poem, *Papistry Storm'd* (1827).

[43] Actually, Abraham *does* include Farrer in an earlier list from 1987, along with some non-Anglican figures. He writes, 'Any through historical survey [of cumulative case arguments] would have to include figures as diverse as Charles Hartshorne, Richard Swinburne, Elton Trueblood, Basil Mitchell, J. R. Lucas, Austin Farrer, and Gary Gutting. All of these have in one way or another deployed cumulative case arguments to support the rationality of religious belief. In doing so they have highlighted and retrieved an approach to natural theology that can be traced right back to F. R. Tennant and John Henry Newman to Joseph Butler.' (17) Two additional contemporary Anglican defenders of the cumulative case approach that could be added are the late William P. Alston and David Brown.

attributing proof and certainty ('certo cognosci') to our knowledge of God, traditional Anglican religious epistemology seems identical to an error condemned by the Roman Catholic Church in Vatican I, an error explicitly proscribed by Pius X in *Lamentabili sane* ('The assent of faith ultimately rests on a mass of probabilities'), an error understood by the Church to be a species of fideism, an error to which S. A. Matczak and others assign the term 'semi-fideism'. I therefore suggest that Anglican epistemology is equivalent to semi-fideism—or, perhaps better, what Abraham calls 'soft rationalism'.[44] I will return to this thought in Section IV below.

C. Philosophical Definitions of 'Fideism'

Given the origins of the term in 19th century French theology, both Protestant and Catholic, Thomas D. Carroll worries that when fideism is (properly) defined 'in a historically sensitive way, it may not be robust enough to survive being detached from its context.'[45] Non-historically sensitive usage tends to oscillate between vagueness of content and inaccuracy of application. But 'fideism' is now employed most often in precisely such detached contexts, being considered as a 'general category in religious and philosophical thought.'[46] As Carroll explains in a valuable summary, over the course of the 20th century,

> use of the term 'fideism' drifts from these nineteenth-century contexts and is projected back through the history of ideas to refer to philosophers and theologians such as Kierkegaard, Montaigne, Pascal, Erasmus, and Tertullian. In each of these thinkers, embrace of Christian faith was coupled with a relative lack of trust in philosophy for discovering religious truth. The term

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[44] See William J. Abraham, 'Soft Rationalism' in Michael Peterson, et. al. (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, Second Edition (Oxford University Press, 2000), 98-108. As Abraham presents it, soft rationalism has three main tenets: (i) religious belief should be assessed as a 'global theory' or worldview; (ii) assessment of such global theories is never a matter of 'simple demonstration or strict probabilistic reasoning'; and yet (iii) such cumulative-case assessment is still genuinely rational. Soft rationalism is thus a *rational* alternative to either 'hard rationalism' or fideism.

[45] Carroll, 7-8.

[46] Ibid., 6.

> was taken to be helpful for understanding the occasional opposition, for religious reasons, between philosophy and theology.[47]

In making this observation, Carroll now moves us from the concerns of the historian of dogma or ideas back to our primary interest in theology and philosophy of religion. For when one encounters references to fideism in such contemporary contexts, it is almost always described ahistorically as a *philosophical* position that has existed from the dawn of time—or, at least, Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360-275 BCE). As Carroll puts it, 'philosophers, on the whole, have been drawn to seek after the essential doctrine underlying various instances of fideism through intellectual history'.[48] For a widely read and very useful example of this tendency, consider the anonymously-written definition of fideism offered in *A Dictionary of Philosophy* (edited by Antony Flew) which was already cited in Chapter One:

> The view, recurrent throughout religious history, that essential religious doctrines cannot be established by rational means, but only accepted, if at all, by acts of faith. Its extreme form (for example, in Kierkegaard) holds that religion requires the acceptance of doctrines actually absurd or contrary to reason (*compare* credo quia impossibile). In its more moderate forms (for example, in St Augustine or Pascal), reason is not antithetically opposed to faith, but plays an auxiliary role in formulating or elucidating what must first be accepted by faith.[49]

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[47] Ibid., 17.

[48] Ibid., 5. Thus, even Matczak, despite his expert awareness of the specific historical derivation of 'fideism' with Ménégoz and Sabatier, its association with Bautain and subsequent treatment by the Magisterium, nevertheless includes the following figures and movements as somehow representative of or touched by fideism: Tertullian (c.160-c.225), al-Ghazzālī (1058-1111), William of Ockham (c.1285-c.1347), Martin Luther (1483-1546) and Protestantism generally, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Thomas Reid (1710-1796), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Friedrich Jacobi (1743-1819), Johann Herder (1744-1803), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) and existentialism generally, William James (1842-1910), Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976), Martin Buber (1878-1965), Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), Karl Barth (1886-1968), and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973). Other figures commonly associated with fideism are Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Lev (Leo) Shestov (1866-1938), and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).

[49] *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, editorial consultant, Anthony Flew (Pan Books, Second Revised Edition, 1983), 120.

And the very distinguished, late, Roman Catholic, analytic philosopher of religion Philip Quinn, in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, offers an almost identical entry, although with a stronger interpretive sting in the tail:

> Fideists hold that religious belief is based on faith rather than reason. Extreme fideists maintain that it is contrary to reason; moderate fideists argue that what must first be accepted on faith may subsequently find rational support. The maxim *credo quia absurdum est* encapsulates the former view; the slogan *credo ut intelligam* epitomizes the latter. There being no reason to prefer one absurdity to another, the commitments of extreme fideists are bound to seem arbitrary.[50]

It would, of course, be possible to question these entries' interpretations of Tertullian (by allusion—note the two different versions of his famous, controversial, oft-misunderstood, and even mis-rendered tag), Augustine (by name and allusion), Anselm (by allusion), Pascal, and Kierkegaard—and that is partly Carroll's concern.[51] But the broader question he raises about such standard philosophical definitions of fideism is their ahistorical and/or pejorative character. That is, given the word's actual origins, to what extent may we rightly describe fideism as the view, '*recurrent throughout religious history*, that essential religious doctrines cannot be established by rational means, but only accepted, if at all, by acts of faith' (Flew, emphasis added)? Carroll questions whether there is, indeed, any such recurrent animal (or

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[50] Philip Quinn, 'fideism,' in Ted Honderich (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Second Edition (Oxford University Press, 2005), 301.

[51] For example, he points out that, according to Geoffrey D. Dunn's *Tertullian* (New York: Routledge, 2004), Tertullian did not, in fact, say either *credo quia impossibile* or *credo quia absurdum est*, but *credible est, quia ineptum est* (Carroll, page 7 and note 24). And others have argued that precisely what Tertullian meant by this phrase should be construed against the background of legal rhetoric rather than sceptical philosophy: he was trying to win a case, not solve an epistemological dilemma. See Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, Second Edition (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 253 note 1, referring to Robert H. Ayers, '"Tertullian's Paradox" and "Contempt for Reason" Reconsidered,' *The Expository Times* (July 1976), 308-311. However, in comments on an earlier version of this chapter, David Brown also noted that the very category 'rhetoric' carried more epistemic weight in the classical context than in the contemporary one—it was not simply contrasted with reason or logic, but was itself a form of truth-seeking discourse.

perennial plant). And, with those such as Quinn in mind, he avers that 'fideism, when used pejoratively, is not very useful in academic discourse.'[52]

I will return to Carroll's concerns and conclusions in Section III of this chapter, but we must first consider two widely-used methods of classifying fideism in contemporary philosophical—rather than theological—discussion. We have already encountered the first method in the citations from Flew and Quinn above, namely the division of fideism into *extreme* (or *radical*) and *moderate* (or *responsible*) varieties. Rightly or wrongly, in this method Tertullian and Kierkegaard are associated with extreme fideism, and Augustine, Anselm, and sometimes even Aquinas are associated with moderate fideism.[53] Extreme fideism, it is said, sees religious belief as absurd or irrational—but still to be believed—whereas moderate fideism sees religious belief as starting with faith which may then find rational support. In extreme fideism, faith is contrary to reason; in moderate fideism, faith precedes reason.

The second method of classification is associated with the work of Terence Penelhum, whose *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* remains the standard historical study of fideism from the perspective of the philosophy of

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[52] Carroll, 4. For a good, clear, careful, historically-sensitive and very helpful survey of fideism that avoids some of the mistakes Carroll finds in most philosophical discussion on this topic, see Richard Amesbury's entry on fideism in the on-line *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fideism/ (accessed on 28 October 2009)

[53] For other examples of this classification beside Flew and Quinn, see Richard H. Popkin, 'Fideism', in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volume Three* (Macmillan / Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1967), 201-202; ibid., *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (University of California Press, 1979), xix-xxi; and Terence Penelhum, 'Fideism', in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 376-382. C. Stephen Evans considers the extent to which Thomas Aquinas might be considered a moderate or responsible fideist in a chapter titled 'Faith Above Reason: Aquinas' in *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 55-64. Recall that Diogenes Allen associated his arguably 'moderate fideist' interpretation of Farrer with Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas as well.

religion, despite its publication twenty-six years ago.[54] Penelhum defines fideism as 'a recurrent theme in religious thought' which holds that 'that faith and reason are so disparate that faith is not undermined, but strengthened, if we judge that reason can give it no support.'[55] Following the historical work of Richard Popkin, Penelhum accepts the thesis that at least some forms of fideism were directly influenced by the 16th century renewal of the study of the classical sceptical tradition: that is, the tradition of Greek philosophers such as Pyrrho of Elis (c.360-c.275 BCE), Arcesilas (c.315-241), Carneades (c.213-129) and their Roman disciples such as Sextus Empiricus (c.160-c.210 CE), who denied that we have any real knowledge of anything at all, religious or otherwise.[56] Such fideists, Penelhum says, 'consider the case for Fideism to be made even stronger if one judges that reason cannot give us truth or assurance outside the sphere of faith any more than within it. In other words, they sustain their Fideism by an appeal to Skepticism. I will call them, therefore, Skeptical Fideists.'[57]

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[54] (D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983). Primarily historical in nature, Penelhum still sees this book as 'an exercise in philosophical criticism' (ix), as his task is to evaluate as well as explicate, and he does take a fairly critical line against both scepticism and fideism. Two more recent, though less historically-oriented, philosophical *defences* of fideism are C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (cited above) and John Bishop, *Believing by Faith: An Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2007). A forthcoming study of fideism in theology is Olli-Pekka Vainio, *Beyond Fideism: Negotiable Religious Identities* (Ashgate, 2010).

[55] Penelhum, *God and Skepticism*, ix. In directly referring to Penelhum's work I will follow his conventions of spelling and capitalisation, but will then revert to standard British use.

[56] See ibid., Chapter 1, which surveys both classical scepticism and its relation to Descartes in some detail. Penelhum pays great tribute to Popkin's groundbreaking work on the 16th century rediscovery of classical scepticism, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*, cited in note 53 above. While certainly relevant to religious fideism, after the first chapter on 'The Intellectual Crisis of the Reformation' (1-17), Popkin's monograph is more purely philosophical in nature, and so a detailed engagement is reserved for Penelhum instead.

[57] Ibid., ix.

Crucially, however, Penelhum goes on to make a two-fold distinction within Skeptical Fideism: Conformist and Evangelical. He writes, 'The attempt to present Christian faith as analogous to the Pyrrhonian conformity to appearances I shall call Conformist Skeptical Fideism.'[58] And here he places Erasmus (c.1466-1536), Montaigne (1533-1592), and Bayle (1647-1706). Conformist Skeptical Fideists are true sceptics in regard to all human knowledge, but focus on the specific consequences of such global scepticism for religious belief, seeing it as a positive way of protecting religion from the depredations of reason. Denying reason's competency in religious as well as all other matters, they thus counsel passive conformity to dominant doctrinal contexts and communities. By contrast, those whom Penelhum calls Evangelical Skeptical Fideists recognize that

> Skeptic belieflessness and Christian faith are indeed the polar opposites they seem. But they have nevertheless seen Skepticism as a tradition which has, unintentionally, served the cause of faith by exposing the inability of human reason to provide grounds for the commitment faith embodies. In doing this, Skepticism has, in their view, prepared the way for divine grace to generate faith without philosophical obstacles. For on this view, the attempts of natural theology to ground faith in reason are, as it has been put in our own day 'a sustained attempt to replace conversion by argument'.[59]

And in this category Penelhum places Pascal (1623-1662) and Kierkegaard (1813-1855). Unlike the conformists, Evangelical Skeptical Fideists typically have religious as well as philosophical objections to natural theology.

Three themes characteristic of the Evangelical Skeptical Fideists that Penelhum explores at length are the rejection of proof, the hiddenness of God, and the reasons of the heart.[60] Evangelical Skeptical Fideists are also inclined toward what Penelhum calls 'the Parity Argument': 'the popular argument which says, roughly,

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[58] Ibid., 15. See Chapters 2 and 3.

[59] Ibid., 15-16. The quotation at the end is from Alasdair MacIntyre, 'The Logical Status of Religious Belief,' in *Metaphysical Beliefs* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 210.

[60] See ibid., Chapters 4 and 5.

that the Skeptic shows us that our common-sense beliefs lack intellectual foundations, and in showing us this makes it clear that the assent that faith requires is analogous to the assent we give, without resistance, to the tenets of common-sense.'[61] In addition to Pascal and Kierkegaard, Penelhum reckons that both Alvin Plantinga and Norman Malcolm employ versions of the Parity Argument.[62]

Finally, in a later essay that presents the basic argument of the book in summarised form, Penelhum asks:

> But what has this to do with us today? My answer is that both Conformist Fideism and Evangelical Fideism have close contemporary counterparts, and that our response to those counterpart forms of apologetic can benefit from the recognition that they are counterparts to these earlier positions. The contemporary counterpart of Conformist Fideism, is the position which Kai Nielson has called Wittgensteinian Fideism, and is most commonly associated with D. Z. Phillips….The contemporary counterpart of Evangelical Fideism is the position of those, particularly Malcolm and Plantinga, who insist that the rationality of religious belief is independent of the existence of grounds for it.[63]

In short, in addition to the two classifications of fideism considered above—extreme and moderate—Penelhum offers us a second method, applicable to those fideists who 'sustain their Fideism by an appeal to Skepticism,' namely to divide such

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[61] Ibid., x. Penelhum considers the Parity Argument at length in Chapter 7: 'Fideism and Some Recent Arguments.'

[62] Ibid., 147-158. Plantinga, in an essay that was later incorporated into his classic statement of Reformed epistemology, 'Reason and Belief in God,' in Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16-93. Malcolm, in 'The Groundlessness of Belief,' reprinted several times, including in his *Thought and Knowledge* (Cornell University Press, 1977), 199-216. Norman Malcolm (1911-1990), was an American philosopher who studied with Wittgenstein in Cambridge in the late 1930s, taught at Cornell University for many years, and who was a major interpreter and defender of Wittgenstein's thought.

[63] Terence Penelhum, 'Sceptics, Believers, and Historical Mistakes', *Synthese* 67 (1986), 138. In a robust response to this article, Eleonore Stump questions even the fairly limited value Penelhum places on the sceptical tradition in philosophy, and strongly dissents from his reading of Plantinga as 'any sort of skeptic, fideistic or otherwise'. See Eleonore Stump, 'Penelhum on Skeptics and Fideists', *Synthese* 67 (1986), 147-154. Nielson, Phillips, and Plantinga will be considered at more length in Chapter Five of this dissertation, so I will not comment further on their position in Penelhum's schema at this time.

Skeptical Fideists into Conformists and Evangelicals. We thus now have five possible categories of fideism at our disposal—extreme, moderate, semi-, conformist, and evangelical—which may or may not overlap amongst themselves.

II. Reason Itself on Trial: Another Essential (But Brief) Excursus

All of these definitions of fideism, whether religious or philosophical, derive their energy from a contrast between faith and reason, with fideism giving the former priority over the latter. But a pervasive feature of our contemporary Western intellectual situation, even (perhaps especially) in philosophy, is a crisis of confidence in the power of reason to do what reason was once thought competent to do—namely, to give us accurate and independent access to knowledge of reality ('truth'). In some influential quarters, such confidence is now held to be naïve at best and dangerous at worst, contributing to a host of ills both individual and social. We must thus at least acknowledge a development that challenges the very distinction between 'faith' and 'reason' on which the term *fideism* is based: the postmodern questioning of reason itself. For postmodernism, it is reason, not faith, that is on trial.

Often said to have (re)originated with Hume and Kant in the 18th century and been exacerbated by Marx and Freud in the 19th century, more or less radical critiques of reason are now frequently associated with a variety of movements sharing the common rubric 'postmodern'. To the extent that it questions reason's competence, postmodernism is similar to both the classical and 16th century scepticism discussed earlier, but remains an independent philosophical movement with its own distinctive concerns and emphases. In a remarkably clear and hence extremely valuable survey of contemporary French postmodernism, Merold Westphal associates such views with both Nietzschean perspectivism ('there are no facts, only interpretations') and the

claim that Descartes's 'clear and distinct ideas' are purely chimerical.[64] He then enunciates the following three theses:

- As the denial of unmediated presence to either meanings or facts, postmodernism is a critique of *the metaphysics of presence*.
- As the denial of Hegelian totality, postmodernism is a critique of *onto-theo-logy*.
- As the denial of the identity of (human) thought and being, postmodernism is a critique of *logocentrism*.[65]

Although such jargon can be forbidding to the non-cognoscenti, Westphal continues:

> These three terms, the metaphysics of presence, onto-theo-logy, and logocentrism are bandied about rather loosely in postmodern contexts [but] they can be given reasonably precise meanings, and when they are they turn out to be more or less interchangeable because, while the sense is different in each case, the reference is pretty much the same. They point, in different ways, to the perennial tendency of western philosophy to overvalue its conceptual currency.[66]

Westphal also provides a helpfully succinct discussion of two other frequently encountered-and-employed terms in such postmodern contexts: namely, the 'hermeneutics of finitude' and the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'. He says that the former

> emphasizes the embeddedness of our concepts and our judgments in the sensible, temporal, linguistic, historico-cultural milieux from which we can never fully extract ourselves by reflection; the latter emphasizes the role of interests and desires, often disreputable enough to require repression and denial, in the work of the mind that would like to call itself 'Reason'.[67]

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[64] Merold Westphal, 'Postmodernism and Religious Reflection,' in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995), 128. This issue also published as Eugene T. Long (ed.), *God, Reason, and Religions: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995).

[65] Ibid., 128-129, 131 (emphasis added).

[66] Ibid., 131.

[67] Ibid., 131-132. For a book-length study of the hermeneutics of suspicion in relation to religious belief, looking specifically at Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche, see Westphal's *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism* (Fordham University Press, 1998), originally published by Eerdmans in 1993.

In other words, according to such postmodern views, reason itself is limited, situated bodily, and contextualised in history, culture, gender, and language. It is never objective, never neutral, never free from bias, and those biases may range from the moderately distracting to the deeply corrupt. As Mary McClintock Fulkerson puts it, 'Knowledge is not *tainted* by interest; it *is* interest.'[68] What is thus presented as the ineluctable deliverances of a pure, disembodied, impartial rationality may in fact be the irrational and destructive outworking of obsession, neurosis, self-deception, class or gender or race prejudice—and so on.[69] Such a postmodern critique or unmasking of reason's finitude and false consciousness is often said to signal the end of the Enlightenment hope (or 'project') of replacing religion, or tradition, or authority, or ethnicity, or nationality with a supposedly universal and secular norm—reason—that transcends all human diversities and so provides an effective cohesion to our inevitability pluralistic society. But reason, it turns out, on this story, is no more secure a foundation on which to build than any of these other options. This is cause for either lament or celebration, depending on your view of the Enlightenent.[70]

In a somewhat similar fashion to Westphal, Paul Murray identifies what he calls two recurrent themes in the postmodern questioning of reason: 'the first of these

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[68] Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Changing the Subject: Women's Discourses and Feminist Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress University Press, 1994), 25 (emphasis in the original). I indebted to William Abraham's discussion of Fulkerson for this quotation, in his *Canon and Criterion*, 450-460 (453).

[69] In addition to the theological / epistemological work of Fulkerson, for another feminist view on the implications of this reconfiguration of reason for the philosophy of religion, see Sarah Coakley, 'Analytic Philosophy of Religion in Feminist Perspective: Some Questions,' in her *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Blackwell, 2002), 98-105.

[70] In addition to the Reformed epistemologists Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff referenced in Chapter One, four major contemporary Anglophone figures in theology and philosophy associated with this broader postmodern—or at the very least post-foundationalist—critique of the ambitions of 'Enlightenment reason' are Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Hauerwas, Jeffrey Stout, and John Milbank. I will briefly consider some of these figures in Chapter Five.

themes presses the claim that there are no neutral perspectives on reality, [while] the second further shifts attention away from the human person as knower by emphasizing the "open texture" of reality and the constructive role that humans play in its shaping.'[71] If the first of these two themes is epistemological and conflates the hermeneutics of finitude and suspicion, the second is more metaphysical and moves toward radical anti-(or non-)realism and constructivism. It thus 'compounds the relativising of human reason occasioned by the first by maintaining that human engagement with reality consists primarily in the shaping, unfolding and living of ever new realities rather than being limited to the attempt to understand reality as given.'[72] Reality, on this view, is not something fixed and external to which we must conform our beliefs and behaviour or else face the consequences, but rather something we apparently make up as we go along. Reality itself, not simply our knowledge of it, is fluid and relative. Epistemology thus dissolves metaphysics, and hermeneutical analysis of texts gives way to ontological anti-realism.

Contemporary philosophers of religion—particularly in the analytic tradition—are often accused of ignoring postmodern concerns. But as we have seen in Chapter One, to varying degrees Basil Mitchell, Brian Hebblethwaite, and Diogenes Allen all deal either explicitly or implicitly with the metaphysical and epistemological issues raised by postmodernism's radical critique of reason. For example, Mitchell's partial endorsement of Kuhn and firm rejection of

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[71] Paul Murray, *Reason, Truth and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Peeters, 2004), 4. The first chapter of Murray's book, 'Establishing the Agenda: Christian Theology and the Postmodern Questioning of Reason' (3-22) provides an overview of these contemporary discussions, which subsequent chapters then explore in more detail.

[72] Ibid., 7. Murray associates the theological expression of this anti-(or non-)realistic theme with Mark C. Taylor and Don Cupitt. His critical philosophical attention is focused on the neo-pragmatism of Richard Rorty, with Nicholas Rescher's pragmatic-idealist position being viewed more favourably.

'Wittgensteinian fideism' and cultural-conceptual relativism, Hebblethwaite's clear defence of the canons of analytic philosophy against MacIntyre's tradition-constituted reason, and Allen's careful exploration of what natural theology might look like on the far side of the Enlightenment. All three are at least aware of postmodernism, and take account of it in their own justifications of religious belief, even if their assessments of the extent and value of the challenge differ.[73]

It remains to be seen whether Farrer's own work—which basically spanned the period 1940-1970—meets or even takes account of these issues. Mitchell claims that although Farrer 'was not confronted by the kind of sophisticated postmodernism which is now prevalent,' he nevertheless anticipated and rejected 'the typically postmodernist claim that philosophical viewpoints are culture-bound in the sense that they would only have developed within a given culture and that their meaning and truth-claims are bound up with the basic presuppositions of that culture.'[74] We will consider these matters further in subsequent chapters. But although of course the multiple metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical challenges of postmodernism are not going to be resolved in this dissertation, it is necessary to at least acknowledge the shadow they cast over all contemporary discussions of the rationality of religious belief—and indeed over the continuing validity of the very term 'fideism.' For if 'reason' is an illusion and the traditional contrast between faith and reason thus fails

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[73] For more on postmodernism, see David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 9-59; John D. Caputo, 'Messianic Postmodernism' (153-166), and Anselm Kyongsuk Min, 'The Other without History and Society—a Dialogue with Derrida' (167-185), in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave, 2001); and Graham Ward, 'Postmodern Theology', in David F. Ford with Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third Edition (Blackwell, 2005), 322-338.

[74] Basil Mitchell, 'Introduction' to Brian Hebblethwaite and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary* (SCM Press, 2006), 5.

to obtain, then what does it mean to prefer 'faith' over 'reason'? If postmodernism is right, we are all fideists, religious or otherwise.

III. Interim Conclusions on 'Fideism'

I now return to Carroll's concerns and conclusions about the use of 'fideism' in contemporary philosophical and theological discourse, as canvassed in Section I. Due to the pervasively ahistorical and pejorative character of most discussions of fideism, Carroll wonders 'whether the term can be excerpted from its original context of use and applied to this novel setting'.[75] He is most concerned about the term 'Wittgensteinian fideism'—and rightly so.[76] Apparently still maintaining the traditional faith / reason dichotomy questioned in Section II, Carroll rather provocatively claims that if fideism was 'defined loosely as the idea that the truth about religious matters cannot be established by natural reason alone, then the vast majority of religious thought—among the many religions of the world—would be fideistic. "Fideism" would lose its usefulness as a term of appraisal, being in extension little different than "religious thought".'[77] This worry is thus just the opposite of the postmodern one that closed Section II: not that we are all in fact fideists, whether religious or otherwise, but rather that all religion is in fact fideistic, because irrational—or at least not sufficiently rational. Strongly rationalistic critics of religion, such as Richard Dawkins, would take this view: 'religion' just equals 'fideism,' and so there is no non-fideistic religion.

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[75] Carroll, 10.

[76] See Kai Nielson and D. Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (SCM Press, 2005), which will be briefly discussed in Chapter Five.

[77] Carroll, 17-18.

Inspired, however, by Wittgenstein's later philosophy, rather than seeking a single definition, Carroll suggests that we look 'to the variety of ways the word is used—that is, to the *traditions* in which the term has been used.'[78] He thus hopes that 'study of particular traditions of use may contribute to the resolution of philosophical problems concerned with the alleged fideism of a philosopher or theologian.'[79] Suggesting that all pejorative uses of the term be abandoned in academic discourse, Carroll argues that the only valid uses of the term are the original 'symbolo-fideism' of Ménégoz and Sabatier and the two varieties of sceptical fideism identified by Penelhum, namely conformist and evangelical. The term should not be used, he thinks, in reference to the 'traditionalism' and 'fideism' of Magisterial pronouncements and papal encyclicals, or to the criticism of 'anti-metaphysical philosophy and theology.'[80] He is unhappy with the extreme / moderate distinction, as he believes it has 'not caught on widely in the literature and [relies] in some unspecified sense on one or more' of the senses he thinks should be either accepted or rejected.[81] Carroll concludes, 'Scrupulously identifying the tradition of fideism that informs one's scholarly use of the term is one way to avoid introducing further confusion into one's analysis of a problem.'[82]

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, my own research into fideism, although not as detailed and deeply historical as Carroll's, had independently drawn similar conclusions to his: specifically, that the term originated in a religious rather than a philosophical context; that it is often used pejoratively; that it can mean

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[78] Carroll, 18 (emphasis added).

[79] Ibid. Of course, this is precisely what I am trying to accomplish in this dissertation in regard to the 'alleged fideism' of Austin Farrer.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 21 footnote 59.

[82] Ibid., 19.

different things to philosophers and theologians; that it certainly means different things to Protestants and Roman Catholics; and that fixing on one specific contemporary definition is thus difficult if not impossible. Fideism, I claimed, is a highly context-dependent concept. I am thus very sympathetic with many of the conclusions that Carroll draws here. I agree that pejorative uses of 'fideism' should normally be avoided, that its actual historical context ought to be known and acknowledged, that the way to avoid confusion is to be attentive to particular traditions of use, and—thus—to offer or even attempt one conclusive definition is a mistake. We must speak of *fideisms*, rather than fideism *simpliciter*. However, I must demur from some of his other specific recommendations. Despite linking his own approach with the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, I think Carroll's lexicographical scrupulosity in fact betrays an insufficiently Wittgensteinian perspective.

Although he never cites it directly, at both the beginning and the end of his article, Carroll invokes Wittgenstein's well-known maxim that 'meaning is use'. He thus explicitly associates his entire project with Wittgenstein, stating that 'it is best to see how ['fideism'] was actually used in its *original* context and to construct extensions of the term carefully from this *original* use.'[83] And then, having limited himself (and us) to the original use, he argues that certain common uses are unacceptable—particularly ahistorical uses that ignore the word's originating context. I will come back to that in a moment. But, as Fergus Kerr has recently reminded us, Wittgenstein does not in fact offer the maxim 'meaning is use' without qualification.[84]

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[83] Ibid., 2 (emphasis added). What Carroll *does* cite as the opening epigraph of his article is *Philosophical Investigations*, Part I, §38.

[84] See Kerr's review of Terrance W. Klein, *Wittgenstein and the Metaphysics of Grace*, in *New Blackfriars* 89 (2008), 126-127. Kerr criticises Klein for making 'meaning as use' into an absolute, unqualified rule, but it is *not* the case, says Kerr, citing Klein, that 'the meaning of any word is its usage' (page 126 of Kerr's review, citing page xii of Klein).

What Wittgenstein actually wrote was: 'For a *large* class of cases—though not for all—in which we employ the word "meaning" it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language.'[85]

Recognising that these are deep and dangerous waters, and without going into technicalities in either hermeneutics or philosophy of language, I wish to propose that even from a broadly Wittgensteinian perspective we may consider at least three criteria for a term's meaning: etymology, origin, and use. Thus, in general, I would say that even ahistoric, essentialistic, philosophical definitions of 'fideism' are not necessarily unacceptable, but rather opportunistic. They take advantage of a convenient word whose etymology (Latin *fides* 'faith' + -ISM) is perfectly suited to a wide range of definitions involving an emphasis on faith. 'Fideism' can mean anything that 'faith-ism' can mean. Only definitions to the effect that fideism disparages or denigrates *faith* would be etymologically unacceptable.

As for origin, I agree that informed use of the term should be aware of its historical context, and that this context is particularly illuminating when considering the different meanings of 'fideism' within specifically Roman Catholic discourse and other, more Protestant or generically philosophical discourse. That is, it is important to know which meaning a specific author has in mind. But, as Carroll himself admits, *fidéisme* may well have been coined by 19th century French Roman Catholic writers entirely independently of Ménégoz and Sabatier, for their own purposes, and probably

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[85] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (Basil Blackwell, 1953), Part I, §43, 20e with German on facing text: 'Man kann für eine *große* Klasse von Fällen der Benützung des Wortes "Bedeutung"—wenn auch nicht für *alle* Fälle seiner Benützung—dieses Wort so erklären: Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache.' As Kerr points out in his critique of Klein, unlike the English translation, the original German italicises *alle* as well as *große*.

even beforehand.[86] So then why assign the originating context to Ménégoz and Sabatier alone and forbid it to Roman Catholics?

And as for use, I think that here Wittgenstein's qualified maxim actually counts *against* some of Carroll's conclusions rather than supports them. First, it is rather odd to invoke 'meaning is use' and then limit such usage to original and not subsequent activity. Second, 'fideism' is not an ordinary word in everyday language—no matter what the language. The 'language' in which it occurs is not primarily English, French, or Latin, but scholarship and official documents. 'Fideism' is a term of art, a word employed in professional academic discussions in philosophy, theology, and intellectual history. And, as both Carroll and Brush have noted, even in those contexts it has not been studied in great depth. So when considering how it is used, we have a very limited range of examples. Contrary to 'meaning is use,' Carroll wants to eliminate what he admits are the two most common uses of the term—namely, within Roman Catholicism and contemporary philosophy of religion—because he reckons they deviate to greater or lesser extents from the term's originating context. But these are precisely the 'particular traditions of use' we have to hand. As long as we recognise them *as* traditions—or, as different 'language games' with certain 'family resemblances'—then they are both free to employ 'fideism' as they like, within the range of its etymology, with rather different connotations or denotations, precisely because there is no one *exact* meaning of the term. The problem is not so much with their stipulated definitions, as with their application to particular individuals.[87]

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[86] Carroll, 8: 'Perhaps the most surprising feature of the history of the term "fideism" is that there seem to be two discrete points of origin for the term.'

[87] Philosophy and theology are of course replete with technical terms that are still defined and deployed very differently even within the same broad discipline. 'Rationalism', 'naturalism', 'humanism', and

So I wish to permit Roman Catholics and analytic philosophers of religion to continue to use 'fideism' as they have been accustomed, and as we have seen the term variously defined above. I would argue, however, that both of these traditions need a greater degree of self-awareness and self-critique about who may or may not belong in the category (or categories), and a greater awareness that fideism is a fluid phenomenon with different traditions of use. Some commonly classified figures (such as Tertullian) may be misplaced, some particular sets (such as 'extreme fideism') may be empty, other particular sets (such as 'semi-fideism') may have unexpected occupants, and what one tradition means by 'fideism' may not align exactly with another.

I also thus disagree with Carroll's claim that the distinction between extreme and moderate fideism has 'not caught on widely in the literature'—a rather odd claim given that he himself mentions the tendency to make this distinction on page 3 of his article. But, more to the point, given the paucity of discussions of fideism, those few books, dictionaries, and encyclopedia entries cited in Section I basically *are* 'the literature': they suffice to constitute a tradition. So, unlike Carroll, I wish to retain this method of classification. As we have already seen in the debate between Hebblethwaite and Allen, as was noted in the theses against Bautain, and as we shall see further in our consideration of Farrer, the distinction between an extreme fideism that sees faith as *contrary* to reason and a moderate fideism that sees faith as *preceding* reason is clear and useful, particularly in contrasting Roman Catholic and Protestant views.

'libertarian' are among the most obvious and prominent examples, but even 'existentialism' means something quite different in contemporary analytic metaphysics than it did in mid-20th century Parisian cafés.

Finally, I agree that *carelessly* or *wantonly* pejorative definitions of fideism are *overly* opportunistic, and should be chastised. So, for example, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines fideism as: 'A term applied to a variety of doctrines which hold in common belief in the incapacity of the intellect to attain to knowledge of divine matters and correspondingly put an excessive emphasis on faith.'[88] The 'excessive' is objectionable—it begs the question on precisely the issue at hand, namely whether or not the human intellect *is* capable of attaining such knowledge. This is a serious question that goes to the heart of both philosophy and theology, that divides various communions of Christendom, and whose answer is far from obvious. But, this being the case, individual philosophers or theologians, or specific traditions of philosophy and theology, may well have very carefully thought-out positions on this matter, and if they have concluded that what they understand fideism to entail is intolerably irrational, immoral, or heretical, then they certainly have the right to think ill of it. So, a *deliberately* pejorative definition may be put forward as the *conclusion* of an investigation, rather than assumed at the beginning. For Carroll to rule out all pejorative definitions is overly scrupulous.[89]

As stated above, I recognise that these are deep and dangerous waters. Carroll raises serious philosophical questions about the nature of linguistic meaning and difficult historical questions about classifying an allegedly perennial category of

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[88] 'Fideism' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition, 609.

[89] For example, in 'Does contemporary theology require a postfoundationalist way of knowing?', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60 (2007), 271-293, Kevin Diller considers various stipulated definitions of fideism, including (F3): 'A position is fideistic whenever an unsupported assumption becomes the *unassailable* ground of knowledge, or there are good reasons to think it is *not* true.' In light of those definitions, particularly (F3), he concludes, 'The real sting of fideism is its lack of humility which stifles dialogue and prevents the growth that can come from being challenged by other views.' (288) This seems to be a perfectly acceptable negative judgement on fideism *as Diller defines it*, and, in so defining it, has contributed to the tradition of its use.

human thought that is supposed to span enormously diverse centuries, cultures, religions, and languages. There is no doubt that a word coined in 19th century France has been, as he puts it, 'projected back through the history of ideas' to encompass those who certainly would not have known the term and perhaps not accepted it for themselves if they did. And this is certainly a questionable practice.

However, I am inclined to think that one can hold or reject a formulated intellectual position without knowing that it goes by a particular name or has a particular history. Alvin Plantinga, for example, reports that he did not know he was a Molinist until Anthony Kenny told him he was, since he had never heard of Luis de Molina (1535-1600), the Spanish Jesuit who apparently first developed the idea that God has 'middle knowledge' (*scientia media*) of counterfactual future contingents. Plantinga arrived at a similar position independently, but by the rather different route of contemporary modal logic and possible-world semantics.[90] Thus, like the title character of Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (1670), who spoke prose for more than forty years without knowing it (until a philosopher enlightened him), Plantinga might well have been a Molinist for more than forty years without knowing it (had not Kenny enlightened him). Elizabeth Anscombe, on the other hand, rejected middle knowledge on purely conceptual grounds when she first encountered the idea (as an adolescent!), without knowing of the long—and highly acrimonious—history of debate between Jesuits and Dominicans on this topic, and so without any historical context. She just 'couldn't see how that stuff could be true' and thus took the Dominican side without realising it.[91] If philosophers such as Plantinga and

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[90] See Alvin Plantinga's 'Self Profile' in James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (eds.), *Alvin Plantinga* (D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), 50.

[91] See the introduction to her *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind: Collected Philosophical Papers*, *Volume II* (Basil Blackwell, 1981), vii. For a classic contemporary discussion of Molinism

Anscombe can relate to 'Molinism' shorn of its name and historical context, then why not 'fideism' as well? Surely fideism can exist without 'fideism'.

But I also accept that thoughts are dependent on language, and that without a specific name and history to hand it is very unlikely that they would 'hang together' in quite the same way across so many divides. It is also extremely doubtful that a single definition of 'fideism' could possibly encompass all of those individuals and movements that are now associated with the term. So I fully agree that we must speak with Carroll of the *traditions* of fideism. I simply wish to keep more of those traditions in play than he seems to want to do—as well as to explicitly hold out the possibility of the criticism and even rejection of whatever a given tradition of fideism might turn out to be.[92]

In conclusion, 'fideism' can mean anything that 'faith-ism' can mean. Thus, we cannot determine in advance and in the abstract whether 'fideism' is good or bad; rational or irrational; what its precise parameters are; or whether a given figure is 'fideist' (and, if so, of what variety). Instead, we can only examine a number of possible traditions of definition and classification, look carefully at a specific example of *alleged* fideism, and then—in light of the various traditions of definition and classification—allow the particular features of the example before us to manifest themselves under questioning. The result will be known in the investigation, not before it.

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that both relates it to Plantinga's work and considers the Jesuit / Dominican conflict, see Robert Merrihew Adams, 'Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil,' originally published in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977), now reprinted in his *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 77-93.

[92] For more on this, see Hugo Strandberg, *The Possibility of Discussion: Relativism, Truth and Criticism of Religious Beliefs* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), and my review in *New Blackfriars* 89 (2008), 129-131.

IV. Conclusion: What 'Sort of' Fideist?

The conclusion of the first chapter suggests the analogy of a legal trial. Austin Farrer has been, as it were, accused of fideism by a key witness, Basil Mitchell. The two questions before the court are: 'Is he guilty as charged?' and 'Is it even a crime?' I am the judge presiding over the case. My readers are the jury. For the defence we have Brian Hebblethwaite, and for the prosecution Diogenes Allen. While this analogy is somewhat fanciful, it clearly identifies the issues at hand and the primary *dramatis personae* according to their roles in the investigation.

This present chapter was thus a necessary background exploration of what the charge of fideism might actually entail, given the multiple definitions and uses of the term. For the fourth (and penultimate) time, Basil Mitchell wrote in 1983 that his impression upon reading the manuscript of *Faith and Speculation* was that Farrer had apparently 'become a sort of fideist, content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer's sense of being nourished by the tradition in which he had been raised.'[93] While we are not yet in a position to comment about the justice of this remark vis-à-vis Farrer himself, having just surveyed in some detail various traditions of defining and classifying fideism, what can we now say about Mitchell's understanding and use of the term?

First, Mitchell describes Farrer as 'a *sort* of fideist,' thus leaving open the possibility that there may be more than one variety. He does not, therefore, make the common mistake of only holding to one specific definition. Second, he defines the sort of fideism Farrer seemed to exemplify in an interesting way, stating that Farrer seemed 'content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer's sense of being *nourished* by the *tradition* in which he had been raised.' This 'spiritual'

[93] Basil Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' 177.

understanding of fideism did not emerge so clearly in the material canvassed in this chapter, and the themes of spiritual 'nourishment' as well as the possible rationality of 'tradition' will be considered further in due course.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, implicit in Mitchell's description of Farrer's alleged fideism is Mitchell's own location in contemporary Anglo-American philosophy of religion and Anglican theology. Or, put differently, Mitchell is *not* wondering whether Farrer might have been a fideist in the Roman Catholic sense of the term. Here, at long last, we can see the need for this chapter, as now the confessional / epistemological differences in defining 'fideism' finally come into play. As the survey in Sections I.A and I.B above made abundantly clear, the past (and present?) *official* epistemological standard of Roman Catholicism would render both Farrer *and* Mitchell as fideists or semi-fideists.[94] It should go without saying that neither Farrer nor Mitchell, as good Anglicans, could have sworn the Anti-Modernist Oath and declared that they 'profess that God, beginning and end of all things, can be *certainly known*, and therefore also *proved*, as the cause through the effects, by the natural light of reason through the things that have been made, that is, through the visible works of creation.'[95] Note that the Anti-Modernist Oath was only issued on 1 September 1910, one month to the day before Farrer's sixth birthday, and not withdrawn until 1967, the year before he died. The epistemological and theological views articulated by the Oath were thus not ancient—or even 19th century—history, but the public stance of the Roman Catholic Church throughout almost the entire extent of Farrer's life. Farrer lived to see the Second Vatican Council, and the eventual repeal of the Oath, but only just.

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[94] And of course Hebblethwaite as well, to his chagrin, not to mention Allen.

[95] Cited in Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, 223 (emphasis added).

And not just confessional reasons would keep Farrer and Mitchell from taking this oath. Farrer's philosophical views have yet to be fully discussed, but it has already been noted that Mitchell is a proponent of the cumulative case approach to religious epistemology, which seeks to rationally justify—but not certainly prove or demonstrate—religious belief through considering a *congerie probabilitatum*.[96] Even Richard Swinburne, Mitchell's immediate successor in the Nolloth chair at Oxford and widely regarded (and often deplored) as among the most rigorous examples of this approach, accepts (1) that metaphysical naturalism (and hence atheism) is a rational system, (2) that deductive arguments for God's existence are not widely convincing, and so (3) the way forward is to reformulate the classical arguments of natural theology on probabilistic grounds. Although he holds that God's existence can be defended as 'a fairly well-justified conclusion by rational argument,' it cannot be proved in any strict sense.[97] Indeed, Swinburne explicitly rejected the epistemology of Vatican I in the first edition of his book *Faith and Reason*:

> the First Vatican Council was wrong to hold that the existence of God can '*certainly* [*certo*] be known by the natural light of human reason from the things which are created'…if by 'certainly' is meant 'without there being the slightest ground for suspecting error'. I do not think that the arguments for the existence of God, although they make their conclusions probable, give it that degree of certainty.[98]

Far from being a 'rationalist,' even Swinburne would thus still be classified as a semi-fideist by the traditional Roman Catholic standard.

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[96] For more details, see Chapter One, Section I, and in particular the discussion of Mitchell's *The Justification of Religious Belief* (Macmillan, 1973) in Section I.D. See also the historical study cited in that chapter as well, Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships Between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1983).

[97] See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, Second Edition (Oxford University Press, 2004), particularly 1, 12-13 and 136-137.

[98] Ibid., *Faith and Reason* (Clarendon Press, 1981), 179 note 2 (Swinburne's emphasis). Interestingly, this note is omitted from the thoroughly rewritten Second Edition (2005).

So no matter how strongly the Anglican philosophers Farrer and Mitchell may be committed to some sort of 'rational theology' or 'justification of religious belief,' in demurring from demonstration they will still fall under the category of semi-fideism. Or, perhaps better, as noted in Section I.B above, the position William J. Abraham calls 'soft rationalism'—although he admits that such a position, in trying to mediate between the 'hard rationalism' of evidentialist natural theology and fideism *simpliciter*, might just as accurately be called 'soft fideism.' It is a matter of where one places the emphasis.[99] Mitchell, at any rate, writing from within his own Anglo-American tradition of philosophy and his own Anglican tradition of theology (which two traditions, according to Abraham, might well be conflated into the single tradition of *Anglican epistemology*) and thus not seeing *himself* as fideistic in any way, is asking to what extent Farrer's later thought might have deviated from the recognised canons of *these* traditions (or, from the *tradition* of Anglican epistemology).

Fourth and finally, where might Mitchell place Farrer's 'sort of fideism' among the five categories defined above in Section I.C—extreme, moderate, semi-, conformist, and evangelical? It is difficult to say, and so here I speculate, but from the description given, it sounds as though Mitchell was interpreting Farrer's position in 1967 as a form of *moderate* fideism (faith is not contrary to reason but precedes it) with both *conformist* ('tradition') and *evangelical* ('nourishment') aspects.

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[99] Abraham, 'Soft Rationalism,' 108. Abraham takes Mitchell as his exemplar of the soft rationalist approach to religious epistemology. The term itself originated with an article by Rod Sykes, 'Soft Rationalism,' *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* VIII (1977), 51-66. In footnote 8 on page 56, Sykes says: 'My label is not intended to impute woolly-mindedness. "Soft" means here what it does in "Soft Determinism": a middle option that carries across one extreme but softens its impact by modification to accord with people's intuitions.' The epistemic parallel with the controversy over Anglicanism's (alleged) ecclesial *via media* status is obvious. Unfortunately, Abraham's citation of Sykes's article in both his essay on cumulative case arguments and in the essay cited above provides the wrong volume number and year of publication.

Remember, however, that Penelhum intends those two latter categories to be understood as varieties of *sceptical fideism*—that is, fideism that draws its inspiration from a pervasive pessimism about the capacities of human reason to achieve any knowledge of anything whatsoever, religious or otherwise. As I shall argue further below, whether or not he was open to religious fideism toward the end of his life, the mature Farrer was not at all inclined toward philosophical scepticism or relativism.

So, in conclusion, it seems that Mitchell would describe the Farrer of *Faith and Speculation* as exemplifying a ('sort of') moderate fideism with both conformist and evangelical tendencies. Hebblethwaite explicitly rejects that description. Allen implicitly accepts it, or something close to it. And so we now finally turn to Austin Farrer himself to consider the primary evidence in this case concerning his alleged turn to fideism. *Ressourcement*!

CHAPTER THREE:

'A VIABLE AND SOPHISTICATED NATURAL THEOLOGY' (1904-1948)

From the time of his undergraduate studies at Oxford, Austin Farrer's avowed aim was to 'have a connected and rational theology, or perish in the attempt.' And yet, an early moment of philosophical illumination involved recognising the *limits* of reason, and specifically that 'it does not touch religion.' This tension between accepting the legitimate claim of 'reason' while simultaneously defending the transcendent truth of 'religion' runs throughout Farrer's subsequent career: for him, to be 'rational' meant, at least in part, appreciating reason's limited function and powers. This chapter begins with a brief sketch of Farrer's life and influences, looks at his undergraduate correspondence where some of these 'fideistic' themes are first articulated, and then focuses on Farrer's classic text of 'rational theology,' *Finite and Infinite* (1943). After noting some of Farrer's other work from this period, the chapter concludes with a brief summary of Eric Mascall's *He Who Is* (1943) as a counterpoint to Farrer's more individual and creative appropriation of 'the Thomist vision.' The interest throughout is on the epistemological rather than metaphysical implications of Farrer's attempt to defend what Rowan Williams calls 'a viable and sophisticated natural theology.'

I. A Swift Among Swallows

Austin Marsden Farrer was born in Hampstead, London, on 1 October 1904 to Augustine and Evangeline Farrer. His father (1872-1954) was a Baptist minister and lecturer who variously taught church history, the history of religion, Hebrew, and New Testament at Regent's Park College, first in its original location in London and

then later when it moved to Oxford. Augustine and Evangeline had three children, including the two girls Joyce (1903) and Eleanor (1907).[1] The Farrers were a serious and devout Nonconformist family, and yet Augustine was 'neither an emotional evangelical nor a biblical fundamentalist. He moved in circles which had early come to terms with biblical criticism.'[2] Consequently, it was difficult for the Farrers to find a home in the rather more conservative Baptist community of London, and young Austin's experience of several congregational schisms and his awareness of his father's intellectual isolation from his co-religionists contributed to his own eventual decision to be baptised in the Church of England instead.

From 1917 to 1923 Farrer was a day boy at St Paul's School in London, and in 1923 he went up to Balliol College, Oxford, as a classical scholar. He received Firsts in Classical Moderations (1925) and Literae Humaniores (1927), along with the Craven Scholarship (1925), Liddon Studentship (1927), and the Jenkins Exhibition (1927).[3] In his first year at Oxford he found the pull of Anglicanism inexorable and was baptised and confirmed in May 1924. This shift in religious allegiance gradually led to a sense of call to ordained ministry in the Church of England, and after a further year of theological study at Balliol—for which he was awarded his third First

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[1] For these details, see Philip Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows: A Biography of Austin Farrer* (SPCK, 1985), 1-4. Curtis says that Farrer was born on 11 October, and that his father's name was 'Augustus,' but these seem to be errors. Farrer's birth certificate, a copy of which may be found in Box 10 of the Farrer papers in the Bodleian, gives the date and name as provided above. See also I. M. Crombie, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden (1904-1968),' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 19* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 121-123, which agrees with the birth certificate rather than Curtis on both counts. (Subsequent references to this multi-volume work will be abbreviated *ODNB*).

[2] Curtis, 3.

[3] See Curtis, 16; Crombie, 121; and Farrer's final entry in *Crockford's Clerical Directory, 1967-68* (Oxford University Press, 1968), 399. Competition for the Craven (classics) and Liddon (theology) prizes are open to all Oxford students, whereas the Jenkins (classics) is limited to Balliol.

(1928)—and formation at Cuddesdon Theological College (just outside Oxford), he was ordained deacon in 1928 and priest in 1929.[4]

After serving his curacy in Dewsbury, Yorkshire (in the Diocese of Wakefield) from 1928 to 1931, Farrer returned to Oxford where he spent the rest of his life in teaching, pastoral ministry, and administration at three different colleges. He was Chaplain and Tutor at St Edmund Hall (1931-1935), Fellow and Chaplain of Trinity College (1935-1960), and the seventh Warden of Keble College (1960-1968). While at Trinity he married Katharine Newton, a fellow Oxford graduate and the daughter of an Anglican clergyman. They had one child, a daughter named Caroline.

Over the course of his career, Farrer was elected to deliver the Bampton Lectures (Oxford) in 1948, the Edward Cadbury Lectures (Birmingham) in 1953-1954, the Giffords (Edinburgh) in 1957, the Nathaniel Taylor Lectures (Yale) in 1961, and the Deems Lectures (New York University) in 1964. Some of his most well-known books emerged from these various lecture series. A good friend of C. S. Lewis, he was also a leading—if relatively moderate—figure in the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England in the mid-20th century, closely associated with such luminaries as K. E. Kirk (1886-1954), Gregory Dix (1901-1952), Michael Ramsey (1904-1988), and Eric Mascall (1905-1993). His association with the Metaphysicals was discussed in Chapter One. Farrer died unexpectedly at the age of sixty-four on 29 December 1968 (twenty days after Karl Barth). Earlier that year he had been elected as a Fellow of the British Academy.[5]

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[4] For this period see Curtis, 16-57.

[5] See Curtis, 58-264, for Farrer's life from his curacy to his death, along with chapters dealing with his philosophical, biblical, and theological thought. For his obituary notice for the British Academy, written by Eric Mascall, see *Proceedings of the British Academy* LIV (1968—Oxford University Press, 1970), 435-442. For a discussion of Farrer's Anglo-Catholicism, see J. N. Morris, '"An Infallible Fact-Factory Going Full Blast": Austin Farrer, Marian Doctrine, and the Travails of Anglo-Catholicism', in

Farrer's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* identifies him as a 'philosopher, theologian, and biblical scholar'. Perhaps ironically, given his Anglo-Catholic credentials, the best one-sentence summary of his intellectual achievement was written by the evangelical Anglican theologian J. I. Packer. Naming each of the three academic fields in which Farrer worked, Packer says that his writings on philosophy, theology, and New Testament exegesis show 'an independent, lucid, agile, argumentative and articulate mind, fastidiously whimsical, witty in the manner of a metaphysical poet, Newmanesque in sensitivity, incantatory in expression, and committed to a rational credal orthodoxy.'[6] However, as the introduction and previous chapters of this dissertation make clear, our focus is on philosophical theology, with a particular interest in the epistemological implications of Farrer's thought, and whether or not he might be described as a fideist. His doctrinal work will thus be touched on only tangentially, and his fascinating and controversial contribution to biblical studies will be completely set aside.[7]

R. N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church and Mary, Studies in Church History* 39 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2004), 358-367. See also Robert MacSwain, 'Above, Beside, Within: The Anglican Theology of Austin Farrer', in *Journal of Anglican Studies* 4 (2006), 33-57.

[6] J. I. Packer, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden' in Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 253. In his biography of Packer, Alister McGrath writes that Packer recalls attending Farrer's lectures and being 'stimulated by the ideas of this remarkable Oxford philosopher' (*To Know and Serve God: A Biography of J. I. Packer* [Hodder and Stoughton, 1997], 44).

[7] Farrer published four monographs of New Testament scholarship—*A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John's Apocalypse* (Dacre Press, 1949), *A Study in St Mark* (Dacre Press, 1951), *St Matthew and St Mark* (Dacre Press, 1954; Second Edition, 1966), and *The Revelation of St John the Divine: A Commentary on the English Text* (Oxford University Press, 1964)—and a number of important articles, most notably 'On Dispensing With Q', in D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Blackwell, 1955), 55-88. Most professional New Testament scholars have been dismissive of Farrer's literary / narrative / typological approach, but for some more sympathetic considerations of Farrer's work in this area, see Michael Goulder's chapter 'Farrer the Biblical Scholar' in Curtis's *A Hawk Among Sparrows* (1985), 192-212; Charles C. Hefling Jr, 'Origen *Redivivus*:

According to I. M. Crombie, 'Farrer had as penetrating a philosophical mind as anyone of his generation, though the truth of this—which puts him on a par with such practitioners as J. L. Austin and Gilbert Ryle—was not apparent outside the relatively small circle of those who engaged in philosophical discussion with him. His especial genius lay in his ability to penetrate through the cloud of detail to the essential structure of a problem or the essential features of some doctrine.'[8] In light of this claim, Basil Mitchell somewhat surprisingly states that Farrer 'did not regard himself as a professional philosopher, and would courteously defer to those who were.'[9] But Mitchell further explains that Farrer's philosophical formation was in the Oxford 'Greats' school, before what would later be known as analytic philosophy revolutionised the discipline. Farrer was educated before the B.Phil. was introduced

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Farrer's Scriptural Divinity', in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity: New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer* (Pickwick Publications, 1983), 35-50; and ibid., 'Farrer's Scriptural Divinity', in David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified: The Practical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T & & Clark International, 2004), 149-172. See also William Horbury's discussion of Farrer in 'The New Testament', in Ernest Nicholson (ed.), *A Century of Theological and Religious Studies in Britain* (Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2003), 51-137, on pages 97-98, 129 and 136. Farrer's perhaps best-known and most influential contribution to New Testament scholarship is his rejection of Q, and the so-called 'Farrer Theory' still has its defenders: see, for example, Jeffrey Peterson, 'A Pioneer Narrative Critic and His Synoptic Hypothesis: Austin Farrer and Gospel Interpretation', *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers 2000* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 651-672; Mark Goodacre, *The Synoptic Problem: A Way Through the Maze* (T & T Clark, 2001); and Ken Olsen, 'Unpicking on the Farrer Theory' in Mark Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin (eds.), *Questioning Q* (SPCK, 2004), 127-150. There is also an interesting debate on Farrer's biblical work that has been carried forward by literary scholars such as Frank Kermode and Helen Gardner, and theologians such David Jasper and David Brown, but this too cannot detain us further.

[8] Crombie, 121.

[9] Basil Mitchell, 'Austin Farrer: The Philosopher', in *New Fire* 7 (1983), 452. Contrast this with Rowan Williams's claim that 'Farrer was professionally a philosopher,' in *Anglican Identities* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 110. Crombie, however, sides with Mitchell against Williams: 'Though [Farrer] assisted in the teaching of philosophy while at Trinity, he did not think of himself as a professional philosopher by vocation.' (121)

as a 'professional' degree in philosophy, focused primarily on philosophical 'problems.'[10] By contrast, 'Greats' involved 'the study of Greek and Latin language and literature, philosophy and ancient history, and thus provided a threefold mental training: in precision of language, clarification of concepts and the weighing of historical evidence.'[11] Consesquently, rather than a narrow 'obsessional' concern with logic and contemporary figures and debates, due to his broad intellectual, linguistic, literary, and historical training Farrer 'was at home in the entire Western philosophical tradition, not excluding Augustine and Aquinas or Leibniz and Kant [not to mention Aristotle, Descartes and Berkeley] and it formed the permanent background to his thinking.'[12] He was also receptive to 19th and 20th century French and German philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), Maurice Blondel (1861-1949), and Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), as well as important 'non-analytic' English philosophers such as A. N. Whitehead (1861-1947) and R. G. Collingwood (1889-1943).

However, Farrer was neither ignorant of nor untouched by the revolutionary ferment in philosophy all around him, particularly in Oxford, and thus, although his work was 'never influential with the professionals, [it] was treated by them with respect.'[13] Or, as Mitchell put it elsewhere, 'Although he rejected their limitations, he

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[10] Farrer completed his formal philosophical training in 1927. It was not until two decades later that, under the influence of Gilbert Ryle, Oxford established the B.Phil. According to Peter Strawson, Ryle 'was primarily responsible for the introduction, by a statute of 1946, of the new postgraduate degree of bachelor of philosophy, which was first examined in 1948.' See Peter Strawson, 'Ryle, Gilbert (1900-1976)', in *ODNB: Volume 48*, 483.

[11] Mitchell, 'Introduction' in Brian Hebblethwaite and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary* (SCM Press, 2006), 2.

[12] Mitchell, 'Austin Farrer: The Philosopher,' 452

[13] Ibid. For a striking example of this respect, see Strawson's review of Farrer's *The Freedom of the Will* (1958) in *Mind* LXIX (1960), 416-418.

respected their standards. So when he entered into dialogue with a [contemporary professional] philosopher, he knew what he was talking about.'[14]

According to Mitchell, Farrer shared with the early analytic philosophy 'its suspicion of obscurity and pretentiousness and its concern for clarity and precision of statement.'[15] Indeed, in a later survey of Farrer's philosophical significance, Mitchell went so far as to claim that

> in an important respect Farrer *was* an 'analytical philosopher'. He did not approach philosophical problems with a pre-existing metaphysical theory which he sought to vindicate against rival theories. In a sense he was also an ordinary language philosopher who simply felt entitled to take as his subject matter ordinary Christian language in its doctrinal and devotional use. This Christian language had for him been largely formed by Aquinas, but Farrer was never formally a Thomist, as his friend and colleague, Eric Mascall, was. His project was to take Christian belief as he found it and seek to render it as clear and coherent as he could make it, and relate it intelligibly to whatever else we could claim to know.[16]

Farrer's relation and indebtedness to both Thomism and analytic philosophy are complex questions that will be explored throughout this chapter and beyond. However, in an important description of Farrer's philosophical approach that raises doubts about his final commitment to formal analytic methods, Crombie writes: 'Though no Platonist, he perhaps had a somewhat Platonic conception of

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[14] Mitchell, 'Introduction', *The Human Person in God's World*, 7.

[15] Mitchell, 'Austin Farrer: The Philosopher,' 452. For a survey of the development of analytic philosophy and an exploration of its relation to Christian theology, see Elizabeth Burns, 'Transforming Metaphysics? Revisioning Christianity in the Light of Analytic Philosophy', in Harriet A. Harris and Christopher J. Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis: The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 46-60. The chapters by Basil Mitchell, Richard Swinburne, and Ann Loades are also highly relevant to this period.

[16] Mitchell, 'Introduction', *The Human Person in God's World*, 7-8. Philip Curtis's chapter on 'Farrer the Philosopher' (170-191) is a valuable source of insight, not only into Farrer's philosophical influences and interests, but also his opinion of then-contemporary analytic philosophy. See in particular the excerpt of a letter from C. G. Stead to Curtis on 188-189. Farrer's interest in the philosophers mentioned above—classical, medieval, modern and contemporary—is documented in various primary and secondary sources.

philosophy—that it is essentially dialogue, that there can be no formulation of the truth so lapidary that it cannot be misunderstood, and that what needs to be said in some context depends on what is being misunderstood in that context.'[17] This statement is significant for two reasons: (1) it intimates a gradual shift within Farrer's own philosophical development that bears some resemblance—one might say a family resemblance—to the development of the early Wittgenstein into the later; and (2) it also situates Farrer within the ongoing contemporary debate about the very nature of reason and philosophy that was noted in Chapter Two, Section II, on postmodernism—namely, regarding their inescapably contextual, 'conversational' status.

Thus, describing Farrer's transition from his first book *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (1943) to his last book *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (1967), Charles Conti says: 'In many respects, the evolution of Farrer's thought to natural forms of belief paralleled Wittgenstein's movement from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, allowing for the living functions of religious language in the later work.'[18] While I will develop this comparison with Wittgenstein

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[17] Crombie, 121-122. Likewise, Mitchell wrote that Farrer's philosophical style was 'dialectical, almost conversational. Objections are incorporated in the discussion as it proceeds—often in the form of actual passages of dialogue—and the reader is encouraged rather than constrained to view the matter in a certain way' ('Austin Farrer: The Philosopher,' 456).

[18] Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism: An Analysis of Austin Farrer's Theistic Metaphysics* (Clarendon Press, 1995), xviii. Wayne Proudfoot makes an almost identical claim, although he only goes from *Finite and Infinite* to *The Glass of Vision* (published five years later): see page 108 and note 27 on pages 147-148 of *God and the Self: Three Types of Philosophy of Religion* (Bucknell University Press / Associated University Presses, 1976). Despite their similar comments about Farrer and Wittgenstein, Conti strongly dissents from Proudfoot's 'individualistic' reading of Farrer in this book, stating that Proudfoot's 'misrepresentation of the evolution of Farrer's thought, in *God and [the] Self*, provided me with the stimulus of a rebuttal.' See Charles Conti, 'Austin Farrer and the Analogy of other Minds', in Eaton and Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity*, 51-91 (quotation from title note on 51). Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism* continues his rebuttal of Proudfoot.

rather differently from Conti, taking it in an epistemological rather than a metaphysical direction, I will nevertheless argue in due course that this comparison combined with Crombie's description points towards perhaps the most fruitful appropriation of Farrer's philosophical legacy.[19]

Although our focus here is primarily philosophical, it is important not to forget the broader theological context, and not just in England. For while Farrer indeed studied and taught at Anglican and analytic Oxford, he was also intensely interested in contemporary Christian theology in Continental Europe, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Thus, in a recent survey of 20th century British theology, Rowan Williams introduces Farrer by stating that 'one of those who initially found [Emil] Brunner attractive was a young Anglican…who was to make a very distinctive mark indeed in the period following the Second World War.'[20] Developing the Brunner connection, Williams says that Farrer 'spent some months studying in Germany in 1931 and 1932, and his correspondence shows how positive an impact Brunner made—and how little he was at that time impressed by Barth.'[21] In fact, Farrer spent this time in both

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[19] My forthcoming article on Farrer in the on-line journal *Philosophy Compass* contains some of this material. For further discussions of Farrer as philosopher, see Brian Hebblethwaite, 'The Anglican tradition', in Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwell, 1997), 175; Daniel W. Hardy, 'Theology Through Philosophy', in David Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Blackwell, 1997), 256; Thomas Williams, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden (1904-68)', in Edward Craig (ed.), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Volume 3* (Routledge, 1998), 560-561.

[20] Rowan Williams, 'Theology in the Twentieth Century,' in Nicholson (ed.), *A Century of Theological and Religious Studies in Britain*, 242. This essay is also useful as general background for Farrer's context in British theology of this era.

[21] Ibid. For a brief introduction to Brunner (1889-1966), see I. John Hesselink, 'Emil Brunner: A Centennial Perspective,' *The Christian Century* 106 (1989), 1171-1174. Likewise for Barth (1886-1968), see—among many possible texts—Daniel W. Hardy, 'Karl Barth', in David F. Ford with Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third Edition (Blackwell, 2005), 21-42.

Germany *and* Switzerland. According to Philip Curtis, Farrer was awarded the Senior Denyer and Johnson Scholarship for Oxford graduates, which he used after his appointment as Chaplain of St Edmund Hall to visit Bonn in December 1931 (to study with Barth) and Zürich in the summer of 1932 (to study with Brunner).[22]

In the Winter Semester of 1931/32, Barth lectured on 'Prolegomena to Dogmatics' (i.e., his *Church Dogmatics*, I/1) and ran a seminar on 'The Problem of Natural Theology'. He had also just published his book on Anselm's ontological argument, having worked on it from the summer of 1930 to the summer of 1931.[23] And Brunner at this point had published at least two major books that Farrer had already read in German: *Religionsphilosophie evangelischer Theologie* (1926) and *Der Mittler* (1927).[24] The famous Barth / Brunner debate on natural theology was

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[22] Curtis, 96. Curtis discusses these visits and cites the correspondence Williams mentions on pages 79-80 and 96-103. The letters may be read in the Bodleian in MS Eng. Lett. C. 272, folios 75, 76, 78, 79, 103-110, and 118. Curtis's reproduction of the correspondence is not entirely reliable, but he still accurately conveys their basic content. Farrer was indeed more impressed with Brunner than with Barth, both in terms of published work and personal presence. Apparently somewhat embarrassed by this, Curtis says, 'It must be remembered that Farrer had not yet read the *Church Dogmatics* and that in 1931 the struggle of the German Church against Hitler was still in the future.' (96) When Farrer later reviewed Barth's *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (*Church Dogmatics* I/1)—some of which he may have heard in lectures (see next paragraph of main text)—he was indeed more respectful, if not yet persuaded (see *Theology* XXXIII [1936], 370-372).

[23] For this phase of Barth's life, see Chapter 10, '*Fides quaerens intellectum* (Bonn, March 1930 – June 1935)' in Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Clarendon Press, 1995), 412-449. The information cited above comes from pages 415-416 and 420. For an English translation of the Anselm book, see Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme*, translated by Ian W. Robertson (SCM Press, 1960).

[24] Fascinatingly, the first was later co-translated into English by none other than Farrer's father, A. J. D. Farrer, and Bertram Lee Woolf, as *The Philosophy of Religion from the Standpoint of Protestant Theology* (Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1937). In their foreword they thank Brunner himself for commenting on the translation, and also 'the Rev. Austin M. Farrer, M.A., Fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, who has had the advantage of sitting at Dr. Brunner's feet' (vii).

still three years ahead, and so the relationship between these two giants of Swiss Reformed theology, while already strained, had not yet broken down.[25]

But, in strong contrast to the Reformed heritage of Barth and Brunner, Williams says that the Anglican Farrer was 'already much influenced by the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition,' although adding that 'there is surprisingly little evidence that he had studied the French Thomists of the twenties and thirties in any depth.'[26] Curtis corroborates this, stating that when Farrer received the scholarship for study abroad, his mentor K. E. Kirk—still at this point Farrer's immediate predecessor as Chaplain of Trinity, but soon to be Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology, and eventually Bishop of Oxford—had 'advised him first to visit France to study the developments among the French Catholic scholars, but Farrer preferred Germany and Switzerland.'[27] Curtis does not mention any specific figures here, but in an unpublished letter to his father dated 4 May (1931), Farrer says that Kirk suggested he go to Paris to work with Étienne Gilson (then at the Sorbonne) and Jacques Maritain (then at the Institut Catholique), on the topic of 'The limitations of natural theology in the Scholastic systems'.[28] That Farrer chose to study with the

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[25] Originally published in separate, individual pamphlets in 1934 and 1935, later collected and translated into English in *Natural Theology: Comprising 'Nature and Grace' by Professor Dr Emil Brunner and the reply 'No!' by Dr Karl Barth*, with an Introduction by John Baille (Geoffrey Bles, 1946). Although he never mentions them directly, Farrer undoubtedly read these essays, probably before they were translated into English. The debate is mentioned in the report *Catholicity*, to which Farrer contributed: see *Catholicity: A Study of Conflict of Christian Traditions in the West* (Dacre Press, 1947), 23. For the growing tension between Barth and the other 'dialectical theologians,' including Brunner, see Part III of McCormack, covering 1924-1936.

[26] Williams, 'Theology in the Twentieth Century,' 242.

[27] Curtis, 96.

[28] Bodleian, MS Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 79. For basic information about the careers of Gilson (1884-1978) and Maritain (1882-1973), see their respective entries in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingston (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition (Oxford University Press, 1997), 677-

Protestant Barth and Brunner instead—against not only his mentor's advice but also contrary to his own likely preference in terms of actual intellectual agreement—shows both his independent character and a willingness to expose himself to perspectives decidedly different from his own. Either that, or a desire to beard the Reformed lions in their own dens—and possibly a mixture of all three. It also helps to verify that Farrer's appropriation of what he later called 'the Thomist vision' was very much his own, and was not mediated by other major interpreters. By contrast, as will be seen at the end of this chapter, the Thomism of Farrer's friend Eric Mascall was deeply indebted to Gilson, Maritain, Garrigou-Lagrange, and other 20th century Thomists.

At any rate, according to Williams, Farrer's theological agenda

> was initially to [develop] a viable and sophisticated natural theology, and he never found any variety of dialectical or existentialist theology at all sympathetic. The final point of this natural theology was a robust doctrine of divine freedom, with will and agency seen as the essentials of any analogy between the created and the uncreated subject. There are both parallels and immense gaps between this and Barth's thought: Farrer concludes his monumental essay of 1943, *Finite and Infinite*, by emphasising that natural theology can do no more than clarify the 'grammar' of divine action; only historical contingency can prompt the conviction that such action has occurred. This is not Barth; but neither is it the anthropocentrism that Barth repudiated.[29]

Whether Barth would agree with Williams's claim here, is of course, a completely different question.[30]

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678 and 1038. For Kirk, see E. W. Kemp, 'Kirk, Kenneth Escott (1886-1954)', in *ODNB: Volume 31*, 772-774.

[29] Williams, 'Theology in the Twentieth Century,' 242. Like 'fideism', the term 'natural theology' is of course open to several definitions—some of which are highly polemical—which could use at least a chapter of their own to sort out, but which will not receive that treatment in this dissertation.

[30] For a more detailed comparison of Barth and Farrer, see James J. Buckley and William McF. Wilson, 'A Dialogue with Barth and Farrer on Theological Method', *The Heythrop Journal* XXVI (1985), 274-293. For further considerations of Farrer's general theological significance—not for specific doctrines such as revelation or Christology—in addition to my article 'Above, Beside, Within' (cited in note 5 above), see Ann Loades, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden,' in Alister E. McGrath (ed.), *The SPCK Handbook of Anglican Theologians* (SPCK, 1998), 120-123; Peter Sedgwick, 'Anglican Theology' in Ford with

To conclude this introductory section on Farrer's life and influences, it is remarkable how many superlatives he has received and yet how little he has been studied. Rowan Williams suggests that he was 'possibly the greatest Anglican mind of the twentieth century'.[31] In 1987 Richard Harries published a set of readings from Farrer titled *The One Genius*, for 'it has been said of him that he is the one genius that the Church of England has produced during this century.'[32] Brian Hebblethwaite argues that he provides the best 20th century example of 'the Anglican tradition's ability to marry natural theology, rational theology, and the theology of revelation,'[33] and—along with Douglas Hedley—claims that he 'exemplified an unparalleled combination of spiritual sensitivity, theological perspicacity and philosophical acuity.'[34] In a survey of religion in Oxford from 1914 to 1970, F. M. Turner says, 'More than any figure of his generation in the University, Farrer embodied the highest ideal of the college chaplain-theologian.'[35] Leslie Houlden says he was 'a giant of a preacher.'[36] I. M. Crombie reports that 'in the judgement of many there was no abler

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Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, 178-181, 183-184; and Robert Boak Slocum, *Light in a Burning Glass: A Systematic Presentation of Austin Farrer's Theology* (University of South Carolina Press, 2007)—along with my review in *Anglican Theological Review* 89 (2007), 682-683.

[31] Rowan Williams, 'Debate on *The Gift of Authority*—Archbishop of Canterbury's Remarks', delivered at the Church of England's General Synod in London on Friday, 13 February 2004, http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1194 (accessed on 27 March 2009).

[32] Richard Harries, introduction to *The One Genius: Readings Through the Year with Austin Farrer* (SPCK, 1987), ix.

[33] Brian Hebblethwaite, 'The Anglican Tradition', in Quinn and Taliaferro (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, 175.

[34] 'Preface and Acknowledgements' in Hebblethwaite and Hedley (eds), *The Human Person in God's World*, vii.

[35] F. M. Turner, 'Religion', in Brian Harrison (ed.), *The History of the University of Oxford. Volume VIII: The Twentieth Century* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 309.

[36] 'Introduction' to Leslie Houlden (ed.), *Austin Farrer: The Essential Sermons* (SPCK, 1991), ix.

Christian thinker among his contemporaries.'[37] The novelist Susan Howatch says that he 'deserves to be read today by all those interested in truth, tradition, and twentieth-century spirituality.'[38] And so on: this is just a small sample of the litany of praise. And yet he remains almost completely unknown and without influence outside the small circle of his admirers and enthusiasts.

As noted in Chapter One, Basil Mitchell has been instrumental in championing Farrer's legacy, and has written some of the most significant tributes in his honour. Nevertheless, he demurs from the title of Philip Curtis's biography, *A Hawk Among Sparrows* (taken from a description of Farrer by his student Gordon Phillips: see pages 230-231). Writing somewhat facetiously, Mitchell said that this title 'has always worried me—Austin was not in the least predatory and the rest of us were not so inconsiderable: *A Swift Among Swallows* might have been better.'[39] Whether Farrer was a hawk among sparrows, or a swift among swallows, he remains less well known than he should be, even among Anglicans. The goal of this dissertation, however, is not to rehabilitate Farrer's general reputation, but rather to clarify the development of this thinking on faith and reason, to which we now turn.

II. An Undergraduate Writes Home

Most studies of Farrer begin with his published material and thus with the formal start of his scholarly career. Farrer's first publication appeared in June 1933 (when he was 28), and his first book ten years later.[40] But as Curtis's biography

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[37] Crombie, 123.

[38] Susan Howatch, 'Introduction' to Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (Mowbray, 1994), xi. This book was originally published in 1964 by Hodder and Stoughton.

[39] Mitchell, 'Introduction,' *The Human Person in God's World*, 6.

[40] 'A Return to New Testament Christological Categories', in *Theology* XXVI (1933), 304-318. The book, of course, was *Finite and Infinite*.

makes clear, the undergraduate Farrer engaged in a long and fascinating correspondence with his highly-educated, widely-read, moderately-liberal but still deeply-Baptist father. The topics they discussed included Austin's decision to join the Church of England, his 'Greats' education, his philosophical and theological thinking, and his initial forays into biblical scholarship. With rare exceptions, only Austin's side of the correspondence survives, but it still provides essential material for anyone seeking to chart the development of his thought. In particular, it greatly complicates Basil Mitchell's concern that, with *Faith and Speculation* in 1967, Farrer had 'become a sort of fideist'. On the evidence of the correspondence, Farrer became 'a sort of fideist' forty years earlier, around 1927—at least for a while.[41]

One of the very few cases where both sides of an exchange survive is in regard to Austin's difficult and painful decision to be baptised (and confirmed) in the Church of England rather than remain a Baptist.[42] These events occurred in May 1924, toward the end of his first year at Balliol, when Austin was nineteen. But the correspondence about it began with him writing to his father on 15 January of that year. Austin's side of this correspondence remains unpublished, and it is indeed a deeply moving and interesting exchange—but I must resist the temptation to discuss it here in detail, as it properly belongs to Anglican and Baptist studies rather than religious epistemology. However, in responding to Augustine's subsequent plea (dated 26 January 1924) that he not make a decision too quickly, Austin replied:

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[41] As stated in Chapter One, Curtis's transcriptions are sometimes unreliable, and so I provide my own transcriptions from the originals, held in Bodleian MS Eng. Lett. c. 270, c. 272, or according to box number in the Farrer papers. In most cases, the cited correspondence is provided by Curtis, if not as accurately, and so I provide page numbers to his biography when available. Farrer did not always provide full dates, and when they cannot be determined by context I follow Curtis's best guess.

[42] For this episode see Curtis, 20-24. Curtis provides excerpts from his parents' letters to Austin at this time, but not Austin's own. None of these letters, on either side, were foliated in Eng. Lett. c. 270 with the other correspondence from this period, but were (and are) kept in the un-catalogued boxes.

> The matter seems at present left to reason. I never yet have decided anything by reason and probably never shall; I see both sides and can convince myself of either at will. I suppose I must just study the subject as much as I can, and wait for the voice of conscience, which will sometime speak, I trust.[43]

Augustine replied to this letter on 3 February and said:

> I quite agree with the view you take of the way in which your deliverance will arise: the question will be settled by conscience rather than reason, and in due time your conscience will become clear as to the line of your duty. (Of course, indirectly reason will have played its part in determining conscience.) And when conscience declares itself, on whichever side, to that side you will go, and with your mother's and father's blessing and prayers to second you.[44]

It is, of course, important not to make too much out of the claim of a nineteen year-old undergraduate that he has not yet 'decided anything by reason and probably never shall' for he can 'see both sides and can convince [himself] of either at will.' It would be a mistake to declare Austin an out-and-out fideist at this point. On the other hand, this is a theme that recurs more than once in this phase of his life, particularly in regard to vocational questions (he was then contemplating a career in law). He finds himself paralysed by his ability to intellectually consider all the different aspects of a question and to see the various reasons for and against it. He thus cannot engage his will to *act* on the direction of reason, for reason is not giving him any clear direction. And this, of course, is the dilemma of classical scepticism and one of the primary causes of fideism (see Chapter Two, Section I.C).

It is unclear in Austin's comment above whether he is making a sharp contrast here between 'reason' and 'conscience,' and thus wondering if conscience will provide what reason lacks, or whether he is saying that, if reason finally makes a decision, conscience will naturally follow. His father's response picks up on this

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[43] Letter from Austin Farrer to his father, Farrer Papers, Box 10. This letter is only dated 'Thursday' but it comes between his father's two letters of 26 January and 3 February 1924.

[44] Letter from Augustine Farrer to his son, Farrer Papers, Box 1. The penultimate word is unclear, and may be 'send.' Both make sense, however.

ambiguity, and brings 'conscience' and 'reason' into more explicit relation: 'the question will be settled by conscience rather than reason,' he says, but 'indirectly reason will have played its part in determining conscience.' And that tells us not only what he thought about the solution to Austin's dilemma, but also the elder Farrer's view of the relationship between, and relative value of, reason and conscience.

But Austin's fear throughout this exchange is that, now that he has finally admitted both to himself and to his parents that he feels drawn to the Church of England, if he does not go ahead and *act* on the vivifying impulse, however uncertain it is, he will 'sink back into apathy'[45]—that is, his state of paralysis mentioned above. And so, in an undated letter that follows at some unspecified time his father's letter of 3 February, Austin writes:

> As for your desire to be assured that I am at least clear in my own mind on the issue—I am about as clear as I am ever likely to become from looking at things from outside, which, you may say, is not saying much. Perhaps not: but hesitancy is rather my vice than precipitancy, and at the present stage of things I feel that to put it off now would be nothing but weakness.[46]

And this, too, is a theme that will emerge again when Austin is considering ordination: the need to act *without* complete certainty, combined with a sense that some knowledge can only be gained from *within* a certain perspective or tradition, rather than 'looking at things from outside.'

The correspondence that followed was less personal and more concerned with Austin's on-going education, initially in 'Greats' and then in theology. In a letter from 14 May, probably in 1926, he tells his father that he is studying Plato's *Republic* with John Macmurray ('He is amazingly good. He opens up a new world of thought to me. The profundity of Plato is far greater than I ever imagined. I am fairly lost in

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[45] Austin's letter cited in note 43.

[46] Letter from Austin Farrer to his father, Farrer Papers, Box 10. This letter is only dated 'Monday' but was written in early 1924, perhaps February or March.

it.').[47] And in a letter from 20 November, also probably in 1926, he says that he is studying metaphysics and reading Samuel Alexander's *Space, Time, and Deity* ('It is the worst written volume I ever attacked').[48] After mentioning Alexander, he writes:

> The philosophical atmosphere has odd effects on people's personal religion: and while I can't profess to perform the startling feat of John Findlay, who has a practising religion without a personal God, still I find that the form of religious thinking is to a certain extent modified: particularly it is real hard work to keep Christ Himself in view; the Communion is the only sure and unfailing hold.[49]

He goes on to say that under philosophical scrutiny the concept of God seems to move inexorably away from conventional religion in an impersonal direction. Thus, how to connect the personal God of Christian tradition—not to mention Jesus Christ—with this remote and abstract philosophical deity is difficult. Here is a familiar practical example of the conflict between faith and reason—i.e., Pascal's famous contrast between the 'God of philosophers and scholars' and the 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and

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[47] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 20. John Macmurray taught at philosophy at Balliol from 1923 to 1928, and ended his career as Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh (1944-1958). His Gifford Lectures—delivered in Glasgow in 1953-1954 and published as *The Self as Agent* (1957) and *Persons in Relation* (1961)—are sometimes compared to Farrer's own metaphysics of action and personhood. For basic information on his life and thought, see David Fergusson, 'Macmurray, John (1891-1976)', in *ODNB: Volume 35*, 919-920. For his teaching at Balliol and comments on Farrer as an undergraduate, see Curtis, 26-27.

[48] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 22 (Curtis, 28). Samuel Alexander was Professor of Philosophy at Manchester (1893-1924). His Gifford Lectures, delivered in Glasgow in 1916-1918, were published in 1920 in two volumes as *Space, Time, and Deity*. See John Laird, revised by Michael A. Weinstein, 'Alexander, Samuel (1859-1938)', in *ODNB: Volume 1*, 684-686.

[49] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 22 (Curtis, 28). This fascinating reference to 'John Findlay' reveals that the South African philosopher J. N. Findlay, who was a Rhodes Scholar at Balliol during 1924-1926 and thus a fellow student there with Farrer, even then held the perspective he famously defended over twenty years later in his essay 'Can God's Existence be Disproved?', originally published in *Mind* in 1948 and reprinted in Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (eds.), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (SCM Press, 1955), 47-56. His Gifford Lectures, delivered in St Andrews in 1964-1966, were published as *The Discipline of the Cave* (1966) and *The Transcendence of the Cave* (1967). See Mark J. Schofield, 'Findlay, John Niemeyer (1903-1987), in *ODNB: Volume 19*, 589-590. By coincidence, Alexander, Macmurray, Findlay, and Farrer all studied at Balliol.

Jacob.' In response to this dilemma, Farrer is driven to conclude that while God may indeed have a personal character in some sense, God is not as a person just like us, but 'a person by analogy.'[50] Curtis comments that this letter marks the first mention of the concept of analogy that he found in Farrer's writings. If so, then Farrer's interest in—or at least openness to—Thomism may have begun as early as 1926.[51]

But undoubtedly the early letter most relevant to the theme of this dissertation was written on 14 March and convincingly placed by Curtis in 1927. That is, in Farrer's fourth year at Balliol (when he was twenty-two) before eventually proceeding to study theology later that year and train for ordination at Cuddesdon. This letter thus culminates Farrer's more purely secular philosophical formation and marks the moment when he was finally able to move forward into accepting his call to ordained ministry and *thus* to grapple with the complexities of the Christian intellectual tradition. For Farrer, these two elements (ordination and theology) came together—he could not consider one apart from the other. And he could not seriously consider either prior to the breakthrough described to his father in this letter. This breakthrough involved nothing less than determining the proper relationship between 'faith' and 'reason', or—as he also puts it here—'religion' and 'philosophy'.[52]

Farrer begins by telling his father about 'an enormous bout of philosophising,' which has led him to the following conclusion: faith should be established 'on its own

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[50] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 23 (Curtis, 29). Farrer actually wrote this phrase in Greek, but Curtis translates it directly in the text of his transcription. I am grateful to David Brown for help in determining the accuracy of Curtis's translation.

[51] See Curtis, chapter 3, note 9, on page 245. Although on page 46 he says that Farrer began to read Aquinas in September 1928—i.e., when he was at Cuddesdon.

[52] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folios 29-30 (Curtis, 30-32). Because of the significance of this letter to the argument of this dissertation, and because Curtis's transcription contains omissions and a major error (writing 'belief' for 'disbelief'), I have included most of the letter in Appendix A, to which readers are now referred. Subsequent quotations will simply be provided in the text to draw out the main points.

foundations, where the ebb and flow of metaphysical speculations ought not to be able to touch it any more.' This, he says, is 'a great gain,' since it delivers the person of faith from constantly worrying whether or not their beliefs stand rationally 'condemned,' or are at least 'dependent upon any turn your theories may take in the future'. This constant worry about the rational credentials of faith, Farrer says, 'is just as disastrous as disbelief and less progressive. So now I am going about saying to myself, that if only people would think their philosophy out they would discover the scope of its view, and realise that it does not touch religion.' And he continues by adding, 'This little victory pleases me a great deal, because the curse of this intellectualism is, that it destroys desire by challenging the grounds of it before it has time to act; and then leaving it hanging on an infinite regress of problems to be considered.' Further on, Farrer writes: 'You don't know how happy I am: I feel less the slave of Reason than I have done any time these four years I should think.' However, and crucially, he then says: 'But don't suspect me of plunging into irrationalism: philosophy is the deliverer and not the chain, and I more and more want to go through with it.' And thus the letter's final conclusion: 'We must (I am a prophet already!) go through with reason and see what it does, and then just say of faith, that it too does and says these other (not contradictory but supplementary) things.'[53]

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[53] In the letter Farrer mentions H. A Hodges (1905-1976), one of Farrer's closest friends at Balliol, eventually a distinguished Dilthey scholar and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading, as someone who had recently gone through a similar experience and foresworn 'rationalism'. Curtis omits this particular sentence from Farrer's letter, but in a letter sent to Curtis for the biography, Hodges says that as a result of Farrer's breakthrough he 'was now ready to join me in acknowledging the insufficiency of human reason and accepting the light of faith' (see Curtis, 33). For Hodges's life and work, see the biographical sketch in H. A. Hodges, *God Beyond Knowledge*, edited by W. D. Hudson (Macmillan Press, 1979), vii-x. This book contains Hodges's Gifford Lectures, delivered at Aberdeen in 1956-1957, under the title *The Logic of Religious Thinking* (xi).

It is unnecessary to comment at length on the fideistic nature of these statements—however one defines fideism (see Chapter Two). This letter takes a position somewhere between extreme and moderate fideism: it is not clear if reason plays any positive role here at all. Although Farrer emphasises that he does not see himself as embracing 'irrationalism,' he certainly seems to have made philosophy 'innocuous' and religion 'invulnerable'—to use the terms employed by Basil Mitchell in *Neutrality and Commitment* in his rejection of 'Wittgensteinian fideism' (see Chapter One, Section I.C). Philosophy 'is the deliverer and not the chain' precisely because its powers are so limited, and only the study of philosophy confirms its weakness. Faith stands established on its own foundations, above the surging tides of metaphysical speculation. The scope of philosophy does not touch religion. Faith 'does its thing' and reason 'does its thing,' and these two 'things' are 'not contradictory but supplementary'. Again, as stated above in regard to Farrer's 1924 claim that he has 'never yet…decided anything by reason and probably never shall,' the point is not to saddle the mature Farrer with such a position—although it remains to be seen how close Farrer's chapter 'The Believer's Reasons' in *Faith and Speculation* is to this letter written forty years earlier. The point is that any attempt to determine whether or not Farrer 'became' a fideist in 1967 must take account of what he wrote to his father in 1927. And, at least *prima facie*, it bears a striking resemblance to what Mitchell was afraid he was saying in *Faith and Speculation*.

After this comes two remarkable letters on the relationship between Gnosticism, philosophy, myth, and early Christianity, written in February 1928 after Farrer had begun to study theology. Farrer takes his newfound appreciation for the decidedly 'odd' intellectual milieu in which orthodox Christian doctrine arose and

puts it to good practical use, arguing against the 'rationalism' of liberal Protestantism. Thus, he provocatively writes to his father:

> Gnosticism has a logic in which A can be B and not-B at the same time, and this should be considered by those who are treating the original meaning of the sacraments, or the Incarnation. One must go further, and see how infinitely more plausible are the Catholic than Protestant theses….And what's more, it looks to me as though the Christian Religion lifted out of this mental atmosphere becomes a fish out of water, and rationalistic arguments used against the sacraments and ministry, just as destructive of the Incarnation, in the hands, that is, of a man who would consent to be consistent. And is not this what is happening to 'enlightened' Protestantism?[54]

The distinctively Christian idea of God 'is simply not philosophy, and cannot be: it is not exact information, or even vague information, but just "the best myth", a poem which vanishes into nothing if we try to interpret it, a symbolism to which there is no key. Christ is the poem that was history, his Eucharist the myth become bread.'[55] While acknowledging that the secular discipline of academic history does indeed have definite criteria which can rule out certain positions as untenable, Farrer nevertheless inveighs against the 'Protestant' preoccupation with getting behind tradition to the supposed factual truth. Rejecting such Protestant rationalism, however, is not an evasion of intellectual responsibility—or, if so, it is a necessary one:

> don't you see that this anti-Protestant line of approach is our only salvation? Protestantism has still something to stand on while there is any one single rational element in the Faith from which it can start: but Philosophy will no longer support so much as the existence of our God, nor science the continuance of our consciousness. No logic can forbid us to establish the antithesis 'God—creatures', because 'God' is so far perfectly empty of content[:] but when you go on to say that God 'is', you must realise that this is poetry, that considering the other attributes you are bound to give Him, His 'being' cannot be predicated in any category known to us, nor have we any means of determining it: so that it is as true to *deny* that He *is* (in any sense of the word we *possess*) as to assert that he *is* in He only knows what sense; and the path of wisdom is to do neither, but to accept this as an element in the revealed poem of divine truth.[56]

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[54] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folios 36-37 (Curtis, 45).

[55] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 37 (Curtis, 45).

[56] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 37-36 again—reverse side of paper (Curtis, 45-46).

Here Farrer boldly mixes contemporary secular scepticism about the existence of God and the immortality of the soul (definitely not adhering to the admonitions of Vatican I and the Anti-Modernist Oath!) with standard apophatic and mystical claims about God's transcendent ineffability, and throws in conformist Catholicism for good measure. That is to say, we don't know *anything* about God, from either nature *or* revelation, but that's all right because it's all poetry anyway—so just go to Mass. Thus rejecting any project of evidentialist apologetics, such as put forward by B. H. Streeter ('poor devil!'), the young Farrer concludes, rather grandly:

> Above all, let us not tire ourselves in vain by beating in the void the wings of the mind, but turn back into the circle of the myth, and there let our spirits dwell: being assured that this is something which Reason can never take from us, because she gave it us not, and that it carries its own truth immanently within itself.[57]

This letter seems to mark the most extreme fideistic statement of Farrer's precocious student phase, and certainly goes far beyond anything he would later say in print. It also seems to have provoked a strong reply from his father, expressing complete consternation, for Austin's next letter, dated 26 February (1928) begins, 'It cannot be necessary for you to go mad, in order to find yourself happy in an atmosphere where I feel myself most sane, and therefore I conclude that I failed to say what I intended to say.'[58] He then both qualified and defended his previous letter: 'Perhaps when I protest against the "rationalism" of all the Protestantism I can understand, I mean that it applies an arbitrary rule or standard to dogma and practice, it judges by an external standard' (i.e., apparently, unexamined canons of secular

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[57] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 36 (Curtis, 46). Streeter (1874-1937) was a distinguished theologian and New Testament scholar who taught at Queen's College, Oxford from 1905 until his death: see his entry in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition, 1547-1548. Farrer would later argue against his solution to the Synoptic Problem in 'On Dispensing With Q'.

[58] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 38.

rationality).[59] However, Farrer stands firm in his conviction that what his Baptist father would no doubt consider 'bad philosophy' (i.e., the Neoplatonism of the early Church) is essential to understanding not just Christianity's historical development but its continued intelligibility (such as it is):

> Did not degenerate Platonism in ceasing to be philosophy become the true 'logic' of religion, and are we not right in viewing our faith through the eyes of the early gentile Church?….I really didn't mean to tie revelation down to discreditable religious developments, but only to suggest that the same religious *logic* was to be found in the degenerate Platonism and in Christianity.[60]

What next follows in the foliated correspondence is an undated fragment, apparently to Farrer's mother, which says:

> I hope Father is not annoyed with my controversiality. I am only disputing with everybody possible in the hope of making up my own mind. He need not be afraid that I shall say any of the things I now say in a year's time. But I will have a connected and rational theology, or perish in the attempt.[61]

This last sentence is revealing, for it indicates not only that Farrer still wished to have a 'rational theology'—and thus to *be* rational himself—but also his opinion that the positions explored in the previous letters still might count as such, even if only under some description of 'rational' that Farrer could accept but his father could not. That is, even if they entailed commitment to a 'religious logic' that was not obtainable by currently respectable philosophical standards. If adherence to orthodox Christian doctrine ('Catholicism') required moves allowed by Neo-('degenerate')-platonism but disqualified by more sober metaphysical schemes ('Protestantism'), Farrer was willing to at least entertain degenerate Platonism. That is, in classical moderate fideist fashion, Farrer was *philosophically* investigating the limits of reason and was inclined, once those limits were determined, to take up a position *outside* the city

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[59] Ibid. (Curtis, 47).

[60] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folios 39-40 (Curtis, 48-49).

[61] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 41 (Curtis, 49).

walls. If, that is, the limits of reason could be safely circumscribed. But what if they could not? What if contemporary philosophy *could* decisively pass judgement on 'the logic of religion' and annexe its territory under philosophical jurisdiction? What if the powers of reason were greater than Farrer thought? What would that imply for the future of 'Catholicism'? And thus for Farrer's own religious beliefs?

For, despite the philosophical / fideistic 'breakthrough' of March 1927, subsequent letters reveal that Farrer continued to struggle with the conventional faith / reason dilemma. That is, he continued to feel the pressing requirements of reason, demanding an answer for the hope that was in him. So, for example, on 23 August 1927, in his first summer at Cuddesdon, Farrer says of his fellow ordinands that they are

> interesting and intelligent, like the rest of mankind. But they tend to be interested in the wrong things, for instance points of ritual, whether we ought to believe in the Immaculate Conception, and the Scout Movement. I don't see how anyone is ever going to have a properly balanced view of things who has never felt the pains of real scepticism. What is the reason for not worrying about the papacy and the use of incense, except the necessity of holding on to the existence and character of God?[62]

Here Farrer soberly speaks of the 'existence' and 'character' of God, as if these were topics one could actually discuss and argue about in shared rational, prosaic terms, not merely as ineffable poetry, apophatic mysticism, or Neoplatonic mystery. And while his reference to 'the pains of real scepticism' may be alluding to his recent struggles, now safely behind him after the fideistic breakthrough five months earlier, this is certainly not the case in a letter written at least a year afterwards, dated by Curtis in March or April 1928. Halfway through his year at Cuddesdon and preparing for his forthcoming ordination, Farrer tells his father that he has turned down the position of chaplain at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, partly because it is too small for the

[62] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 33 (Curtis, 42).

chaplain to have much to do, and so Farrer would have to start teaching immediately. But he has not yet been ordained or spent time in a parish. Thus, he says:

> If I took it, I could only do so with the intention of doing theological research and so becoming a theology tutor at last: and I don't think this is right or decent to start with. You cannot research profitably into the philosophy of religion—the only conceivable branch of study for me—until you know what you are talking about, and the sphere to reveal that to you is the practical life. Or at least it is so to me: I have no doubt [that] other people can be mystics quietly by themselves in corners, but I'm not endowed that way: at least I feel so, and can't give reasons. And besides this, I don't know whether you have seen, but I suppose you have, the profundity of my scepticism. My faith is a very small and tender plant in a very vast expanse of unsheltered desert: religion is a wild and almost preposterous experiment to me, which I must try out on the most stringent testing ground I can find before I shall have any peace. A bad reason, you may think, for taking Holy Orders: I don't know: but I am convinced that in any other line of life my faith would never assert itself against sceptical indifference. I must give it the most bracing air or it won't grow at all. If I don't live for religion, I shan't live by religion. If you ask me whether I'm such an utter empiricist as this: whether I am prepared to say 'experience will decide' perhaps I shall say no: the test is not pragmatical, only it is by experience alone that the 'innate ideas' imprinted in the soul can be drawn out into the light of day and recognised for the eternal truths that they are. Of course I know that one can live 'for religion' without becoming a priest: but I haven't written this as an abstract doctrine, but as what I feel for myself, which the immediate point.

And he concludes, 'I think I am a Proteus, and give an entirely different set of reasons, whenever questioned, which must be a little confusing for my friends. But while I write I imagine each time that I am saying exactly what I feel and have felt for years. So I must leave you to fit the jig-saw together as best you can.'[63]

Here we see that the concerns expressed in his 1924 letters about whether or not he should join the Church of England continue to trouble him. Despite four years of further study and Anglican practice, and indeed on the cusp of ordination, his actual beliefs are still uncertain. He still finds himself able to give 'an entirely different set of reasons' to justify his desired conclusions. And despite his vaunted 'breakthrough' in 1927, where he allegedly discovered that philosophy properly

[63] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 43 (Curtis, 54-55).

understood did not touch religion, he here admits a profound scepticism under which his 'small and tender' plant of faith wilts in the 'very vast expanse of unsheltered desert'—'unsheltered,' that is, from the harsh light of reason. So whatever degree of fideism Farrer may have embraced in 1927 seems somewhat moderated by 1928.

Again, however, as with his eventual decision to seek baptism because only in so doing could he stop inconclusively 'looking at things from outside,' so here Farrer asserts that the only way he can move forward in dealing with his doubt is to 'live *for* religion'—otherwise, he says, 'I shan't live *by* religion' but will succumb to 'sceptical indifference.' And this 'pragmatic' 'empirical' approach with its emphasis on 'practical life' over 'innate ideas' will indeed return to the fore in *Faith and Speculation*. For now, it is sufficient to note that Farrer was ordained deacon on 23 December 1928 to serve his curacy in the Parish of All Saints, Dewsbury. Curtis writes: 'It lies in the south of the West Riding of Yorkshire, a region as rugged as its inhabitants, where anything worth building must be founded on the rock, and at this moment in its history it was a region of great poverty and distress. Here indeed he could try the experiment of religion on what he had explicitly desired, a stringent testing ground.'[64]

III. 'Possessed by the Thomist Vision'

During the fifteen years between his ordination and the publication of *Finite and Infinite*, Farrer matured greatly as a philosopher, theologian, and biblical scholar, and in particular became fascinated with the increasingly controversial project of 'rational theology'. But in making this sudden leap of a decade-and-a-half, I am not simply following the specific concerns of this dissertation with the development of

[64] Curtis, 57.

Farrer's religious epistemology. For while he published some interesting articles and book reviews between 1933 and 1943 concerned with various philosophical, theological, and biblical topics, *Finite and Infinite* was the first clear indication of Farrer's undoubted genius, announcing that a major figure had arrived. Even so, the years leading up to this book cannot be passed over without comment—especially since they usually are.

A. Preparation

For these were the years when he engaged seriously with Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, not only reading their work in German but also travelling to study with them directly. Brunner's *Der Mittler* of 1927 (ET 1934)—which Farrer apparently read in March 1931 while still a curate, in the Spring before his return to Oxford later that year—made an enormous impact.[65] And while, as noted above, Farrer's initial impression of Barth was less favourable, this was of course primarily the 'early' Barth of the first-and-second-editions of the *Romans* commentary. Farrer went to Bonn in 1931, the year the Anselm book appeared, and in 1936 he gave *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (*Church Dogmatics* I/1) a critical but positive review. Somewhat puckishly, Farrer says that this book 'deals with the nature of dogmatics, a science in which Barth believes, and we—according to his view—probably do not.'[66] But the Anglo-Catholic chaplain-don's encounter with the best of contemporary Continental

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[65] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 75 (Curtis, 79).

[66] Austin Farrer, Review of Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* and *God in Action*, in *Theology* XXXIII (1936), 370. The conventional understanding of Barth's theological development as a shift from 'dialectic to analogy,' associated with Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988), has been seriously challenged by Bruce McCormack (see note 23 above). Even McCormack, however, accepts and indeed argues for considerable development in Barth from *Der Römerbrief* (1919) to *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* (1932-1965). So far as I am aware, there is no evidence that Farrer read the book on Anselm, but—as with the Barth / Brunner debate—it is very difficult to believe that he did not, particularly since he went to Bonn the year it was published.

Reformed theology undoubtedly challenged and stimulated his thinking on a number of topics, not least being his eventual defence of what Rowan Williams described above as 'a viable and sophisticated natural theology' in *Finite and Infinite*. It is vital to remember that this book was written by someone with personal knowledge and experience of both Barth and Brunner and their work.[67]

But these were also years when Logical Positivism swept through British philosophy, mostly due to the publication in 1936 of the first edition of A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*.[68] Although this slender book was hardly original, it forcefully and accessibly presented the ideas of the Vienna Circle, Bertrand Russell, and the early Wittgenstein (at least, as understood by Ayer) to a much broader audience than a small group of professional philosophers. Famously, Ayer argued that metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, and religion were all, strictly speaking, *meaningless*, as their 'assertions' could not be verified by positivistic criteria.[69] In particular, his critique was strongly felt in philosophy of religion and, eventually, theology. Thus, Donald MacKinnon writes that when

> Ayer's book appeared, the world of philosophical theology was dominated in Great Britain by the works of three men: A. E. Taylor's *The Faith of a Moralist* [1930]; F. R. Tennant's *Philosophical Theology* [Volume 1, 1928; Volume 2, 1930]; and John Oman's *The Natural and the Supernatural* [1931]. The impact of logical positivism led to a sharp depreciation of their

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[67] For Williams, see note 29 above. Farrer also reviewed *God Transcendent* by the German Lutheran theologian Paul Heim (1874-1958), in *The Church Quarterly Review* CXXII (1936), 334-337. Farrer's engagement with Continental Reformed and Lutheran theologians during this period deserves more attention than it can receive here.

[68] (Victor Gollancz, 1936; second edition, 1946). For Ayer's life and career, see Richard Wollheim, 'Ayer, Sir Alfred Jules [Freddie] (1910-1989)', in *ODNB: Volume 3*, 8-10; and Ian Morton, 'A. J. Ayer (1910-1989)' in Philip B. Dematteis, et. al. (eds.), *British Philosophers 1800-2000* (Thompson Gale, 2002), 26-35.

[69] See, in particular, Chapter VI, 'Critique of Ethics and Theology.' Flew and MacIntyre's 1955 collection of *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (cited in note 49 above) is a classic document of the encounter between logical positivism and Christian theology.

> achievement, and to a heightened self-consciousness concerning the logical precariousness of any significant statement concerning a transcendent absolute. It is to this period that there belongs the preparation of Dr Austin Farrer's major work—*Finite and Infinite* [1943]. In it he presented to the world the fruits of his prolonged attempt to find, in a refashioning of the Thomistic way of analogy, the means whereby a rational theology might be constructed and rendered immune from the positivist critique.[70]

So, in addition to grappling with Barth and Brunner on one side, and Logical Positivism on the other, these were also the years in which Farrer seriously engaged with the thought of St Thomas Aquinas and with contemporary Roman Catholic theologians and philosophers. Indeed, Farrer said in 1959 that during the period when he wrote *Finite and Infinite* he 'was possessed by the Thomist vision, and could not think it false.' In this book, he ambitiously and ecumenically attempts to answer both Barth and Ayer while simultaneously repairing Thomistic metaphysics from within, by rescuing it from 'the breath-taking naivety of old linguistic realism.'[71]

As noted above, Rowan Williams comments that although Farrer was clearly 'influenced by the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition,' there is yet 'surprisingly little evidence that he had studied the French Thomists of the twenties and thirties in any depth', and in support of this claim I provided original unpublished evidence that he had declined Kirk's suggestion to study with Gilson and Maritain in Paris.[72] And I

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[70] D. M. MacKinnon, 'Philosophy of Religion in Great Britain: A Personal Impression', in Raymond Klibansky (ed.), *Contemporary Philosophy: A Survey. Volume IV* (La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1971), 214. According to Conti, Farrer wrote to John Glasse at Vassar in 1965, saying that in *Finite and Infinite* he was 'reacting to Ayer's first edition, and to the current discussion of it.' See Appendix 2 to Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, 265-269. For a general survey of this period that discusses Ayer, Tennant, Oman, Farrer, Mackinnon, and many others, see Stewart Sutherland, 'Philosophy of religion in the twentieth century', in Nicholson (ed.), *A Century of Theological and Religious Studies in Britain*, 253-269. Taylor will be discussed further below.

[71] Both citations from Austin Farrer, Revised Preface for the Second Edition, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (Dacre Press, 1959), ix.

[72] See notes 26 and 28 above. For illuminating discussions of some of the other great 'French Thomists' of that period—Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895-1990), Yves Congar (1904-1995), and Henri

also already mentioned, in the Introduction, that—frustratingly—Farrer tends not to indicate his sources. As Mitchell puts it, 'The materials of his thought are so thoroughly fermented in his imagination that no sediment remains (footnotes are notoriously absent)'.[73] This leads to a genuine uncertainty, even among experts, as to what precisely Farrer had read and whom exactly he was either drawing upon or criticising.[74]

However, Farrer's book reviews from this period provide some evidence of his reading, both directly and indirectly. In 1935 he reviewed P. Erich Przywara's *Polarity* (a major text in its own right), in which he speaks with at least apparent authority about the 'revived study of Thomism' and the opinions of 'Modern Thomists'. And in 1939 he reviewed Walter Farrell, OP, *A Companion to the Summa: Volume II: The Pursuit of Happiness* and M. C. D'Arcy, SJ, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*. These latter two are obviously not significant works of Thomist scholarship, but Farrer's comments on them reveal a direct knowledge of Aquinas himself. Thus, Farrer was not impressed with Farrell ('St Thomas was careful to understand his opponents: his expositor prefers a bewildered derision'); but of D'Arcy's volume he says, 'As an anthology to delight the reader who already knows the obvious things, nothing could be better', and that throughout D'Arcy's diverse selection of Aquinas's texts the 'beautiful clarity, the serene and devout reasonableness, the direct vision of realities could not be more happily illustrated.'[75]

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de Lubac (1896-1991)—see the relevant chapters of Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Blackwell, 2007).

[73] Mitchell, 'Austin Farrer: The Philosopher', 456.

[74] See, for example, Farrer's letters to Edward Henderson, in Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism*, Appendix 4, 272-275, in response to Henderson's inquiry regarding Farrer's sources and opponents.

[75] See Austin Farrer, Review of P. Erich Przywara, *Polarity*, in *Theology* XXXI (1935), 361-363; Review of Walter Farrell, OP, *A Companion to the Summa: Volume II: The Pursuit of Happiness*, in

Curtis claims, without citation, that Farrer began reading Aquinas in September 1928, when he was still at Cuddesdon, about three months before his ordination. In an undated fragment of a letter to his father that Curtis places as possibly at Cuddesdon in December 1928, Farrer says, 'I am in the middle of a section of Thomas Aquinas, and have a treatise of my own on his theory of knowledge broken off in the middle.'[76] So he was certainly studying Aquinas by at least December 1928. However, as I pointed out earlier in regard to Farrer's use of 'analogy' in his letter of 20 November (1926), his interest in or openness to Aquinas or Thomistic thought may have started then.

Even so, this is still very far from the profile of a standard Thomist. Farrer the Oxford-educated classicist and Anglican priest went through nothing like the conventional early 20th century Roman Catholic training in neoscholastic philosophy and theology, *ad mentem Sancti Thomæ*. Nor was Farrer bound by the epistemic strictures of Vatican I and the Anti-Modernist Oath, as discussed in Chapter Two. Ironically, Farrer may have thus actually read *more* of Aquinas himself than did the average Roman Catholic student.[77] On the other hand, serious interest in Aquinas and

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Theology XXXVIII (1939), 153-154; and Review of M. C. D'Arcy, SJ, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings*, in *Theology* XXXIX (1939), 319-320. Another book of Roman Catholic philosophy that Farrer reviewed in this period was Paul Ortegat, *Philosophie de la Religion*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* Old Series XL (1939), 100-101. The review of the Przywara volume, translated by A. C. Bouquet, was preceded by Bouquet's own essay a year earlier seeking to introduce Przywara's thought to British theology: see his 'A German Catholic Philosophy of Religion', in *Theology* XXIX (1934), 327-348. Erich Przywara SJ (1889-1972) of course played a major role in Barth's development and in shaping his (mis)understanding of Roman Catholicism: see McCormack, 319-322, 383-391, 407, 416.

[76] Eng. Lett. c. 270, folio 52 (Curtis, 44). For the reference to September 1928, see note 51 above.

[77] For a discussion of such neoscholastic training, see the first chapter of Kerr's book, cited in note 72 above: 'Before Vatican II' (1-16). Kerr directs readers to Anthony Kenny's *A Path From Rome* (Oxford University Press, 1986)—which I discussed in note 14 of Chapter One—as containing the 'best account' of what it was like go through the course at the Gregorian (Kerr, 9). Recall that Kenny reports Farrer's quip that the Pope should issue an encyclical titled *Deus Artium Magister* (Kenny, 50):

Thomism was also atypical of Oxford-educated Anglicans during this period.[78] Rightly or wrongly, Anglicans still saw themselves as primarily heirs of the patristic 'undivided Church,' rather than deeply indebted to either Western Scholastic or Reformation thought; and with a stronger emphasis on the Greek Fathers than the Augustinian focus of their Continental cousins, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic.[79] So Bruce Marshall's description of the late Victor Preller could just as easily be applied to Farrer: he was 'a kind of Melchizedek among Thomists, without father or mother or genealogy—at least any genealogy that most other readers of Aquinas could understand.'[80] Or, as Douglas Hedley rightly puts it, Farrer's 'debt to Aquinas is huge, his affinity to the textbook neo-Thomism of his contemporaries slender.'[81]

The singular and somewhat ambiguous nature of what we might call Farrer's 'proto-analytic Thomism' was noted by four reviewers of *Finite and Infinite*, two

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this witticism actually gives a very good sense of how Farrer himself approached Aquinas—that is, as someone holding an Oxford MA rather than a Roman licentiate.

[78] Or even now. As a complement to his discussion of early 20th century Roman Catholic Thomism, see Kerr's comments on the study of Aquinas in late 20th century—and thus still predominantly Anglican—Oxford, where he says that one can today receive a degree in theology 'without knowing anything of Aquinas' ('The Varieties of Interpreting Aquinas,' in Fergus Kerr [ed.], *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation* [SCM Press, 2003], 27-28).

[79] The classic statement of Anglican doctrine in the mid-20th century, which Farrer would certainly have read carefully, is the 1938 report *Doctrine in the Church of England* (reprinted by SPCK in 1982). See William Temple's comments on the Anglican preference for the Greek fathers on 5-6. And for a useful survey of Anglican theology after the War and after the increased influence of Barth, which also mentions both Farrer and his colleague Eric Mascall, see R. Cant, 'Recent Tendencies in Theological Writing', in *The Church Quarterly Review* 142 (1946), 149-175.

[80] Bruce Marshall, 'In Search of An Analytic Aquinas: Grammar and the Trinity', in Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (eds.), *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein* (SCM Press, 2004), 56.

[81] Douglas Hedley, 'Austin Farrer's Shaping Spirit of Imagination', in Hebblethwaite and Hedley, *The Human Person in God's World*, 132 note 19.

Roman Catholic and two Anglican.[82] Gervase Mathew OP of Blackfriars, Oxford, begins his brief review by stating that

> Mr Farrer's study on the nature of Being has an especial significance for the future of Thomism in England. It would be quite misleading to describe the author as Thomist. The structure of his concise and compressed thinking is very characteristically his own. Both directly and by reaction he owes much to the Logical Positivists. But the debt to the *De Ente et Essentia* is patent enough and even possibly a debt to Père Penido, and it is perhaps the first time that a modern English philosopher, teaching in one of the greater universities, has discussed and utilized Thomism as a living system of metaphysics.[83]

And in a longer review essay, Vincent Turner SJ of Campion Hall, Oxford, says:

> The author is as empirical in temper as anyone could wish and is well acquainted with philosophy, Kantian and modern, Cartesian and Berkeleian; and while the argument is radically thomistic, it is not exegetical or a serving of a twice-cooked dish. It is philosophical to a degree—yet nothing could be less 'neo-scholastic.'[84]

W. G. de Burgh, an Anglican layman and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading from 1907 to 1934, says that while Aquinas 'alike in metaphysics and theology furnishes the groundwork for Mr Farrer's construction,' he nevertheless detects more of a direct influence from contemporary positivism. He also notes that Farrer's 'repudiation of the claim of rational theology to be demonstrative' sets his project apart from a purely, or at least conventionally,

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[82] The term 'analytic Thomism' was coined by John Haldane, currently Professor of Philosophy at the University of St Andrews. It is mostly associated with the 'Cornell School' associated with the late Norman Kretzmann and his students such as Eleonore Stump and Scott MacDonald. See Bruce Marshall's essay cited above, page 70, note 4 for a brief discussion and bibliography. According to Eric Mascall's British Academy obituary of Farrer (cited in note 5 above), Dom Gregory Dix referred to Farrer as a 'para-Thomist' (436)!

[83] Gervase Mathew OP, Review of *Finite and Infinite*, in *Blackfriars* XXV (1944), 33. Mathew is probably referring to M. T-L. Penido's text *Le Rôle de l'Analogie dens la Theologie dogmatique* (Paris: Vrin, 1931), which is discussed by Mascall in *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*, Second Edition (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966—first edition published in 1943) and *Existence and Analogy: A Sequel to "He Who Is"* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966—first published in 1949).

[84] Vincent Turner SJ, 'Mr Austin Farrer's Metaphysics of Theism', in *Theology* XLVII (1944), 99.

Thomistic one.[85] He thus comments (approvingly) that 'by allowing no demonstrative argument anywhere in theology,' Farrer has—perhaps inadvertently—eliminated the traditional Thomistic distinction between natural and revealed theology: 'In the one, Aquinas held, reason could demonstrate; in the other, it could only offer probable reasons in support of truths accepted by faith and in refutation of objections raised against them.' Therefore, since Farrer 'offers probable arguments in Natural Theology; why should he not go on to argue on similar lines to the truth of Revelation?'[86] Here in both Farrer and de Burge we see the Anglican 'semi-fideism' discussed in Chapter Two, Section I.B and Section IV: properly construed, reason can only offer probable arguments, not demonstrative ones, and so therefore Thomism needs to be updated accordingly. We will return to this theme in a moment.[87]

But perhaps the most substantial review of *Finite and Infinite* was written by A. E. Taylor, another Anglican layman, successively Professor of Moral Philosophy at St Andrews (1908 to 1924) and Edinburgh (1924 until 1941). His Gifford Lectures, delivered in St Andrews in 1926-1928 and published in 1930 as *The Faith of a Moralist*, were mentioned above by MacKinnon as one of the great works of early 20th century British philosophical theology. Describing him elsewhere as 'a man of very remarkable learning,' and on Plato 'an authority of international repute,' MacKinnon singles out his substantial article on 'Theism' as 'one of the most

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[85] W. G. de Burgh, Review of *Finite and Infinite*, in *Mind* LII (1943), 345.

[86] Both citations from ibid., 351. For de Burgh's life and career, see Alan P. F. Sell, 'De Burgh, William George (1866-1943)' in Stuart Brown (General Editor), *The Dictionary of Twentieth-Century British Philosophers: Volume 1* (Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 223-224. Sell says that de Burgh died on 27 August 1943, and indeed this volume of *Mind* contains his death notice. This review may well have been his final publication. He is one of the very few contemporary philosophers mentioned by name in *Finite and Infinite* (on 153), and positively, at that.

[87] Note, however, that in his review Mathew denies that a Thomist is committed to such demonstrative argument, stating that such an epistemic standard is actually the Anselmian one that Aquinas rejected (34).

valuable introductions to theistic metaphysics in the English language'.[88] Taylor's nine-page review, written after his retirement from Edinburgh and so at the end of his long and brilliant scholarly career, begins: 'Rarely has any book come into my hands which argues a greater metaphysical theme for three hundred pages with the closeness, penetration, and subtlety shown by Mr Farrer.'[89] Stating that Farrer 'really knows what Metaphysics, as conceived alike by Aristotle and St Thomas and by Descartes or Spinoza, is all about,' he goes on to say that Farrer 'shows himself to be thoroughly steeped in Thomism; indeed, his argument is couched all through in Thomist technical language…but he is no blind devotee of Thomist formulae.'[90] Taylor also discerns engagements both positive and critical, explicit and implicit, with Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Kant, Bergson, Whitehead, and positivism. And, among many other points, Taylor also draws attention to Farrer's denial of demonstrative arguments in rational theology (or indeed anywhere in contemporary philosophy).[91]

But Taylor also frankly addresses what all commentators on this text have found to their chagrin, namely that 'Mr Farrer's essay is hard reading, very hard reading….[T]he argument calls for an exceptionally arduous effort to maintain one's thinking continuously at the highest level of philosophical abstraction, and permits of no digressions of the kind by which Plato likes to relax the strained attention of his

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[88] See Donald M. MacKinnon, revised by Mark J. Schofield, 'Taylor, Alfred Edward (1869-1945)', in *ODNB: Volume 53*, 860-862. For the weighty article, which is indeed highly illuminating and informative, even for the contemporary scholar, see A. E. Taylor, 'Theism' in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Volume XII* (T&T Clark, 1921), 261-287. Farrer refers to *The Faith of a Moralist* on 298 of *Finite and Infinite* as a good example of theistic argument from morality or duty.

[89] A. E. Taylor, Review of *Finite and Infinite*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* Old Series XLV (1944), 237-238.

[90] Ibid., 238 and 239.

[91] Ibid., 242-243.

readers.'[92] He even adds, modestly, that 'there are turnings in the argumentation which are still dark to me—very likely from my own native dullness—after more than one careful reading.'[93] Mathew, Turner, and de Burgh all heave similar sighs, although Turner and de Burgh are more inclined to blame Farrer for serious 'faults of construction and presentation'.[94] I. M. Crombie, Anthony Kenny, and Charles Helfling have all described *Finite and Infinite* as 'difficult', and Philip Curtis reports, 'I once tried to summarize the 300 pages of *Finite and Infinite* and found I had 120 pages of notes.'[95]

All eight of these authors—and many more—also remark on the primarily *metaphysical* focus of Farrer's first book, although it ranges through epistemology and ethics as well. As stated in the Introduction to this dissertation, Farrer was indeed a great metaphysician, and most scholarly attention to his philosophical work has rightly been devoted to this aspect of his thought. This is work that has already been done, thoroughly, and often very well—but one also notes a tendency for such commentators to get entangled in a metaphysical briar-patch from which they only emerge, if at all, with difficulty. My own concern here, however, is in tracing the development of Farrer's religious epistemology in relation to the subsequent charge of fideism. Therefore, the following far-too-brief treatment of *Finite and Infinite* will also be comparatively oblique, as I am interested not so much in Farrer's direct arguments for, e.g., substance and free human agency, but in the epistemological

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[92] Ibid., 240.

[93] Ibid., 241.

[94] So Turner on 101. For the difficulty of the book, see Mathew, 34; Turner, 100; and de Burgh, 344; and on how Farrer could have mitigated this, see Turner, 101; de Burgh, 350-351; and Taylor, 240.

[95] Crombie, 122; Kenny, 'The Problem of Evil and the Argument from Design' (1988), reprinted in his *The Unknown God: Agnostic Essays* (Continuum, 2004), 81; Helfling, *Jacob's Ladder: Theology and Spirituality in the Thought of Austin Farrer* (Cowley Publications, 1979), 127; and Curtis, 'The Rational Theology of Doctor Farrer', *Theology* LXXIII (1970), 249.

'payoff'. For my purposes, it will suffice to determine the epistemological implications of *Finite and Infinite* for the rationality of religious belief.[96]

B. A Philosophical Essay

Let me begin by reminding readers of what I said in Chapter One, Section I.A: namely, that in this text Farrer set out to deal with four interrelated tasks essential to the successful practice of what he called, not 'natural theology' or 'philosophy of religion,' but 'rational theology'—which he defined as the study of God through 'philosophical enquiry and not something else'.[97] Or, spelled out more explicitly, 'a reflective cognitive activity appropriated to the knowledge of God from universal grounds.'[98] And yet remember also what was determined at the end of Chapter Two: namely that—despite the Thomist influence discussed above—Farrer is still basically working within the 'semi-fideistic' context of British philosophy and Anglican theology, rather than within the arguably more rationalistic epistemic framework of the (then contemporary) Roman Catholic Church. According to Farrer, the four tasks of rational theology are:

(1) 'To state the whole mechanism of the mind in working with the scheme of the Analogy of Being or, as I have called it, the Cosmological Idea.'

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[96] For valuable studies that focus much attention on the metaphysics of *Finite and Infinite*, see John Glasse, 'Doing Theology Metaphysically: Austin Farrer', in *Harvard Theological Review* 39 (1966), 319-350; Jeffrey C. Eaton, *The Logic of Theism: An Analysis of the Thought of Austin Farrer* (University Press of America, 1980); Julian Hartt, 'Austin Farrer as Philosophical Theologian: A Retrospective and Appreciation', in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity: New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer* (Pickwick Publications, 1983), 1-22; and Wayne Proudfoot, *God and the Self* (cited in note 18 above). The most recent major study remains Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism* (also cited in note 18), but for my reservations about that text, see the Introduction, which also references reviews of *Metaphysical Personalism* by Jeremy Morris and Charles Taliaferro. For Julian Hartt's fairly critical review of Conti's book, see *Religious Studies* 32 (1996), 525-528. For a more sympathetic review by a fellow traveller, see Frederick Ferré's in *Process Studies* 28 (1999), 141-143.

[97] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite: A Philosophical Essay* (Dacre Press, 1943), v.

[98] Ibid., vii.

(2) 'To show the involvement of theology with an at least implicit doctrine of finite substance, and to re-state the doctrine explicitly.'

(3) 'To show how far down in our common thinking the question of faith enters.'

(4) 'To show what the traditional arguments for God's existence are, and are not; to classify them in an intelligible manner and to find a principle for distinguishing between valuable and absurd types.'[99]

Of these four tasks, (2) takes up far and away the most space of *Finite and Infinite*—all of Part II: 'Examination of Finite Substance' (63-261)—but I shall by-pass it almost entirely. Or rather, I shall merely note the role it plays in Farrer's overall argument. My primary interest is in the first task, which sets out Farrer's epistemological perspective in the context of his overall metaphysical scheme.

(1) The Whole Mechanism of the Mind

To begin with task (1), both the subtitle and the first sentence of *Finite and Infinite* announce that the work is a *philosophical* essay or treatise, not a theological one. It is, however, a philosophical essay or treatise about *God*, and such an enterprise was—and is—widely regarded as both philosophically and theologically problematic, leading inevitably to either mere 'speculation' or sheer 'ecclesiasticism'. Farrer rejects both, and says that 'we may hope to avoid the worst faults on either side if we take up the traditional theology without having decided either what area of its extent is capable of direct philosophical support, or what degree of strength and demonstration that support can attain.'[100] In other words, as Farrer makes more clear elsewhere, his first interest is in the *analysis* of theistic belief, and only secondarily in *dialectic* (that is, in this context, actually arguing for the *truth* of this position).[101] This also seems to be part of his distinction between 'rational' and 'natural' theology,

[99] Ibid., vi-vii.

[100] Ibid., v.

[101] See ibid, 5-6.

with rational theology being more concerned with analysis and natural theology being more concerned with demonstration. Farrer says that to analyse is to treat 'the system with respect, but without favour,' in order 'to discover *on what assumptions* the system would become credible'.[102] While this approach is now normative in contemporary analytic philosophical theology, which feels free to take up questions of the coherence of doctrines such as the Incarnation or the Trinity independently of questions of their truth or the grounds of belief in them, this was not the case when Farrer wrote *Finite and Infinite*. But he *is* interested in dialectic as well, and this means arguing not only for belief in God but also in defence of a particular metaphysical commitment, namely the controverted doctrine of *substance*.[103]

Farrer writes, 'It is generally recognised that there are some metaphysical questions which must be settled if we are to vindicate the significance of any theological statements whatever of the traditional type.'[104] And, as Farrer sees it, the concept of substance is chief among them, and not just the one infinite substance that we may call 'God', but also the many finite substances that make up everything else, including human beings. Indeed, Farrer explicitly claims that 'finite substance has to be vindicated if theism is to be upheld'—for, presumably, if finite substance is vindicated then infinite substance may be entertained as well—and devotes most of *Finite and Infinite* to that goal, thus fulfilling task (2) above.[105]

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[102] Ibid., 5 (emphasis in the original).

[103] Explicitly rejected by Ayer: 'The metaphysical question concerning "substance" is ruled out by our criterion as spurious.' See *Language, Truth and Logic* (Second Edition, cited in note 68 above), 40, and the further discussion on 42-45. As noted above, *Finite and Infinite* is partly a response to Ayer's radical positivism and phenomenalism. These positions must be ruled out for theism to be affirmed.

[104] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, v.

[105] Ibid., 21. Farrer's actual understanding of substance is not our concern, but for a very brief discussion see note 132 below.

However, as our four reviewers have already alerted us and as I just reminded us again, Farrer undertakes this metaphysical task with the conviction that, while philosophy does indeed admit of reasoned argument (i.e., the appeal to 'universal grounds' mentioned above), it does not allow for strict demonstration (i.e., a deductive syllogism whose conclusion cannot be denied). In a significant paragraph he thus writes:

> In taking this attitude towards philosophy, we are intervening whether we wish or no in the unhappy debate between the Thomists and the Modern Theologians. The Thomists possess the true principles for the solution of the problems of rational theology and above all the problem of analogical argument and analogical predication. But by their rigid Aristotelianism and their insistence on the possibility of inescapable demonstration they make themselves vile in modern eyes. The Moderns by reaction deny that the problems exist, and either philosophise about the Infinite Being with surprising naivety or refuse to philosophise at all and content themselves with introducing a certain degree of order into the deliverances of diffused or particular inspiration. There is nothing for it but to re-state the doctrine of Analogy of Being in a credible form, and this is our endeavour here.[106]

Although he does not mention any specific Thomists by name, it is clear enough in general whom Farrer intends, whether or not his accusation is just (see note 87 above). But the referents of 'the Modern Theologians' are considerably more ambiguous, and here we see Farrer's penchant for avoiding footnotes or even specific names at work. A clue is provided in his claim that some such modern theologians content themselves with ordering 'the deliverances of diffused or particular inspiration,' for later on he playfully writes that 'Liberals believe in a diffused, and Calvinists in a particular, spiritual revelation, and some of us are hardy enough to believe in both.'[107] Here the above 'Moderns' are now divided into 'Liberals' and 'Calvinists,' and yet even those terms are somewhat arch, for while by 'Liberals' Farrer could mean several different Protestant groups (all more or less following in

[106] Ibid., vi.

[107] Ibid., 1.

the wake of Schleiermacher), by 'Calvinists' he almost certainly means *Barthians*.[108] And by 'some of us' he probably intends to refer not just to himself and his close associates but to those Anglicans who walk in the correct *via media* between natural and revealed theology. For, contrary to de Burgh's suggestion that he has (perhaps inadvertently) abolished that distinction, Farrer still wants to maintain it, at least at this point. Thus, ignoring for now any distinction he may intend between his term 'rational theology' and the more conventional designation 'natural theology', he still writes: 'We have, then, to be ready to draw the ancient line between rational and revealed theology, though not necessarily in the ancient place, nor with the ancient optimism about the strength of demonstration in the rational branch.'[109]

At any rate, Farrer's intention to re-state Thomism in a way that the Moderns will find 'credible' is clear enough. But, whether or not the Thomists insist on it, why cannot God's existence—or anything else—be conclusively demonstrated? Farrer apparently just accepts this as a commonplace of contemporary (British, analytic) philosophy—and it also fits in with the probabilistic, cumulative-case, 'semi-fideistic' quality of the English intellectual tradition discussed in Chapter Two, Section I.B. So Farrer asserts that *Finite and Infinite* is presented as an exercise in 'rational theology' even though he is not committed to 'the perfect demonstration of even one basic theological proposition. We may find that we can only show its possibility or probability.'[110] Over a decade later, in 1957, Farrer observed that the attempt to prove

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[108] This is also the group to whom Farrer probably intends to refer under the term 'revelationists'. See the brief but trenchant critique of such on ibid., 2-3. Having reviewed *Church Dogmatics* I/1, Farrer was of course very well aware that Barth described the Analogy of Being that Farrer here sets out to rehabilitate as 'the invention of the antichrist'.

[109] Ibid., v. See also the discussion on 58—'The condescension of God does not belong to rational theology. Revealed theology is about little else.'—and the famous conclusion on 299-300.

[110] Ibid.

'is now out of fashion, not so much because theology cannot be philosophically demonstrated as because nothing can'.[111] And back in *Finite and Infinite*, in regard to the existence of God, Farrer says:

> An 'inescapable demonstration' *must* be a fallacy. For if a proof of this kind could be produced it would have been produced. Anselm thought he had produced it, so perhaps did St Thomas; but Gaunilo and Kant and Russell are not convinced, and they are as good men to follow an argument as any others.[112]

This appeal to authority—and to such authorities (Russell in particular)—may seem dubious to Thomists, but it conveys Farrer's life-long conviction that it is absurd to assume that 'the difference between the believing and the unbelieving philosopher [lies] in the greater logical competence of the former, or in his superior judgment of empirical evidence (in any ordinary sense).'[113] This claim—which finds some parallel in the so-called 'Parity Argument' that Terence Penelhum associates with fideism (see Chapter Two, Section I.C)—recurs several times in Farrer's work over the years: atheists are smart people whose intellectual integrity he is at pains to defend. While theism may indeed be both true and rational, its truth and rationality are not so obvious that atheists are *ipso facto* irrational in rejecting them. If the existence of God could be logically demonstrated in some straight-forward manner, A. J. Ayer and Bertrand Russell would be convinced. Farrer takes their lack of conviction seriously, and formulates his own case in response to it. If there is a philosophical argument that leads to God, it must have a different character, and

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[111] Austin Farrer, 'A Starting Point for the Philosophical Examination of Theological Belief', in Basil Mitchell (ed.), *Faith and Logic: Oxford Essays in Philosophical Theology* (George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 9. And to this extent Farrer agrees with Ayer, who likewise denies the capability of philosophy to provide demonstrations outside of formal logic and tautological statements.

[112] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 4. Note that here Farrer acknowledges that Aquinas himself may not insist on the 'inescapable demonstration' that Farrer finds orthodox among Thomists (again see note 87).

[113] Ibid., 5.

cannot be a 'proof'. And yet, of course, from the then-official Roman Catholic perspective, this statement is anathema, the (Anglican) heresy of semi-fideism.

Further on, Farrer justifies his denial of theistic demonstration by stating that it is precisely the *uniqueness* of God that renders God's existence un-demonstrable. God—if God exists—is not *purely* unique in the sense that *no* analogy between finite and infinite can be found, for about 'that which is simply unique there can be no discourse; we can only repeat its name, and say that it is itself and not any of the others.'[114] Rather, God—if God exists—is unique in the slightly weaker sense that God 'shares no *identical* characteristics with anything else, and so cannot be placed in a proper class with the others [and so analogy is both possible and necessary]. Now, if this is so, by what sort of reasoning could the existence of God possibly be *proved*?'[115] For in falling outside all classes, God also seems to fall outside all normal rules of our understanding. Thus, Farrer argues:

> neither under the head of causality nor under any other head can God or His activity be made the case of a rule, or the instance of a class, and therefore He cannot be demonstrated in the ordinary sense; for no principle can be found for a proof. It is not merely that (as St Thomas says) He cannot be demonstrated *a priori*….He cannot be demonstrated *a posteriori* either, i.e., from His effects, because we must first know that they are effects, and effects of a perfectly unique activity….So then, to argue from effects is to begin by positing the divine activity and the divine Agent, and begs the question.[116]

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[114] Ibid., 23.

[115] Ibid., 7 (emphasis added). Farrer first mentions God's uniqueness in the Preface, on page vii. Jeffrey Eaton's *The Logic of Theism* makes Farrer's emphasis on divine uniqueness one of the key points of his interpretation.

[116] Ibid. Farrer's summary—and indeed rather compressed—rejection of *a posteriori* theistic arguments requires more attention than I will give it here, for my primary concern at this point is to exposit Farrer's position. Even the evaluative comments that will follow in due course will be general rather than detailed in nature, but clearly many of these claims could be debated at considerable length. Note, however, that Fergus Kerr makes a similar observation about Aquinas's mode of argumentation 'from effects' in *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Blackwell, 2002), 58-59. Kerr does not reject such arguments as briskly as Farrer, but concedes that they are 'pervaded by theological assumptions' (58).

But if not by *demonstration*, then can God be known by the intellect, apart from special revelation? Only, according to Farrer, through *apprehension*. And here he appeals to an insight drawn from Descartes, which provides a somewhat different role for 'effects' than the conventional Thomistic one rejected above, where they provide material for the premises of a syllogism. Instead, 'Descartes is on the right line when he suggests that what we have to do is to show that in and through and with His effects our minds grasp God—since we have seen that God cannot be inferred, and it remains that He should be apprehended.'[117] Now, precisely what Farrer means by 'apprehension' is not easy to determine, and would require a whole chapter—or dissertation—in itself.[118] He clearly distinguishes it from inference (deductive *or* inductive); he seems to think of it an intuitive cognitive power; and his most concise definition of it is 'objective grasp of realities'.[119] But, at least in part, 'apprehension' conveys Farrer's insistence that belief in God's existence is less the *conclusion* of a formal *argument* as it is the *recognition* of a unique *relation*.[120]

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[117] Ibid., 8. Farrer explicitly cites and interacts with Descartes, *Meditations*, Chapter III on 14-16.

[118] See Rodger Forsman, '"Apprehension" in *Finite and Infinite*', in Eaton and Loades, *For God and Clarity*, 111-130. This is one of the few treatments of this text from an epistemological angle. Forsman indeed wrote a doctoral dissertation on this theme: *Austin Farrer's Notion of Apprehension: An Analysis and Appraisal of His Claim to Knowledge of Substance* (University of Toronto, 1974). See the list of 'Theses and Dissertations' on Farrer on 207-208 of Hein and Henderson, *Captured by the Crucified*. Proudfoot also has a helpful section on apprehension in *God and the Self*, 106-122.

[119] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 45.

[120] Forsman argues that 'apprehension' in *Finite and Infinite* should not be understood in intuitive terms, and proposes what he calls a 'criteriological' interpretation instead: see 113, 122-129. I am not convinced on either conceptual or textual grounds that this is a necessary distinction. By 'intuition' Forsman seems to mean something like a power of (actual) perception or a 'sixth sense' (122), whereas by 'criterion' he intends 'a condition which if satisfied confers rational acceptability upon a proposition', and 'apprehension' thus 'signifies satisfaction of such a criterion.' (123) More formally, Forsman says, 'If S *takes it for granted* that p (under relevant standard conditions) then S is warranted in believing that p.' (123) According to Forsman, Farrer holds that 'what justifies us in accepting the claim that we are substances is that we take it for granted—find it unavoidable, natural, inevitable to

Those who believe in God, Farrer says, 'have believed in Him as bearing to all finite things a single necessary relation—necessary to the finites, that is, and to all in the same way; as performing for all of them a single function which they could not do without.'[121] And this 'function,' of course, is the continuous act of their creation and preservation. This act is unique, as is the Agent who performs it. Therefore, 'the description we give ourselves of Him cannot (with any justification) be independent of the ground on which we propose to believe in Him, viz., the function He performs for all the finites. He must be understood as the Agent of this very effect.'[122] And understanding God in *this very specific particular way*—as the Agent of the function of our creation—seems to be what Farrer means by apprehending the existence of God. Thus, further on he writes: 'God, the absolute form of existence, is apprehended in the instance "my existence".'[123] Farrer then adds to this claim in a footnote: 'Where the existence of something impresses us, we apprehend God, for we interpret that existence by the clue of our own.' This, in short, is what Farrer calls 'the

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believe that—we are substances in the determinate conditions to which Farrer calls our attention, that is, in the situations of deliberation, decision, and carrying out of an intended course of action, and so on.' (124) But, if so, Forsman's distinction between 'intuition' and 'criteria' becomes much less clear: for even in the criteriological version we just 'see' it to be the case. At least, that's how I would metaphorically explain what I meant if I said that I took a belief for granted, found it unavoidable, natural, inevitable to believe, etc.—'I just see it.' So, while it may be important to take account of Forsman's distinction in regard to the nuances of what Farrer means by 'apprehension', it still does not seem inaccurate to describe it, if only loosely, as an 'intuitive cognitive power'. And, *contra* Forsman, Farrer *does* explicitly associate apprehension with intuition, as when he glosses 'the cosmological intuition' as 'the apprehension of God' (*Finite and Infinite*, 262). What Forsman wants us to accept, perhaps, is that apprehension is an intuitive cognitive power that only obtains under certain conditions, namely deliberation, decision, etc. If so, fine.

[121] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 3.

[122] Ibid., 4. See also page 22, where Farrer says that it is 'impossible to over-stress the importance of realising that creation is an unique relation. No theology can survive the assumption that it is reducible to some other, for manifest absurdities result.'

[123] Ibid, 47.

cosmological idea': that is, 'the scheme of God and the creature in relation.'[124] And, as task (1) of rational theology indicates, the 'cosmological idea' is simply Farrer's term for the more traditional phrase 'analogy of being'.

In his focus on God as the unique Agent of a unique act, and on apprehension as the recognition of God's existence vis-à-vis the function of our own creation, and on the cosmological idea as the scheme of God and the creature in relation, Farrer is keen to emphasise that all of these terms and definitions are just a formal way of expressing actual, simple, unreflective, religious belief—what he calls the 'Jacob's-ladder of living religion.'[125] All this, he says, is just what religious people have always believed and taught—one doesn't need a metaphysician to know that God is the Creator. Thus, 'Those who accept a revealed theology place among its articles the Creator of heaven and earth; this is the foundation upon which the rest is built.'[126] But, Farrer says, even revelation must be intelligible to the human mind before it can be accepted, and so we must be properly designed to receive it. Otherwise, it is futile:

> unless I had some mental machinery for thinking the bare notion of God, could I recognise His revelatory action as that of God?….As we shall learn, to study this notion of God, of a supreme and original being, is to study what the mind can only see in and through the general nature of finite and dependent being. And this is to study rational theology.[127]

Although, as usual, Farrer doesn't name any names, it seems probable that here he is (among other things) taking up Brunner's side in the debate with Barth over natural theology, for this human capacity for revelation is nothing other than the disputed 'point of contact' which makes *theologia naturalis* possible.[128]

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[124] Ibid., 16.

[125] Ibid., 4. Hence the title of Hefling's book, cited in note 95.

[126] Ibid., 2.

[127] Ibid.

[128] See note 25 above

But here we also see Farrer walking the tightrope between fideism and rationalism. On one hand, he eschews the demonstration of God's existence, defends the rationality of atheists, and says that he does not 'expect to convince the sceptical philosopher'.[129] The difference between belief and unbelief is not a matter of logical competence or the weighing of empirical evidence. Is it then purely arbitrary and / or irrational? No, for, on the other hand, as a theist Farrer assumes that 'God's activity is there for the mind, and there is hope of bringing it into view.' Indeed, if this is in fact the case, 'it is unlikely that it has remained wholly latent hitherto; if the world is in God, it is likely that those who habitually look at it have some crypto-theism in some parts of their interpretation of it, some sub-awareness of certain aspects of the divine activity.'[130] What this means is that 'the theist's first argument is a statement; he exhibits his account of God active in the world and the world existing in God, that others may recognise it to be the account of what they themselves apprehend—or, if you like, that others may find it to be an instrument through which they apprehend, for perhaps apprehension is here not separable from interpretation.'[131] So, while those such as A. J. Ayer and Bertrand Russell may be excused from condemnation for refusing to accept traditional demonstrative arguments for the existence of God, it remains possible to engage with them on a more subtle level. Even they are—or ought to be—subliminally aware of their dependence on God, as finite substances / agents in relation to the infinite Substance / Agent. For while God's existence may

[129] Ibid., 5.

[130] Both citations from ibid., 10.

[131] Ibid., 9-10. This linkage—or even identification—of 'apprehension' with 'interpretation' raises all sorts of interesting epistemological and hermeneutical questions that cannot detain us here, but which will re-emerge later in Chapters Four and Five, if only implictly. Farrer discusses this again briefly in a section titled 'Apprehension and Interpretation' (102-104).

not be demonstrated, it might still be discerned—apprehended—through reason. It all depends on what one means by 'reason'.[132]

If Farrer concisely defines 'apprehension' as 'objective grasp of realties', his concise definition of 'rationality' in the same context is 'appropriate response to them'.[133] This links up with an important discussion in which Farrer astutely notes that the meaning of terms such as 'coherence' and 'rationality' are not self-evident, and thus not defined without controversy, and that their meanings shift according to context and between different philosophical systems. In particular, the meaning of these terms differs between the logically-oriented positivist on one side and the metaphysically-oriented Thomist or Idealist on the other. Farrer sees this as a basic epistemic divide not easily crossed. For these are two (or three) different perspectives that 'start with completely different views of what constitutes "coherence" and "rationality", of what "satisfies the mind".'[134] And where they start largely determines where they finish. So, he says:

> The question, then, must not be 'What view is more rational, more coherent?' but 'What sort of coherence or order is in the things, and what sort of things are there?' If we must use the word 'rational', i.e., 'worthy of a reasonable mind', let us recall the Aristotelian doctrine that mind is in a manner all things; the nature of mind is simply to be the characters of its objects in the state of understood-ness. What is 'rational', what is felt to 'satisfy the mind' must, in the long run, be a correct account of what there is for the mind. Unless 'rational' means this, it must mean simply 'that which is in accordance with the formal procedure of the discursive reason'. But this in turn either reduces to the absolute formality of pure logic—the principles must be exemplified in every system of terms with which we are able to think at all—

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[132] In here conflating 'substance' with 'agent' and 'agency', I am introducing a major piece of Farrer's metaphysical scheme that other scholars have commented on at length, namely his insistence that (*contra* Berkeley) *Esse est* ***operari***, and thus that 'the substance is a unit of activity, and we think of God also as a unit of activity, when we think of Him as the perfection of which we are the limitation' (see pages 21 and 28). This is Farrer's way of restating the Thomistic doctrine that God is Pure Act: God as 'absolute existent' is also 'absolute activity'.

[133] Ibid., *Finite and Infinite*, 45.

[134] Ibid., 9.

> or else means 'that which is consistent with the principles of one assumed system'. But what system should we assume? That is the question.[135]

Here Farrer is undoubtedly taking aim at Ayer's reduction of philosophical reason to logic, and thus at his explicitly contrary statement that 'to be rational is simply to employ a self-consistent accredited procedure in the formation of all one's beliefs,' for 'we define a rational belief as one which is arrived at by the methods which we now consider reliable.'[136]

Against this positivistic reduction of reason to logic alone, Farrer insists that it has to do with an appropriate response to objective realities.[137] In a posthumously-published essay on 'Poetic Truth,' which Charles Conti dates as contemporaneous with *Finite and Infinite*, Farrer leaves the lectern and ascends the pulpit to express his more 'metaphysical' view of reason in a moving passage that incorporates both the concept of 'apprehension' discussed earlier and the above comment that those who

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[135] Ibid. Farrer's reference to the 'the Aristotelian doctrine that mind is in a manner all things' connects to the current renewal of interest in 'mind/world identity,' associated with 'analytic Thomism': see Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 28-30, 32-33, 78-79.

[136] Ayer, 100.

[137] See, further, *Finite and Infinite*, 18-19. While respecting logic within its proper limits, Farrer apparently maintained this 'metaphysical' view of reason throughout his life. See his interesting and amusing letter to his father, written on 1 February (1953), which Curtis says is 'a comment on a certain type of logical philosopher in the ascendant in Oxford in the 1950s,' but which inspection of the original reveals is actually is about Lewis Carroll! However, the comparative evaluation remains apropos. Observing that Carroll's 'intellect resides in a world of arid logical puzzles while his sentiments and human interests are childlike and naïve to the last degree', Farrer goes on to say that he 'is an instance of a sort of eccentricity pretty common among academic philosophers whose philosophy is chiefly logical, rather than being an attempt to gain insight into the essence of things. Their intellect becomes absorbed in puzzles about the relation between dream and real experience, about logical identity and inferential validity, about sense and nonsense. The mind having gone a wool-gathering, the rest of their life has to take care of itself: and as it is not a very complicated or painful one (for the most part), and as the possession of an absorbing intellectual hobby makes for contentment, such men are likely to drop into an amiable and virtuous puerility: especially if they be not married.' See Curtis, 142, and Bodleian Eng. Lett. c. 272, folios 140-141.

carefully and habitually 'look' at the world should discern at least some awareness of divine activity. Again undoubtedly with those such as Ayer in mind, Farrer laments:

> The chief impediment to religion in this age, I often think, is that no one ever looks at anything at all: not so as to contemplate it, to apprehend what it is to be that thing, and plumb, if he can, the deep fact of its individual existence. The mind rises from the knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of their creator, but this does not happen through the sort of knowledge which can analyse things into factors or manipulate them with technical skill or classify them into groups. It comes from the appreciation of things which we have when we love them and fill our minds and senses with them, and feel something of the silent force and great mystery of their existence. For it is in this that the creative power is displayed of an existence higher and richer and more intense than all.[138]

Similarly, but in a different context, he pronounces: 'We are not suffering from too much logic, but from too little contemplation.'[139]

As we have heard earlier, according to Farrer the first task of rational theology is to state 'the whole mechanism of the mind in working with the scheme of the Analogy of Being or, as [he has] called it, the Cosmological Idea.' To complete this brief sketch of the first task, three more elements need to be mentioned. First, Farrer does indeed enter into a discussion of the nature of analogy itself and its necessary role in our understanding the divine nature.[140] Second, in seeking to ascend the scale

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[138] 'Poetic Truth', in Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Charles C. Conti (SPCK, 1972), 37-38. Hedley discusses this passage in 'Austin Farrer's Shaping Spirit of Imagination,' 122.

[139] 'The Nature of God as Personal Act', in *Reflective Faith*, 139. Conti says that this previously unpublished essay was written 'for a philosophical conference at Windsor, 1951, in the form of a letter to its convener, Miss Dorothy Emmet' (137).

[140] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 52-55. For further contributions from Farrer on the essential and highly contested topic of analogy, see his 1947 article in *The Downside Review*, 'The Extension of St Thomas's Doctrine of Knowledge by Analogy to Modern Philosophical Problems', reprinted in *Reflective Faith* as 'Knowledge by Analogy' (69-81); his 1955 article on 'analogy' from *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, reprinted as 'The Concept of Analogy' in *Reflective Faith* (64-68); the posthumously-published 'Metaphysics and Analogy' which Conti dates circa 1951, in *Reflective Faith* (82-90); and the posthumously-published 'Analogy and Common Talk' which Conti says was delivered to a postgraduate class on analogy in Michaelmas 1968, and so just a month or so

of being from finite to infinite, Farrer distinctively insists on the advantage of what he calls 'the interior scale' as opposed to 'the scale of nature'.[141] This is because Farrer is convinced that our knowledge of ourselves, and in particular of our willing and thinking, is more 'reliable' than our knowledge of external realities: we know human nature from the inside, as it were, whereas we do not know what it is like to be an electron or an amoeba.[142] As he says further on, 'we have no direct knowledge of any particular mode of existence except our own.'[143] These two aspects of Farrer's argument are extremely important and obviously controversial, and should be treated much more fully than the mere mention they will receive here.[144]

Third, despite Farrer's insistence that we *do* have 'some mental machinery for thinking the bare notion of God,' that 'God's activity is *there* for the mind,' and that therefore we *can* to some extent apprehend God's existence—and even, by analogy, God's infinite nature—Farrer nevertheless insists that, finally, God is incomprehensible. Deity exceeds the power of our intellect to grasp, but

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before his death, in Austin Farrer, *Interpretation and Belief*, edited by Charles C. Conti (SPCK, 1976), 202-210. See also Ian Davie, 'Inverse Analogy', in *The Downside Review* 113 (1985), 196-202; and Kevin Tortorelli, 'Some Contributions of Balthasar and Farrer on the Subject of the Analogy of Being', in *The Downside Review* 107 (1989), 183-190. Simon Oliver claims that Farrer's interpretation of Aquinas's theory of analogy 'as one of proportionality' (specifically in the 1955 article) is 'a common misreading', but I cannot pursue this matter further in this dissertation, either in regard to Farrer or Aquinas. See Simon Oliver, 'The Theodicy of Austin Farrer', in *The Heythrop Journal* XXXIX (1998), note 34 on 296-297.

[141] See Chapter IV, 'The Ladder of Ascent,' 37-48.

[142] Ibid., 45.

[143] Ibid., 264. Of course this largely depends on what Farrer means by 'direct knowledge'. If I had time to comment on this claim, I would argue that here Farrer is still captive to Cartesian scepticism.

[144] They are thoroughly discussed in the works of Conti, Curtis, Eaton, Glasse, Hartt, Hefling, and Proudfoot cited in notes 18, 95, and 96 above. See also Eric Mascall's *Existence and Analogy* (cited in note 83), which refers to *Finite and Infinite* at several points and engages exclusively with it on pages 158-175.

> whoever said that Deity was conceivable?....God is (in the sense implied) inconceivable, and it is necessary to face this fact; any doctrine that says otherwise must fall into limitless absurdities….It remains that the act of thinking the divine perfection strains to the uttermost the powers of the human mind. How could it be otherwise, if God is God?[145]

So by 1943 Farrer, 'possessed by Thomist vision', has clearly moved some distance from the extreme apophaticism and ineffability in regard to the divine nature expressed in his undergraduate letter in February 1928. However, he still insists that God is ultimately a mystery that we cannot fully comprehend. This does not excuse us from the strenuous attempt to do so, nor does it mean that rational theology is entirely impossible. It just means that its results are very meagre indeed.

(2) Knowledge of Substance

The second task of rational theology is to 'show the involvement of theology with an at least implicit doctrine of finite substance, and to re-state the doctrine explicitly'—and, as stated above, this endeavour takes up a full two-thirds of *Finite and Infinite* (Part II, pages 63-261). This part of the book is a metaphysical *tour de force* (for the most part concerned with what in contemporary terms would be called philosophy of mind and philosophical psychology) that deals successively with the logical prolegomena of the examination of finite substance, including the problems of speech about and apprehension of substance (63-105); the definition, scope, and freedom of the will (106-170); the nature and unity of the self (171-229); the knowledge of things (230-246); and the metaphysical analysis of finite substance in terms of form and essence (247-261).[146]

For my purposes, however, all that needs to be said about this extremely dense, difficult, and doubtful exercise are twelve words cited earlier, namely Farrer's

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[145] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 56 and 60.

[146] For in-depth discussions of this material, see Glasse, 325-335; Proudfoot, 88-148; Eaton, 73-115; and Conti, *passim*. See also de Burgh, 349-350; Turner, 101-103; and Taylor, 245-246.

claim that 'finite substance has to be vindicated if theism is to be upheld'.[147] For here, despite all the qualifications and subtleties and nuances discussed above, despite the rejection of inference and the emphasis on apprehension, despite the denial of demonstrative arguments and the insistence on divine incomprehensibility, one can yet see the residual rationalism lurking at the core of *Finite and Infinite*. For theism to be upheld, Farrer says, finite substance—a controverted metaphysical doctrine—must be *vindicated*. That is, not just believed in as an article of faith (*à la* revelationism or fideism), and not—per impossible—proved (*à la* conventional natural theology or rationalism), but yet still convincingly established by philosophical argument as a perfectly respectable rational belief (*à la* the moderate 'rational theology' described above). This part of the book is thus *necessary* for Farrer's defence of theism; or, more broadly, *metaphysics* is thus necessary for Farrer's defence of theism. Why? Because, as Farrer approvingly said earlier, 'there are some metaphysical questions which must be settled if we are to vindicate the significance of any theological statements whatever of the traditional type.'[148]

In short, the rationality of religious belief rides on Farrer's success (or failure) in these 200 pages. In terms of grasping the epistemic character of Farrer's thought at this stage in his development vis-à-vis rationalism and fideism, it is sufficient to note the avowed strategy of *Finite and Infinite*. The question of whether or not Farrer actually succeeds on his own terms here is of course of great philosophical interest, and has been much written about, but is not my primary concern.[149] As stated several times previously, this is where the epistemic emphasis of my project differs from the

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[147] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 21.

[148] Ibid., v.

[149] Farrer himself came to think his argument in *Finite and Infinite* was problematic, as we will see in Chapter Four.

metaphysical focus of those such as Glasse, Eaton, and Conti who are more concerned with following through on the details of Farrer's argument in his first major work.

However, it is important to discuss briefly what Farrer says about 'knowledge of things', as this has significant implications for his religious epistemology as well, particularly in his later work. In Chapter VII of *Finite and Infinite*, 'Substance-Propositions and the Function of Language', Farrer says that is 'not plausible that we should be able to talk about types of things, about which we can do nothing but talk.'[150] This claim receives a more well-known alternative formulation on page 294, in which talking (*language*) is replaced by thinking (*thought*): 'we cannot think about anything about which we can do nothing but think.'[151] In these two variations of the same idea, Farrer expresses a central aspect of both his general and religious epistemology, namely that human knowledge is not purely *intellective* but primarily *interactive*.

Immediately after stating the dictum cited above, Farrer writes: 'Understanding, to be real and a part of me, must be an act, for I am activity. An

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[150] Ibid., 74.

[151] In a manner reminiscent of the later Wittgenstein, Farrer sometimes identifies thought *with* language. It would thus be interesting to pursue to what extent the argument of *Finite and Infinite* depends on 'apprehension' being a *non-linguistic* form of knowledge. Thus, on 249 Farrer says, 'we have seen in what sense and why both activity as such and the substantial whole or unit of activity are indescribable, *through not inapprehensible*' (emphasis added). But if thought and language are linked as intimately as Farrer himself indicates, then what does it mean to apprehend something we cannot describe? Is that even possible? Those sympathetic to a Wittgensteinian or 'cultural-linguistic' approach to theology would think not: see Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, Second Edition (SPCK, 1997) and George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Westminster Press, 1984). But both Kerr and Lindbeck would probably agree with Farrer's formulation that we cannot talk (and think) about that which we can do *nothing* but talk (and think). Proudfoot criticises the non-linguistic character of Farrer's 'apprehension' in *Finite and Infinite*, and notes that by *The Glass of Vision*, Farrer admits that 'without discourse there is no intellectual apprehension' (cited on Proudfoot, 141). I discuss *The Glass of Vision* briefly below.

understanding which was thought of as a passive mirroring of that which is, could form no part of any real being; it would be itself a phenomenon requiring an active subject to contemplate it.' He develops this interactionist epistemology in more detail in Chapter XX, 'Knowledge of Things.' Here Farrer says that his theory of knowledge is 'causal': that is, 'we know things as they condition or effect our vital operation.'[152] Our knowledge arises from 'an interaction of beings, and the form of that [other being] as an ingredient in the interaction'[153] Commenting on this passage, Edward Henderson says, 'Our experience of the world, then, is not primarily a result of synthesizing passively received data; it is operation in which the world is apprehended as a diversified field of supports and limits to action.'[154] This interactionist perspective is not just the familiar Kantian view that our mind actively organises—and thus interprets—the raw data of experience within certain specific and determined categories, but the more holistic claim that our acquisition of knowledge is not so much mental as corporal, involving every aspect of our being. I would argue that Farrer's brief sketch of an interactionist epistemology is actually far more important than the interior scale of Part I or the long and detailed defence of substance in Part II, and not just in terms of the epistemological focus on this dissertation, but in terms of Farrer's contribution to contemporary philosophical theology.[155]

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[152] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 231. Farrer adds that he means 'causal' more in Spinoza's sense than in Locke's.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Edward Henderson, 'Knowing the World: The Process View of Austin Farrer', in *Philosophy Today* 12 (1968), 207.

[155] As will become more apparent in Chapters Four and Five, I am largely indebted to Henderson for my appreciation and understanding of the interactionist—or, as he sometimes prefers to call it, 'volitionist'—character of Farrer's epistemology. In addition to his essay cited above, see 'Knowing Persons and Knowing God', *The Thomist* 46 (1982), 394-422; and (most especially) 'Valuing in Knowing God: An Interpretation of Austin Farrer's Religious Epistemology', *Modern Theology* 1 (1985), 165-182. As I will discuss further in the next chapter, Henderson thinks that Chapter XX of

Interestingly, Farrer tells us that in order to understand his view it is necessary, if only temporarily, to 'abandon the path of logical rectitude, and to consider evolutionary theory and biological probability.'[156] This is because Farrer takes seriously our nature as embodied and indeed animal intellects: we are neither brains in vats nor (the currently more popular alternative) computer programmes, but evolved organic material beings. Following the Thomistic insight that the scope of our knowledge is determined by our specific (human) nature—i.e., that we know according to our order of being—Farrer says that what we know is a matter of 'being up against that which we interact with in some manner on a level and which must thus be known as to some degree *in pari material* ['of like kind'] with our own activity and being.' We thus do not see things as 'the holy angels' or even as the physicists do—or, if so, it is only 'at the price of diagrammatic and analogical abstraction.'[157] But such 'angelism' is not the normal human way of knowing. And so, 'to apprehend things we must conventionalise them under the form of static conditions for our own active existence. The things themselves can be no more static than this existence of ours which they are seen as conditioning.'[158]

Finite and Infinite is key to this book's general importance and continuity with Farrer's later thought, particularly with *Faith and Speculation*. Of all Farrer's interpreters, Henderson's work brings out perhaps most clearly and helpfully the distinctive character of Farrer's thought in this area. Many readers just miss it entirely and interpret his epistemology in more conventional 'Cartesian' terms.

[156] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, 232.

[157] Both citations from ibid., 235.

[158] Ibid., 237. 'Angelism' is the 'sin' (or heresy) of Descartes, according to Jacques Maritain in his *Three Reformers: Luther, Descartes, and Rousseau* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1941). As noted earlier, Farrer declined Kirk's suggestion to study with Maritain at the Institut Catholique, but Farrer still probably read at least some of his books, and possibly this one, published two years before *Finite and Infinite*. Farrer contrasts human and angelic cognition several times in his book, and while he may have inadvertently slipped into angelism at some points (see note 151) that was not his general intention. I am indebted to Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*, 208 for the reference to angelism.

Henderson notes the parallels between Farrer's activist metaphysics and interactionist epistemology in *Finite and Infinite* with the 'process view' of Whitehead and Bergson. As we will see further in Chapter Four, there is indeed a strong resemblance between Farrer's dictum that 'we cannot think about anything about which we can do nothing but think' (and similar comments from *Faith and Speculation*) and Whitehead's 'reformed subjectivist principle' which denies 'any meaning not abstracted from the experiential meaning'. As David Brown explains it, Whitehead is claiming that 'no sense can be attached to an account of God [or indeed anything] that is not based on that alone of which we have knowledge, namely our own experience'—which seems to be an excellent gloss on Farrer's statement as well.[159] However, Henderson differs from Charles Conti in that while he (correctly) attributes a process influence on Farrer's *philosophy*—that is, on his cosmology and epistemology—Henderson does not carry that influence (more doubtfully) into Farrer's *theology*—that is, into his doctrine of God. It is probably much safer to call Farrer a process philosopher than a process theologian.[160]

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[159] Whitehead's 'reformed subjectivist principle' from *Process and Reality* (1929) and the quotation from David Brown are both cited from Brown's *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology: An Engagement* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), 50.

[160] Rather damagingly for Conti's thesis, Farrer explicitly distanced himself from process theology in 'The Prior Actuality of God' (a paper delivered in the United States in 1966 and published in *Reflective Faith*, 178-191), to which Schubert Ogden later replied: '*Must* God Be Really Related to Creatures?', in *Process Studies* 20 (1991), 54-56. For a useful selection of readings that survey the major themes of process theology and some criticisms that have been raised about them, see Chapter 2, 'Process Theology: A more engaging God?' in Jeff Astley, David Brown, and Ann Loades (eds.), *Problems in Theology 1: Creation* (T & T Clark, 2003), 38-63. For recent statements from the two leading process theologians, see Cobb's 'Process Thought' (251-265) and Ogden's 'Process Thought—a Response to John B. Cobb, Jr' (266-280), both in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave, 2001).

(3) Faith and Argument

As we saw above, Farrer claims that the third task of rational theology is to 'show how far down in our common thinking the question of faith enters.' He adds that he means this not in the specifically religious or theological sense of faith, but in the general sense in which 'intuitions…mould our practical thought.'[161] He seems to be referring to the now familiar anti-sceptical epistemological point associated with Newman, James, Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Gadamer and many others that most of our beliefs are in fact taken on trust rather than painstakingly established by reason. The fact that we cannot prove each and every belief (for either pragmatic or epistemic limitations) is not a philosophical scandal, but constitutive of the human condition. He adds that this theme 'runs throughout the book and has no special place.'[162] It is partly expressed in his conviction about the non-demonstrative character of philosophy discussed earlier: a belief may be rational, even if it cannot be proven. And it will emerge with greater prominence in Chapter Four, particularly in connection with the discussion of 'initial faith' in *Saving Belief* (1964).

Part III of *Finite and Infinite*—'Dialectic of Rational Theology' (262-300)—is concerned with the fourth and final task of rational theology, to 'show what the traditional arguments for God's existence are, and are not; to classify them in an intelligible manner and to find a principle for distinguishing between valuable and absurd types.' However, I will not directly discuss the details of this section since, like Part II, its specific content and success or failure (even on Farrer's own terms) is largely irrelevant to the epistemic strategy of *Finite and Infinite* as presented in Part I. We already know that, at this point in his career, Farrer believes that 'finite substance has to be vindicated if theism is to be upheld'. Part III, where he applies the results of

[161] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite*, vi.

[162] Ibid.

Part II specifically to theistic arguments, is thus important to the details of Farrer's case but less significant for the bigger epistemic picture. The point is, he apparently thinks that something along the lines of an argument is necessary, if only in principle. But Julian Hartt rightly notes that, even so, Farrer's treatment of the theistic arguments is curiously insouciant: while apparently still necessary for the successful execution of his project, they are 'tucked…into the last few pages of his performance…almost as though [they] were a concession to the unfortunate expectations of the audience.'[163] In *Finite and Infinite*, protests to the contrary notwithstanding, the actual purpose of Part III seems rather ambiguous, with only 38 out of 300 pages devoted to the arguments themselves. In fact, given what Farrer says in Part I about apprehension rather than inference being the path to God, it remains unclear how *any* sort of argument functions in aiding the task of apprehending either God or finite substance—but that is a point of interpretation that I will here leave unresolved.[164]

C. Knowledge by Analogy

Finite and Infinite is far and away Farrer's most important and extensive statement of his thinking about the rationality of religious belief while 'possessed by the Thomist vision'. Discounting those pieces focused on biblical or more theological issues, most of the relevant articles, book reviews, and posthumously published papers from this period (roughly from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s) are interesting for the points of detail and nuance they provide, but are not essential for establishing

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[163] Hartt, 'Austin Farrer as Philosophical Theologian,' 10

[164] See Hartt's essay, 10-11, for a discussion of the 'Proofs' and their place in *Finite and Infinite*. Jeffrey Eaton provides a summary and analysis of each of the thirteen arguments considered by Farrer in Part III and interested readers looking for a commentary are referred to his text (20-33). Proudfoot also discusses Farrer's theistic arguments in *God and the Self*, 132-137.

the content of his epistemological position.[165] Likewise for his other major book of this period, *The Glass of Vision*.[166]

As Basil Mitchell's eloquent testimony from Chapter One bears witness, this is one of Farrer's most profound, fertile, and suggestive books. Charles Helfling says that it is 'undoubtedly the most important source for understanding the breadth of Farrer's genius'.[167] And it does indeed have a strong epistemological character: both Eric Mascall and Rowan Williams speak of Farrer's 'epistemology of images'.[168] In *The Glass of Vision*, Farrer continues his polemic against Barth and Ayer by defending a 'natural knowledge of God' (such as he argued for at greater length in *Finite and Infinite*), the reality of revealed truth that is above unaided human reason to reach on its own (a theme almost entirely absent from the previous book), and the indispensable role of creative imagination or 'wit' in human intellectual activity (likewise). However, the *primary* concern of this book as a whole is with how inspiration, revelation, and imagery combine with the literary character of the

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[165] For relevant articles and papers, see 'The Rational Grounds for Belief in God' (approximately contemporaneous with *Finite and Infinite* and posthumously published in *Reflective Faith*, 7-23); 'Can We Know That God Exists?' (editor's summary of a debate between the Rev. A. M. Farrer and Mr MacNabb), in *Socratic Digest* 2 (1944), 12-13; 'Does God Exist?', in *Socratic Digest* 4 (1947), 27-34, reprinted in *Reflective Faith*, 39-47, and in Ann Loades and Robert MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart: Austin Farrer and His Writings* (Canterbury Press, 2006), 207-215; 'On Credulity' in *Illuminatio* 1 (1947), 3-9, reprinted in *Interpretation and Belief*, 1-6, and *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 190-195; 'Faith and Reason' (of unknown early date, posthumously published in *Reflective Faith*, 48-63); 'The Nature of God as Personal Act' (cited in note 139 above); and 'On Verifying the Divine Providence' (according to Conti, written sometime between 1951 and 1954, posthumously published in *Reflective Faith*, 140-148). See also the book reviews in the Bibliography, I.1.4., published between 1935 and 1946.

[166] *The Glass of Vision: The Bampton Lectures of 1948* (Dacre Press, 1948).

[167] Helfling, *Jacob's Ladder*, 130.

[168] Mascall, in his British Academy obituary notice of Farrer, 438; Williams, in his *Christology and the Nature of the Church: The Fourth Mascall Memorial Lecture*, given in St Mary's Bourne Street, 6 November 1999 (St Mary's Bourne Street London), 4.

Scriptural text to convey what Farrer calls 'the form of divine truth in the human mind'.[169] Revelation itself is at least in part an epistemological concept, as William Abraham has recently reminded us, but in *The Glass of Vision* revelation does not connect directly with the *rationality* of religious belief or the question of fideism.[170] Farrer does indeed explicitly consider the implications of supernatural revelation for these topics, but not until 1957, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four. So, while I agree with Helfling that *The Glass of Vision* is perhaps Farrer's most significant single book, and also acknowledge David Brown's suggestion that its emphasis on images and imagination perhaps represents Farrer's most fruitful line of thought for contemporary Christian theology, I will not discuss it further in this dissertation.[171]

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[169] Farrer, *The Glass of Vision*, 1. Thus, Henderson does not deal with *The Glass of Vision* in 'Valuing in Knowing God: An Interpretation of Austin Farrer's Religious Epistemology' (cited in note 155), but skips straight from *Finite and Infinite* to *The Freedom of the Will*.

[170] For Abraham, see his *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Eerdmans, 2006), and my review in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 (2008), 219-222.

[171] As cited below, Brown has written two essays on Farrer's work. In 'The Role of Images in Theological Reflection' (92) he says that 'although Farrer is not mentioned, I have taken seriously his stress on the power of images and their capacity to generate new meanings' in two major volumes, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford University Press, 1999) and *Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* (Oxford University Press, 2000). For studies that engage directly with *The Glass of Vision*, see David Brown, 'God and Symbolic Action', in Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T & T Clark, 1990), 103-122; ibid., 'The Role of Images in Theological Reflection', in Hebblethwaite and Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World* (SCM Press, 2006), 85-105; Ingolf Dalferth, 'The Stuff of Revelation: Austin Farrer's Doctrine of Inspired Images', in Ann Loades and Michael McLain (eds.), *Hermeneutics, the Bible and Literary Criticism* (St Martin's Press, 1992), 71-95; Jerry H. Gill, 'Divine Action as Mediated', *Harvard Theological Review* 80 (1987), 269-378; Douglas Hedley, 'Austin Farrer's Shaping Spirit of Imagination', in Hebblethwaite and Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World*, 106-134; and Gerard Loughlin, 'Making it Plain: Austin Farrer and the Inspiration of Scripture', in Loades and McLain (eds.), *Hermeneutics, the Bible and Literary Criticism*, 96-112. See also Proudfoot, 137-146; Eaton's chapter 'Diagrammatic Fictions and Inspired Images' in *The Logic of Theism*, 131-200; and Robert Boak Slocum, *Light in a Burning Glass: A Systematic Presentation of Austin Farrer's Theology* (University of South Carolina

However, to round out this discussion of Farrer's unique brand of Thomism as it relates to his revision of rational theology and the development of his religious epistemology, it will be illuminating to look briefly at a largely neglected paper, 'The Extension of St Thomas's Doctrine of Knowledge by Analogy to Modern Philosophical Problems.' Originally delivered to the Aquinas Society of London and published in *The Downside Review* in 1947, while it is indeed partly concerned with analogy, I am more interested in its implications for knowledge.[172]

Farrer begins by saying that Aquinas introduces the concept of analogy specifically to deal with problems associated with our knowledge of God. For Aquinas, we know the items of everyday life simply and without complication or confusion—and thus without analogy—whereas God transcends these normal categories and so can be grasped by us only by analogy with mundane objects. But, according to Farrer, 'for a modern the balance of this contrast has considerably altered, and…what we take to be our apprehension of finite substances approximates far more towards the traditional [Thomist] account of our apprehension of God than strict traditionalism would have said.'[173] Our epistemic situation vis-à-vis the world is much more indirect than Aquinas assumed, and finite substances are far more mysterious. Since Berkeley, Hume, Kant, quantum physics, etc., we now think of ourselves as almost as distant from the mundane 'things in themselves' as we are from God. Thus: 'We say of the physical, something far more like what the medieval would say of the divine being, that it is indirectly signified to us by the sensible signs,

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Press, 2007), 50-76. Hedley has recently published a major study titled *Living Forms of the Imagination* (T. & T. Clark, 2008) which contains a chapter dealing with this aspect of Farrer's thought: 'Inspired Images, Angels and the Imaginal World' (211-244).

[172] *The Downside Review* 65 (1947), 21-32; reprinted in *Reflective Faith* as 'Knowledge by Analogy', 69-81: I will cite from the version in *Reflective Faith*.

[173] Farrer, 'Knowledge by Analogy,' 72.

that we cannot give ourselves a clear and proper account of it, but are reduced to using diagrams, in which certain elements selected from the sensible signs are combined to yield some sort of indirect representation—presumably an analogical representation.'[174] Hence the characteristically modern emphasis on epistemology rather than the classical and medieval focus on metaphysics—that is, on being itself.

Farrer then distinguishes between what he calls the *supernatural object* (God), the *connatural object* (finite physical being), and the *perspicuous object* (the sensible sign by which we perceive finite physical being). Explaining the latter term, he says that a 'sense-datum, a patch of colour *qua* seen, a tone of sound in so far as heard, and so forth, is perspicuous by definition: it is only when we raise the question what physical being it is the sign of that we arrive at the non-perspicuous.'[175] And he admits that being as such, even the finite beings we interact with on a daily basis, is non-perspicuous. He then asks when and why we are driven to thinking by analogy, and answers that it is only when we are faced with a reality that transcends our normal cognitive powers. But this is now the case with all 'reality' whatsoever. Analogy is no less necessary for our attempt to grasp a grain or a gnat as it is to grasp God. Thus, Farrer concludes:

> analogical method will not simply assist the solution of this and that philosophical puzzle: it must save philosophy itself. The modern philosophers [i.e., post-Descartes], having nailed the colours of clear-and-distinct thinking to the mast, have been obliged by their principle to throw more and more of the cargo out of the ship. Now there is no going back upon the work of the critical philosophers [i.e., post-Kant], and if we are to re-apply philosophical method to the world of real being and recover the science of metaphysics, we have got to give a credible account of how the mind proceeds in approaching real being—the supernatural object ultimately, but primarily the connatural object.[176]

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[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid., 77.

[176] Ibid., 80.

Ironically, therefore, the only way to save modern philosophy is to retrieve the Thomistic doctrine of analogy. He then adds, 'For though analogy may not give us clear-and-distinct knowledge of that about which we analogize, there is nothing to prevent our having a clear-and-distinct account of what analogizing itself is, and of its several varieties or modes. And by such an enquiry we shall justify analogical thinking, including that metaphysical thinking which is analogical, and we shall gain a clearer understanding of the nature of our knowledge of the real.'[177]

This latter passage is one of the very few places where Farrer seems to look favourably at more formal, analytic strategies, as he seems to claim that while the deliverances of both metaphysics and epistemology will always fail to be 'clear-and-distinct'—and will thus stubbornly remain problematic from a Cartesian perspective—we might yet have, or devise, a *method* of approaching them that is itself 'clear-and-distinct,' at least to us. And this, of course, is the dream of the early analytic philosophers such as Moore, Russell, and (the early) Wittgenstein. But this interest in formalising the methods of our thinking is decidedly at odds with the more organic or 'human' approach characteristic of *Finite and Infinite* and the other texts cited in this chapter.

In keeping with his general practice, Farrer does not name any specific Thomists in this essay. It is, however, to some extent a courteous but critical response to Dorothy Emmet's book *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking*, and he does discuss her by name, including (very briefly) her understanding of Aquinas.[178] However,

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[177] Ibid., 80-81. For more of Farrer's view of analogy, and for commentary on his views, see note 140.

[178] See Dorothy Emmet, *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (London: Macmillan, 1945). Emmet (1904-2000) was an exact contemporary of Farrer's at Oxford during their undergraduate days, and although she was a student at Lady Margaret Hall she was tutored by A. D. Lindsay, the Master of Balliol, who also taught Farrer. She ended her career as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Manchester. Farrer and she knew each other professionally and interacted on several occasions, as we

Farrer's position here bears some resemblance to the post-Kantian school of 'Transcendental Thomism' associated with Joseph Maréchal, which concluded that

> Cartesian / Kantian philosophy could not be outwitted by being regarded as a total mistake; rather, Thomas had to be reread in the light of modern philosophical considerations. The 'Copernican revolution' inaugurated by Kant, in his focus on the active role of the knower and the autonomy of the moral agent, turned out, on this rereading, to be anticipated in Thomas's conception of the natural drive of the mind towards truth and being. Far from a supposedly empiricist epistemology, with the mind being conformed to things in the world, Thomas viewed every act of knowing and choosing as implicitly knowing and choosing the truth and goodness which is the mystery of the divine being.[179]

Whether or not he had read any of the Transcendental Thomists, Farrer, at any rate, is here trying to do equal justice to both the undeniable conclusions of post-Kantian 'critical' philosophy and the epistemic wisdom of medieval Thomism. Although very well aware of the complicating character of the modern critique, he is still possessed by the Thomist vision.

IV. Conclusion

This third chapter—the physical centre of the dissertation—has had three goals. Section I introduced Farrer's life and career, and provided a much more

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shall see again in Chapter Four (see also note 139 above). Emmet belonged to a circle called the Epiphany Philosophers, which also included Richard Braithwaite and Margaret Masterman (husband and wife). While in some very loose sense 'Christian', the Epiphany Philosophers were decidedly less orthodox—both philosophically and theologically—than the Metaphysicals. For Emmet's life and career, see Onora O'Neill, 'Emmet, Dorothy Mary (1904-2000)', in *ODNB: Volume 18*, 415-416. See also Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'The Epiphany Philosophers', in *The New York Times Magazine* (21 September 2008), available on-line at: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/21/magazine/21jolley-side.html?ref=magazine (accessed on 16 May 2009). Eric Mascall's *Existence and Analogy* deals with both *Finite and Infinite* and Emmet's *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* in the final chapter, 'Two Recent Discussions of Theism' (158-181).

[179] So Fergus Kerr's summary of Transcendental Thomism on page 208 of his *After Aquinas*. See also David Brown's section titled 'From Kant to Maréchal' in his *Continental Philosophy and Modern Theology*, 7-10.

detailed biographical and intellectual context for his work than his commentators normally offer. In particular, I looked at his philosophical and theological education in early 20th century Britain vis-à-vis analytic philosophy, the dialectical theology of Barth and Brunner, and the revival of Thomism. Section II then continued in this biographical vein by going behind Farrer's professional published work to consider his undergraduate correspondence with his father. This material demonstrates that any concern about Farrer's alleged fideistic turn in 1967 must take account of his 1927 'breakthrough' letter and his two letters in 1928 dealing with Gnosticism, myth, and Neoplatonism. The young Farrer undoubtedly went through a fideistic phase in the late 1920s, and while one of the 1928 letters expresses an extreme fideism and apophaticism that never again surfaces in Farrer's thought, I will argue in Chapter Four that the position taken in the 1927 letter is almost identical to 1967's 'The Believer's Reasons' in *Faith and Speculation*.

Third and finally, Section III offers an epistemically-oriented reading of *Finite and Infinite* that—as with Farrer himself in Section I—contextualises this book more thoroughly within the then-contemporary debates than most previous studies. Specifically, I argued that Rowan Williams's description of *Finite and Infinite* as 'a viable and sophisticated natural theology' meant reconstructing a basically Thomistic project while holding off Barth with one hand and Ayer with the other. My reading of *Finite and Infinite* indicates that by 1943 Farrer had indeed moved a considerable distance from the strong fideism of 1928. Both metaphysically and epistemologically, Farrer's stance here is certainly more subtle and nuanced than conventional Neoscholastic Thomism. However, by this point—perhaps in reaction to Barth and in response to Ayer—he has nevertheless acquired a distinctly rationalistic bent. Although—*contra* Vatican I and the 19th century condemnations of Abbé Bautain—

he insists that rational theology cannot demonstrate the existence of God and only allows for non-inferential 'apprehension' or merely probabilistic arguments, Farrer nevertheless also states—*contra* Barth and Ayer—that 'finite substance has to be vindicated if theism is to be upheld'.[180] God cannot be 'known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason' (*Dei Filius*), but metaphysical justification is still necessary for the rationality of theistic belief. In short, while Farrer would be regarded as a semi-fideist (at best) by the standards of Vatican I and the Anti-modernist Oath (still in full effect), within the context of British philosophy and Anglican theology he is still defiantly adhering to the canons of rational respectability, holding out against the twin onslaughts of Barthianism and positivism.

This third chapter thus charts a more complicated portrait of Farrer's epistemological development than was perhaps anticipated. We have seen him move from a very early and immature general scepticism ('I never yet have decided anything by reason and probably never shall'); to an oppressive rationalism brought on by his initial study of philosophy (under which he felt himself 'the slave of Reason'); to the liberating fideistic 'breakthrough' of 1927 (faith 'should be established on its own foundations' and philosophy 'does not touch religion'); to an extreme fideistic depreciation of reason (the Christian myth 'carries its own truth immanently within itself'); and finally to the moderate ('soft') rationalism of *Finite and Infinite* (with its conviction that 'some metaphysical questions…must be settled if we are to vindicate the significance of any theological statements whatsoever of the traditional type'). Thus, now 'possessed by the Thomist vision,' but still as an

[180] Barth would deny that such vindication is necessary; Ayer would deny that it is possible.

Anglican also in dialogue with Barth and Ayer, Farrer sets out his 'viable and sophisticated natural theology'.

In terms of the five categories of fideism discussed in Chapter Two—extreme, moderate, semi-, conformist, and evangelical—I would say that Farrer's 1927 'breakthrough' letter took a position somewhere between moderate and extreme fideism, with evangelical tendencies; the 1928 letter expressed an extreme fideism, of a more conformist (and specifically Catholic) stripe; and *Finite and Infinite* exemplified an unusually subtle Anglican semi-fideism (too rationalistic for Barth, not rational enough for Rome, and impossible for Ayer).

To conclude, it is both interesting and illuminating to note that Farrer's friend Eric Mascall (the founder of the Metaphysicals) published his own defence of Thomism—*He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism*—in 1943, the very same year as *Finite and Infinite*.[181] Mascall and Farrer are often classed together as the two 'Anglican Thomists' of the 20th century, but that is somewhat misleading.[182] I have already noted at length the singular and ambiguous nature of Farrer's so-called 'para-Thomism'. It would be deeply unfair to Mascall, and indeed entirely inaccurate, to describe *He Who Is* as (in Vincent Turner's terms above) a 'twice-cooked dish,' for it is a major work of synthesis and interpretation. However, unlike *Finite and Infinite*, it is certainly 'exegetical'.[183] In marked contrast to Farrer, Mascall deals directly and at length with the actual text of Aquinas, and interacts extensively with leading (and mostly French) Roman Catholic Thomists such as D'Arcy, Garrigou-Lagrange,

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[181] Mascall's text went through many editions, the last of which was a 1966 paperback with a substantial new introductory essay that surveyed developments in the intervening two decades (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966).

[182] For just two examples out of many, see Rowan Williams, *Christology and the Nature of the Church*, 4; and John Macquarrie, *Twentieth-Century Religious Thought* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 290.

[183] For the use of 'twice-cooked' and 'exegetical,' see Turner's review of *Finite and Infinite*, 99.

Gilson, Maréchal, Maritain, Penido, Przywara, and Victor White. He also considers classical commentators such as Cajetan and Suarez, and even takes account of R. P. Phillips's widely used Neoscholastic textbook *Modern Thomistic Philosophy*.[184] Mascall is probably best classified as an exponent of the Existential Thomism of Gilson and Maritain, and not the Transcendental Thomism with which Farrer may have flirted in 'Knowledge by Analogy'.[185] But, while Mascall's interpretation of Aquinas does indeed take account of modern and contemporary developments in philosophy, both British and Continental, we still find him asserting that 'our conviction of God's existence is not merely of a high degree of probability or even of purely moral certitude: it is objectively certain.'[186] While some aspects of Mascall's defence of natural theology are identical to Farrer's—for example, they both insist on the necessity of a 'contemplative' attitude to finite realties in order for divine reality to be grasped as well, and both speak of 'apprehending' God—Mascall's insistence on *certain* knowledge is a major difference between them. Although like Farrer a priest in the Church of England, Mascall nevertheless stands on the 'Catholic' rather than the 'Anglican' side of the epistemic division discussed in Chapter Two. Unlike Farrer, Mascall is not any kind of fideist, semi- or otherwise.

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[184] In two volumes, London: Burns and Oates, 1934, 1935.

[185] For more on this, and on Mascall's Thomism generally, see Fergus Kerr, '"Real Knowledge" or "Enlightened Ignorance": Eric Mascall on the Apophatic Thomisms of Victor Preller and Victor White', in Stout and MacSwain (eds.), *Grammar and Grace*, 103-123. According to Kerr, John Macquarrie (in the book cited in note 182; I owe the reference to Kerr) classifies Mascall as a Transcendental Thomist—'but that cannot be right' (110).

[186] Mascall, 76. Mascall's position is subtle and interesting, but cannot be discussed any further here. For more detail, see Chapters IV-VII of *He Who Is* (30-94).

CHAPTER FOUR:

'CAN REASONABLE MINDS STILL THINK THEOLOGICALLY?'

(1949-1968)

While never surrendering his commitment to some form of 'rational theology,' Farrer became increasingly open to placing a greater epistemic emphasis on faith and the supernatural character of Christian belief. Metaphysics thus functioned as less of an essential foundation for theism. And yet, Farrer continued to press the question: 'Can reasonable minds still think theologically?' What we might call 'the middle Farrer' articulated a moderate fideist view of the relationship between faith and reason in the first chapter of *Saving Belief* (published in 1964). In 1963, however, Farrer began reading the doctoral dissertation of an American postgraduate from Yale named Diogenes Allen. Stimulated by Allen's work and citing it explicitly, Farrer's first chapter of *Faith and Speculation* (1967) attempts to blend Allen's more 'fideistic' view with a continuing concern for legitimate philosophical critique. Whether this rather syncretistic position is then fully integrated into the interactionist epistemology of the rest of the book remains to be seen. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* (1967) as an example of a text which, rather than either Farrer's or Allen's, set the agenda for the subsequent history of religious epistemology in Anglo-American philosophy.

I. The Freedom of the Will and the Mind of Christ

Although it is difficult to identify a precise transition-point, there is arguably an increasingly 'fideistic turn'—or 're-turn'—in the last two decades of Farrer's life. Between *The Glass of Vision* in 1948 and *The Freedom of the Will* in 1958, Farrer's

academic energies were mostly devoted to biblical scholarship, with only the occasional essay or book review dealing with a philosophical topic. There is thus a considerable gap in the available published evidence for those seeking to determine exactly when and why his thinking shifted in this period.[1] And when, after this long silence, Farrer publicly returned to philosophy with his Gifford Lectures (delivered in Edinburgh in 1957), rather than offering a direct defence—or even discussion—of natural theology, it is notable that the author of *Finite and Infinite* focused instead on an almost entirely 'secular' theme: the perennial debate between free will and determinism. Perhaps aware of the incongruity of this situation, Farrer tells us, in the very first paragraph of Chapter I, that a

> Gifford Lecturer need not handle the substance of rational theology; he may discuss the preliminaries. There are two branches of these, logical and material. The logical branch examines the formal nature of theological statement, and the force of theological argument. The material branch traces in the world of our common experience those characteristics which lend support to theistic belief. We take the material branch.[2]

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[1] Farrer's archived correspondence becomes more fragmentary at this point and so is not much help either. Philosophical essays include 'Editor's Introduction,' to G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*, edited by A. M. Farrer and translated by E. M. Huggard (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), 4-47; and 'A Midwinter Daydream', in *University: A Journal of Inquiry* 1 (1951), 86-90. Both of these pieces were reprinted in slightly abridged form in Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Charles C. Conti (SPCK, 1972), as 'The Physical Theology of Leibniz' (91-113) and 'Prologue: Theology and Philosophy' (1-4). The latter appears in full under its original title in Ann Loades and Robert MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart: Austin Farrer and His Writings* (Canterbury Press, 2006), 163-167. The only philosophically-oriented book review of the decade between 1948 and 1958 is of John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge: A Modern Introduction to the Problems of Religious Knowledge*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* New Series IX (1958), 410. Farrer's assessment of the constructive aspects of Hick's argument was rather negative, but as we shall see Farrer eventually moved somewhat closer to Hick's position.

[2] Austin Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will* (A. & C. Black, 1958), 1. (This book was published in a second edition in 1960 that included a 'Summary of the Argument' on 316-320, but the original pagination was unchanged.) Farrer says that, as for the logical branch, he has nothing to add to what Ian Crombie wrote in 'The Possibility of Theological Statements', in Basil Mitchell (ed.), *Faith and Logic: Oxford Essays in Philosophical Theology* (George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 31-83.

Libertarian human freedom thus assumes something like the doctrine of substance in *Finite and Infinite*, as a 'preliminary' metaphysical position that must be defended if theism is to be held rationally—although Farrer simply says that such freedom lends theism 'support' to the extent that it enables us to conceive of God as a freely willing agent as well. Indeed, in the very last sentence of the main text of the book, on page 315, Farrer invokes the 'human will, from which alone the divine can be conjectured.' So if in *Finite and Infinite* Farrer's basic argument was, 'no finite substance, no infinite substance,' here Farrer's basic argument is, 'no human free will, no divine free will.' In the first fourteen chapters, Farrer speaks from a purely philosophical perspective, considering various aspects of the determinist / libertarian debate, and only turns to theological concerns in the fifteenth and final chapter.

It is interesting to note that Farrer's 'voice' or 'persona' in these lectures is far more conventional than in *Finite and Infinite*, at least in terms of the context of then-contemporary British philosophy.[3] Yes, the prose in which the arguments are expressed is unusually elegant and literary, the defence of metaphysics (in general) and libertarianism (in specific) is certainly atypical, and the arguments themselves—both in terms of presentation and content—are distinctively 'Farrerian'. But the book is still unmistakably a piece of late 50s / early 60s 'ordinary language' or 'linguistic' philosophy rather than some unique form of 'para-Thomism'. Reviewers thus greeted

[3] Several of the general surveys of the relationship between theology, philosophy, and philosophy of religion cited in the previous chapter are equally relevant for the second half of the 20th century as well. In particular, see Daniel W. Hardy, 'Theology Through Philosophy', in David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Blackwell, 1997), 252-285; Ann Loades, 'Philosophy of Religion: Its Relation to Theology', in Harriet A. Harris and Christopher J. Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis: The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion* (Ashgate Publications, 2005), 136-147; and Stewart Sutherland, 'Philosophy of religion in the twentieth century', in Ernest Nicholson (ed.), *A Century of Theological and Religious Studies in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 253-269.

the text with less perplexity, while still retaining the usual reservations. In short, while *The Freedom of the Will* may be a more successful 'philosophical essay' than *Finite and Infinite*, and while it is unquestionably one of Farrer's major works, it is not directly concerned with the rationality of religious belief as such, and so—like *The Glass of Vision*—will largely be passed over in silence.[4]

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to flag Edward Henderson's claim that these Gifford Lectures marked a 'crucial turning point' for Farrer's general epistemology that was later to have a significant impact on his religious epistemology as well. According to Henderson, in *Finite and Infinite* Farrer was running two entirely different and disconnected epistemologies: the 'apprehensionist' epistemology of Parts I and III, and the 'interactionist' or 'volitionist' epistemology of Part II, most clearly expressed in Chapter XX, 'Knowledge of Things' (see Chapter Three of this

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[4] For contemporary (and mostly positive) reviews of Farrer's Gifford Lectures, see C. T. Chapman in *Church Quarterly Review* CLXI (1960), 107-108; John Hick in *Theology Today* 17 (1960), 268-270; Bernard Jones in *The Expository Times* 75 (1964), 170-171; I. T. Ramsey in *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series X (1959), 456-459; and P. F. Strawson in *Mind* LXIX (1960). For essays dealing with the substance of Farrer's arguments in this text, see Steven M. Duncan, 'Experience and Agency', in F. Michael McLain and W. Mark Richardson (eds.), *Human and Divine Agency: Anglican, Catholic, and Lutheran Perspectives* (University Press of America, 1999), 149-161; Brian Hebblethwaite, 'Finite and Infinite Freedom in Farrer and von Balthasar', in *Human and Divine Agency*, 83-96; Edward Henderson, 'The Supremely Free Agent', in *Human and Divine Agency*, 97-119; Robert H. King, 'The Agent's World: Farrer's Contribution to Cosmology', in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity: New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer* (Pickwick, 1983), 23-34; Nancey Murphy, 'Downward Causation and *The Freedom of the Will*', in Brian Hebblethwaite and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary* (SCM Press, 2006), 14-37; and W. Mark Richardson, 'A Look at Austin Farrer's Theory of Agency', in *Human and Divine Agency*, 121-148. See also John Glasse, 'Doing Theology Metaphysically: Austin Farrer', in *Harvard Theological Review* 39 (1966), 323-324, and 326 note 17; and Jeffrey C. Eaton, *The Logic of Theism: An Analysis of the Thought of Austin Farrer* (University Press of America, 1980), 90-98. W. Mark Richardson's essay is especially helpful in providing the 20th century British philosophical 'background and historical context,' particularly in philosophical psychology and philosophy of mind, for Farrer's Giffords (122-131).

dissertation, Section III.B.(2) for more detail). But Henderson argues that in *The Freedom of the Will* 'the apprehension theory altogether disappeared. Now Farrer saw that the paradigm for understanding all knowledge of real subjects, both human and divine, is not that of the spectator-observer who "sees," but that of the agent whose knowing is a specialized form of practical action in the world.'[5] Thus, Henderson points out that when Farrer finally does turn to theological matters in Chapter XV, 'Liberty and Theology,' his

> thought about both the nature of God and our knowledge of God had completed the volitionist turn. Now he no longer saw the need to translate from the language of personal agency into the language of scholastic formalism. Consequently, he conceived God not as the identity of essence and existence, but as a perfect creative will.[6]

So, as Henderson observes, in one of the very few references in this volume to God, Farrer writes that 'the physical is known to us by the way it conditions our physical motion; and the divine will, which is God himself, is known to us in limiting or evoking our dutiful action, through all the persons with whom we have to do.'[7] Henderson rightly comments that this claim links up with moral arguments for God's existence, but he does not here mention another passage along these same lines which connects rather more with the theme of spirituality, which we will explore further in Chapter Five. In this subsequent passage, Farrer addresses how we may, through actual relation, come to know the inconceivable deity. On the final page of the book, in the penultimate paragraph, Farrer says:

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[5] Edward Hugh Henderson, 'Valuing in Knowing God: An Interpretation of Austin Farrer's Religious Epistemology', in *Modern Theology* 1 (1985), 168.

[6] Ibid. Farrer's shift toward a voluntarist conception of God is a major topic in secondary literature on his philosophical theology that will attract our attention only tangentially—that is, as it relates to 'our knowledge of God' rather than 'the nature of God'. Obviously, these topics are intimately connected, as Henderson indicates above, but our primary concern is with the former rather than the latter.

[7] Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will*, 309 (also cited and discussed by Henderson on page 168 of his essay). Eaton discusses this same passage on pages 97-98 of *The Logic of Theism*.

> As God himself is unimaginable, so also must be the dependence of his creatures on his power. And if the relation appears imaginable, we have reason to fear that we are viewing it unrealistically, and, as it were, from a great distance. The nearer we come to it, and the more we are involved with it, the less imaginable, the more paradoxical we shall find it to be. But what we lose in imaginative clarity is made up for us in actuality; just when we cease to conceive our dependence on God, we begin to live it.[8]

Intriguingly, Farrer here claims that conceptual understanding ('apprehension') dims as we engage in relation ('interaction') with God, and yet that the very 'living' of this dependency somehow compensates for the loss in intellectual vision. We will come back to these ideas when we reach *Faith and Speculation*, but for now it is sufficient to agree with Henderson that *The Freedom of the Will* indeed has considerable relevance for Farrer's religious epistemology, but mostly in terms of its place as a 'bridge' text within Farrer's overall epistemological development from apprehension to interaction, and not in its primary argument for libertarian freedom.[9]

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[8] Ibid., 315. The word 'begin' in the final sentence is actually printed as 'being' in the text, but this is an obvious typographical error.

[9] It seems obvious that Farrer's work on the 1957 Gifford Lectures, as well as the various reactions to *Finite and Infinite*, not to mention important developments in British philosophy between 1943 and 1959, all stand behind the Revised Preface to the Second Edition of *Finite and Infinite* (Dacre Press, 1959). Although—as with the second edition of *The Freedom of the Will*—the main text and pagination remained unchanged, Farrer's revised preface indicates how his thinking had developed in the intervening years and to what extent he both agreed and disagreed with the original argument of the book. It is in this revised preface that Farrer describes his previous self in 1943 as 'possessed by the Thomist vision' (ix). He says, 'My starting-point was correct, and my procedure materially sound; but my methodology was ill-considered.' He admits that his talk of 'apprehension' of substance or self was chimerical: 'What was I doing, in fact, but finding a certain abstract, artificial and diagrammatic account of my active being applicable or luminous? What right had I to claim that any such account was *the* account?' (ix) Here, Farrer seems to concede that all of his detailed analysis of the willing self / substance was perhaps nothing other than what we might call, somewhat oxymoronically, *introspectionist projectionism*. However, he then makes the fascinating suggestion that perhaps the structure of the self can be found more externally and objectively in *language*: 'A grammar of being is not a chimerical project, where the being in question is our own. Every grammar is a grammar of speech, but speech is human being, and uniquely revelatory of the rest of it. And as I trust I was able to show in this book, we both do and must think of the being of all things through an extension of our

When Farrer does directly address the relationship between faith and reason in this period, a decisive shift is apparent from his work in the 1940s. This may be seen in his contribution to *Faith and Logic: Oxford Essays in Philosophical Theology*, a collection of essays by the Metaphysicals, edited by Basil Mitchell in 1957, the same year as Farrer delivered his Gifford Lectures.[10] Farrer contributed two chapters to this volume, 'A Starting-Point for the Philosophical Examination of Theological Belief' (9-30) and 'Revelation' (84-107). Although Henderson associates the first essay with the connection between morality and theistic belief mentioned above, I am more interested in the second one. For in this piece, Farrer not only explicitly considers the epistemological implications of supernatural revelation, but also makes some overtly fideistic statements. As with my treatment of Farrer's metaphysics in Chapter Three, here I am less concerned with the specific doctrinal contours of his understanding of revelation as I am with its epistemic payoff.[11]

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self-understanding.' (ix-x) This connects directly with a number of statements in *The Freedom of the Will* which construe human nature in linguistic terms, and begs to be compared with Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (published six years earlier in 1953) and other of his later texts—but further discussion would, alas, take us away from the focus of this dissertation.

[10] Cited, for Crombie's chapter, in note 2 above. For a fairly critical review of this collection, see H. D. Lewis, Review of Basil Mitchell (ed.), *Faith and Logic*, in *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series X (1959), 202-205. For a rather more positive one, see Howard Root's joint review of *Faith and Logic* with C. A. Campbell's *On Selfhood and Godhood*, in *Theology* LXII (1959), 36-38. However, Root does comment that the 'essays, eight in number, are of unequal length and importance, and one cannot but feel that the laymen involved do rather better than the clergy.' (38)

[11] The first essay was reprinted by Charles Conti in Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith*, under a new title: 'A Moral Argument for the Existence of God' (114-133). Several commentators have regretted this, as it both narrows the actual content of the article and rather misleadingly turns Farrer's suggestive comments into a specific 'argument'. See, for example, Walter E. Creery, Review of Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith*, in *Theology Today* 30 (1973), 298-301. For Henderson's linkage of this essay to *The Freedom of the Will*, see 'Valuing in Knowing God', 168. And for Henderson's own development of the link between recognising the reality of our neighbours and the existence of God, see his essay, 'Knowing Persons and Knowing God', *The Thomist* 46 (1982), 394-422.

Farrer begins by noting that there is 'nothing superficially less attractive to a philosophical mind than the notion of revealed truth. For philosophy is reasonable examination, and must resist the claim of any doctrine to exempt itself from criticism.'[12] How, then, can divine revelation be incorporated into a philosophically-acceptable—that is, reasonably critical—perspective? The most common strategy, found even in the pages of the New Testament, is to offer an analogy of 'human statements taken upon trust'—but is this sufficient? St Paul perhaps complicates matters even further by making a sharp and basic distinction between the 'natural' and the 'spiritual' human person (or mind). The things of God are 'foolishness' to the natural person—she 'cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged'—but Christians 'have the mind of Christ.' All this seems 'wildly irrational' to the 'natural' person, so how can she possibly come to believe it?[13]

Farrer does indeed develop the analogy between accepting revealed truth with accepting the general authority of human culture (as children) and even the specific authority of established scientific beliefs (as adults). In each case we initially accept something on authority, by faith or trust, and then go on to confirm its truth—or at least reliability—in our own lives. But the analogy can only take us so far:

> The religion we derive from saints and prophets lays down precepts by which we are to live, and unless they can be lived by, they will cease to be accepted. For faith is not the blind belief that certain attitudes and policies, utterly undemonstrative in this world, will be inexplicably rewarded in another. Faith assures us of everlasting salvation, but only because it is a way of life here and now; a way which must convince us, not indeed by easing life, but in some way by deepening it. Yet the proving, in life, of those things delivered to us upon authority, is nothing like physical experiment, nor does it in like manner free us from dependence upon the authority accepted.[14]

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[12] Farrer, 'Revelation', in Basil Mitchell (ed.), *Faith and Logic*, 84. Eaton discusses this essay on pages 146-147, and 159-163 of *The Logic of Theism*, but with a rather different focus from my own.

[13] Ibid., 84-85. Farrer is of course quoting from 1 Corinthians 2.9-15, using the Authorised Version.

[14] Ibid., 89.

So while putative divine revelation may well induct us into a convincing 'way of life' that 'deepens' our perception and experience of mundane reality as well, and so must to that extent be continuous with 'natural' perceptions and experiences, such putative revelation still goes far beyond them, and perhaps illegitimately. Even more, both the technique for testing the results and the certainty of the outcome are different:

> Nature is tested by masterful violence, but if God is to be known, it is by humble obedience, and by patient waiting for Him....No one has the spirituality to prove anything absolutely, and the spirituality of the ordinary believer is a negligible equipment compared with that of the saint. What is received on authority must be proved in action, and yet it is never so proved, that it could not be proved more….The religious mind, incapable of proving faith in seventy years of imperfection, adds the years of others to its own and extends experiment by proxy.[15]

It is important to stress that Farrer is making these claims, not in a sermon or even in a work of theology, but in a philosophical essay. While they are of course homiletic and pastoral platitudes, their presence in a book published in 1957 with the avowed aim of developing a rapprochement with the dominant empiricism of British philosophy was bound to be seen as provocative at best and anti-intellectual at worst. Critical readers may well have thought that Farrer had traded his erstwhile Thomism for pietism, or had reverted to the prevailing stereotype of his ancestral religion.[16]

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[15] Ibid., 90.

[16] Thus, commenting on one of Farrer's later—and even more explicitly theological—claims in this essay, H. D. Lewis says, 'It is more irritating than helpful to be told, *in this context*: "For the recognition of revealing action begins with Christ. He first, and in himself, acknowledges divine presence. And if he was in truth the Divine Son it seems absurd to ask how he knew it; how could he have been ignorant of it?" There are genuine and most reverent questions that this just sweeps aside.' (From Lewis's review of *Faith and Logic*, cited in note 9, page 203; emphasis in the original; Farrer's quoted passage is from page 102 of 'Revelation'.) By italicising the phrase, 'in this context,' Lewis indicates his fear that Farrer is dangerously blurring the boundaries of philosophy and theology. And Farrer indeed admits that this is precisely what has happened, and which *must* happen, when revelation is discussed at all, in *any* context: see page 99. For further analysis this essay, see Ninian Smart, 'Revelation and Reasons', in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 11 (1958), 352-361.

But Farrer goes on to make even more eyebrow-raising claims on behalf of divine revelation—or, rather, for personal inspiration. Picking up right where he left off fourteen years earlier at the conclusion of *Finite and Infinite*, Farrer argues that the

> impossibility of deducing the form of God's personal dealing with us from the mere notion of a supreme personal Being personally known, is a logical aspect of Revelation itself as Christendom understands it. To believe in God is doubtless to believe in a supreme personal Cause; yet His 'personality' is subject to negative qualification, and conviction dissolves in ambiguity when we try to decide how deep the qualifications go. But (our religion holds) while we are immobilized by logical mist, God sends us his *Logos*. We cannot fit our human similitudes on God, but God can, and does, take the human similitude on Himself, and in that form deal humanly with human creatures.[17]

Rhetoric aside, this, of course, is just the standard Thomistic claim that revealed theology takes us far beyond the limited deliverances of natural theology into the intentions, actions, and inner nature of the Godhead. But, again, why should we accept the claims of Christian (or any other) revelation? While Farrer discusses various methods of testing revelation-claims according to different criteria, he admits that they are all inconclusive. For example, in considering the evidence for the Resurrection of Christ, 'it will always remain open to the unbelieving historian to weigh the improbability of delusion or fraud on the part of the witnesses against what is to him the supreme improbability of the miracle, and to find the second improbability the greater. The believer's mental scale tips the other way.'[18] This is reminiscent of Farrer's claims in *Finite and Infinite* that there can be no conclusive demonstration of the existence of God, partly because positivistic and Thomist or Idealist philosophers have different understandings of reason. But here there is just the shared norm of objective historical scholarship—only interpreted through two entirely different conceptions of the universe. Believer and unbeliever look at the same evidence, but see it differently.

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[17] Farrer, 'Revelation,' 98.

[18] Ibid., 101.

But again, why is this? Ultimately, and rather surprisingly, Farrer traces the answer back to the claim that believers are among the 'spiritual' rather than the 'natural': like St Paul, they have 'the mind of Christ'. And so, Farrer concludes—perhaps remarkably, in a philosophical essay, in this cultural context—that 'apart from a claim, however modest, to a divine gift, *the Christian can say nothing rational about the fact that he believes, while his perhaps equally well-instructed neighbour does not*. If the Gospel is credible to him it is that some touch of the supernatural presence which the Gospel describes acts in his mind.'[19] Thus, religious belief is not a matter of either clearer thinking or better information: it is a gift of God. While Farrer may well have received full marks for honesty, hostile readers would have undoubtedly concluded that his admission here is viciously circular and—hence—purely fideistic. If the Christian 'can say nothing rational' about her belief other than that a divine gift or supernatural presence acts in her mind, and so inclines her to believe in the face of inconclusive and perhaps even questionable evidence, then it seems as though critical reason has been totally abandoned. Again, as with the 1927 'breakthrough' letter, Mitchell did not need to wait until 1967 to wonder if Farrer had become 'a sort of fideist': it seems that Farrer blatantly articulated a form of fideism in 1957, in a book that Mitchell himself edited!

This acceptance of the Pauline distinction between the 'natural' and the 'spiritual' mind finds a close parallel in a 'memorable dictum' preserved by Farrer's own disciples in the oral tradition until Philip Curtis committed it to print: 'He remarked with great seriousness on the difference between the orthodox and the heretical mind: the orthodox tried to understand revealed truth so far as possible, and then beyond that point just adored God, while the heretical mind was determined to

[19] Ibid., 104 (emphasis added). This discussion begins on 103 and continues to the end of the chapter on page 107.

accept only what it could master.'[20] Interestingly, this piece of oral tradition is presented in the chapter on Farrer's period at St Edmund Hall, from 1931 to 1935, and so provides evidence for such an attitude later than the undergraduate letters yet earlier than *Finite and Infinite*. Likewise, in an essay published in 1937, we find Farrer saying that 'spiritual realities become *unintelligible* in so far as they are expressed in an *unredeemed* universe: for their explanation we must look to their end and consummation.'[21] All three of these statements, whatever their provenance, point toward a fideistic tendency in Farrer's thought that cannot be denied. Referring back to Brian Hebblethwaite's implicit definition of fideism as discussed in Chapter One, Section II.B, they indicate that Farrer held—at least occasionally—that *faith* is a necessary precondition for appreciating the *rationality* and/or *intelligibility* of religious belief. And, even more strongly, Farrer's view in 'Revelation' suggests that faith itself is a gift, and so not something either fully answerable to or derivable from human reason alone.

Returning to the period currently under consideration, this fideistic tendency also finds explicit expression in Farrer's next major work, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*.[22] Originally delivered as the Nathaniel Taylor Lectures at Yale Divinity School in 1961, this book primarily deals with the perennial and painful topic of natural evil in relation to divine providence. Over the course of eight chapters, Farrer sets out an insightful, innovative, and sophisticated theodicy, explaining how the two elements of the title can be reconciled without contradiction. As with *The Freedom of the Will*, the primary concern of this book is not religious epistemology, and yet the

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[20] Philip Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows: A Biography of Austin Farrer* (SPCK, 1985), 86.

[21] Austin Farrer, 'Eucharist and Church in the New Testament', in A. G. Hebert (ed.), *The Parish Communion: A Book of Essays* (SPCK, 1937), 86 (emphasis added).

[22] Austin Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited: An Essay on Providence and Evil* (Collins, 1962).

implications of natural evil for the rationality of religious belief still clearly provide the underlying motivation of the lectures.

It is thus something of a shock to reach the penultimate page of the final chapter to read:

> The inquiring mind is not to be turned back from its chosen path. Speculative questions deserve speculative answers; and so in this book we have tried to satisfy those whom the riddle of providence and evil intrigues or torments. But the value of speculative answers, however judicious, is limited. They clear the way for an apprehension of truth, which speculation alone is powerless to reach. Peasants and housekeepers find what philosophers seek in vain; the substance of truth is grasped not by argument, but by faith.[23]

This is not, admittedly, the extreme fideism that denies all value to reason: 'the inquiring mind' has a place, albeit a limited place, and its concerns are rightly heard. But it is at least a forthright declaration of a moderate fideism that places greater value on faith than reason, and that indeed sees the simple faithful ones as not just preceding the philosophers into the Kingdom of Heaven, but as actually achieving what philosophers *qua* philosophers 'seek in vain'—that is, without any success at all. Here, faith is not just prior to reason, it is superior to it in every way.[24]

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[23] Ibid., 187. This chapter, and thus this passage, may also be found as 'Griefs and Consolations' in Loades and MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 220-227, with this citation on page 226. Interestingly, Thomas Aquinas expressed an almost identical thought in a sermon on the Creed, probably delivered in Naples in 1273: 'None of the philosophers before the coming of Christ was able, with all of his effort on the task, to know as much about God…as a little old lady knows, after the coming of Christ, through her faith.' Cited in Fergus Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

[24] Again, as with *The Freedom of the Will*, I am not here interested in the details of Farrer's theodicy, as interesting and important as they may be. For some contemporary reviews, see J. G. Davies, joint review of Karl Heim, *The World: Its Creation and Consummation*, Austin Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, and Harry Johnson, *The Humanity of the Saviour*, in *The Expository Times* 73 (1961-1962), 296-297; Adam Fox in *Church Quarterly Review* CLXIII (1962), 500-501; and G. F. Woods in *Theology* LXVI (1963), 375-377. For essays that deal with *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited*, or with other aspects of Farrer's theodicy, see Brian Hebblethwaite, 'Freedom, Evil and Farrer', *New Blackfriars* 66 (1985), 178-187; Ann Loades, 'Austin Farrer on *Love Almighty*', in Eaton and Loades

II. Faith and Evidence

Readers of the previous section may well be somewhat bemused or nonplussed—at least, they should be. In 1957, Farrer delivered a set of Gifford Lectures arguing that the divine will can only be 'conjectured' (or conjured?) from the human will, and yet also published a philosophical essay stating that the only difference between believer and non-believer is that the 'spiritual' believer has 'the mind of Christ'. In that essay, he stated that putative revelation must be 'proved' in life and yet conceded that this never can be done. He admitted that believers and non-believers saw the same evidence differently. He asserted that 'we should not find revelation intrinsically convincing if everything else made nonsense of it, and it made nonsense of everything else'[25] (and so apparently held out for an objective rationality and standard of intelligibility common to believer and unbeliever alike), but then also wrote a few pages later that the only thing that will convince us of revealed truth is a special act of God in the mind. Four years later, he delivered a set of lectures at Yale on 'providence and evil,' arguing that Almighty Love is not incompatible with unlimited ills, only to say at the very end of the last lecture that the path to truth is not argument but faith, and that peasants are thus in a better epistemic position than philosophers.

(eds.), *For God and Clarity*, 93-109; Robert MacSwain, 'Imperfect Lives and Perfect Love: Austin Farrer, Stanley Hauerwas, and the Reach of Divine Redemption', in Natalie K. Watson and Stephen Burns (ed.), *Exchanges of Grace: Essays in Honour of Ann Loades* (SCM Press, 2008), 142-154; Simon Oliver, 'The Theodicy of Austin Farrer', in *The Heythrop Journal* XXXIX (1998), 280-297; and William McF. Wilson and Julian N. Hartt, 'Farrer's Theodicy', in David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified: The Practical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T & & Clark International, 2004), 100-118. See also the chapter 'The Problem of Evil' (38-49) in Robert Boak Slocum, *Light in a Burning Glass: A Systematic Presentation of Austin Farrer's Theology* (University of South Carolina Press, 2007).

[25] Farrer, 'Revelation,' 102.

It is therefore easy to see why Farrer is widely regarded as an exasperating and elusive thinker. The previous section, covering just five years of his life, contains so many claims and counter-claims, statements and modifications thereof, balancing acts and acrobatics, fascinating ideas inconclusively defended, strains of rationalism and fideism intertwined, that it is tempting to dismiss him for sheer inconsistency. Just what, exactly, is he trying to say? What philosophical / theological position is he seeking to occupy? Farrer seems to be a classic example of someone who wants to have his epistemic cake and eat it too. But in regard to the specific focus of this dissertation, his essay 'Revelation' is an undoubted watershed. If we accept Henderson's claim that the 1957 Giffords mark a 'crucial turning point' in Farrer's general epistemology, with a decisive shift from apprehension to interaction, I would argue that the 1957 essay on revelation also marks a 'crucial turning point' in Farrer's religious epistemology, one which pointed away from the lingering rationalistic core of *Finite and Infinite* towards an increased openness to faith and the supernatural element in Christian belief.

However, to claim that we 'can say nothing rational' about our belief other than that it is a divine gift and supernatural act in our minds is obviously a highly unsatisfactory answer to those looking for a more robust apologetic. And it still fits uneasily with various other claims Farrer made during this period, and indeed in this same essay, claims which suggest a greater commitment to 'reason' and a less blatant fideism after all. Farrer himself seemed to be aware of the need for a more systematic and consistent statement of his evolving position on faith and reason, and he finally provided it in the first chapter of *Saving Belief*.[26] This book is the closest thing Farrer ever wrote to a systematic theology, although as its subtitle and brevity indicate it is a

[26] *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1964).

'discussion of essentials' rather than anything approaching a comprehensive treatment of Christian doctrine.[27] It was originally delivered as a lecture series for Oxford undergraduates, probably in 1962, and was eventually published in 1964.[28] Due to the highly controversial and widely discussed release of John A. T. Robinson's *Honest to God* in 1963, *Saving Belief* appeared during a time of great public debate and uncertainty regarding the relation between Christian belief and human knowledge. In the Church of England it seemed as though old lines were being erased and everything was 'up for grabs'.[29]

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[27] As this is one of Farrer's 'popular' books it was not widely reviewed in the academic journals, but was mostly discussed in secular and ecclesial newspapers. Box 10 of the Farrer Papers include clippings of several such reviews, including one by Alasdair MacIntyre from *The Guardian*, 12 February 1964, and an anonymous review from *The Times Literary Supplement*, 16 April 1964 (probably written by Eric Mascall). See also J. G Davies, Joint Review of Daniel Jenkins, *The Christian Belief in God*, Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief*, Eric C. Rust, *Towards a Theological Understanding of History*, and H. A. Hodges, *Death and Life Have Contended*, in *The Expository Times* 75 (1964), 231. For a useful summary of the book's contents and its significance in 1960s British theology, see Susan Howatch's introduction to Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials*, edited and with an introduction by Susan Howatch (Mowbray / Morehouse, 1994), vii-xi. See also Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows*, 213-225.

[28] In the preface, dated 'Easter, 1963,' Farrer says that the book 'was performed for a non-specialist audience of undergraduates' (5-6). Curtis says that the lectures were delivered in 1963 (*A Hawk Among Sparrows*, 182), but this seems to be an error. Box 4 of the Farrer papers contains a letter from Farrer to his friend Martyn Skinner, written (by chance) on the back of a flyer announcing the lectures, here titled 'A Plain Examination of Christian Belief'. Although the year is not given, they were all delivered in October and November, which thus must have been in the year before the preface date—that is, in the Autumn of 1962.

[29] See John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (SCM Press, 1963). The probable date of the actual lectures somewhat complicates Mascall's claim, apparently based on personal conversation with Farrer, that *Saving Belief* 'was considered by him, though this is nowhere stated, as his reply by implication to *Honest to God*' (see Mascall's obituary notice of Farrer in *Proceedings of the British Academy* LIV (1968—Oxford University Press, 1970), 440. While the book was indeed published the year after *Honest to God*, if the lectures on which it is based were delivered in 1962 then Farrer could not have composed them with Robinson's book in mind. However, it is still likely that by publishing the lectures for a wider audience, Farrer hoped to provide a different interpretation of Christian belief than Robinson's, one that was both more 'orthodox' and in conversation with the mainstream of empirical

Farrer thus opens the book with a provocative question: 'Can reasonable minds still think theologically?'[30] Just this question alone indicates that Farrer has not embraced a wholesale extreme fideism. Although he almost immediately states that theology can and must be done without knowing the answer to this question, he obviously regards it as one worth asking. Indeed, it is striking that he formulated it the way he did, rather than the more fideistic version: i.e., 'Can theological minds still think reasonably?' In opening the book with the emphasis thus placed on 'reason,' with the question of whether *reasonable minds* can cope with theology rather than whether *theological minds* can cope with reason, Farrer indicates that he still thinks that (for good or ill) 'reason' has the right to make the first move, or at least to make claims that cannot simply be ignored. And this indication is amply confirmed by the first chapter, 'Faith and Evidence'.[31] Rather than a theological prolegomena dealing with Revelation, or Scripture, or Tradition, or Ecclesia, Farrer begins his 'discussion of essentials' with general epistemological considerations. However, it is equally striking that although Farrer begins the book by dealing with the claims of reason, he does so from within a primary commitment to faith. Masterfully weaving together all of the epistemic strands surveyed thus far by this dissertation into a single, brief, accessible document, 'Faith and Evidence' is a brilliant, deeply subtle but deceptively

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British philosophy rather than Robinson's neo-orthodox existentialism. For an essay on Robinson that compares his work—rather unfavourably, it must be said—to Gregory Dix, Austin Farrer, and Eric Mascall, see '*Honest to God* and the 1960s' in Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 103-120. For Robinson's controversial career, see Eric James, 'Robinson, John Arthur Thomas (1919-1983)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 47* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 371-372.

[30] Farrer, *Saving Belief*, 5.

[31] Most of the lecture titles are identical to the published chapter titles, but according to the flyer mentioned in note 28, the first lecture—delivered on 17 October (1962)—was titled 'Belief and Evidence' rather than 'Faith and Evidence'. This chapter (*Saving Belief*, 11-34) has been reprinted in *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 168-184, and I will cite from this version.

simple, comprehensive expression of moderate fideism. Expressing the position of what I call the 'middle Farrer,' it deserves to be better known than it currently is.[32]

Farrer begins the chapter by observing that 'the key of entry' to the Christian religion is faith. How then can it be obtained? And what of those who can't seem to find it? He explains that, in this context, by 'faith' he simply means 'an attitude of mind'—the *human* mind, that is, not the 'mind of Christ'—and we will hear more about this in a moment. But first, it is important to note that Farrer claims that this 'attitude of mind' and the beliefs that accompany it properly precede any critical reflection on the attitude or the beliefs. And this is the case not just for religion but for any other epistemic matter as well, such as adherence to the beliefs of a specific political party (Farrer's standing example is the now defunct Liberal Party). Faith (in this very general sense) precedes reason. Specifically in regard to religion, faith begins 'with our hearing about God or, if we are clever enough, thinking thoughts about him for ourselves. If anything is importance is to follow, the thought we think,

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[32] Henderson, for example, just gives *Saving Belief* a brief mention in his article on Farrer's religious epistemology (note 5), and it gets passed over by most commentators, who are more interested in Farrer's 'big' books. Glasse (note 4) mentions it in an interesting footnote that also considers Ninian Smart's response to Farrer's 'Revelation' (see note 17) in the narrative of Farrer's epistemological development: Glasse comments that 'Farrer's discussion of faith and evidence, in chap. I. of *Saving Belief* (1964), seems to exhibit a softer, more Augustinian stance than did [*Finite and Infinite*] (1943)' (Glasse, 343 note 51). I previously wrote about this chapter in the context of an article on Farrer's Anglican theology: see Robert MacSwain, 'Above, Beside, Within: The Anglican Theology of Austin Farrer', in *Journal of Anglican Studies* 4 (2006), 33-57, especially 48-51. But for helpful commentaries on 'Faith and Evidence' I am indebted to two works of Diogenes Allen that I discussed in Chapter One: 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity', in Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T & T Clark, 1990), 197-210, and *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992), 11-16. See also Eaton, *The Logic of Theism*, 44-51, and Eric O. Springsted, *The Act of Faith: Christian Faith and the Moral Self* (Eerdmans, 2002), 236-239 (both Eaton and Springsted were two of Allen's doctoral students at Princeton Theological Seminary).

or the tale we are told, must be initially persuasive.'[33] Or, as he puts it elsewhere, 'The believer in Liberalism, like the believer in God, is first captured by a story.'[34] So, despite his mischievous nod in the direction of Descartes, Farrer here acknowledges that most people's religious and political beliefs come to them from their family, community, or cultural tradition. They are first inherited before they are examined.

It is only *after* we have received these religious or political beliefs that we then consider their epistemic credentials. This is a proper and necessary activity for rational beings: 'being reasonable people we ask ourselves what is the basis of our feeling or persuasion that such things are at all true.'[35] So we start looking about for reasons to either justify or discredit our previously-accepted beliefs. And, unless our beliefs are completely irrational, we are indeed likely to find some reasons to support them, good or bad. However, we are also likely to encounter negative 'opposing reasons' for our positive supporting reasons, and so we then look for some way to adjudicate the debate between these conflicting reasons to determine which ones should exercise jurisdiction over our beliefs. Unfortunately, 'there seems to be no simple logical method for deciding conclusively between the *pros* and the *cons*. No simple logical method, no, nor any advanced logical method, either.'[36] In terms of theism, Farrer references the debate between 'those famous philosophical twins, Russell and Whitehead, the co-inventors of mathematical logic and the joint authors of an epoch-making book. One of them turned out an atheist, the other a theist; and

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[33] Farrer, 'Faith and Evidence,' 169. Previous citations in this paragraph are from 168 and 169.

[34] Ibid., 170. This reference to 'story' links up interestingly with contemporary narrative theology, but aside from a note below which mentions Farrer's influence on the so-called 'Yale School,' I will not explore that connection further in this dissertation.

[35] Ibid., 169.

[36] Ibid., 169-170.

neither could show the other the error of his ways.'[37] Pure logic, it seems, is not of much use here. Apparently, the power of philosophy is insufficient to conclusively rule out one position or another. Both seem equally, or at least adequately, rational.

So if we are faced with a philosophical or evidential stalemate, if 'sheer logic, or plain evidence' cannot settle the disagreement, then 'what it is that decides our minds for, or against, religious conviction'? It is important to note that Farrer seems to believe that this is in fact the epistemic situation in which we find ourselves: one of studied ambiguity, without *obvious* truth or falsehood staring us in the face. If one of these positions is in fact 'more rational' than the other, its superior rationality is not immediately or universally apparent. But Farrer then replies that the answer to this question ('what it is that decides our minds for, or against, religious conviction') can only be *faith*—the same faith that was there from the beginning, before epistemic questions were raised.[38]

In some cases such initial faith survives the trial by reason, in some cases it does not. If it survives, however, it survives because the person is genuinely *persuaded* of its truth, *not* because she is believing perversely against overwhelming evidence to the contrary. Indeed, it is precisely at this point that the believer discovers that she, in fact, *has* faith and what such faith *means*. Farrer says that such faith 'becomes self-conscious in exerting itself against the counter-persuasions; but it was there already….Either we are persuaded or not persuaded, that is the starting-point. If we are persuaded, some element of faith is there; it is just a matter of maintaining itself or not against rival persuasions.'[39] But, crucially, what truly persuades the believer is not faith itself, but *evidence*. Faith is neither belief *against*

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[37] Ibid., 170.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., 171.

nor belief *without* evidence, but rather 'a subjective condition favourable to the reception of the evidence.'[40] And again we will hear more about this in a moment.

However, at this point Farrer complicates this basic epistemic picture, which applies across the board to all our beliefs whatsoever, by candidly admitting that the real 'difficulty about faith is not a difficulty about faith in general, or about the enormous part it plays in every department of life. The difficulty about faith is a difficulty about religious faith in particular, because it is so unlike other examples of faith; not because it resembles them.'[41] And that is because religious faith entails belief in the *existence* of its (admittedly very odd) object, not just in its *trustworthiness* (as, for example, with the policies of the Liberal Party). And here Farrer makes the claim we heard in Chapter One, Section I.D from Basil Mitchell, who duly credited it to Farrer himself: 'God is trustworthy, by definition, always supposing that he exists....I can trust him if he exists, how can I trust him to exist?'[42] Farrer accepts that this type of fideism seems both impossible and absurd, and he says that the recognition of this impossible absurdity is what motivates those who would, by contrast, deny 'any faith-element in a conviction of God's existence.'[43]

And here the Anglican Warden of Keble College explicitly engages with the Roman Catholic tradition of religious epistemology and natural theology that we discussed in Chapter Two, which he finds almost as mistaken in its rationalism as 'trusting God to exist' is in its fideism. Bearing in mind that the Second Vatican

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[40] Ibid., 176.

[41] Ibid., 171.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid. However, 'trusting God to exist' does seem to be more or less what Rowan Williams is suggesting we try to do in *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Canterbury Press, 2007). See my review in *Foundation: The Annual Periodical of the St Chad's College Foundation* IV (2007), 115-118, which compares Williams to Farrer on this issue.

Council had literally just started when he gave the lecture on which this chapter was based, and that the Anti-Modernist Oath was still in full effect, Farrer says that denying the element of faith in our conviction of God's existence

> used to be almost the official Roman Catholic view. We believe in God (it was said) by force of reason; by faith we trust the promises he gives us through accredited channels of revelation, once they are accredited; our acceptance of the channels as authoritative cannot itself repose on faith. Such is, or was, the high and dry scholastic doctrine. As a positive account of the matter, it is utterly useless, and we have already shown why. It is useless, because it involves us in accusing all well-informed atheists either of mental imbecility or of intellectual dishonesty, or of both….Now I am simply not prepared to bring an accusation of this kind against my godless friends. Since I myself believe, I must suppose that they suffer from some bias in disbelieving; but it is not the sort of bias that turns away from cogent reasons. It is just that subtle and elusive bias which leads to misjudgement in matters of faith.[44]

Farrer has some interesting things to say about why atheists may be drawn to atheism, but the main point is that, in his view, atheism is a rational position to hold: 'You can run a plausible line in atheist propaganda, to persuade us that nature, without God, is the sufficient cause of our existence.'[45] The interpretation of faith, on

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[44] Ibid., 172. The Second Vatican Council opened on 11 October 1962, and if I am correct in my dating of these lectures (see note 28 above), 'Belief and Evidence' was delivered in Oxford just six days later on 17 October. It is interesting that even in 1962-64 Farrer was aware that determining the exact contours of the Roman epistemic tradition was perhaps more complicated than it seemed, but it is doubtful that he could have imagined how much change the Council would unleash, on epistemic as well as on many other matters. However, for an example of a Roman Catholic writer from the previous generation who does indeed seem to make some of the claims Farrer attributes above to the Church, see C. W. O'Hara's contribution in *Science and Religion: A Symposium* (Gerald Howe, 1931), 107-116. This is the same 'Fr O'Hara' famously chastised by Wittgenstein in his lectures on religious belief, and (not quite so famously) defended by Brian Davies in 'Scarlet O'Hara: A Portrait Restored', *Philosophy* 57 (1982), 402-407. I am not convinced by Davies's intervention on O'Hara's behalf, as I think Davies fails to acknowledge the dubious extent of O'Hara's rationalistic confidence that Catholic doctrines 'are reached by the very same intelligence that is operative in science and with the same certainty' (O'Hara, 112).

[45] Ibid., 174. Here Farrer agrees with Basil Mitchell, Brian Hebblethwaite, Diogenes Allen, and Richard Swinburne, as we saw in Chapter One. See 178-179 for Farrer's speculations about possible noetic factors contributing to atheism.

the other hand, is 'natural' and thus likewise plausible, and indeed well supported by objective evidence, as we shall see in a moment. But it too, like atheism, is not rejected on pain of irrationality. Again, the point is that when it comes to belief in God's existence, Farrer rejects what he describes as the 'scholastic' view which says that 'faith only comes in later, when we trust the explicit promises of God. There is some element of faith there from the start.'[46]

Recalling that Farrer has always rejected demonstrative theistic arguments, and also recalling that Abbé Bautain (1796-1867) was forced to assert that

- 'Human reason is able to prove with certitude the existence of God'

and that

- 'The use of reason precedes faith and, with the help of revelation and grace, leads to it'

we can see that Farrer's position here is clearly fideistic *from the traditional Roman Catholic perspective*.[47] However, since Farrer *also* rejects what even he regards as the overly fideistic idea that we can 'trust God to exist,' he is led to stake out a middle

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[46] Ibid.

[47] For the theses against Bautain, see Chapter Two, Section I.A. It is of course possible, and indeed certain, that what Farrer means by this general 'faith' is *not* equivalent to the 'heavenly gift' described in these 19th century Roman Catholic documents. That is, Farrer's general faith is *not* the theological virtue of faith (1 Corinthians 13.13), nor Peter Lombard's 'faith formed by love' (*fides formata caritate*). And this becomes explicitly clear in Farrer's imminent distinction above between 'initial faith' and 'saving faith'. But making this distinction and deliberately applying 'initial faith' to questions about belief in God is itself part of Farrer's (Anglican) argument *against* the 'scholastic' Roman Catholic epistemology: by interpreting 'faith' *only* in such supernatural terms and by denying its relevance to general belief-formation, the Church is led to the mistaken view that arguments for God's existence can *only* be construed in strictly rationalistic, demonstrative terms. And this, Farrer thinks, is untenable for the reasons discussed above. For a brief but useful survey of the historical development of the concept of faith and the different definitions that have been applied to it, see 'faith' in F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Third Edition (Oxford University Press, 1997), 595-596. And for a book-length treatment, see Springsted's text cited in note 32.

position (a *via media*) that draws a distinction from scholastic practice between 'two operations of faith'. The first is the 'implicit' or 'initial faith' he has been exploring so far, and the second is the full-blown 'saving faith' of Christian commitment.

To further illustrate what he means by 'initial faith'—which he describes as 'a deeply felt personal attitude, even if it not exactly an attitude of trust'[48]—Farrer asks us to consider a child brought up as an orphan who suddenly wonders if his mother is still alive. This unexpected possibility produces a reaction in the child; he 'alternates between hope and resignation.'[49] Farrer says, 'The suggestion that there might be a mother is not an isolated factual hypothesis; it is a picture of the world, with an attitude built in; it is filial existence in place of orphan existence.'[50] The possibility has a profoundly affective quality to it, appealing not just to the child's reason, but also to his imagination and heart. It is, as Farrer's quotation above implies, *existential*. And the same situation obtains, Farrer insists, when human beings consider the existence of God.

In an acute and sensitive manner, Farrer thus argues that rationalistic evidentialism and extreme fideism are both inadequate responses to the possibility of God's existence. To the rationalist evidentialist (whether theist or atheist) he says:

> We are too much inclined to think of a disputed idea as a drawing over there on the blackboard, a bloodless diagram about which you and I are calmly deliberating whether to fill it in with the colours of real existence, or not. Such an account is always misleading, but not always equally misleading. It is supremely misleading in cases like those we are considering.[51]

That is, the question of God's existence is not an abstract intellectual puzzle, but analogous to the orphan's personal interest in the possibility of a living parent:

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[48] Farrer, 'Faith and Evidence,' 172.

[49] Ibid., 173.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

> For the child, to think of a possible mother is to experiment in having a mother; to try filial existence. The experiment takes place in the realms of imagination, but it is real enough to the heart. And similarly to think of a possible God is to experiment in having God. The attitude of creature to Creator, of doomed mortal to immortal saviour, is built into the very idea. The heart goes out to God, even to a possible God; whether we should call the attitude 'faith' or something else, is a question of little consequence.[52]

Farrer acknowledges that this imaginative 'experiment in having God,' even if it does result in a longing of the heart for the reality of God, even if it does evoke the 'deeply felt personal attitude' of openness to the existence of God, it does not as yet *justify* such belief. We may be like orphans who try filial existence, and like it—and yet are truly orphaned. As Farrer says bluntly, 'The orphan's painful interest in the idea of a possible mother is no evidence that he has a mother.'[53]

Thus, having laid the groundwork in 'initial faith,' the next step is to apply this faith to the evidence. That is, after insisting on the necessity of faith to the rationalist evidentialist (again, whether theist or atheist), Farrer then turns to the extreme fideist and insists on the necessity of evidence: 'A God could show himself through his creation, and it is the simple conviction of believers that God does.'[54] Farrer thus rejects the anti-evidentialist line (associated, for example, rightly or wrongly, with Barthianism and so-called 'Wittgensteinian fideism') which says that such concerns are completely irrelevant or inappropriate when considering religious beliefs. But even here faith is still required, for God 'shows through the evidence more than hard-headed calculation could build out of the evidence; and the readiness to accept that "more" will be faith, or the effect of faith.'[55]

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[52] Ibid. As with 'story,' the link with 'imagination' is suggestive and could connect in interesting ways with the Farrer-inspired work of David Brown cited in note 171 of Chapter Three, and likewise with the similarly-cited essay by Douglas Hedley and his *Living Forms of the Imagination*.

[53] Ibid., 174.

[54] Ibid., 176

[55] Ibid.

What is distinctive and appealing about Farrer's moderate fideism in this chapter is the intimacy with which he intertwines the 'faith and evidence' of the title: the attitude of faith is required to subjectively interpret the evidence which is objectively present and compelling. Thus, he says that without

> the readiness of faith, the evidence of God will not be accepted, or will not convince. This is not to say that faith is put in place of evidence. What convinces us in not our faith, but the evidence; faith is a subjective condition favourable to the reception of the evidence….[T]he evidence is intrinsically and of itself convincing, but only under conditions which allow it to be appreciated. Faith supplies the conditions.[56]

But if faith supplies the conditions, what is the evidence that is then considered? The brief answer is 'everything'; the more specific, distinctively Farrerian answer is 'human nature.' Perhaps bearing in mind his original undergraduate audience, Farrer now presents a far more conventional version of the cosmological argument than those analysed in Part III of *Finite and Infinite*. He reluctantly concedes that we can indeed, in merely formal terms, argue from the world to God, but then unrepentantly insists—as we saw in the Chapter Three, Section III.B.(2), with perhaps a lingering Cartesianism—that, since we only know what 'existence' is through our own being, 'if we take ourselves out of the picture, the evidence vanishes.'[57] However, the main point here is that Farrer not only appeals to some version of the cosmological argument to support our belief in the existence of God, but that in 'Faith and Evidence' the argument actually seems to do some work,

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[56] Ibid. Eaton helpfully juxtaposes this chapter from *Saving Belief* with Farrer's contribution to Hans Werner Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate* (SPCK, 1953), a symposium which centres around Rudolph Bultmann's famous essay, 'The New Testament and Mythology'. On page 220 of his chapter, 'An English Appreciation' (212-223), Farrer makes an almost identical statement about the relation between faith and evidence as the one cited above, although in this earlier context his concern is not religious epistemology (belief in God) but religious history (belief in the resurrection of Christ). However, this chapter still provides evidence that Farrer gave a crucial epistemic weight to faith eleven years before *Saving Belief*. See Eaton, 158 and 169.

[57] Ibid., 180.

unlike in *Finite and Infinite*. As stated above, and as the title of the chapter clearly indicates, while faith is necessary, evidence is equally essential.

The interactionist epistemology that Henderson says comes to the fore after 1957 is indeed present in this lecture / chapter, but in a rather muted way. Farrer tells his listeners / readers that both 'the scandal of faith, and the force of it, lie in the fact that the (possible) God of our belief must be *my God* to each of us. Apart from the implied relationship, there is no field in which the peculiar action of faith can be deployed.'[58] So, again, faith is contextualised in a relationship with a deity with whom we do more than just think. And in a summary of this chapter, Farrer remarkably manages to convey in just a few lines both the consistency and the development in his religious epistemology from 1943 to 1964, although only those who know his earlier work would catch the allusions:

> it is in ourselves that we sample that existence, of which we see the cause in God [*Finite and Infinite*]; and in ourselves that we sample that personality which furnishes the idea of God [*The Freedom of the Will*]. The basis of theology comes down to this: human existence has a superhuman creator; the God of my belief can only be my God, and the attitude of faith is necessary to any genuinely theological contemplation [*Saving Belief*].[59]

Farrer's final step, however, is to say that simply *believing* in God (or not) is not the actual issue. And this is when the open attitude of 'initial faith' may finally develop into the devout commitment of 'saving faith'. It is no good to conclude that God exists and then pretend that it makes no difference. Rather, we must 'honour our belief in God by giving God his due; and God's due is our life. Indeed we shall not achieve full intellectual belief unless we live by it. Who can go on believing in a supreme Good which he makes no motion towards embracing?'[60] And the rest of the

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[58] Ibid., 179.

[59] Ibid., 182.

[60] Ibid., 183.

book thus presents the essential doctrines of Christian theology, according to which we may embrace this supreme Good which has already embraced us.[61]

In terms of its 'sort' of fideism, 'Faith and Evidence' marks a certain step-back from the Pauline epistemology articulated a few years earlier in 'Revelation'. Now Farrer has replaced the divine gift of faith as a special action in the mind of the 'spiritual' believer with a more general and psychological 'initial faith,' one that fits in well with Basil Mitchell's openness to Kuhn (and family resemblance to Gadamer) noted in Chapter One, Sections I.C and I.D. 'Faith and Evidence' is indeed very close to the perspective Mitchell defends in *Faith and Criticism*.[62] However, what seems new to Farrer's epistemology in this period and what still separates it from Mitchell's—and even more from Hebblethewaite's—is the strong emphasis on the *priority* and *necessity* of faith. While even in *Finite and Infinite* one of the tasks of rational theology was to 'show how far down in our common thinking the question of faith enters,' in *Saving Belief* not only does Farrer *begin* with faith, but he further insists that without faith 'the evidence of God will not be accepted'. This is precisely

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[61] Several paragraphs in this section were taken or adapted from my article 'Above, Beside, Within: The Anglican Theology of Austin Farrer,' cited in note 32 above. This article also considers the more doctrinal content of *Saving Belief*, specifically Farrer's rather binitarian view of the Trinity, as well as two other texts. Relatively little has been written on Farrer's forays into systematic theology. For some exceptions, in addition to my article and Robert Slocum's book cited in note 24, see Brian Hebblethwaite, 'The Doctrine of the Incarnation in the Thought of Austin Farrer' in his collection *The Incarnation: Collected Essays in Christology* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112-125; David Hein, 'Austin Farrer on Justification and Sanctification', *The Anglican Digest* 49 (2007), 51–54; Edward Henderson, 'Incarnation and Double Agency', in Julius J. Lipner (ed.), *Truth, Religious Dialogue, and Dynamic Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Brian Hebblethwaite* (SCM Press, 2005), 154-164; M. P. Wilson, 'Austin Farrer and the Paradox of Christology', in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982), 145-163; and ibid., 'St John, the Trinity, and the Language of the Spirit', in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 41 (1988), 471-483.

[62] (Clarendon Press, 1994). See Chapter I, notes 46 and 62, the latter of which includes my qualification of Douglas Hedley's comparison of Farrer and Mitchell.

the position that Hebblethwaite fears and rejects (Chapter One, Section II.B). Faith is now both the starting point and the epistemic grid without which the evidence for God is not convincing. And yet, complementing the requirement of faith, Farrer still insists that faith needs evidence to interpret: to adapt the well-known verse, faith without evidence is dead. So, in answer to the question, 'Can reasonable minds still think theologically?', the answer is 'yes'—so long, that as, as 'reason' is understood to include the initial faith that is open to the possibility of God. Otherwise, the answer seems to be 'no'.

If we recall the definitions of fideism canvassed in Chapter Two, it seems clear that what I call the 'middle' Farrer is now defending, not just conventional Anglican *semi-fideism*, but *moderate fideism*: 'reason is not antithetically opposed to faith, but plays an auxiliary role in formulating or elucidating what must first be accepted by faith.'[63] And so, on the basis of the evidence surveyed thus far in this dissertation, particularly this first chapter of *Saving Belief*, I judge that Diogenes Allen's interpretation of Farrer's epistemology is more accurate than Brian Hebblethwaite's, not least because it acknowledges change and development in Farrer's thought (Chapter One, Section III.B). According to Allen, from the time of *Saving Belief*, 'Farrer takes the believer's faith to be essential for a proper assessment of the grounds of Christian theism.'[64] That unquestionably seems to be the case, although the transition appears to have occurred several years earlier.

In regard to Mitchell's concern as to whether Farrer had become 'a sort of fideist' in 1967 (Chapter One, Section I.B), we have already established in both Chapter Three and this chapter that Farrer went through an extreme fideist phase as an

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[63] *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, editorial consultant, Anthony Flew (Pan Books, Second Revised Edition, 1983), 120.

[64] Allen, 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity, 198.

undergraduate in the late 1920s; that even his 'rational theology' of *Finite and Infinite* in 1943 would still be classified as semi-fideism by traditional Roman Catholic standards; that in 1957 Farrer expressed the Pauline view that only those who have the 'mind of Christ' will believe the Gospel; that in 1961 he preferred peasants to philosophers; and finally that in 1962 he defended moderate fideism in the lectures which were eventually published as *Saving Belief* in 1964. Thus, the real question we should be asking is, 'Was Farrer ever *not* "a sort of fideist"?' And, on the basis of the evidence surveyed so far, the only time when it seems he may have been a thorough-going rationalist was between 1923 and 1927: that is, after going up to Oxford and before his 'breakthrough' experience in March 1927. According to his own report, during this time he felt himself 'the slave of Reason' and was consequently miserable and inhibited on multiple levels. So I would strongly dissent from Mitchell's recent claim that 'Farrer in all of his writings remains an out-and-out rationalist.'[65] Rather, I would argue that it was only when Farrer *rejected* rationalism—but not *reason*—in 1927 that he finally felt himself free to actually pursue the true and the good, if not the beautiful. And, as he then wrote to his father, 'You don't know how happy I am…'

III. 'Your ideas keep expanding in my head'

Near the end of Chapter Two, I suggested that this dissertation could be construed along the analogy of a legal trial. Austin Farrer has been, as it were, accused of fideism by a key witness, Basil Mitchell. The two questions before the court are: 'Is he guilty as charged?' and 'Is it even a crime?' I am the judge presiding over the case. My readers are the jury. For the defence we have Brian Hebblethwaite, and for the prosecution Diogenes Allen. I added that while this

[65] Basil Mitchell, 'Introduction', in Hebblethwaite and Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World*, 5.

analogy is somewhat fanciful, it clearly identifies the issues at hand and the primary *dramatis personae* according to their roles in the investigation.

In terms of the first question before the court, I have already passed my verdict: granting the various definitions surveyed in Chapter Two, Farrer definitely exemplified several variants of fideism over the course of his career. The question of whether his fideism is a 'crime' remains to be seen. As I argued in Chapter Two, fideism *as such* should not automatically be considered a pejorative term or concept. There are various sorts and conditions of fideism, and some may be right and beneficial whereas others may be false and pernicious. To establish that Farrer was indeed 'a sort of fideist' is not *ipso facto* to convict him of a crime against reason, or of intellectual irresponsibility.

The witness, Basil Mitchell, thought that he might have observed Farrer committing an act of fideism in 1967, but our investigation revealed that he was in fact a serial fideist and that the first documented case occurred forty years earlier. While we have gathered sufficient evidence for our verdict, we still need to consider *Faith and Speculation*. In terms of both Mitchell's concern and the debate between Hebblethwaite and Allen, it is the primary 'bone of contention'. And, as Mitchell's response to the manuscript of this book suggests, it is indeed possible that Farrer's fideism is even more pronounced in the first chapter of this book, and thus perhaps of greater concern for those worried about fideism's possible negative characteristics and consequences than the works we have considered thus far.

However, before we reach *Faith and Speculation* itself we need to explore a crucial and yet almost entirely neglected influence on this final phase of Farrer's religious epistemology. And here it turns out that our legal analogy may be deeply problematic, for—as I already indicated in the Introduction—Diogenes Allen

functions in this dissertation not only as an interpreter *of* but also an influence *on* Austin Farrer. So, rather than running the prosecution in this case, perhaps Allen should be up there in the dock as well.

A. From New Haven to Oxford

As mentioned in Chapter One, Section III, Diogenes Allen ended his academic career as Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological Seminary.[66] He was born in Kentucky in 1932, but his parents were Greeks who had been expelled from Turkey (along with over a million of their fellow co-nationalists) a decade earlier and who then immigrated to the United States. After completing a BA in philosophy at the University of Kentucky, Allen began postgraduate studies at Princeton University. However, when he was awarded a Rhodes scholarship in 1955, he left Princeton for St John's College, Oxford. There he read Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from 1955 to 1957, and was tutored by H. P. Grice.[67] After Oxford he went to Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Connecticut, for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity and to train for ordained ministry in the Presbyterian Church. While at Yale he studied with Julian Hartt, Paul Holmer, George Lindbeck, and Hans Frei—all of whom are associated with the so-called 'Yale School' of 'postliberal' theology.[68] After ordination and two years of parish ministry, Allen returned to Yale in 1961, but

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[66] The biographical information in this section is drawn from the published sources cited in note 110 of Chapter One, personal correspondence with Professor Allen, and the interview cited in the Acknowledgements.

[67] For Grice's career and thought, see Barry Stroud and G. J. Warnock, 'Grice, (Herbert) Paul (1913-1988)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 23* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 903-904. An influential philosopher in his own right, he also taught many leading figures, including Peter Strawson.

[68] For some discussion of these figures and this movement, see James Fodor, 'Postliberal Theology', in David F. Ford with Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third Edition (Blackwell, 2005), 229-248; and Paul J. DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Blackwell, 2006).

this time to the Graduate School for a doctorate in philosophy. He particularly wanted to continue his work with Hartt, but was soon strongly influenced by Holmer's more Wittgensteinian approach as well.

Although Allen spent two years in Oxford in the 1950s (while Farrer was Fellow and Chaplain of Trinity), he had no contact with him then; and although Allen returned to Yale in the Autumn of 1961 for his doctoral studies, this was just after Farrer had given the Nathaniel Taylor Lectures there in the Spring of that year. Allen was thus first introduced to Farrer's work by Hartt at Yale in 1959, in a year-long seminar that was half on Barth's *Church Dogmatics* and half on Farrer's *Finite and Infinite*. After passing his comprehensive exams in 1962, Allen began work on his dissertation, on religious epistemology, which included a chapter dealing critically with both *Finite and Infinite* and John Hick's *Faith and Knowledge*.[69] Because Allen's Rhodes scholarship still provided a third year of study, he decided to return to Oxford and finish the dissertation there. Hartt suggested that he do so under Farrer's supervision, and Allen agreed. So Hartt wrote to Farrer to introduce Allen and propose the arrangement, and Allen went back to Oxford in 1963, during Farrer's third year at Keble.[70]

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[69] Hick's book was cited in note 1 above, along with Farrer's review of it.

[70] This episode is just part of a broader and fascinating story, which I cannot explore further here, regarding Hartt's role in introducing American theology to Farrer's thought, not only through teaching *Finite and Infinite* to several generations of students at Yale and (later) at the University of Virginia, but also through supervising several doctoral dissertations on Farrer, writing two articles on his work, and inviting Farrer to Yale in 1961 for the Nathaniel Taylor lectures (Farrer's first visit to the United States). In addition to Allen, Hartt also brought Farrer to the attention of Hans Frei, Stanley Hauerwas, and several other prominent American theologians. John Glasse of Vassar College, mentioned in the Introduction and whose article on Farrer has been cited several times, was also one of Hartt's students. See Curtis, 165; DeHart, 5-6; and William M. Wilson, 'A Different Method, a Different Case: The Theological Program of Julian Hartt and Austin Farrer', *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 599-633. Hauerwas discusses his first-hand encounter with Hartt and second-hand encounter with Farrer in his forthcoming

According to Allen, when he first met with Farrer they simply had a casual conversation about various topics, including Robinson's *Honest to God* ('which distressed both of us') and Allen gave him a copy of his dissertation-in-progress, which contained the critique of *Finite and Infinite*.[71] As this was the autumn of 1963, Farrer had already delivered the lecturers that became *Saving Belief* and submitted them to the publisher, but the book itself had not yet appeared. In their next meeting, which was a proper supervision session, Farrer responded to Allen's critique of his earlier work. Farrer stated that, according to Allen's dissertation, in *Finite and Infinite* he had confused a necessary condition for the rationality of theism for a sufficient condition. That is, in *Finite and Infinite* Farrer had argued that theism required the metaphysical doctrine of substance, and yet seemed to regard this doctrine as not only required but adequate in itself to establish theism's rationality. Rather to Allen's surprise, Farrer fully conceded the legitimacy of this critique. Moreover, before the end of the session he provided Allen with proof-pages of the forthcoming *Saving Belief* and told him that this represented his current thinking.[72]

However, after granting Allen's critique of *Finite and Infinite* and before giving him the proofs of *Saving Belief*, Farrer subjected the constructive proposals of Allen's dissertation to a very thorough analysis, which Allen says lasted over an hour.

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autobiography, *Hannah's Child*, and Frei cites Farrer sporadically throughout his essays: see, for example, 'Remarks in Connection with a Theological Proposal,' in Hans W. Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 34-35; and 'Appendix A: Theology in the University', in Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology*, edited by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Yale University Press, 1992), 120. Frei clearly liked Farrer's description of Christ as God's 'self-enacted parable' (in Farrer, 'Revelation', 99), calling it an 'eloquent phrase' and quoting it several times, as in 'The "Literal Reading" of Biblical Narrative in the Christian Tradition: Does It Stretch or Will It Break?', *Theology and Narrative*, 145. Farrer is thus undoubtedly part of the genealogy of postliberal / Yale School theology, and this connection deserves to be more thoroughly investigated.

[71] E-mail from Diogenes Allen to Robert MacSwain, 15 November 2004.

[72] Ibid., and e-mail from Diogenes Allen to Robert MacSwain, 17 November 2004.

They continued to meet regularly until the Christmas holiday, and Farrer wrote Allen several letters from November 1963 until May 1967, many of which deal directly with the developing dissertation and the ideas Farrer encountered therein (see Appendix B). In February 1964, Farrer invited Allen to present the pith of his argument about faith and reason to the Metaphysicals. Allen recalls that those present were Basil Mitchell, Helen Oppenheimer, J. L. Lucas, I. M. Crombie, and G. C. Stead. He reports that while one member was resistant and 'took it as Barthianism,' another was 'quietly interested,' and that Farrer was 'very lively and defending the position.'[73]

For, as Allen's recollections and Farrer's letters to him both bear witness, although Farrer had strong reservations about certain aspects of Allen's dissertation, regarding them as overly fideistic, in general he found it immensely stimulating and helpful.[74] Thus, in his first letter to Allen, Farrer wrote, 'Your ideas keep expanding in my head' (Letter 1), and in later note he said, 'I do not altogether agree with you but I think what you say is very important' (Letter 6). And, as I stated in the Introduction, within a few years Farrer publicly confessed to 'plundering' Allen's ideas in the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*, and then went on to cite an article from *American Philosophical Quarterly* that expressed the central argument of the dissertation. There is thus no doubt that Allen's dissertation was a key influence on 'The Believer's Reasons' in *Faith and Speculation*. However, this influence has not yet been adequately recognised or investigated.[75] The most fulsome statement in print

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[73] Undated letter from Diogenes Allen to Robert MacSwain, February 2006.

[74] See Allen's introduction to the letters from Farrer to him, now in the Bodleian, and included in Appendix B.

[75] As noted in the Introduction, I have only found three places where Allen's influence on Farrer has even been mentioned: the introduction to Eric O. Springsted (ed.), *Spirituality and Theology: Essays in Honor of Diogenes Allen* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 3; Eaton, *The Logic of Theism*, 68 note 126 (Eaton was one of Allen's students and this book is based on his 1979 Ph.D. from Princeton

is precisely two sentences from the late Baptist theologian James McClendon, who wrote: 'Already in process of change, Farrer read Allen's completed dissertation while he was at Oxford and found it persuasive. Behind both stand the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose posthumous influence was felt at Allen's Yale and Farrer's Oxford during the 1960s.'[76] While that is correct so far as it goes, rather more could be said.

B. Motives, Evidence, and Religious Commitment

Farrer's letters to Allen express far more eloquently and interestingly than any second-hand account the impact the dissertation had on Farrer and his own process of thinking through, summarising, and responding to Allen's argument, so I refer readers to Appendix B at this time. Like Mitchell's reported reaction to the unpublished manuscript of *Faith and Speculation* circa 1966, Farrer's reaction to Allen's dissertation in 1963-64 provides an invaluable contemporary window into both his own thinking and the general intellectual milieu of British philosophy of religion in this period. With the letters clearly in mind, this segment will look very briefly at the dissertation itself rather than Farrer's reaction to it.[77]

Theological Seminary); and James Wm McClendon, Jr (with Nancey Murphy), *Witness: Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Abingdon Press, 2000), 278-281.

[76] McClendon, 279. He thanks Allen in the preface (along with, among several others, Hartt and Hauerwas), and is obviously drawing on personal communication for those details, as am I.

[77] As it happens, the version of the dissertation actually read by Farrer—*Motives, Evidence, and Religious Commitment* (1964)—was *not* the final version ultimately accepted by Yale for the Ph.D. That final version—*Faith as a Ground for Religious Beliefs* (1965)—is widely accessible through the normal methods of accessing unpublished doctoral dissertations. However, the original version read by Farrer and revised by Allen in light of his comments only existed in a handful of typescripts prepared for Allen's supervisors and examiners. Remarkably, Paul Holmer kept his copy of this original version, and it is now deposited in the Special Collections Department of the Henry Luce III Library of Princeton Theological Seminary. I am grateful to Professor Allen and Mr Kenneth Henke of the Luce Library for making this document available to me.

Allen's argument is simple.[78] Drawing on a distinction made by Wittgenstein in *The Blue and Brown Books* between two different types of reasons, Allen proposes a parallel distinction between what he calls 'motives' and 'rationales'. A motive (or, sometimes, 'motive-reason') is the *actual reason* why someone holds a certain belief. It is specific to her as an individual, and Allen sometimes refers to it as 'biographical.' For example, 'I was brought up to accept this religion and not that one.' A rationale, on the other hand, is a *possible reason* that one could provide, not to justify the belief itself as *actually* held by the person, but as a general reason why the belief *might* be true or even *ought* to be held. For example, 'God exists because only an eternal unmoved mover can explain the existence and nature of the universe.' So whereas motives are actual and personal reasons, rationales are possible and impersonal.[79] Allen sometimes refers to rationales as seeking to provide 'a general case,' that is, one that makes 'no reference to any specific believers.'[80]

In regard to religious beliefs, and specifically in regard to Christianity, Allen holds that most people's motive for belief is faith, aroused biographically. In some rare instances, the *actual reason* someone believes might indeed be the cosmological or some other argument, in which case her motive-reason is in fact an argument, but

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[78] In the following pages, I will cite from the unpublished manuscript of *Motives, Evidence, and Religious Commitment*, since this is the version read and commented upon by Farrer. However, as indicated previously, in *Faith and Speculation* Farrer not only mentions Allen in the preface, but also cites an article in which Allen presented the basic argument of the dissertation: 'Motives, Rationales, and Religious Beliefs', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3 (1966), 111-127. Allen sent him an offprint of the article, and so Farrer read it as well before publishing *Faith and Speculation* (see Letter 6 in Appendix B). Since this article is more accessible than the manuscript, I will, when possible, provide references to parallel passages from the article in brackets after the primary citations from the dissertation.

[79] Allen, *Motives, Evidence, and Religious Commitment*, 20-21 [111-112]. He refers to Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books: Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical Investigations'* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), 14.

[80] Allen, 51 (including note 1 on that page).

this is neither normal nor necessary. Crucial to Allen's position is the claim that not only is it *actually* the case that most people's religious beliefs are based on faith (which is fairly uncontroversial), but also that this situation is perfectly rationally *acceptable*. As he puts it, such faith-based 'biographical' reasons are 'a proper basis for the affirmation of Christian beliefs. The motives one has for one's adherence to religious beliefs are not grounds which warrant other kinds of assertions, but they are a basis for the assertion of religious beliefs. To believe on the basis of one's motives is not to act arbitrarily, blindly, or without any reason.'[81]

Furthermore, Allen makes the stronger claim that to insist that religious beliefs must be based on arguments is to distort their true character: 'To seek to give religious beliefs an evidential basis results in turning them into something else. In particular, it makes religious beliefs appear to be like other kinds of metaphysical assertions.'[82] This is another crucial distinction. Metaphysical beliefs (which Allen does not reject on principle) are based on reasoning that observes aspects of the cosmos and then makes appropriate / valid or inappropriate / invalid inferences about realities beyond empirical investigation. Religious beliefs, on the other hand, while they may well imply or even entail certain metaphysical commitments, are *not* based on such reasoning. Rather, they arise in response to personal confrontation with a message about God—'the gospel'—which one encounters either through growing up in the Christian community, or reading the Bible, or hearing a street preacher, etc.[83] Even if a particular metaphysical belief is verbally identical to a particular religious belief—for example, 'God created the world'—they are in fact *different beliefs* because they are held on different grounds and thus are related differently to other

[81] Ibid., 2 [111].

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid., 3 [112-113]. The first two examples are Allen's, but he clearly does not limit himself to them.

beliefs held by the person. To insist that the religious belief 'God created the world' must be justified by argument is to turn it from a religious belief to a metaphysical one, and hence into a different belief.[84]

Although Allen maintains that to grow up within the Christian community is itself a valid motive-reason to hold Christian beliefs (assuming, as we shall see in a moment, that one has not encountered insurmountable objections to these beliefs), in fact there is more to faith on his account than mere biographical considerations. According to Allen:

> The grounds [of religious belief] are that a man has come to have faith in response to the witness of the Christian community and in the condition of faith he finds his soul nourished. By praying, by reading the Scriptures, by fellowship with other Christians, he finds his life is beginning to conform to what Paul described as the new life. This nourishment is his assurance and ground for the condition of faith in which he finds himself; and the very response of faith itself (which includes receiving nourishment) is a ground for faith.[85]

Thus, having faith is not merely assenting to a particular set of groundless beliefs just because one was taught them as a child, but rather to actively receive what Allen calls 'nourishment' from them—nourishment which itself provides at least part of the grounds on which they are rationally held. Presumably, then, someone who received no such 'nourishment' from her religious beliefs, or who once received it but ceased to do so, or concluded they such nourishment was a psychological illusion or otherwise false, might on that very basis cease to hold them.[86]

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[84] See ibid., 110-117, and Chapter Seven: 'Religious Cosmological Beliefs' (118-142). This claim is interestingly similar to Lindbeck's well-known assertion that religious beliefs cannot be reduced to bald propositions, but that their meaning is part of a cultural-linguistic framework that must be learned.

[85] Ibid., 25 [113].

[86] This seems to be the case with Michael Goulder. One of Farrer's students who became an eminent New Testament scholar and a priest in the Church of England, Goulder eventually lost his faith and left the priesthood for precisely these reasons: see 'The *Fram* Abandoned', in Michael Goulder and John Hick, *Why Believe in God?* (SCM Press, 1983), 1-30—which also contains much of interest on Farrer.

What then of 'rationales'? Do they play any role at all in this scheme? Yes, for religious believers often encounter rational *objections* to their belief, objections which arise either internally or externally, which cause them to doubt or perhaps even to abandon their faith—nourishment or no nourishment. Allen explicitly mentions the critiques of religion provided by Ludwig Feuerbach, Sigmund Freud, D. F. Strauss, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Antony Flew, and we could of course add Karl Marx, Bernard Russell, J. L. Mackie, Richard Dawkins, and many others. Although Allen defends a position in which religious beliefs are 'innocent until proven guilty,' he fully acknowledges that sometimes they do need to be defended. Thus, Allen accepts that

> when actual doubts arise and rationales such as arguments, distinctions, and counter evidence are given to rebut challenges, rationales may be employed, be useful, and yet not become a part of the motive-reason or serve as the foundation of [the] motive-reason. They may exist alongside [the] motive-reason as a different kind of reason for belief. They could be cited as a reason for continuing to believe in the face of a challenge and yet not be the reason one believes.[87]

Rationales may thus be a necessary component of the life of faith, answering accusations and dealing with doubt. However, as with metaphysical beliefs, Allen insists that rationales still need not—and perhaps even should not—become the believer's *actual* motive-reason: she should still believe because of the *nourishment* she has actually received from the gospel, not because of an impersonal, objective argument, or 'general case.'

Allen develops this perspective in considerably more detail, but this brief summary provides the basic outline of his positive thesis.[88] However, in the course of presenting his own position, he also critiques a number of other contemporary

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[87] Ibid., 27 [114].

[88] An essential chapter that explains his distinctive view of faith is Chapter 6: 'The Nature of Religious Commitment and Affirmations' (90-117).

philosophers, including (as indicated earlier) Austin Farrer. According to Allen, in *Finite and Infinite* Farrer 'believes that evidence or a general case for a crucial part of the Christian religion must be given.'[89] In particular, as we have seen in our own discussion of Farrer's defence of the metaphysical doctrine of substance in *Finite and Infinite* (Chapter Three, Section III.B), Farrer is convinced that 'Christianity must conceive of the constituents of the world as having some connections among themselves. Items must be conceived as real entities. He therefore sets for himself the task of showing that there are connections amongst things in the world and degrees of reality amongst finite things.'[90] Thus, for Farrer, 'the view of God envisioned in Christianity entails a belief in substances and evidence for the existence of substances can be found *only* from an examination of the constituents of the universe. A case which establishes the existence of substances is necessary for the belief that God is creator.'[91] However, Allen concludes that 'Farrer's position is thus contrary to my own. I have maintained that religious beliefs may be asserted on the basis of the motive-reason of faith without evidence to certify or to recommend the beliefs. His view is that an essential part of it cannot be based on faith but must be based on evidence.'[92]

Allen proceeds to argue against Farrer's position here—what I identified in Chapter Three as 'the residual rationalism lurking at the core of *Finite and Infinite*'—by advancing three claims. The first was noted earlier in the account of Farrer and Allen's first supervision session. Allen argues that Farrer has, at best, mistaken a necessary condition for the rationality of Christian theism for a sufficient one (56-60).

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[89] Ibid., 51.

[90] Ibid., 54.

[91] Ibid., 55.

[92] Ibid. As a point of clarification, I think Allen has overly 'Christianised' Farrer's position in this text. *Finite and Infinite* is a 'philosophical essay,' not a work of Christian theology.

The second claim is to go a step further and deny that Christianity is, in fact, 'committed to saying that *it can be shown* or that *it must be shown* that its view of the constituents of the universe are as it claims them to be' (60-71).[93] That is, whether or not substances exist, and whether or not they are entailed by Christianity, Allen thinks that philosophically *establishing* a *specific* doctrine of substance is neither necessary nor sufficient for the rationality of Christian theism. Hence, Allen denies Farrer's claim that 'there are some metaphysical questions which must be settled if we are to vindicate the significance of any theological statements whatever of the traditional type.'[94] Further on in the dissertation, Allen illustrates his counter-claim by contrasting Farrer's insistence that Christianity is committed to a specific metaphysical doctrine of substance with what Allen takes to be the actual situation. He observes that when Christians affirm that God is the Creator they typically make statements 'which speak of him as creator of the sun, moon, light, animals, plants, and men. The objects that are said to have been created are objects of our daily life. [This affirmation] does not speak of substances.'[95] While not denying that 'substance' can be a meaningful, useful, and even appropriate term when used informally in Christian discourse, and while not denying that substances do in fact exist, Allen nevertheless argues that

> if it is meant that Christianity is committed to a belief in substances *in the sense* that the Christian belief in God as creator entails: (1) that its view of substance must cohere with philosophical and scientific views of substance and matter, and (2) that it must be revised or re-stated to cohere with new developments in philosophy and science, then I deny that Christianity is committed to belief in substances.[96]

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[93] Citation from page 61.

[94] Farrer, *Finite and Infinite* (Dacre Press, 1943), v.

[95] Allen, 125.

[96] Ibid., 125-126.

Third and finally, Allen also denies Farrer's claim that the metaphysical doctrine of substance is required to furnish us with our idea of God (71-72). In short, Allen's threefold critique of *Finite and Infinite* attempts to show that Farrer was wrong to hold that the successful execution of a metaphysical programme is necessary for the rational defence of (Christian) theism. The residual rationalism of *Finite and Infinite* must be exorcised.[97]

IV. The Believer's Reasons: Farrer's Version

Given the content of Farrer's letters to Allen between November 1963 and May 1967, and given that he explicitly acknowledges Allen in the preface and first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*, it is natural to assume that Farrer's very next work after reading Allen's dissertation would bear the clear marks of its influence, and thus that—having considered Allen's various arguments—we could now move straight from the 'middle' Farrer's pre-Allen articulation of 'Faith and Evidence' to the 'late'

[97] For an article on the relation between Christian theology and metaphysics that draws on this dissertation and makes a similar general argument, but which does not focus on the critique of Farrer, see Diogenes Allen, 'Christianity's Stake in Metaphysics', *Theology Today* 24 (1967), 185-202. Allen later published a revised version of his dissertation, which incorporated the substance of both this article and the one mentioned in note 78, as *The Reasonableness of Faith: A Philosophical Essay on the Grounds for Religious Beliefs* (Corpus Books, 1968). Ann Loades's personal copy was given to her by Allen, who wrote on the inside: 'Ann, this is what kicked off *Faith and Speculation*. I revised my text before publication on the basis of Farrer's criticisms. He never saw this—its final form.' But from the preceding pages, it is obvious that, completely independently of the connection with Farrer, in this dissertation and book Allen put forward an important approach to religious epistemology, one that bears a striking resemblance to so-called 'Reformed Epistemology,' but which was formulated about twenty years before the seminal work of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff. However, perhaps because it was ahead of its time, Allen's work in this area has been mostly over-looked. Interestingly, Kai Nielsen gave *The Reasonableness of Faith* a largely positive review: see *Theology Today* 26 (1969), 344-346. The review begins, 'This significant book deserves careful critical examination by both theologians and philosophers.' I will briefly return to Allen's thesis, Reformed Epistemology, and Kai Nielson in Chapter Five.

Farrer's post-Allen discussion of 'The Believer's Reasons.' This, however, is not the case. In 1966, between his initial encounter with Allen in 1963 and the publication of *Faith and Speculation* in 1967, Farrer released a small book titled *A Science of God?*[98] And this text—frustratingly for those seeking a tidy linear progression in Farrer's thought—expresses a view of faith and reason that, despite its typically Farrerian elegance, is actually somewhat *more* rationalistic and empirical in nature than even the moderate fideist perspective of *Saving Belief.*

Just as the first chapter of *Saving Belief* seemed to mark a step-back from the rather extreme 'mind of Christ' view of the earlier essay 'Revelation,' so in *A Science of God?* Farrer seemed to return—if only briefly—to a more conventional apologetic stance regarding the rational grounds of theistic belief than the view he articulated in 'Faith and Evidence.' Once again we see the fluidity of his thought on these matters. While there is no question of demonstrating God's existence, and while the case does indeed become more nuanced and subtle as it goes along, with certain fideistic motifs and themes gradually making an appearance, *A Science of God?* still seems to have more in common with the Farrer of *Finite and Infinite* than with the later texts we have considered so far in this chapter: i.e., it is more semi-fideist or soft rationalist in character. It was, perhaps, the title uppermost in Basil Mitchell's mind when he wrote that he was disappointed in *Faith and Speculation* precisely because it failed to present 'an improved version of the sort of rational theology that Farrer had first developed in *Finite and Infinite* and revised and corrected in various of his occasional writings.'[99] Although the entire book is germane to the focus of this dissertation, and

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[98] Austin Farrer, *A Science of God?* (Geoffrey Bles, 1966). This book was republished by SPCK in 2009, with a new foreword by Margaret Yee.

[99] Basil Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' in Eaton and Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity*, 177.

although an exhaustive survey of Farrer's epistemological development would thus need to consider it in more detail, in the interests of space I am forced to acknowledge its complicating and somewhat anomalous character in this phase of Farrer's life and then move to the dénouement.[100]

In preparing readers for the discussion of *Finite and Infinite*, I spent ten pages looking at the background of that text in Continental Reformed theology, Logical Positivism, and Thomism (Chapter Three, Section III.A). When it comes to *Faith and Speculation*, Charles Conti argues that the primary influence on Farrer at this point was the process theology of Charles Hartshorne, mediated via John Glasse of Vassar College, New York. Consideration of these process themes and sources thus occupies an important part of Conti's book, which (rather oddly) does not consider Allen at all.[101] As I indicated in my Introduction, Conti's thesis is controversial among Farrer scholars. It is also focused primarily on Farrer's metaphysics and in particular on his metaphysics of God. However, it is unnecessary for me to engage explicitly with Conti on this topic, if only because of the complementary epistemological interests of

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[100] The book was not well-received initially, and in particular Dorothy Emmet and two of her 'Epiphany Philosopher' colleagues launched a surprisingly hostile attack on it: see Dorothy Emmet, Ted Bastin, and Margaret Masterman, Review Discussion of Austin Farrer's *A Science of God?*, in *Theoria to Theory* 1 (1966), 55-71, with Farrer's somewhat exasperated reply on 72-75. Another critical review, by W. S. Boycott, may be found in *Theology* LXIX (1966), 184-185. As with *Saving Belief*, Edward Henderson does not consider *A Science of God?* in his survey of Farrer's religious epistemology. For contemporary evaluations, see Margaret Yee's foreword in the 2009 edition (4-7) and my forthcoming review in *Anglican Theological Review*. But in light of *A Science of God?*'s rather more rationalistic position, it should be clear that describing the 'late' Farrer as a fideist *simpliciter* is too simplistic. Another important text that I cannot discuss further here is Farrer's essay 'The Christian Apologist', in Jocelyn Gibb (ed.), *Light on C. S. Lewis* (Geoffrey Bles, 1965), 23-43, which sheds interesting light not only on Farrer's view of Lewis but on his own assessment of the role of reasoned argument in the life of faith. For a critique of this essay, see John T. Stahl, 'Austin Farrer on C. S. Lewis as "The Christian Apologist"', in *Christian Scholars' Review* 4 (1975), 231-237.

[101] See Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism: An Analysis of Austin Farrer's Theistic Metaphysics* (Clarendon Press, 1995). 'Oddly,' because Conti had actually read Farrer's letters to Allen.

this dissertation. Nevertheless, as also indicated in my Introduction, it is still interesting to observe that Farrer himself specifies precisely which chapters Glasse influenced—only three out of twelve—and yet also mentions Allen in regard the first chapter. Thus, as cited previously, in the preface Farrer writes:

> Among the many philosophical friends who have given me food for thought I will mention Dr Diogenes Allen of Princeton, and Professor John Glasse of Vassar. The latter persuaded me to do the rethinking of scholastic positions which runs through my seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters [‘The Theology of Will,’ ‘Justifiable Analogy,’ and ‘First Cause’]; the former I have plundered in my first [‘The Believer’s Reasons’].[102]

Farrer’s self-described ‘plundering’ of Allen in this chapter included both the general ideas of the dissertation itself and their published expression in the *American Philosophical Quarterly* article that Farrer cites on page 10.[103] This dependence is what Farrer was referring to when he wrote to Allen on 12 May 1967, stating with his typical self-depreciating wit: ‘The only tolerable part of the book, as you will see, is the part I stole from you. I have made a few grudging acknowledgements’ (Letter 8). On the basis of this evidence, both published and unpublished, I thus argue that the crucial influence on ‘The Believer’s Reasons,’ at least, was *not* the metaphysical process theology identified by Conti, but rather Allen’s epistemological and somewhat anti-metaphysical dissertation discussed in Section III above. That is the long-neglected background necessary to understand the precise source of Farrer’s thinking—and possible ‘sort of’ fideism—in this chapter.

And, if one then turns to Chapter I of *Faith and Speculation* with Allen’s dissertation and article in mind, Farrer’s dependence on Allen is immediately obvious, up to and including the specific terms and examples employed. He begins by

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[102] Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (A. & C. Black, 1967), vi.

[103] See note 19 of my Introduction and note 78 above.

admitting that 'the contemporary mind sees something almost comic in the old rational theology.' Why? Because we now 'find it absurd that anyone should pretend to discount both the fact and the form of religious belief, while he rakes the universe for signs of a First Cause.'[104] It is thus with this pre-established 'fact and form' that we must begin, with actual religion, not with philosophical abstraction. Striking what in retrospect seems like a presciently 'postmodern' note, with a keen sensitivity to culture and context and interpretation, Farrer asks:

> How could we possibly escape from the cultural history of our race? How experience the theistic suggestiveness of the world, as we might have done if there had never been theology? How experiment with an un-interpreted environment, to see whether it prompts the formation of a brand-new interpretive concept, the concept—dear me, yes!—the concept of God? Whatever the rational theologian may pretend to do, he will in fact be considering a question posed to him by religious belief; and he may as well be above-board about it.[105]

Although this was published as early as 1967, Farrer has here already accepted the 'rationality of tradition' and the 'hermeneutics of finitude'.

However, Farrer then states that while he wishes to avoid a 'neutral approach' that ignores the actual context of actual religious beliefs, he is still concerned with a properly *philosophical* investigation of the grounds *for* these beliefs. That is, he is *not* advocating a contemporary 'religious studies' approach that focuses sociologically, anthropologically, linguistically, and historically on context and content but which ignores truth-claims. No, 'The philosopher's concern is whether any theology is true. But if it is true, it will not surely be true by accident; it will be true because the grounds or motives for such belief have been sound. So it is the actual motives or grounds for religious believing which demand the philosopher's attention.'[106] This

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[104] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 1.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

strategy and terminology—e.g., actual religion and actual motives—is drawn directly from Allen's work. But Farrer then proceeds to interrogate it further, and he now divides his voice into a running dialogue between a sceptical 'philosopher' and a non-philosophical 'believer' that occupies the remainder of the chapter.[107]

This is all well and good, the philosopher says, but what about the evidence? We cannot just believe whatever we want: wishful thinking and 'ascertained fact' are two different things. Religious belief must thus be based on a respectable 'cognitive activity' that interprets reality accurately, or at least plausibly.[108] But the problem with this proposal, counters the believer, is that we typically do not, in fact, offer any such 'rational' account—even to ourselves—of how we have come to hold our religious beliefs. Such philosophical justifications are, at best, only *post factum* constructions that may or may not relate to the propositional content of our religious life. And so in answer to the question, 'How did religion get into our heads?', the obvious answer is that we were taught it.[109] But, again, the philosopher feels bound to reply, citing personal history or corporate tradition does not address the question of 'objective truth'. With Allen's various distinctions and arguments clearly in view, Farrer writes (in the voice of the philosopher) that if such a biographical explanation 'claims to express truth or to determine right, the question is not whence it came, but why we should accept it; *and the second question cannot be answered by merely answering the first*.'[110] Here is Farrer's lingering worry about Allen's position.

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[107] Readers may recall that when Basil Mitchell read this text in manuscript he found himself 'in complete agreement with the protestations of the philosopher in the little dialogues with the believer that occur throughout the chapter' (see Chapter One, Section I.B).

[108] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 2.

[109] Ibid., 2-3.

[110] Ibid., 4 (emphasis added).

Farrer continues this dialogue over the next several pages, using Allen's work to form the substance of the believer's voice and his own concerns to form the substance of the philosopher's (see Letters 2 and 4 in Appendix B for Farrer's direct summaries of and reactions to Allen's dissertation). Thus, drawing explicitly from Allen, but also echoing his own earlier and thus independent arguments in *Saving Belief*, Farrer writes that he will take as 'our typical believer a Christian brought up in the simple acceptance of his faith, grown up into an awareness of many reasons taken to discredit belief, but still persistent in believing.'[111] The dependence on Allen reaches a crescendo on page 10, and this is indeed the page on which Farrer finally cites Allen's 'Motives, Rationales, and Religious Beliefs' from *American Philosophical Quarterly* and so reveals the source of much that has come before. Here Farrer brings in Allen's distinctive epistemic focus on the saving message of the (or at least a) 'gospel' and consequent 'nourishment' (which Farrer re-brands as 'blessing'). Thus, the believer says to the philosopher:

> the Christian faith was preached to me as a gospel of salvation. Perhaps—though I do not know—the creedal propositions it contains might be verified along various other and more scientific lines, but I cannot claim to have tried any line but one—the line directly suggested by the claim of the gospel to be a gospel. It offers to me the blessing of a union of will with the primal Will. I follow the way of union which it prescribes and I find that the blessing blesses….The gospel offers God to me as good, not simply as fact. In embracing the good I am convinced of the fact.[112]

In other words, according to this perspective, when it comes to justifying our religious beliefs, natural theology or philosophical arguments are at least *unnecessary*, for the 'nourishment' or 'blessing' conveyed by 'embracing' the 'good' of the gospel

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[111] Ibid., 8.

[112] Ibid, 10. It is precisely at the end of this sentence that Farrer cites Allen's article. I cannot pursue this comparison further, but it seems to me that Farrer's claim here is equivalent to Eleonore Stump's interpretation of Aquinas on faith. See her 'Aquinas on Faith and Goodness,' in Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Cornell University Press, 1991), 179-207.

creates personal conviction as well as enhanced well-being. But the philosopher insists in turn that this response, however moving, remains epistemologically inadequate and so asks the believer, with just a touch of sarcasm: 'perhaps you could examine your thoughts, and tell me your reasons for holding, not that the faith-attitude is a blessing, but that the object of faith is an existent being.'[113] Each position is allowed to express itself further, but then towards the end of the chapter Farrer finally concludes the dialogue and states that he himself will intervene to 'strike the balance of the debate.'[114]

Writing now in his own voice, he says, 'The philosophical inquiry into the grounds for belief in God is neither an examination of the reasons [in the sense of Allen's 'motive-reasons'] which lead the believer into commitment, nor is it an independent investigation unrelated to those reasons.'[115] That is, while it is true that religious belief does not rest—and does not need to rest—on philosophical arguments, metaphysical or otherwise, philosophy may still play a role within the life of faith: faith and philosophy are not two entirely disconnected enterprises. In responding to the gospel and receiving its blessings, the believer assumes she is truly in contact with God (an actual infinite eternal transcendent personal reality external to the believer). Given the resultant blessings, the believer is perfectly entitled to hold this assumption; and, given its conceptual oddness, the philosopher is perfectly entitled to question it. Philosophy (and here Farrer undoubtedly intends then-contemporary academic Anglo-American philosophy) does have some rights as an autonomous intellectual activity

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., 12.

[115] Ibid. This statement seems somewhat at odds with Farrer's earlier claim that 'it is the actual motives or grounds for religious believing which demand the philosopher's attention' (1). This slight discrepancy highlights the exegetical challenge of teasing out from this chapter exactly what position Farrer was intending to assert as his own.

which all thinking people at least need to acknowledge. But if the believer is *also* a philosopher then this dialogue must take place within as well as without. In other words, to be complete, the dialogue between the non-philosophical believer and the sceptical philosopher needs yet a third character: namely, the *philosophical believer*, or the *believing philosopher*. Farrer's concluding intervention in the dialogue is clearly meant to add the voice of this third character.

Farrer claims that the believer's belief 'is not shown to be groundless by the mere fact that he has never questioned his general assumption.' So philosophy is indeed unnecessary, and religious belief may be properly grounded by what Allen calls 'biographical' considerations or 'motive-reasons'. The believer does not require a rationalistic foundation of natural theology to justify her beliefs.[116] On the other hand, Farrer maintains that 'what is not groundless may still be ill-grounded; and when philosophical criticism develops it will torture every assumption it has the ability to isolate or define.'[117] So philosophy still at least has the right—and perhaps, in some minds, the duty—to ask all the difficult and probing questions heard in the preceding dialogue. Thus, while religious belief does not *need* to go to philosophy for its justification, on the other hand it does *not* seem to be the case that religion is either 'invulnerable' or that philosophy is 'innocuous' (see Basil Mitchell's critique of 'Wittgensteinian fideism' in *Neutrality and Commitment* in Chapter One, Section I.C). So Farrerian fideism, it seems, is *not* identical with the standard interpretation of so-called Wittgensteinian fideism.

However, Farrer then appears to go one step further. Religious belief is innocent until proven guilty; in embracing its good the believer is convinced of its

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[116] As will be discussed further in Chapter Five, this claim is equivalent to the classic formulation of the 'Reformed Epistemology' of Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

[117] Both quotations in this paragraph from Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 12.

fact; and philosophy still has the right to criticise all it wants—yet, 'Meanwhile the believer, convinced of the reality of what he handles, is entitled to the confidence that his gold will never be proved dross by logical acid.'[118] This is a troublingly ambiguous sentence, both in itself and in terms of where it comes in the argument as a whole. Here it does indeed sound as though the 'gold' of religion is now resolutely (and rightly?) invulnerable to the strangely innocuous 'acid' of logical analysis. The believer is entitled to her confidence—but for how long, and under what adverse conditions? Can the acid of reason *never* prove that religion is mere dross?

Yet again, Farrer is compelled to qualify the implications of his position, and now strikes a more conventionally rationalistic note, balancing out the ambiguously open-ended sentence above. He says that the position he has been articulating

> indicates a *starting-point* for the philosopher who approaches the theological question. His task is to see whether the believer's *experience* of salvation or fulfilment in his embracing of an *apparent* divine Good can *intelligibly justify* his *assumption* that the blessings which accrue are the work of *actual* deity. But to mark the starting-point is not to limit the field of inquiry. The philosopher who attempts the question from the angle we have suggested will be excused none of the topics belonging to traditional discussion.[119]

And a bit further he amplifies this rationalistic note even more:

> Such formulas let us off nothing, philosophically speaking….If the God whose name comes into our simple questions is meant as a creative omnipotence, it has to be shown that the universe of finites allows of being interpreted as his creation, and so forth. Every one of the old problems remains. Except, you may say, the proof of God from the world. At least we are rid of that. Are we? I do not think so. Can you argue that the finites *allow* of being read as creations of the Infinite, without arguing that they *ask* to be read as such?....And so we shall be obliged to examine the case for the demonstration *a contingentia mundi*, after all.[120]

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[118] Ibid., 12-13.

[119] Ibid., 13 (emphasis added).

[120] Ibid. (emphasis in the original). Farrer takes up this argument further on in *Faith and Speculation*: for exposition and analysis, see F. Michael McLain, 'Austin Farrer's Revision of the Cosmological Argument,' in *The Downside Review* 88 (1970), 270-279. Farrer is clearly using the terms 'proof' and 'demonstration' loosely rather than formally: he simply means a plausible philosophical argument.

But then, just as Basil Mitchell and Brian Hebblethwaite perhaps begin to feel that Farrer has rejoined their ranks and finally turned his back on fideism, he immediately continues: 'We may let ourselves off the claim that the force of the proof is evident to an unbelieving mind. We can say if we like that the existential insufficiency of the finites is imperceptible apart from awareness of the Infinite, and that such an awareness comes through faith.' And this claim dashes their hopes, for only the believing mind, through faith, can truly see and feel the force of theistic argument. However, and crucially, Farrer then concedes: 'What we cannot (I suspect) say is that the finites could as well have been uncreated, for anything we can ever see in them; but that they just do happen to be created by God, for faith assures us of it.'[121] And with this caveat, we have now at long last reached the furthest edge of Farrerian fideism, the point at which the mature Farrer draws the boundary between faith and reason, beyond which he is unwilling to go. Faith can—and even *must*—allow us to see realities as they *really* are (i.e., finite, contingent, created), but it cannot *impose* on them a character they apparently lack (even to 'the eyes of faith'). If that character is either indiscernible or absent, then so is God.

Here, although he typically never mentions his name, Farrer is alluding to the contrary position of John Hick in the first edition of *Faith and Knowledge: A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (cited in note 1 of this chapter), which states—in Diogenes Allen's summary—that 'theism is an interpretation which phenomena are capable of being given, but that an atheistic or naturalistic interpretation is *equally* possible.'[122] That is, in Hick's view the theistic interpretation does not *ask* to be 'read off' the character of finite existence (however subtly and non-demonstratively), but rather *allows* itself to be 'read in' (along with the completely

[121] Ibid., 13-14.

[122] Allen, *Motives, Evidence, and Religious Commitment*, 63 (emphasis added).

contradictory interpretation of atheism). As I indicated in note 1 of this chapter, the only philosophical book that Farrer reviewed between 1948 and 1958 was this text, in *Journal of Theological Studies* New Series IX (1958), 410. Farrer was rather dismissive of Hick's constructive proposals ('it will be surprising if any critical philosopher finds satisfaction on these topics in what Professor Hick has written'), but he was apparently moved to reconsider Hick's position while reading Allen's dissertation, which compares and contrasts *Faith and Knowledge* with *Finite and Infinite*, and which seems to be more sympathetic to the former than the latter. Indeed, Allen explicitly states that he personally does not believe 'that we must be able to "read off" the cosmological idea; rather, it seems to be that all that is necessary is that we be able to "read in" the idea.'[123] Hence the paragraph in Farrer's Letter 2 (written on 2 April 1964) which begins, 'I think that a long and very subtle discussion would be needed to settle the "read in or read off?" issue,' and then offers Allen a 'compromise'—i.e., between Hick's *Faith and Knowledge* and Farrer's own *Finite and Infinite*—in which 'those who *do* "read off" are making an incipient move towards religious belief, and that the believer really does and can "read off", just as he really does and can interpret his own standing in relation to God'.

This letter to Allen basically recapitulates Farrer's position in 'Faith and Evidence' from *Saving Belief* (published the same year): the evidence for God is objectively there, and so the theistic reading of the universe can be rightly 'read off' rather than merely 'read in'—but only by one who has faith. While Farrer admits—and indeed, has always admitted—that atheism is a rational position and thus that the naturalistic interpretation is indeed *possible*, he balks at the idea that these readings are both *equally* justified by the evidence. Recall his comments from 'Poetic Truth'

[123] Ibid., 61

against those such as Russell and Ayer: although they cannot be conclusively defeated on the formal level, still the mind 'rises from the knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of their creator,' but only 'from the appreciation of things which we have when we love them and fill our minds and senses with them, and feel something of the silent force and great mystery of their existence.'[124] This, again, is the line beyond which Farrer will not go. *Faith and Speculation* might thus be considered, in part, as his later and more considered 'long and very subtle' response to Hick's book, spurred on by Allen's critique.[125]

In short, it is essential to see that even the 'late' post-Allen Farrer still wants to maintain that the theistic interpretation of finite existence is somehow *there*, actually inherent in and even suggested by the very character of the finites themselves. It is not simply projected on to a purely neutral, perfectly ambiguous world that could just as well be read atheistically. The moderate fideistic position which Farrer defended in *Saving Belief* and which perhaps intensified under Allen's influence in *Faith and Speculation* still has limits, and it does not ever fully shift into extreme fideism. It still is an exercise in 'rational theology'. It does, however, provide what both Farrer and Allen now regarded as the correct starting point from which to examine such problems. That is, we must begin with the perspective of faith and not expect to work our way there by reason alone. The chapter thus concludes as follows:

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[124] 'Poetic Truth', in Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Charles C. Conti (SPCK, 1972), 37-38.

[125] Interestingly, Farrer was one of the examiners of Hick's 1951 Oxford doctoral dissertation, on which this first edition of *Faith and Knowledge* was based. Hick reports that Farrer was highly critical of his view of faith then, as well! The other examiner was I. M. Crombie, and (quoting directly from his diary) Hick reports: 'I had a very sticky time at the viva. Farrer clearly strongly disagreed with my theory of faith, whilst Crombie also disagreed but was more friendly disposed….I did very badly in answering. I got confused and made a poor showing.' Hick thought that he had failed, and so was greatly relived to discover a week later that Farrer and Crombie 'had reported favourably to the Lit. Hum. Board'. See John Hick, *An Autobiography* (Oneworld Publications, 2002), 72-73.

> The importance of a proper distinction between saving faith and philosophical reflection lies here. No progress is possible so long as it is supposed that faith is or contains an elementary, or an implicit, or any other sort of philosophy which believers are bound to defend, since upon it their confidence reposes [that is, Farrer now accepts Allen's claim that successful metaphysical arguments are unnecessary]….But if a proper distinction of saving faith from pious philosophy is vital, equally vital is a just relation between them. Otherwise the philosopher loses his starting point. He must know that he is examining or articulating the assumptions of the believing mind.[126]

So this is the perspective Basil Mitchell found so distressing when he read it in manuscript; this is the perspective he had in mind when he wrote that Farrer 'had become a sort of fideist, content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer's sense of being nourished by the tradition in which he had been raised.'[127] But what 'sort of' fideism has Farrer articulated in this first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*? And has he, in fact, taken a more strongly fideistic position under Allen's influence than in *Saving Belief*? To answer these questions, it is helpful to consider Letter 6 in the Appendix, the final comments we have from Farrer on Allen's project. Dated 29 July [1966], and thus after *Faith and Speculation* had been written but before it had been published, Farrer tells Allen that his ideas '(not unacknowledged) furnish the substance of the first chapter.' But then Farrer states candidly,

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[126] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 14-15. This passage bears close comparison with the conclusion of Letter Four in Appendix B (15 June 1964), in which Farrer still seems more committed to probing the metaphysical implications of Christian belief. That is, just as in *Finite and Infinite* he maintained that 'there are some metaphysical questions which must be settled if we are to vindicate the significance of any theological statements whatever of the traditional type,' so likewise in this letter he wrote that even granting Allen's view that faith is its own evidence still '*implies* that a certain metaphysical interpretation of finite-experience is true—not in the sense that we are bound to be Thomists, Hegelians, or any other brand of metaphysician, but that certain broadly-stated metaphysical positions *must* be asserted, and others *must* be denied: "must," logically, of course, not psychologically'. By emphasising 'implies,' Farrer is holding out for more than just 'reading in' even as he concedes that the theistic epistemic situation may not be as strong as 'reading off'. It is precisely such metaphysical implications of faith that Farrer goes on to explore in the rest of *Faith and Speculation*, but at least in *this* passage from 14-15, cited above in the main text, he seems to accept a permissible agnosticism.

[127] Mitchell, 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' 177.

> I do not altogether agree with you but I think what you say is very important. I think it comes to this: The believer, qua believer, rightly says 'I believe because the grace of God' (or the like) 'persuades me.' But the philosopher's business is not (mainly) to say: 'Quite right, my boy, that's how believing goes' but to examine the assumptions upon which the facts through which 'the grace of God persuades' come to be taken as instruments, effects or evidences as the Grace of God.

In other words, although he was willing to publish a chapter drawing from and even at least partly defending Allen's position, this letter confirms that Farrer remained ambivalent about it. And the parenthetical 'mainly' in regard to defining the philosopher's proper task indicates that—even while writing this letter—Farrer cannot quite make up his mind. This helps explain the dialogue-style of 'The Believer's Reasons': Farrer is genuinely thinking through these issues as he writes: he feels the force of both voices—the 'believer' vs. the 'philosopher'—and is unsure of his own final position.

My reading of the situation would thus nuance James McClendon's comment cited earlier: 'Already in process of change, Farrer read Allen's completed dissertation…and found it persuasive.'[128] As Section II above on 'Faith and Evidence' demonstrated, Farrer had accepted a subtle form of moderate fideism by 1962. In terms of his earlier work, he was indeed 'in process of change' by the time he encountered Allen the following year. However, I am not sure the total evidence supports McClendon's further claim that Farrer was 'persuaded' by Allen. I think rather that—as Allen himself says in his introduction to Farrer's letters to him (see Appendix B)—Farrer was 'greatly stimulated' by the dissertation. It meshed with certain currents in his own thinking that stressed the priority of faith, pushed him to re-evaluate the 'residual rationalism' and metaphysical focus of *Finite and Infinite*, and also perhaps reminded him of his own 'breakthrough' letter of 1927 (see

[128] McClendon, 279.

Appendix A and Chapter III, Section II). Although there are some differences between that early undergraduate letter and the 'believer's voice' in the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation*, the resemblances are remarkable. Allen's dissertation, I argue, presented Farrer with a fully worked-out and well-defended position on the relation between faith and reason, religion and philosophy, a position that Farrer found strongly appealing and which resonated with various stages of his own life-long attempt to harmonise these realms. Upon encountering Allen's position, Farrer immediately (and somewhat mischievously) brought it into conversation with the other Metaphysicals by inviting Allen to make a presentation (see Appendix B, Metaphysicals Letter) and eventually incorporated it into the first chapter of his own final book. In short, Allen emboldened Farrer to make claims he might not have otherwise made, to finally say in print (if only in the voice of 'the believer') something close to what he had written forty years earlier to his father.

Nevertheless, and this is equally important, at least as late as 1966 (two years before his death) Farrer continued to hold back from unqualified acceptance of Allen's position, and even in the published version of 'The Believer's Reasons' the ambiguity remains. Although clearly more fideistic than either Mitchell or Hebblethwaite would like, determining the precise 'sort of fideism' in the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation* is complicated by the tentativeness of Farrer's thought and by the subtlety of the dialogue. While the 'evangelical' element of the 'gospel' and its consequent 'nourishment' / 'blessings' have been brought to the fore, the 'conformist' element of accepting 'the cultural history of our race' is present as well. It is also difficult to distinguish Farrer's own view from his interpretation and presentation of Allen, and even the conclusion in Farrer's own voice remains somewhat ambiguous. Without commenting on the intellectual merits of their

respective positions, it might justly be said that the 'middle' Farrer of 'Faith and Evidence' and Allen himself both articulated themselves better and stated their epistemological convictions more effectively than the 'late' Farrer of 'The Believer's Reasons'. One gets the sense that the 'late' Farrer was still thinking through the implications of Allen's dissertation, was struggling with various aspects of it, and had not yet fully integrated it into his own perspective. And then, alas, he died.

However, given the reiterated refrain in 'The Believer's Reasons' of how faith is the proper 'starting-point' of the philosophical examination of religious belief, it might be possible to distinguish Farrer's biographically-final position from all earlier formulations by designating it as a moderate *methodological* fideism with both conformist and evangelical aspects. That is, whether or not this is a *stronger* sort of fideism than previous ones, the concern with determining the proper *method* by which one approaches religion now seems paramount. It has to be with and by faith, 'examining or articulating the assumptions of the believing mind.'[129] One might say that the 'middle' Farrer articulated a *de facto* moderate fideism, whereas the 'late' Farrer shifted to a *de jure* one. And, without being overly polemical, I would argue that, in so doing, Farrer has thus shifted his starting-point from metaphysics (with its focus on being) to epistemology (with its focus on belief). Metaphysical arguments may and indeed do follow from this starting point, but they do not rest on a metaphysical *foundation*. I will briefly consider the implications of this in Chapter Five.[130]

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[129] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 14.

[130] For relevant philosophical book reviews by Farrer in this period, the Bibliography, I.A.4. In terms of other publications, Farrer's rejection of papal infallibility is analogous to his earlier rejection of demonstrative theistic proofs, in that in both cases he prefers an Anglican probabilistic epistemology: see 'Infallibility and Historical Revelation', in Austin Farrer, et. al., *Infallibility in the Church: An*

V. Conclusion

Whereas Chapter Three covered over three-quarters of Farrer's life and career, this chapter has only considered his last decade. This, however, is the crucial period for determining the answers to the various questions driving this dissertation, and in particular the alleged fideism of *Faith and Speculation*. But, as with Chapter Three, some of our findings have been unexpected. Farrer used his Gifford Lectures—the most prestigious venue in the world in which to discuss natural theology—to defend the freedom of the will. Without much fanfare he seemed to shed his Thomist-inspired framework for one more indebted to mainstream British philosophy. Although I argued that even the 'rational theology' of *Finite and Infinite* should be construed within the genre of Anglican semi-fideism or British soft rationalism, a more overtly fideistic position first emerged in Farrer's academic work (surprisingly enough) in an essay-collection edited by Basil Mitchell himself, *Faith and Logic*. Here Farrer insists that only those who have 'the mind of Christ' can accept the reality of revelation. Even Farrer's theodicy, despite its concern with justifying the ways of God to humanity, concludes with the claim that 'the substance of truth is grasped not by argument, but by faith.'

The neglected 'middle' Farrer then set forth what I regard as his most careful and nuanced articulation of moderate fideism in 1964's *Saving Belief.* Although it was not published until after he met Diogenes Allen in the Autumn of 1963, it is vital to recognise that 'Faith and Evidence' was delivered in lecture form in 1962 and submitted to the publisher by Easter 1963, and is thus entirely independent of Allen's work: and it is here, I argue, that Farrer shifts from semi-fideism to moderate fideism. But then, as both published and unpublished sources confirm, Farrer was 'greatly

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Anglican-Catholic Dialogue (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968), 9-23—an abridged version may be found in Loades and MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 81-93.

stimulated' by Allen's dissertation and moved to reconsider his own position on a number of points. Rather oddly, *A Science of God?* seems to belong more with the texts in Chapter Three than in Chapter Four, but in *Faith and Speculation* Allen's influence is explicitly acknowledged and immediately obvious to those who have read either the dissertation itself or its published versions.

Although Farrer was intrigued and challenged by Allen's early work, he was not entirely persuaded by it, and so even 'The Believer's Reasons' maintains a certain critical distance. Thus, Farrer did not adopt the more strongly fideistic position defended by Allen (at least, at that time: Allen's own religious epistemology continued to evolve, as I will discuss briefly in Chapter Five). However, in the biographically-final, post-Allen, 'late' Farrer we see what I have called a *moderate methodological fideism*: that is, one that emphatically and explicitly insists that faith is the essential *starting point* for the evaluation of theistic belief and evidence. And so while I do not concur with Mitchell's view that this fideistic element first emerged *de novo* in 1967, I conclude that in 'The Believer's Reasons' Farrer does indeed defend 'a sort of fideism.'

But I also dissent from Mitchell's further claim that this sort of fideism is 'content to rest the truth of Christianity upon the believer's sense of being nourished by the tradition in which he had been raised'—if by 'content' he means that, as in extreme fideism, no challenge is ever accepted or no further evidence admitted. That stance may be acceptable for the 'believer' but not for the 'philosopher'—and since Farrer opts to be a 'believing philosopher' he cannot rest content with faith alone. In short, Farrer's moderate methodological fideism *begins* with faith, and does indeed find its *primary* justification in the 'nourishment' or 'blessings' of the gospel, but at least among the philosophically-awakened the 'faith-attitude' must still perceive

('read off') a finite, contingent, and thus created universe for such belief to be rationally maintained.[131] Whether the moderate methodological fideism of this first chapter is fully integrated into the interactionist epistemology of the rest of the book will be discussed in Chapter Five.

At the end of Chapter Three, I briefly compared *Finite and Infinite* with another important book published the same year: Eric Mascall's *He Who Is*. It is likewise fascinating to compare *Faith and Speculation* with a contemporaneous text that, rather than either Farrer's or Allen's work, largely set the agenda for the subsequent history of Anglo-American religious epistemology: Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*.[132] The contrast between Farrer's last book and Plantinga's first one is best captured by recalling I. M. Crombie's claim that, although Farrer was no Platonist, 'he perhaps had a somewhat Platonic conception of philosophy—that it is essentially dialogue, that there can be no formulation of the truth so lapidary that it cannot be misunderstood, and that what needs to be said in some context depends on what is being misunderstood in that context.'[133] In support of this claim, consider Farrer's remarkably forthright declaration in the preface to *Faith and Speculation*: 'I wish I had written the book better; I do not wish I had written it more formally. Reflection and discussion may permit realities to disclose themselves to us; and I would rather, if

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[131] And to this extent may indeed still involve metaphysical implications: see note 126 above.

[132] (Cornell University Press, 1967), paperback edition with a new preface by the author, 1990. Interestingly, Plantinga's book was reviewed by both Allen and Mascall, and also by H. D. Lewis (whose review of *Faith and Logic* was considered in note 16 of this chapter): see Diogenes Allen, in *Theology Today* 25 (1968), 263-264; H. D. Lewis, in *Journal of Theological Studies* XXI (1970), 269-271; and E. L. Mascall, in *Religious Studies* 4 (1969), 288-291. All three were impressed with the book's technical brilliance, but dissented from its constructive conclusions in various ways.

[133] I. M. Crombie, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden (1904-1968),' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 19* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 121-122.

I dared to hope it, provide materials for an exercise in understanding, than formalise a chain of argument.'[134]

But *God and Other Minds*, despite being published the same year as *Faith and Speculation*, is a striking example of the philosophical mode which aims at lapidary expression and formal chains of argument. It has a severely logical style, in which propositions are numbered and definitions set forth for rigorous scrutiny, with all steps in the argument laid out and all possible inferences analysed: e.g.,

> (4) *P* is an *essential property* of *x* if and only if *x* has *P* and there is a being *y* identical with *x* and a property *P'* identical with *P* such that *y* has *P'* necessarily (in the sense of (3)).[135]

And so on. In this manner, Plantinga goes through the traditional arguments both for and against the existence of God, and—judging them by this highly exacting standard—concludes that they all fail, the atheistic as well as the theistic. He then provides his alternative proposal, which is to compare the basis of our knowledge of other (human) minds with our (putative) knowledge of God. Providing a classic recent example of what Terence Penelhum calls the 'Parity Argument' (see Chapter Two, Section I.C), Plantinga concludes that while no rigorous argument can *demonstrate* the existence of other minds, it is still rational to *believe* in them—and thus famously claims that 'belief in other minds and belief in God are in the same epistemological boat; hence if either is rational, so is the other. But obviously the former *is* rational; so, therefore, is the latter.'[136] There is no space here to pursue the immensely complicated details of Plantinga's various arguments, but only to point out that it was precisely *this* style of philosophy which was to remain dominant for the next three decades. Once again, Farrer was moving against the stream.

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[134] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, vi.

[135] Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, 179-180.

[136] Ibid., xvi, and see also 268-271.

CHAPTER FIVE: *'SOLVITUR IMMOLANDO'*

This concluding chapter evaluates the significance of Farrer's 'moderate methodological fideism' as it relates to several different but interconnected contexts. Chapter Four's conclusions are brought into conversation with other interpretations of *Faith and Speculation*, and the Allen-inspired claims of 'The Believer's Reasons' are integrated with the more explicitly interactionist epistemology of the rest of the book. At last moving from past to present, after revisiting the positions of Basil Mitchell, Brian Hebblethwaite, and Diogenes Allen as explored in Chapter One, Farrer's final position is then compared to several other contemporary positions in religious epistemology, specifically foundationalism, Reformed Epistemology, and Wittgensteinian Fideism. Due to the increased recognition of 'spirituality' in recent philosophy and theology, Farrer's unusually 'diaphanous' mentality now emerges in a new, highly favourable light. In conclusion, Farrer distinctively seems to locate theistic evidence not primarily in nature or reason, but in notably holy lives and our own more halting attempts to live by faith: 'It is solved by sacrifice.'

I. Striking the Balance: From Past to Present

In reaching the conclusions first expressed in Sections II and IV and then summarised in Section V of the previous chapter, I have answered the historical and exegetical questions this dissertation set out to investigate. In light of Morris's review of Conti's monograph, and by contrast with most previous studies, I have argued for the complementary value of an epistemological approach to Farrer's philosophical-

theological legacy, and have demonstrated that the primary influence on the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation* was not Charles Hartshorne but Diogenes Allen. In light of Mitchell's concern and Hebblethwaite's denial, I have argued that Farrer was indeed 'a sort of fideist'. In light of common uses and abuses of 'fideism,' I have argued that this concept is complex and that its meaning varies from community to community, with 'semi-fideism' being equivalent to a view also known as 'soft rationalism' or 'Anglican epistemology'—all three terms referring to the cumulative case or probabilistic approach which insists that religious belief is rational but which denies that God's existence can be conclusively demonstrated or proved. And in light of the many different 'sorts' of fideism, I have argued that, although the mature Farrer never advocated extreme fideism, his final position might be expressed as a 'moderate methodological fideism' which holds that the correct starting point for the philosophical examination of religious belief must always be faith.

However, although the primary historical and exegetical conclusions of the dissertation have been reached in Chapter Four, it still remains to fulfil the claim in the Introduction that this work has both historical *and* constructive ambitions. We must thus round off the arguments of the first four chapters by exploring their significance for contemporary religious epistemology. First, however, it is necessary to pick up where we left off and finish our consideration of *Faith and Speculation*. For, although my interpretation of the Allen-influenced 'moderate methodological [or *de jure*] fideism' of 'The Believer's Reasons' may well be right, that is still only the first chapter of the book. How does Farrer take the argument forward, and does it link up with the interactionist epistemology encountered earlier?

The second chapter of *Faith and Speculation*, 'The Empirical Demand,' does indeed reintroduce the interactionist epistemology that Farrer first developed in *Finite and Infinite* and which Edward Henderson sees as fundamental to understanding Farrer's contribution to philosophical theology. In this chapter, in keeping with the fideistic theme we have been charting throughout this dissertation, Farrer freely admits that 'a strict empirical criterion for truth of fact must condemn theistic belief.'[1] Those philosophers and theologians who think that they can produce a convincing argument for God's existence on conventionally empirical grounds are thus mistaken. However, rather than resting there, Farrer proceeds to reformulate 'the empirical demand' such that its proper requirements—which he has no wish to evade—may be met without inevitably eliminating any and all theistic claims. 'Seeing is believing,' Farrer says, 'but contact is knowledge. Physics is not concerned with the way things look but with the way they act; and the method of physical discovery is physical interference.'[2] Obviously, we cannot know God by 'physical interference,' but Farrer goes on to insist that, nevertheless,

> to know God is to know, and not to do anything fundamentally different; it is to accord to some real being a conscious recognition (always supposing that religious conviction has any validity whatever). And it seems we cannot say even so much as this, without implying something about the logic or the structure of the thought affirmative of God. 'To know,' or 'to acknowledge as real,' when used of finites and when used of God, cannot mean two utterly different things.[3]

And so Farrer then returns, almost verbatim, to the phrase we encountered on page 294 of *Finite and Infinite* and discussed in Chapter Three, Section III.B.2. Seeking for a 'generalisation' of the empirical principle 'wide enough' to include both physical and spiritual reality, including the reality of other human persons, Farrer says:

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[1] Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (A. & C. Black, 1967), 16.

[2] Ibid., 17.

[3] Ibid., 21.

> [T]o know real beings we must exercise our actual relation with them. No physical science without physical interference, no personal knowledge without personal intercourse; no thought about any reality about which we can do nothing but think. Is not this the highest possible generalisation of the empirical principle? Theology must be at least as empirical as this, if it is to mediate any knowledge whatsoever. We can know nothing of God, unless we can do something about him. So what, we must ask, can we do?[4]

The answer to that question occupies Farrer over the next two chapters, and after many twists and turns in the argument it is finally determined to be—not sheer thought or even worship—but *obedience*: 'What can we do about God?—We can devote ourselves to his will; that is, we can place ourselves in his action as we suppose it to be disclosed.'[5] Farrer then immediately links this answer to the idea of the 'blessings' of the gospel, derived from Diogenes Allen and discussed in Chapter Four: 'Is there any empirical verification of our engagement with the actual will of an actual God?—Only of a general kind, in so far as we find "life" or "blessing" in the process, through God's uniting us with his will; and when we say "with his will" we are saying "with himself".'

This claim seems identical to one Farrer made the previous year in *A Science of God?*, in a chapter titled (significantly enough) 'Experimental Proof':

> God does not stand alongside us or on a level with us….He is related to us in quite another way: as the will which underlies our existence, gives rise to our action and directs our aim….How can we have experimental knowledge of the will behind our will? Only by opening our will to it, or sinking our will in it; there is no other conceivable way. We cannot touch God except by willing the will of God. Then his will takes effect in ours and we know it; not that we manipulate him, but that he possesses us.[6]

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[4] Ibid., 22.

[5] Ibid., 57.

[6] Austin Farrer, *A Science of God?* (Geoffrey Bles, 1966), 106-107. 'Possession' is an infelicitous term to describe the divine contribution to this relationship, as Farrer would still insist that we retain our freedom in relation to God, and that our obedience must be continually willed on our part. I am grateful to J. P. Cassidy for clarifying conversations on this topic, and for his contribution to the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to C. S. Lewis* (which I have co-edited with Michael Ward), in which he makes just this point.

Thus, although we cannot know God by 'physical interference,' we can yet 'touch' God by willing God's will, and in this manner 'do something about him,' and so by analogy with physical knowledge come to know the divine as well.[7] As I indicated in Chapter Four, here we see the 'fideistic' element finally emerging from the somewhat more conventionally rationalistic epistemology prevalent in *A Science of God?* If we want 'experimental knowledge' of God, then we must submit our wills to God—'there is no other conceivable way.' Such knowledge by interaction is not 'fideistic' in any irrational sense, for it is but the generalisation of the empirical principle as applied to spiritual reality. This is true of all knowledge whatsoever ('to know real beings we must exercise our actual relation with them'), the only difference being that we exercise our actual relation with God through obedience rather than physical interaction. But it *is* 'fideistic' to the extent that here obedience is our route to knowledge of God, rather than pure thought or reason or argument.

Back in *Faith and Speculation*, Farrer reaches this conclusion on page 57, and it is precisely on the next three pages of the book, 58-60, that Henderson sees the argument coming to fruition. Henderson's signal contribution is not just to highlight the interactionist character of Farrer's epistemology, but also to emphasise the additional element of what he calls 'valuation'. As he puts it, 'In affirmation of existence evidence alone is not enough; there must also be a valuation—and a valuation of a certain kind,

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[7] Edward Henderson discusses this passage from *A Science of God?* in his essay 'The God Who Undertakes Us,' in David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified: The Practical Theology of Austin Farrer* (T & & Clark International, 2004), 66-99; and Jeffrey Eaton does so on page 204 of his *The Logic of Theism: An Analysis of the Thought of Austin Farrer* (University Press of America, 1980). The final chapter of Eaton's book, 'The Experiment of Faith' (201-259) is an exceptionally helpful treatment of this theme, particularly in the way it draws on Farrer's sermons as well as his more academic work.

viz. one which recognises some claim made upon our action by what is there.'[8] And for such a claim to be made, we must recognise that the reality whose existence we are affirming (or not) impacts us on a personal, rather than on a purely physical, level. Henderson wants us to see, with Farrer, that 'experimental science' is not 'the standard for judging the meaningfulness of all thought,' but instead that the 'form of thought to which the affirmation of individual existence primarily belongs is the personal form of subjects and their actions.'[9] This leads Henderson to propose a two-stage process in Farrer's religious epistemology in which both *interaction* and *valuation* lead to the *affirmation* of God's existence as a personal reality with whom we have to do. The first stage is to recognise the epistemic significance of interaction and valuation. The second stage 'is the qualification of our activity *after* the evaluative response. This new evidence verifies or falsifies the judgement made in response to the first evidence.'[10] Thus, the second stage might be called our *assessment* of our response to the evidence of God perceived through interaction and valuation. But what, in this view, is 'the evidence of God'? Henderson replies that it is 'any experience which provokes us to use the name

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[8] Edward Henderson, 'Valuing in Knowing God: An Interpretation of Austin Farrer's Religious Epistemology,' in *Modern Theology* 1 (1985), 171. See also his comments on this neglected and misunderstood aspect of Farrer's religious epistemology on 165-166 of this article.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 174. As implied above, structurally this two-stage process is also how we assert the existence of other human persons as well, not just God. To some extent, therefore, Henderson's argument may be similar to Plantinga's in *God and Other Minds*, but their method and style are entirely different. For more on valuation and on the link between affirming personal existence in general as well as divine existence in particular, see Henderson's earlier article, 'Knowing Persons and Knowing God', *The Thomist* 46 (1982), 394-422. See also Charles Conti, 'Austin Farrer and the Analogy of Other Minds,' in Jeffrey C. Eaton and Ann Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity: New Essays in Honor of Austin Farrer* (Pickwick Publications, 1983), 51-91.

"God" and to mean by it what theists do….Consequently, basic to all human experience as such is evidence for God.'[11] In other words, theistic evidence is not limited to uniquely 'religious experience,' but can be found in every aspect of our lives.

In an intriguing passage, Henderson explains how *Faith and Speculation* marks the development in Farrer's thought from *Finite and Infinite*. In *Faith and Speculation*

> the affirmation of God's existence is not a matter of mind leaping to the cosmological intuition as *Finite and Infinite* had it. It is a matter of acknowledging the claim that impinges, and this is an action of the will pursuing value. The condition of a subject that makes the affirmation of God possible is not an extra-rational attitude which some people allow to overwhelm reason. It is a condition of openness to goods which make claims upon us. Such openness belongs to the look-out activity of an agent aspiring for good. When such an agent conceives of God as one who does make the absolute claim that we submit and conform our wills to his, then the condition exists which is necessary for that agent to appreciate the evidence for God as evidence for God. To acknowledge the claim is to affirm though an act of rational will or practical reason that God exists. Such an act is no leap beyond reason; it is the expression of the very kind of reason that is always involved in genuine assertions of existence.[12]

In another essay, Henderson states that in his view Farrer indeed accepted 'a kind of fideism.'[13] But as this above passage makes clear, Henderson does not see Farrer's fideism as *anti*-rational: it is simply the right response to the realities under discussion, and although belief in God may not measure up to the strictly empirical demand of experimental science, it is still a proper exercise of 'rational will' or 'practical reason'. It is, however, an exercise of those capacities which requires a particular 'condition' for their successful operation, namely 'an openness to goods which make claims upon us'.

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[11] Ibid., 177.

[12] Ibid., 178. As noted in Chapter Four, note 112, this bears interesting resemblances to Eleonore Stump's interpretation of Aquinas on faith.

[13] See Edward Henderson, 'Austin Farrer and D. Z. Phillips on Lived Faith, Prayer, and Divine Reality,' in *Modern Theology* 1 (1985), 223-243. However, Henderson is at pains to distinguish Farrer's 'form of fideism' from Phillips's. I will briefly discuss Phillips below.

Although Henderson does not say so, this condition of openness seems analogous and perhaps even identical to the 'initial faith' Farrer defends in *Saving Belief.*

Henderson provides us an example of a contemporary philosopher who is persuaded by at least one interpretation of the religious epistemology Farrer articulates in *Faith and Speculation*. Without committing myself to all the details of Henderson's particular formulation of this approach to belief in God—an approach which combines interaction, valuation, and practical reason—I think his subtle and sophisticated reading of Farrer has much to commend it, and it is particularly useful in weaving together the interaction epistemology and action theory from *Finite and Infinite* with the later arguments of *Faith and Speculation*. My claims in Chapter Four about the moderate (*de facto*) fideism of 'Faith and Evidence' in *Saving Belief* and the Allen-influenced moderate methodological (*de jure*) fideism of 'The Believer's Reasons' in *Faith and Speculation* are entirely compatible with Henderson's interpretation, which focuses more on the valuation element in pages 58-60 of *Faith and Speculation* than on the new 'starting point' of the first chapter. Our views are thus not contradictory, but complementary. However, as indicated above, it might be fair to say that my own interpretation ends on page 57, at least in terms of setting out the essential steps of Farrer's argument, whereas Henderson's picks up on the very next page. Strictly speaking, then, I would thus regard Henderson's interpretation as supplementary to my own, adding an additional nuance to the picture. He does not, for example, discuss Allen or Allen's influence on *Faith and Speculation*.

Henderson admits that Farrer's religious epistemology is easily misunderstood, not only because the argument in *Faith and Speculation* assumes familiarity with his

earlier work—specifically, the interactionist epistemology of *Finite and Infinite*—but also because 'the dialogical style prevents a systematic presentation of the epistemology, leaving it up to us to put the pieces together.'[14] It is thus no surprise that Farrer's final position has been very much a minority report in religious epistemology over the last four decades, and has indeed been almost completely neglected. Like Basil Mitchell, some of the initial reviewers of *Faith and Speculation* were puzzled and bemused by it, and at least one was overtly hostile. Frederick Ferré dismissed it as a 'philosophical hangover,' 'not really a book at all but a series of fireside chats with an avuncular companion of urbane wit and theological whimsy.'[15] One gets the distinct impression that Ferré would have preferred Plantinga's formal chain of arguments to Farrer's attempted exercise in understanding. Ninian Smart was less dismissive, but still saw the book as 'rather a private argument, as though Farrer was discoursing with himself.'[16] H. P. Owen, J. Heywood Thomas, and Keith Ward were more positive, although of course with certain reservations about aspects of Farrer's overall argument.[17]

John Hick, interestingly, reported that he found 'the opening section, on an empirical approach [to religious belief], highly illuminating and valuable, but…fared less fortunately with the rest of the book.'[18] The first three chapters, which basically cover the material I have dealt with in detail, make

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[14] Henderson, 'Valuing in Knowing God,' 171. See also 165-166.

[15] Frederick Ferré, Review of *Faith and Speculation*, in *Theology Today* 25 (1968), 269.

[16] Ninian Smart, Review of *Faith and Speculation*, in *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1970), 93.

[17] H. P. Owen, Review of *Faith and Speculation*, in *The Journal of Theological Studies* XIX (1968), 699-702; J. Heywood Thomas, Review of *Faith and Speculation* in *The Expository Times* 75 (1967-1968), 173-174; and Keith Ward, Review of *Faith and Speculation*, in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 21 (1968), 224-225.

[18] John Hick, Review of *Faith and Speculation*, in *Theology* LXX (1967), 557.

> the important point that the claims of religion are to be studied as claims made by living people on the basis of their own inheritance and experience….Accordingly the proper philosophical approach should be a probing of the actual foundations and structure of living and operative beliefs, rather than of theoretical and non-operative arguments for coming to hold those beliefs. The apologetic task is not to prove, starting from scratch, that God exists, but to show that the religious man, given the distinctively religious form of human existence in which he participates, is entitled as a rational being to believe what he does believe.[19]

Hick continues that this claim 'connects with Dr Farrer's next contention: that in order to know the realities that surround us, both natural and divine, we have to live in relation to them'.[20] Although Hick then slightly misrepresents Farrer's argument by limiting our relation to divine reality to worship (rather than obedience), this is an accurate enough statement of Farrer's position.

What makes Hick's review so interesting is that he then goes on to say, 'Thus far I am able to go in Dr Farrer's book and to go with real profit and gratitude. But thereafter I am merely puzzled. I cannot say what the author's train of thought is, in spite of the fact that he supplies his own summaries of it. So subtle are these later chapters that, to my gross eyes at least, the argument becomes ethereal and vanishes from view.'[21] And this reaction is interesting for at least two reasons. First, it indicates that Farrer's approach to religious epistemology in this book was illuminating and provocative and perhaps even new to Hick. Given that Hick was at this point the H. G. Wood Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, having previously taught philosophy at Cornell University and been Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton Theological

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[19] Ibid., 557-558. It is interesting to note how this passage also perfectly (and yet unwittingly) summarises Allen's dissertation as well.

[20] Ibid., 558.

[21] Ibid. The summaries of each chapter, and of the book as a whole, may be found on 171-175 of *Faith and Speculation*. Hick modestly if unconvincingly states that he is 'fairly certain that my inability to appreciate the latter part of the book is my own fault and not the author's' (558).

Seminary, this is highly significant.[22] As with Mitchell's response to the manuscript of *Faith and Speculation* (read just before he became Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at Oxford), it tells us how singular a position Farrer was occupying in Anglo-American religious epistemology during this period.

And, second, Hick's comments on the rest of *Faith and Speculation* are likewise reminiscent of Mitchell's claim that he returned the entire manuscript to Farrer without comment. As with Ferré's apparent preference for a more formal approach, Hick's bafflement over the remaining chapters indicate that Farrer's dialogical method was failing to reach his philosophical peers. What I earlier described in Chapter One as the rigid empiricism and logical rigorism still characteristic of British and American philosophy in the 1960s—exemplified by texts such as Plantinga's *God and Other Minds*—made it difficult to take Farrer's more diffuse and conversational style seriously. *Faith and Speculation* apparently seemed alternatively frustrating and/or fascinating to its first readers, but rarely convincing.

Moving from the past to the present, aside from the work of Mitchell, Hebblethwaite, and Allen discussed in Chapter One, and Henderson's work discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, there is an almost complete lack of engagement with Farrer's religious epistemology in contemporary philosophical theology. Although Farrer remains an important voice in current discussions about divine action (in particular) and science-and-theology (in general), his epistemic position has been severely neglected.[23]

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[22] For Hick's career, see his autobiography, published by Oneworld in 2002. Hick briefly taught at Cambridge between holding the professorships in Princeton and Birmingham. As indicated earlier, in Chapters One and Four, Allen was his successor in the chair at Princeton Seminary.

[23] But on these other two topics there is a substantial literature, probably the most significant in Farrer studies. In addition to the essays collected in Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Henderson (eds.), *Divine*

A notable exception to this rule is a substantial article by Jeremy Morris, titled 'Religious Experience in the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer.'[24] Other than Henderson's article on 'Valuing and Knowing God,' this is perhaps the most sustained analysis of Farrer's religious epistemology that has appeared to date. However, although there is much of value in Morris's article, I find myself in strong disagreement with his particular reading of the fideistic and voluntaristic character of Farrer's thought. While Morris, like me, sees the development in Farrer between *Finite and Infinite* to *Faith and Speculation* as basically a movement from an emphasis on the metaphysics of being to an emphasis on the epistemology of belief, he also sees Farrer as moving to a wholesale fideism based almost entirely on subjective religious experience disconnected from objective evidence or rational argument.[25]

Readers of this dissertation or of Henderson's work will notice that Morris does not thoroughly engage with the interactionist character of Farrer's epistemology, but rather seems to think of him in more conventionally rationalistic 'Cartesian' terms. Reality and our evidence thereof is apparently something we think about rather than

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Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer (T & T Clark, 1990), readers are referred to the Bibliography, Section B.3, which contains a large number of philosophical / theological discussions of Farrer on divine action and 'double agency.' For recent surveys of the theology-and-science dialogue that mention Farrer's position as a continuing 'live option' in regard to divine action, see Christopher Southgate, 'A test case: divine action,' in Christopher Southgate et. al., *God, Humanity and the Cosmos*, Second Edition (T & T Clark International, 2005), 260-299; and Wesley J. Wildman, 'The Divine Action Project, 1988-2003', *Theology and Science* 2 (2004), 31-75.

[24] *The Journal of Theological Studies* New Series 45 (1994), 569-592. Although this article was published under the name 'J. N. Morris,' it is in fact by same 'Jeremy Morris' whose review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism* was discussed at length in the Introduction to this dissertation.

[25] For a discussion of religious experience in recent philosophy of religion and theology, see David Brown, 'Experience Skewed', in Kevin Vanhoozer and Martin Warner (eds.), *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience* (Ashgate Publishing, 2007), 157-175.

come up against. Far more seriously, however, Morris also takes Farrer's insistence on the necessity of faith for the proper evaluation of the evidence to be purely a matter of *choice*.[26] Rather than the 'rational will' or 'practical reason' emphasised by Henderson, Morris thus commits Farrer to the highly dubious notion that (religious) belief is *purely voluntary*. Citing precisely some of the same 'middle' and 'late' Farrer texts that I have either discussed directly or in light of Henderson's work, Morris claims that, for Farrer,

> [t]he 'empirical' evidence for God's existence could not be taken as such without the accompanying acknowledgement of the value of God's existence....The world could yield no knowledge of God other than that which followed from the believer's commitment to God's existence, because there was nothing that could be demonstrated empirically of God in the world outside those effects of his action which the believer, in faith, chose to regard as such….Farrer's account of verification specified the mode by which belief was confirmed by evidence, but hardly resolved the difficulty that its implicit voluntarism yielded no control over what the believer might or might not choose to regard as evidence.[27]

Morris makes these sorts of claims again and again throughout the course of his paper: e.g., 'if the believer chose not to believe, no form of experiential verification of God's activity was possible'; 'all that can be said is that the believer finds confirmation of faith in the experience of God which he or she chooses to undergo,' etc.[28] Thus, according to Morris, for Farrer the 'evidential value of experience ceases as soon as any attempt is made to switch the focus of analysis away from the believer's personal experience to the rational grounds of faith in general.'[29] In short, rather than the moderate fideism I have

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[26] Morris, 'Religious Experience in the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer,' 572. In fairness to Morris (and as already indicated in the Introduction), I should say that in his later review of Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*—and indeed under its influence—Morris seems to have modified his interpretation of Farrer's fideism in a less extreme direction, so this article may no longer represent his current thinking. It remains, however, a significant contribution to the secondary literature which needs to be engaged with.

[27] Ibid., 578-579.

[28] Ibid., 584-585.

[29] Ibid., 585.

argued for in this dissertation, Morris interprets Farrer as something close to an extreme fideist, and says further that if 'the fideist recognizes that there are criteria of rational criticism external to the believer which can be validated by appeal to some universal, demonstrable standard, then he or she has abandoned fideism altogether.'[30] In other words, not only is this the sort of fideist that Farrer is, it is also the only sort of fideism. Fideism cannot recognise any objective criteria of rational criticism outside the individual believer. Objecting to such an irrational position, Morris thus concludes that Farrer's religious epistemology is a disappointing, if interesting, failure.

However, I think Morris's interpretation is flawed on several levels. First, his restriction of fideism to an extreme form that denies all claims of reason is sufficiently answered by Chapter Two of this dissertation. There are many types of fideism, and one can be a fideist and still accept that reason has a rightful place in our mental lives, religious or otherwise. Second, the question of whether or not—and, if so, to what extent—belief is voluntary is a vast and complicated one that I do not intend to enter here, as it would require a dissertation in itself. However, as my presentation and analysis of Farrer's moderate (methodological) fideism in Chapter Four ought to have made clear, unlike Morris I do not read even the later Farrer as advocating a purely voluntary view of belief in general or religious faith in particular. Initial faith, and thus belief in God, may indeed partly depend on certain voluntary decisions or acts (recall that Allen, in Chapter One, said that faith was the result of having an 'open heart') but it cannot simply be *chosen*. One cannot just *decide* to believe, and the will is not the primary factor at work here. As Farrer argues in 'Faith and Evidence,' faith is something

[30] Ibid., 588.

that we discover we have and then rationally consider in light of the evidence, both pro and con: 'Either we are persuaded or not persuaded, that is the starting-point. If we are persuaded, some element of faith is there; it is just a matter of maintaining itself or not against rival persuasions.'[31] The religious believer is not a neutral will that just happened to adopt a belief for no reason, but someone who has been *persuaded*, 'captured by a story.'[32] But, again, what persuades the believer is not faith itself, but *evidence*. Initial faith is neither belief *against* nor belief *without* evidence, but rather 'a subjective condition favourable to the reception of the evidence.'[33] Our wills may indeed be involved in whether or not we enter that 'subjective condition,' but without the necessary evidence the will is insufficient—it cannot create beliefs from scratch.

So when Farrer says in *Faith and Speculation* that 'it has always been recognised that faith in God calls for voluntary effort,'[34] I interpret this claim in terms of the antecedent operations of the will which are necessary for us to grasp *any* complex or obscure reality whatsoever: i.e., attention, concentration, effort, persistence, sympathy, 'purification of the heart,' etc. I do not think that Farrer is saying that faith can be directly willed, and further believe that any interpretation such as Morris's which suggests that this was ever Farrer's view runs against the entire grain of Farrer's epistemic thought as I have been exploring it in this dissertation.

Third and finally, and in consequence of the above arguments, I also do not interpret Farrer as advocating the sort of extreme fideism that Morris seems to saddle him

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[31] Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (Hodder and Stoughton), 171.

[32] Ibid., 170.

[33] Ibid., 176.

[34] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 59. This is a key claim in the section that Henderson regards (positively) as central to Farrer's argument. It is also essential to Morris's (negative) critique.

with, which is basically the 'read in' position discussed in Chapter Four. Despite my claim that in *Saving Belief* and *Faith and Speculation* Farrer embraced a moderate (methodological) fideism, I also took pains to emphasize that in both texts Farrer maintained a necessary—if secondary—place for evidence and reasoned argument. Faith may supply the conditions for the evidence to be perceived and the reasons recognised, but without such evidence or reason there is nothing for faith to work with (or against). And, furthermore, the available evidence and reasons really need to point in a theistic direction. However subtly balanced and finally inconclusive the philosophical debate between theists and atheists may be on purely formal or strictly empirical terms, the character of the world still cannot be such that it could just as well be read in a naturalistic as a theistic manner. The theistic interpretation of the universe is not simply 'read in' by an (irrational) act of will, but is truly 'read off' the nature of things—faith, in this sense, is 'natural' whereas disbelief is 'unnatural.' The perspective of faith allows theists to see things, not as they just *choose* to see them, but as they *really* are. As Farrer says:

> Sympathy does not create the personal facts it descries, it reveals them; and there are many true facts, to which suspicion closes our eyes….The evidence of faith is that it convincingly shows us things in their true colours; having once seen man in God, we know that we have seen man as he is; we can never again believe another picture of ourselves, our neighbours, or our destinies.

This is not the language of choice.[35]

[35] See Farrer, *Saving Belief*, 23 and 26; for Farrer's comments on the 'naturalness' of faith, see 24-25.

II. The Evidence of Faith: Contemporary Voices and Farrer

Chapter One of this dissertation primarily focused not on Farrer himself but on three different interpretations of his religious epistemology, all set within the context of the interpreters' own understanding of the rationality of religious belief. This was deliberate on my part, and for two reasons. First, by beginning with Mitchell's concern about Farrer's possible fideism and the debate between Hebblethwaite and Allen on the merits thereof, I introduced the conceptual and exegetical dilemmas this dissertation set out to resolve. Second, I intentionally wanted to bring these three specific figures into the conversation, and again not just in regard to their respective readings of Farrer on 'the believer's reasons' but also to highlight their own work on this contentious topic.

As noted in Chapter One, Mitchell, Hebblethwaite, and Allen are all well-respected scholars, and within the broad range of extant positions in contemporary philosophy of religion and religious epistemology they are not themselves that far apart. With varying degrees of strength and commitment, they all accept the cumulative case approach to the rationality of religious belief. Mitchell pioneered the revival of this previously discredited strategy; Hebblethwaite endorsed, extended, and popularised it; and it should be noted that Allen's *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* defends a rather more robust epistemology than his Yale dissertation and early work would indicate. Partly under the influence of Farrer, and partly due to changes in his thinking brought about by developments in philosophy and science in the subsequent decades, Allen's later work shows a greater confidence that a 'general case' can indeed be made for the truth of Christian belief, even if he remains more cautious in his conclusions than either Mitchell or Hebblethwaite.

However, while indeed well-respected, none of these three figures—not even Mitchell—are currently shaping the on-going conversation in religious epistemology. Like Farrer himself—and perhaps because of their association or sympathy with his work?—his three interpreters have been largely sidelined in philosophical circles by the more formal and technical contributions of the analytic philosophers Richard Swinburne and Alvin Plantinga, as well as by the more provocative and puzzling contribution of the Wittgensteinian philosopher D. Z. Phillips. The vast majority of work in contemporary philosophy of religion deals with *these* three figures rather than Mitchell, Hebblethwaite, or Allen. Theological circles are both wider and more diffuse than philosophical ones, and generalisations consequently more difficult to come by. But Roman Catholic theology is currently still engaged in the post-Vatican II rejection of Neo-Thomism, and has only just begun to digest John Paul II's 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* which calls for a renewed faith *in* reason among Catholic philosophers and theologians. In Protestant theology, perhaps the two most influential figures currently writing in English are Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank: the former's postliberal 'Yale School' narrative approach upholds a firmly Barthian rejection of natural theology, while the latter's 'Radical Orthodoxy' seeks to transcend the canons of 'secular reason'. Feminist and liberation theologians are more focused on struggles for social justice and reinterpreting Christian doctrine in light of their specific concerns, and consequently tend to avoid epistemological and metaphysical issues as a distraction from what they regard as more urgent objectives. And of course there are many, many other voices besides these.[36]

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[36] For a convenient collection of liberationist essays from various perspectives, see Susan Brooks Thistlewaite and Mary Potter Engel (eds.), *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Orbis Books, 1998). In an interesting and sympathetic critique

In short, amidst this welter of conflicting positions and extreme pronouncements, the rather more modest assertions of Mitchell, Hebblethwaite, and Allen, advocating a patient and non-dramatic cumulative case approach to religious belief, seem to have been lost in the shuffle. And Farrer's own contribution to these debates has been even more neglected. But is this wise? I will now very briefly compare and contrast Farrer's final position with three of the movements alluded to above which are currently exercising a stronger influence than Farrer on what most scholars think of as 'the evidence of faith.' Readers may recall that in the Introduction I cited Hebblethwaite and Henderson's observation that Allen's interpretation of Farrer 'does not claim here to give us a complete theological epistemology, of course. But inasmuch as his and Farrer's Augustinian view appears importantly different from classical foundationalism, from the Wittgensteinian view that belief in God is a form of life, and from Plantinga's view that belief in God is properly basic, the effort to develop the idea in the context of a larger epistemology would seem well worth making.'[37] While I cannot offer the desired 'larger epistemology' in the very few pages I have left at my disposal, I will at least bring Farrer into dialogue with those three movements before concluding the dissertation.

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of the liberationist avoidance of key conceptual issues, Jeffrey Eaton points out that a troubling feature of liberation theology 'for those who have been technically trained in academic theology is its adherence to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, according to which the first priority is not to understand the world, but to change it.' However, Eaton goes on to argue from an explicitly Farrerian viewpoint that unless God really does *act* in the world to liberate the oppressed, 'liberation theology' is a misnomer. Liberation theologians, he claims, are thus committed, if only implicitly, to a certain view of divine action and, hence, metaphysics. See Jeffrey Eaton, 'Divine Action and Human Liberation,' in Hebblethwaite and Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action*, 211-229 (citation from 211).

[37] Hebblethwaite and Henderson, 'Introduction' to *Divine Action*, 18.

The term 'classical foundationalism' has been polemically defined by its avowed opponents, the Reformed Epistemologists, and so will be discussed later in light of their own positive contribution. In secular epistemology, however, foundationalism is 'the view that knowledge and epistemic…justification have a two-tier structure: some instances of knowledge and justification are non-inferential, or foundational; and all other instances thereof are inferential, or non-foundational, in that they derive ultimately from foundational knowledge or justification.'[38] Or, put differently, according to the foundationalist model, some knowledge is just immediately present to us and requires no further justification (hence it is labelled 'foundational'), whereas other knowledge is not immediately present to us and thus requires some further epistemic labours on our part in order to be held reasonably. As such non-foundational knowledge is not known immediately but only by (perhaps dubious) inference, it is regarded as less epistemically secure than the foundations themselves. As Paul K. Moser states: 'Versions of foundationalism differ on two main projects: (a) the precise explanation of the nature of non-inferential, or foundational, knowledge and justification, and (b) the specific explanation of how foundational knowledge and justification can be transmitted to non-foundational beliefs. Foundationalism allows for differences on these projects, since it is essentially a view about the *structure* of knowledge and epistemic justification.'[39] There is thus a variety of foundationalisms, of which classical foundationalism is only one.

Foundationalism and its close cousin, evidentialism, are both normally associated with traditional natural theology. According to evidentialism, religious beliefs cannot be

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[38] Paul K. Moser, 'foundationalism', in Robert Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 276.

[39] Ibid., 276-277.

foundational, and so to be rational they must be supported by evidence or argument.[40] Thus, expressed in current terminology, traditional natural theology is seen to be committed to both foundationalism and evidentialism, in that it holds that while belief in God is indeed rational, it is not immediately known to us, but must be inferred from other things that we do know immediately (such as that some objects are in motion). Furthermore, however, traditional natural theology also holds that such inferred knowledge of God is deductively certain. But, given the various critiques of reason discussed in Chapter Two, Section II, there are relatively few public adherents of a traditionally foundationalist / evidentialist natural theology in present-day philosophy of religion or theology.[41]

Denys Turner, however, is a striking example of a contemporary Roman Catholic thinker who actually *defends*, à la Vatican I, the capacity of reason to not simply support but *demonstrate* the existence of God. Moreover, his *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* is simultaneously a restatement *and* re-conception of the traditional Roman Catholic epistemology discussed in Chapter Two, and so may neatly be allowed to speak—if somewhat idiosyncratically—on behalf of that enormously influential body of thought as well.[42] Turner unabashedly endorses the conventional reading of the documents of Vatican I, namely the Council's claim that the existence of God can be 'formally and validly proved by rational argument,' and that 'the capacity of reason must be such that

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[40] For 'evidentialism', see the entry by William Hasker in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 253.

[41] David Brown admitted to being a foundationalist in regard to religious belief in 1986, but in light of his later work it is less than clear that he would accept this label today. See his 'Wittgenstein Against the "Wittgensteinians": A Reply to Kenneth Surin on *The Divine Trinity*', in *Modern Theology* 2 (1986), 262. And even the Brown of 1986 was still only committed to the probabilistic approach associated with Basil Mitchell rather than traditional demonstrative natural theology.

[42] Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

the certain knowledge of God from creatures lies within its reach strictly as reason.'[43] He is careful to distinguish this epistemic optimism from a strong foundationalism, since although the Council insists that reason does indeed have this capacity, the documents 'say nothing at all about having to prove God's existence by the natural light of reason *before* any Christian theology can get off the ground.'[44] However, Turner concedes that 'there does appear to be a form of weak "foundationalism" implicit in the Vatican decrees'—and thus, by clear implication, in his own project as well.[45]

Throughout this monograph, Turner stresses that he does not intend to actually produce a valid deductive demonstrative proof of the existence of God, but only to argue for the philosophical and theological possibility of such an argument. Such an argument, he says, has three conditions: (1) it 'must meet the ordinary, secular, conditions for inferential validity'; (2) it must 'demonstrate that there is something which answers to the description "God"' (which Turner here glosses as 'Creator of all things out of nothing'); and (3) 'the description "Creator of all things" must be shown to be *quod omnes dicunt Deum'*—that is, 'the God of proof must be "extensionally equivalent" to the God of faith.'[46] And, finally, the argument itself must centre around the question, 'Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?'[47] According to Turner, if someone can be brought to acknowledge the intelligibility of this question, they have already accepted theism.[48]

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[43] Ibid., 5.

[44] Ibid., 37 (emphasis added).

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 226.

[47] Ibid., 233.

[48] Ibid., 242. This is the merest sketch of Turner's subtle and sophisticated book. For further analysis, including some self-defence against Turner's critique of his own reading of Aquinas, see Fergus Kerr's review in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 (2005), 446-449.

If Turner's foundationalism is largely inspired by the Thomism of Vatican I, spiced with something of a postmodern twist, Reformed Epistemology is primarily associated with the Calvinists Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, but the late William P. Alston (personally Anglican rather than Reformed, but still included under the label) and various other philosophers are also numbered among this highly influential group.[49] Their characteristic claim is that belief in God is rational—in their technical term, 'properly basic'—even in the absence of any philosophical argument to that effect. Indeed, they further claim that *requiring* philosophical arguments on behalf of theistic belief is itself a philosophical mistake, entangled in the problematic epistemic frameworks of evidentialism and what they call 'classical foundationalism'. In their view, classical foundationalism is distinguished from foundationalism *per se* in that it specifies the criteria under which a belief may be foundational or properly basic. Namely, such a belief must be (1) self-evident, (2) evident to the senses, and/or (3) incorrigible. This entails that for a belief to be *rational* it must be either properly basic (according to those criteria) or derived by valid forms of argument *from* a properly basic belief. Again we see that (classical) foundationalism is closely allied with evidentialism, with foundationalism more concerned with structure and evidentialism with criteria.

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[49] The classic manifesto remains the essay collection co-edited by Plantinga and Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), which contains seminal essays by Plantinga, Wolterstorff, and Alston, among others. But see also Wolterstorff's earlier volume, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, Second Edition (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984) and important article, 'The Migration of Theistic Arguments: From Natural Theology to Evidentialist Apologetics', in Robert Audi and William J. Wainwright (eds.) *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Cornell University Press, 1986), 38-81; Alston's *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cornell University Press, 1991); and Plantinga's 'Warrant trilogy,' particularly *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Reformed Epistemology, however, rejects both classical foundationalism and evidentialism and replaces them with another form of foundationalism in which different criteria for rational belief are in play. Reformed Epistemology retains a foundationalist structure, but widens the criteria under which beliefs may be properly basic by including (among others) belief in God within the immediate, non-inferential, foundational beliefs. Plantinga, however, also insists that these anti-classical foundationalist and anti-evidentialist claims do not amount to fideism. Distinguishing extreme fideism from moderate fideism, he goes on to conclude that even though Reformed Epistemology rejects evidentialist natural theology, 'the Reformed epistemologist is not a fideist at all with respect to belief in God. He does not hold that there is any conflict between faith and reason here, and he does not even hold that we cannot attain this fundamental truth by reason; he holds, instead, that it is among the deliverances of reason.'[50] Belief in God may not be self-evident, evident to the senses, or incorrigible, but it is a belief that is nevertheless a 'deliverance of reason' and so therefore not held against or even without reason, or fideistically.[51] This, however, is precisely what critics of the movement contest. Recall that in Chapter Two I cited Terence Penelhum's assertion—and Eleonore Stump's denial—that Plantinga was an Evangelical Fideist.[52]

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[50] Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God,' in *Faith and Rationality*, 90. His discussion of fideism may be found on pages 74 and 87-91.

[51] In an interesting nuance, Plantinga admits that, in fact, 'it is not wholly accurate to say that it is belief in God that is properly basic; more exactly, what are properly basic are such propositions as ['God has created all this,' 'God forgives me,' God is to be thanked and praised'], each of which self-evidently entails that God exists. It is not the relatively high-level and general proposition *God exists* that is properly basic, but instead propositions detailing some of his attributes or actions.' (81)

[52] See Chapter Two, page 90 and notes 62-63. There is an endless and still proliferating secondary literature on Reformed Epistemology, both appreciative and critical. The first full-length study (written, as

'Reformed Epistemology' is a positive, if slightly arch and provocative, self-designation. By contrast, the term 'Wittgensteinian Fideism' was coined by the atheist philosopher Kai Nielson in 1967 to designate what he regarded as a disturbing trend among philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein which aimed to insulate religious belief from rational critique. According to his original article, Wittgensteinian Fideism makes the following eight claims (or 'dark sayings'):

1) The forms of language are the forms of life.
2) What is *given* are the forms of life.
3) Ordinary language is all right as it is.
4) A philosopher's task is not to evaluate or criticize language or the forms of life, but to describe them where necessary and to the extent necessary to break philosophical perplexity concerning their operation.
5) The different modes of discourse which are distinctive forms of life all have a logic of their own.
6) Forms of life taken as a whole are not amenable to criticism; each mode of discourse is in order as it is, for each has its own criteria and each sets its own norms of intelligibility, reality and rationality.
7) These general, dispute-engendering concepts, namely intelligibility, reality and rationality are systematically ambiguous; their exact meaning can only be determined in the context of a determinate way of life.
8) There is no Archimedean point in terms of which a philosopher (or for that matter anyone else) can relevantly criticize whole modes of discourse, or, what comes to the same thing, ways of life, for each mode of discourse has its own specific criteria of rationality/irrationality, intelligibility/unintelligibility and reality/unreality.[53]

Nielson's construal of Wittgensteinian Fideism was (allegedly) drawn from the work of several philosophers, mainly Norman Malcolm, Peter Winch, and G. E. Hughes. But the term soon came to be irrevocably associated with the prolific and influential Welsh philosopher Dewi Zephaniah Phillips (1934-2006)—very much to his chagrin.

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it happens, by an advocate) was Dewey J. Hoitenga, Jr., *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology* (State University of New York Press, 1991).

[53] Kai Nielson, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism,' originally published in *Philosophy* 42 (1967), 191-209, reprinted in Kai Nielson and D. Z. Phillips, *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* (SCM Press, 2005), 21-38 (citation from 22).

Phillips spent much time and energy disavowing the term as applied to him, or as anything like an accurate account of what a truly Wittgensteinian understanding of both philosophy and religion might entail. Shortly before his death, Phillips and Nielson collaborated on a useful volume titled *Wittgensteinian Fideism?* which sought (unsuccessfully) to conclusively settle the exegetical and conceptual issues in their debate.

In his introduction to this book, although Béla Szabados seems to side with Phillips on the substantive matters at hand, he also gently points out that, if not given the specific interpretation provided by Nielson in the eight statements above, there is no reason why Phillips—or Wittgenstein, for that matter—should abhor being called a Wittgensteinian fideist.[54] Both Penelhum and Henderson certainly read Phillips as a fideist of sorts, with Penelhum seeing him as a Conformist Fideist.[55] For good or ill, by contrast with more rationalistic thinkers such as Turner or Swinburne, or even Plantinga and Wolterstorff, any philosopher of religion inspired by Wittgenstein is going to be associated with Wittgensteinian Fideism, whether they like it or not: the term has taken on a life of its own. Rather than rejecting it entirely, Wittgensteinian philosophers should attempt to modify its specific meaning and pejorative connotations so that it becomes a positive self-designation, like 'Reformed Epistemology,' rather than a polemical slur. Given my survey and analysis of 'fideism' in Chapter Two, this should not be difficult. A Wittgensteinian Fideist would thus be any philosopher of religion inspired by the later

[54] See Béla Szabados, 'Introduction: Wittgensteinian Fideism 1967-89—An Appreciation,' in Nielson and Phillips, 14-15.

[55] For Penelhum, see the internal references cited in note 52 above; for Henderson, see his article 'Austin Farrer and D. Z. Phillips on Lived Faith, Prayer, and Divine Reality' cited in note 13 above.

Wittgenstein who, rather like the Reformed Epistemologists but for somewhat different reasons, consequently rejects evidentialism and classical foundationalism. In accepting the label, a Wittgensteinian Fideist is in no way committed to accepting Nielson's eight claims or his interpretation of what they mean (for example, the precise nature and range of 'a form of life').[56]

Obviously, each of these three movements requires far more space to fully articulate their significance and nuances, but this abbreviated treatment must suffice for now. Leaving aside the Thomist-inspired Anglican 'semi-fideism' of *Finite and Infinite*, where does the religious epistemology of the later Farrer fit into this picture? As argued in Chapter Four, in strict genetic-chronological terms I distinguish between the *de facto* 'moderate fideism' of the first chapter of *Saving Belief* (the 'middle Farrer') and the slightly stronger Allen-influenced *de jure* 'moderate methodological fideism' of the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation* (the 'late Farrer'). But if the first chapter of *Faith and Speculation* is then integrated with the interactionist epistemology of subsequent chapters, as Farrer clearly intended, then that technical difference vanishes almost to nothing, and we can see Farrer's moderate fideism organically linked to his conviction that we only come to know God through exercising our actual relation with God—that is,

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[56] The literature here is immense. For a slightly dated but still very helpful start, see Joseph M. Incandela, 'The Appropriation of Wittgenstein's Work by Philosophers of Religion: Towards a Re-evaluation and an End', *Religious Studies* 21 (1985), 457-474. And for two more recent conversations, see Stephen Mulhall, 'Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Religion' (95-118) and Walford Gealy, 'Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Religion: a Reply to Stephen Mulhall' (119-143), both in D. Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century* (Palgrave, 2001); and Cyril Barrett, 'The Wittgensteinian Revolution' with a 'Postscript' by Brian R. Clack, in Harriet A. Harris and Christopher J. Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis: The Impact of Analytical Philosophy on the Philosophy of Religion* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 61-75.

by obedient engagement with the divine will. So here I will leave aside my diachronic scrupulosity and synchronically conflate just these two texts. Given the fluidity of Farrer's thought and his elusiveness as a moving target, spreading his final epistemic position over *Saving Belief* and *Faith and Speculation* seems to be a reasonable compromise. How then would Farrer, so construed, relate to contemporary religious epistemology? I will focus here on Farrer's moderate fideism, and turn to his interactionist epistemology in the next and final section.

Again, far more briefly than these matters warrant, I argue that Farrer would reject Turner's attempt to rehabilitate the epistemology of Vatican I as too rationalistic. While he would deeply appreciate Turner's desire to broaden and deepen of the concept of 'reason' beyond mere ratiocination—which bears some resemblance to Farrer's own earlier, anti-positivistic view in *Finite and Infinite*—he would part company with Turner's continued insistence on the need for demonstrative, deductive proof or certainty. As we saw repeatedly in Chapters Three and Four, Farrer never held that reason could offer that degree of certitude, and always thought the quest for it was chimerical at best. His late comments about papal infallibility are set within a broader epistemic conviction that in our mental lives we must choose between 'appropriate procedures admitted fallible and pretended infallible procedures proved inappropriate.'[57] Since all 'appropriate procedures' are fallible, this rules out any deductive certainty, in religion as well as all other intellectual matters.

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[57] From 'Infallibility and Historical Revelation', in Austin Farrer, et. al., *Infallibility in the Church: An Anglican-Catholic Dialogue* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968), 9-23—an abridged version may be found in Ann Loades and Robert MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart: Austin Farrer and His Writings* (Canterbury Press, 2006), 81-93. This citation is from page 89 of the abridged version.

Farrer's relation to Reformed Epistemology and Wittgensteinian Fideism is more complex, partly because of his close affinities with certain aspects of each movement, and partly because as collective phenomena they are internally more diverse than the work of individual philosophers such as Turner. Reformed Epistemology has gone through several stages, and in its current manifestation it is producing ever more sophisticated epistemic frameworks. Perhaps contrary to Hebblethwaite and Henderson's observation cited above, I think that the later Farrer (and early Allen) are extremely close to the simpler 'classic' position contained in the Plantinga-and-Wolterstorff-edited *Faith and Rationality* which maintained—with less conceptual machinery than their present versions—that belief in God is rational without requiring philosophical support.[58] Indeed, I would go so far as to argue that Farrer and Allen put forward an epistemic proposal in the late 1960s that was almost indistinguishable from what Plantinga and Wolterstorff unveiled in the early 1980s, but that Farrer and Allen were simply dismissed out-of-hand due to the stranglehold of classical foundationalism and evidentialism. It took another fifteen years before a very similar proposal was able to receive a fair hearing, in a radically different intellectual climate in which the rigid empiricism and logical rigorism of Anglo-American philosophy were gradually tempered into something more hospitable to soft rationalism and moderate fideism. This is in fact the explicit narrative arc of Mitchell's essay 'Two Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion,' in

[58] For some discussion about the progressive stages of this movement, see Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Reformed Epistemology' in Phillips and Tessin (eds.), *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century*, 39-63. Stephen J. Wykstra's 'On Behalf of the Evidentialist—a Response to Wolterstorff' (64-84) is an able and interesting interrogation of Reformed Epistemology from a fellow Dutch Reformed philosopher and former colleague of both Plantinga and Wolterstorff on the faculty of Calvin College, Michigan, but one who does not share their epistemic commitments.

which he describes how he eventually became more receptive to Farrer's argument in *Faith and Speculation*, and in which he himself goes on to argue for a mediating position between Swinburne's 'rationalism' and Wolterstorff's 'fideism.'[59] And, to the extent that both Farrer and Reformed Epistemology appeal to *some* form of religious experience, however that contested concept is understood, they merit Penelhum's appellation of 'evangelical'.[60]

Likewise, although Farrer would never assent to the version of Wittgensteinian Fideism defined by Nielson, which is equivalent to conceptual relativism, several commentators have rightly noted a 'Wittgensteinian' character to the later Farrer's thought.[61] While this may be due partly to the explicit influence of Wittgenstein on Allen's dissertation, Farrer himself undoubtedly read at least the *Tractatus* and probably *Philosophical Investigations* as well.[62] His descriptions of humanity as talking animals, of thought as internal speech, and of the social, cultural, and linguistic context of rationality all have provocative echoes in Wittgenstein's philosophy.[63] And Farrer's

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[59] In Eaton and Loades (eds.), *For God and Clarity*, 117-190.

[60] See Brown's essay, 'Experience Skewed,' cited in note 25, for more discussion of the various types of religious experience and the diverse appeals to them in contemporary philosophy of religion and theology.

[61] It is interesting to note that Nielson's article was published in 1967, the same year as Farrer's *Faith and Speculation* and Plantinga's *God and Other Minds*. It is also interesting to note that two years later Nielson wrote a fairly positive review of Allen's *The Reasonableness of Faith*, the published version of his Yale dissertation, despite its own Wittgensteinian and fideistic tendencies. See Kai Nielsen, Review of Diogenes Allen, *The Reasonableness of Faith*, in *Theology Today* 26 (1969), 344-346.

[62] As always, it is difficult to know what Farrer read, aside from the classics of Western philosophy and theology. However, he does mention Wittgenstein in passing in *The Freedom of the Will* (A. & C. Black, 1958), 271, and given the date of this volume he was probably referring to the *Investigations* (1953).

[63] For an essay that offers a Wittgensteinian reading of Farrer, although with anthropological rather than epistemic interests, see my 'Imperfect Lives and Perfect Love: Austin Farrer, Stanley Hauerwas, and the Reach of Divine Redemption', in Natalie K. Watson and Stephen Burns (eds.), *Exchanges of Grace: Essays*

characteristic phrases from *Faith and Speculation* of 'life-in-grace' and 'life-in-God' bear at least a 'family resemblance' to Wittgenstein's 'forms of life.'[64] To the extent that Farrer is willing to take 'the cultural history of our race' along with a pre-established tradition of the theistic interpretation of the world as 'givens,' then he—like Phillips—merits Penelhum's appellation of 'conformist.'[65] As I have argued all along, the later Farrer is a moderate fideist with both evangelical and conformist tendencies. He thus belongs somewhere between Reformed Epistemology and Wittgensteinian Fideism (as I have widened the term). Where his moderate fideism differs from theirs is perhaps in the precise nature of his appeal to some form of religious experience—i.e., interaction with God—to which I now turn to conclude.

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in Honour of Ann Loades (SCM Press, 2008), 142-154. Henderson's essays 'Valuing in Knowing God' and 'Austin Farrer and D. Z. Phillips on Lived Faith, Prayer, and Divine Reality' also bring out various Wittgensteinian elements of Farrer's thought. And as its title indicates, the latter essay compares and contrasts Farrer and Phillips on those three topics.

[64] See, for example, Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 47 and 130.

[65] See ibid., 1. However, in comments on an earlier version of this chapter, David Brown stated, 'I think it is one thing to say that there are parallels with Wittgenstein, quite another to talk of parallels with Phillips. I would have thought that Farrer would have been prepared to be revisionist in a way that Phillips scarcely allows. In other words, [Farrer] does not see himself as engaged on a purely descriptive exercise.' I concede this point, and refer readers to Henderson's second essay above for a more sustained discussion of Farrer and Phillips. Brown's observation about Farrer's openness to revision of the tradition is, however, an interestingly contested one, in that Farrer is often held up as a champion of conservative (Anglo-Catholic) orthodoxy. Instead, I—like Brown—read him as a moderate 'liberal catholic'. Farrer's 'conformism' is thus of a different quality and order from Phillips's, being less global and thorough-going. Although, as I go on to say in the main text, Farrer has both 'evangelical' and 'conformist' tendencies, they are not evenly balanced, but weighted toward the 'evangelical'.

III. Conclusion: 'It is solved by sacrifice'

In Chapter Three I cited both I. M. Crombie's Platonic description of Farrer: 'Though no Platonist, he perhaps had a somewhat Platonic conception of philosophy—that it is essentially dialogue, that there can be no formulation of the truth so lapidary that it cannot be misunderstood, and that what needs to be said in some context depends on what is being misunderstood in that context'; and Charles Conti's comparison of Farrer with Wittgenstein: 'In many respects, the evolution of Farrer's thought to natural forms of belief paralleled Wittgenstein's movement from the *Tractatus* to the *Investigations*, allowing for the living functions of religious language in the later work.'[66] I then stated that although I would develop this comparison with Wittgenstein rather differently from Conti, taking it in an epistemological rather than a metaphysical direction, I would nevertheless argue in due course that Conti's Wittgensteinian comparison combined with Crombie's Platonic description points towards perhaps the most fruitful appropriation of Farrer's philosophical legacy. It is now time for me to conclude this dissertation by making this argument explicit.

To begin with a *mea culpa*: a serious omission in this dissertation is any sustained attention to the contested concepts of 'faith' and 'reason' themselves. Although I devoted an entire chapter to fideism and although I have in passing discussed several ways in which faith and reason have been, or are, or should be understood, for the most part I have worked with *implicit* definitions of these two foundational terms for both philosophy of religion and Christian theology. If I had more space, I would devote it

[66] I. M. Crombie, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden (1904-1968),' in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: Volume 19* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 121-122; Charles Conti, *Metaphysical Personalism: An Analysis of Austin Farrer's Theistic Metaphysics* (Clarendon Press, 1995), xviii.

towards filling this lacuna. In terms of faith, I would explore the important distinction between faith-as-theological virtue ('saving faith') and faith-as-epistemic concept ('initial faith'), and so engage more thoroughly with Christian doctrine. In terms of reason, I would return to the section on postmodernism in Chapter Two and Turner's *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* in this chapter and engage more thoroughly with the current attempts to redefine, contract, or expand what we mean by this characteristically human capacity.[67] I would also consider in more detail the relevance of secular studies of contemporary epistemology—e.g., debates about foundationalism and evidentialism, internalism and externalism, pragmatism and neo-pragmatism—as well as Stanley Hauerwas's theological appropriation of Alistair MacIntyre's understanding of reason as always shaped and normed by a particular tradition.[68] But these investigations must wait for another occasion.

In my Introduction, I said that one goal of this dissertation was to shift the study of Farrer away from a predominantly metaphysical bias toward a more epistemological one. I also said that once the fideistic character of Farrer's thought was taken into account, one could see that (*contra* Conti) the later Farrer fully accepted the prospect of a *non-metaphysical* foundation for philosophical theology, indeed perhaps a *non-*

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[67] This, I take it, is also at the heart of debates around *Fides et Ratio*—although I note in passing that, even though that papal encyclical technically endorses the epistemology of Vatican I, it does not *explicitly* commit itself to the view that a demonstrative proof or absolute certainty is actually possible, but only that belief in God is indeed *rational*. *Fides et Ratio* is thus, arguably, semi-fideistic (and hence Anglican!) in its epistemology.

[68] See Hauerwas's 2000/2001 Gifford Lectures at the University of St Andrews, published as *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Brazos Press, 2001 / SCM Press, 2002), which are heavily indebted to MacIntyre's own Gifford Lectures, delivered in Edinburgh in 1988 and published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

foundational position altogether. This is precisely is what it means to start with *faith*. It may still be urged, however, that my focus on epistemology rather than metaphysics is itself problematic in various ways—and I would entirely agree. In light of Crombie's Platonic description, I endorse the view that philosophy and theology are both essentially dialogue, that lapidary clarity will always elude us, and thus that what needs to be said depends in part on what is being misunderstood. It is an ongoing conversation. So it would be deeply unfaithful to Farrer's endlessly restless and rethinking mind to say, 'This is the definitive interpretation—stop here.' While I am convinced that the preceding chapters have opened up a new and helpful angle on Farrer's thought, I would not recommend that we simply replace a metaphysical approach with an epistemological one and leave it at that. Rather, we must continue to move on in this direction and see where it takes us.

And so, in light of Conti's Wittgensteinian comparison, consider Walford Gealy's claim that

> Wittgenstein's thinking forms part of a wider philosophical movement that became ultimately responsible for placing logical considerations at the heart of philosophical activity, and that for the greater part of the twentieth century. What this concern with logic displaced was epistemology—a discipline which, in Wittgenstein's earlier work, was relegated to the realm of psychology, while in his later work, epistemology is seen to be, as most other philosophical issues, the product of conceptual confusion.[69]

Wittgenstein thus reorients us 'away from epistemology and towards logic.'[70] Fully aware that this may be a controversial reading of Wittgenstein (can there be one that isn't?), I would nevertheless follow the flow of Gealy's argument here and suggest that if my dissertation has reoriented Farrer studies away from metaphysics and towards

[69] Walford Gealy, 'Wittgenstein and the Philosophy of Religion: a Reply to Stephen Mulhall', 120.

[70] Ibid., 121.

epistemology, then in these final pages I would encourage a further reorientation away from epistemology and towards—not logic—but spirituality.

In making this suggestion, I am in fact returning us to the theme of the very first monograph ever published on Farrer: Charles C. Helfling Jr.'s *Jacob's Ladder: Theology and Spirituality in the Thought of Austin Farrer* (still a valuable study).[71] After centuries of disconnect, the mutual relationships between philosophy, theology, and spirituality are now much discussed in academic circles and have become a source of fermentation and insight.[72] However, as with his metaphysical and epistemological convictions, Farrer was decades ahead of his time in this area as well.[73] As Stephen Platten put it, alluding to a famous passage from *The Glass of Vision*, Farrer's thought was 'diaphanous' and so diverse elements could merge therein.[74] Even his later purely philosophical work, as we have seen, insists on the necessity of interaction with God as the primary path of religious epistemology, and so has an explicitly 'spiritual' character. Farrer would thus escape the trenchant critique Harriet A. Harris offers of Reformed Epistemology, namely that

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[71] (Cowley Publications, 1979). See also Hefling's article on Farrer in Gordon S. Wakefield (ed.), *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (The Westminster Press, 1983), 146-147.

[72] For an overview of developments in theology, see Mark A. McIntosh, 'Theology and Spirituality', in David F. Ford with Rachel Muers (eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Third Edition (Blackwell, 2005), 392-407. In philosophy of religion, recent examples include Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Blackwell, 2002) and John Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy and Human Value* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[73] For studies of this aspect of Farrer's legacy, see Diogenes Allen, 'Farrer's Spirituality', in Hein and Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified*, 47-65; Richard Harries, '"We Know On Our Knees": Intellectual, Imaginative, and Spiritual Unity in the Theology of Austin Farrer', in Hebblethwaite and Henderson (eds.), *Divine Action*, 21-33; Gordon Mursell, *English Spirituality: From 1700 to the Present Day* (SPCK, 2001), 449-460; and Stephen Platten, 'Diaphanous Thought: Spirituality and Theology in the Work of Austin Farrer', in *Anglican Theological Review* 69 (1987), 30-50.

[74] See Platten's essay cited above. The passage is *The Glass of Vision* (Dacre Press, 1948), 7-8.

despite its commendable anti-evidentialism, it still 'wastes the opportunity' to appeal to personal spiritual development and a deeper theological framework when it considers the nature and justification of religious belief. Although she does not mention Farrer as a counter-example of a philosopher who does in fact take account of these matters, he certainly fits the description.[75]

While Farrer wrote several devotional works—the first as far back as 1952—his unusual fusion of spiritual and conceptual concerns is perhaps best displayed in his sermons.[76] Of these, quite a number—particularly those preached to Oxford undergraduates—deal explicitly with the relation between faith and reason, belief and doubt, in light of then-current philosophical challenges. While some of these texts express in a homiletical mode ideas that Farrer elsewhere discusses almost verbatim in his more academic writings, in others he allows himself to venture into new territory. And this explorative, imaginative, creative character is perhaps most apparent in his comments on the epistemic value of 'saints'—individuals of notably holy or Christ-like lives. Those familiar with Farrer's devotional and homiletical works will know that this

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[75] See her 'Does Analytical Philosophy Clip our Wings?: Reformed Epistemology as a Test Case', in Harris and Insole (eds.), *Faith and Philosophical Analysis*, 100-118.

[76] For the early devotional work—itself primarily a collection of paragraph-long homilies—see *The Crown of the Year: Weekly Paragraphs for the Holy Sacrament* (Dacre Press, 1952). The sermons proper were published in five volumes, four of which were posthumous; a convenient collection is Austin Farrer, *The Essential Sermons*, edited and introduced by Leslie Houlden (SPCK, 1991). For some comments from a purely homiletic angle, see O. C. Edwards and David Hein, 'Farrer's Preaching: "Some Taste of the Things We Describe"', in Hein and Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified*, 173-195; and J. Barry Vaughn, 'Resurrection and Grace: The Sermons of Austin Farrer', in *Preaching* 9 (1994), 61-63. Jeffrey Eaton's chapter 'The Experiment of Faith,' *The Logic of Theism* (201-259) deals at length with the theological and philosophical content of Farrer's sermons, and includes a helpful appendix which classifies them according to three categories: 'For Reason,' 'For Faith,' and 'For Grace' (258-259). Eaton also touches briefly on what I call 'the epistemic value of the saints' in this excellent treatment of Farrer's work here.

theme emerges again and again and was obviously close to his heart. It is perhaps most fully expressed in 'Narrow and Broad' and 'Double Thinking'.

In 'Narrow and Broad,' Farrer considers the difficulty of how to assess the quality of the 'evidence of faith.' Is it widely accessible or restricted to only a select few? Who can perceive it, and how? In order to answer these questions, Farrer replies, somewhat obliquely:

> I knew a man whose name, though uncanonized, I shall always silently mention when I recall at the altar of God those saints whose fellowship gives reality to our prayers; a man who sacrificed in the prime of his age a life which he had never lived for himself; a man whose eyes sparkled with all the passions, pity, indignation, sorrow, love, delight, but never for himself; unless it is more proper to say, Yes, for himself; since he had made God's loves and God's concerns his own, and had no others that you would greatly notice.[77]

Farrer then immediately states, rather provocatively:

> Such a life, then, is evidence, and what other evidence could you hope to find?....[Humanity] knows God only by yielding to him; we do not know the fountain of our being, so long as we are occupied in stopping it with mud. So the saint is our evidence, and other men, of course, for the glimpses of sanctity we see in them.[78]

Indeed, Farrer flatly asserts, 'The evidence of faith is incorrigibly aristocratic.'[79] Here we see the familiar theme of knowing God through interaction, and especially through obedience, combined with the new conviction that saintly lives are the primary

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[77] Originally published in *Said or Sung: An Arrangement of Homily and Verse* (The Faith Press, 1960); reprinted in, and here cited from, Loades and MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 187. This uncanonized saint was the Aberdonian Anglican priest and British Army chaplain Hugh Evelyn Jackson Lister (1901-1944), of whom Eaton writes that he 'most fully embodies Farrer's ideal of the faithful person' (*The Logic of Theism*, 216). For an indispensible study of the close friendship between Farrer and Lister, Lister's remarkable life, ministry, and death, and the relevance of all this to the topic at hand, see David Hein, 'Farrer on Friendship, Sainthood, and the Will of God,' in Hein and Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified*, 119-148.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid.

'evidence' for such interaction. Rather than nature or logic, Farrer tells us, 'the saint is our evidence.'

Then in his sermon 'Double Thinking,' Farrer makes some candid admissions. He confesses that even in sharp debate with an atheistic philosopher his own faith is not in danger, for 'since God has shown me a ray of his goodness, I cannot doubt him on the ground that someone has made up some new logical puzzles about him. It is too late in the day to tell me that God does not exist, the God with whom I have so long conversed, and whom I have seen active in several living men of real sanctity, not to mention the canonized saints.'[80] Towards the end of the sermon come two paragraphs worth citing in full, both for what they reveal about the nature and extent of Farrer's 'fideism,' and for how he believed saints provided the necessary evidence to overcome what he frankly regarded as intellectually irresolvable difficulties with Christian belief:

> When the logicians say that there is a certain inevitable division between spiritual thinking and natural thinking, they are in a certain sense right. We can't reconcile the spiritual picture of things and the everyday picture of things completely on the intellectual level. If we claimed to be able to do it, we should claim to comprehend the ways of God as well as we comprehend the ways of this world, and that would be an exaggerated claim. We see God in pictures, in images only, reflected in a glass and riddlingly says St Paul: and we cannot fuse our picture of God perfectly with our picture of the natural world. There always remains a certain discontinuity, a certain incoherence on the intellectual level.
>
> The saints confute the logicians, but they do not confute them by logic but by sanctity. They do not prove the real connection between the religious symbols and the everyday realities by logical demonstration, but by life. *Solvitur ambulando*, said someone about Zeno's paradox, which proves the impossibility of physical motion. It is solved by walking. *Solvitur immolando*, says the saint, about the paradox of the logicians. It is solved by sacrifice. I can offer my life to the God who has shown me his face in the glass of riddles. The God who is seen in the sphere of religion takes control in the sphere of conduct, and there he gives me, unworthy, the help of his holy spirit.[81]

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[80] Originally published in *A Celebration of Faith*, edited by Leslie Houlden (Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), here cited from *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 197.

[81] Ibid., 199-200.

There is an enormous amount of material to unpack in those two paragraphs that I must leave largely untouched, but here in just 244 words is the constructive argument of this entire dissertation. Up to this point, my concerns have been primarily historical and analytic, trying to understand the development of Farrer's religious epistemology, clear away confusions and misinterpretations, and articulate what he was actually trying to say. Any *defense* or *endorsement* of Farrer's views have been only implicit in my attempts to take his epistemological contribution more seriously than most previous commentators. However, in these final pages I must now finally move into an explicitly constructive mode and so will make Farrer's moderate fideist argument my own—but only when augmented by the interaction with God we see in the lives of others and, crucially, experience within ourselves. As Farrer says in *Faith and Speculation*, and as I likewise accept, 'Our position is that theism must be lived as well as thought; and equally that without being thought it cannot be lived.'[82] Here we see the essential symbiotic balance between life and thought, faith and reason, experience and intellect. This theme goes all the way back to Farrer's undergraduate correspondence in which—wrestling with questions of church membership and vocation—he concluded that some truths can only be known from inside, and only verified by life. He maintained this conviction up to *Faith and Speculation*—and beyond.

What now follows is of course more assertion than argumentation, and would require extensive qualification to stand, but I believe it is worth our consideration. All Christians, at any rate, I contend, must indeed accept 'a sort of fideism'—that is, *moderate fideism*—because I agree with Farrer that in rightly bringing our rational minds

[82] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 130.

to bear on the claims of faith there 'always remains a certain discontinuity, a certain incoherence on the intellectual level.' But in seeking to resolve those inevitable paradoxes which the logicians helpfully bring to our attention, I also accept that the demonstration of the truth of our faith actually takes place not 'by logical demonstration, but by life.'[83] And not just by 'any old (form of) life,' but a life freely surrendered to God. As Farrer says, 'It is solved by sacrifice.' But the sacrifice of which he speaks, the sacrifice of the saints, is not (as the logicians suppose) the sacrifice of their intellect—but rather of their will.

It is clear that Farrer hears the triumphant cry, *Solvitur immolando*, most vividly in Christ himself and the great saints of the Church. Perhaps Farrer's most famous sermon is titled, 'Walking Sacraments,' in which he memorably suggests that someone ordained to the priesthood and entrusted with the sacraments of the Church 'is sacramental himself; he is, one might say, a walking sacrament.'[84] If priests are walking sacraments, then I suggest that, for Farrer, saints are *incarnate arguments*. They are living instantiations of the truth of our faith. They are, in short, witnesses.[85]

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[83] There is an interesting echo here of Coleridge's statements in *Aids to Reflection* about knowing the truth of Christianity. Coleridge asks, 'How can I comprehend this? How is this to be proved? To the first question I should answer: Christianity is not a Theory, or a Speculation; but a Life….To the second: TRY IT.' Cited in 'Not a Theory, but a Life,' Lucy Beckett's joint review of Ann Loades and Robert MacSwain (eds.), *The Truth-Seeking Heart: Austin Farrer and His Writings* and Brian Hebblethwaite and Douglas Hedley (eds.), *The Human Person in God's World: Studies to Commemorate the Austin Farrer Centenary*, in *Times Literary Supplement* (3 August 2007), 23. In regard to Hedley's own contribution to *The Human Person in God's World*—'Austin Farrer's Shaping Spirit of Imagination' (106-134)—Beckett says that 'the connections (or unconscious similarities) between Farrer and Coleridge become clearer and clearer.' (24)

[84] Preached on 22 December 1968, just seven days before Farrer's death, and originally published in *A Celebration of Faith*, here cited from *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 140.

[85] For a somewhat similar understanding of the value of holy lives in the life of the Church but which uses the language of 'witness' rather than 'saint,' see Hauerwas's *With the Grain of the Universe*, Chapter 8,

Rowan Williams makes a remarkably similar claim as well. In a recent All Saints' Day sermon he stated:

> Witnesses establish the truth by giving evidence. It really is as simple as that. When we celebrate the saints, we celebrate those who have given evidence, who have made God believable by how they have lived and how they have died. The saints are the people who recognise that arguments will finally not win the day. God does not make himself credible by argument [but] by lives and deaths that make him credible, that make Jesus tangible here and now.[86]

Likewise, in Williams's book *Tokens of Trust*, he draws from the Jewish martyr Etty Hillesum—who died in Auschwitz in 1943 at the age of twenty-nine—the view that concrete but fallible human lives, rather than abstract but infallible arguments, must 'take responsibility for making God credible in the world.'[87]

But if Farrer sees such incarnate arguments most persuasively in Christ and the great saints, he also sees them—albeit less strongly—in the lives of certain people he has

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'The Necessity of Witness' (205-241). The epistemic value of such holy lives, while not a major topic in contemporary philosophy and theology, has been occasionally discussed. In addition to David Hein's chapter cited in note 77 above, see, for example, Victoria S. Harrison, 'Human Holiness as Religious *Apologia*', in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 46 (1999), 63-82; Grace B. Jantzen, 'Conspicuous Sanctity and Religious Belief', in William J. Abraham and Steven W. Holtzer (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell* (Clarendon Press, 1987), 121-140; and Patrick J. Sherry, 'Philosophy and the Saints', in *The Heythrop Journal* 18 (1977), 23-37. See also the interesting, more ethically-oriented exchange between Susan Wolf and Robert Merrihew Adams: her 'Moral Saints', in *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (1982), 419-439, and his 'Saints', in *The Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984), 392-401, reprinted in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 164-173.

[86] Rowan Williams, All Saints' Day sermon at All Saints' Margaret Street, London (1 November 2009), on-line at http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2603 (accessed 19 November 2009).

[87] Rowan Williams, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Canterbury Press, 2007), 22. Williams's use of Hillesum raises the vital issue of the evidence of holy lives outside of Christianity, which neither Farrer nor I would wish to deny or downplay. Although I am writing as a Christian and using mostly Christian examples in this final section of the chapter, and although I would argue that Christian saints may indeed function as part of a larger argument for the truth of Christianity, in more general terms the undoubted existence of holy lives as found in various other religions functions as evidence for *theism*.

actually met. And, indeed, once again, crucially, for such incarnate arguments to be at all effective, they must be heard and seen, however faintly, even in our own lives. In one of Farrer's greatest sermons, 'The Burning-Glass,' he says that it is 'useless to preach unless we can claim some taste of the things we describe; just enough taste of them to interpret what we hear from the saints, or see in them.'[88] He explains that he does not mean dramatic religious experiences but something far more mundane—yet still remarkable—and necessary not just for the preacher but for those who listen as well:

> The saints who have crucified their wills are the visible incarnations of grace. Grace triumphs in them during this mortal life; they love the love and will the will of God. And though we are not so, God gives us grace, even to us. We are incorporate in Jesus with all the saints, we eat and drink him in the sacrament. And are there no fruits? Certainly there are fruits. There is the fruit of continual repentance. Again and again our most uncrucified will is reunited with the cross; we are forgiven and accepted as living parts of Christ. Moreover by grace we receive many good desires, and the expulsion of many that are evil. We pray for those whom we dislike, and care for them; we pray to do the duties we detest, and delight in them. Such are the fruits of grace; and to such fruits ordinary Christians can testify.[89]

In short, if 'the saint is our evidence,' then we must see that evidence—'the evidence of faith'—in our own lives as well. Not just externally, in others, but internally, in ourselves. We too must incarnate the argument, or evidence, for God in order for it to be persuasive for us. We too must strive to become saints.[90]

But is there, in fact, any such evidence to be found, either in those whom we call saints or in our own rather less impressive lives? Farrer himself has been called a saint by his admirers, and certainly he at least tried to be an 'incarnate argument' for the truth

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[88] 'The Burning-Glass,' originally published in *Said or Sung*, here cited from *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 135.

[89] Ibid., 136-137.

[90] As Coleridge says in answer to his second question, cited in note 83 above, the way to prove the truth of Christianity is to try it.

of God in all that he said and did.[91] He would, however, be the first to disclaim any attribution of sainthood for himself. But, whether or not Farrer merits this title, there are indeed flesh-and-blood human beings, however rare, whose character and quality of life point beyond themselves to a transcendent reality, a reality whose apparent beauty, truth, and goodness at least *prima facie* justifies our faith in its existence. For example, the distinguished analytic metaphysican Peter van Inwagen explicitly appeals to such extraordinary lives in an account of his own conversion to Christianity. Although he admits that 'there is no way I can convey the evidence I am in possession of to you,' he nevertheless asserts that 'there are five or six Christians I know who, for all the rich individuality of their lives and personalities, are like lamps, each shining with the same dearly familiar, uncreated light that shines in the pages of the New Testament….When one is in the presence of this light—when one so much as listens to one of these people speak—it is very difficult indeed to believe that one is not the presence of a living reality that transcends their individual lives.'[92] Such lives, van Inwagen frankly admits, are among 'the reasons I have for being a Christian.'[93] Or, put in Farrer's words, having

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[91] See, for example, Susan Howatch's comments in the introduction to her reprint of Farrer's *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (Mowbray / Morehouse, 1994), vii-xi, especially xi; and her 'Author's Note' in *Absolute Truths* (Fawcett Crest / Ballantine Publishing, 1994), 622-624. The sixth of her popular 'Starbridge' novels about the Church of England in the 20th century, every chapter of *Absolute Truths* begins with a quote from Farrer, and he is cited several times in the other volumes as well. Ironically, Howatch's novel has probably brought Farrer's life and work to the attention of a larger audience than all of the scholarly studies over the past forty years put together. She writes that Farrer's 'reputation remains high and his admirers rate him a religious genius and even a saint.' (623) Philip Curtis's biography, *A Hawk Among Sparrows* (SPCK 1985), also has a somewhat hagiographical character to it.

[92] Peter van Inwagen, 'Quam Dilecta', in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason* (Oxford University Press, 1994), 57-58.

[93] Ibid., 58.

once glimpsed this vision of God-infused humanity, 'we can never again believe another picture of ourselves, our neighbours, or our destinies.'[94]

However, one may well ask what, precisely, are Farrer, Williams, and van Inwagen appealing to at this point. First of all, what is it that they are claiming to discern in those they call saints or witnesses or lamps? Is it moral goodness? Joy? Endurance? Some indefinable numinous quality? And second, how does what they claim to discern lead to the conclusion that 'God exists' or 'Christianity is true'? In other words, is this appeal to the 'evidence' of the saints simply a particular type of religious experience, with all the normal benefits and problems this category raises? Likewise, does the 'evidence' of holy lives warrant the theistic or Christian conclusion any more convincingly than, say, the cosmological argument? How far, really, does this take us?[95]

For Farrer, at any rate, and also for me, the answer to the first question is 'all of the above': the value of the saints is not simply moralistic, but a vivid example of 'life-in-grace' or 'life-in-God'. They are compelling by their very nature, both fascinating and frightening, showing us a glimpse of what our own lives could be like, if we were willing and able to make the same total sacrifice of the self. They show us, 'proved in action,' the solution to the epistemic dilemmas that beset us.[96] For just when they cease to conceive their dependence on God, they begin to live it.[97]

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[94] Farrer, *Saving Belief*, 26.

[95] David Brown raised some of these questions in comments on an earlier version of this chapter, and they are also canvassed (in regard to general religious experience) in his essay 'Experience Skewed'. Victoria Harrison, Grace Jantzen, and Patrick Sherry raise similar questions about the epistemic value of saints in their articles cited in note 85.

[96] See Austin Farrer, 'Revelation', in Basil Mitchell (ed.), *Faith and Logic: Oxford Essays in Philosophical Theology* (George Allen and Unwin, 1957), 90.

[97] See Farrer, *The Freedom of the Will*, 315.

And the answer to the second question—how do such holy lives lead to a theistic or Christian conclusion?—is intimately connected to the interactionist epistemology that has increasingly come to the fore over the past three chapters. By themselves, such lives fall radically short of any such conclusion. But again and again it must be stressed:

> [T]o know real beings we must exercise our actual relation with them. No physical science without physical interference, no personal knowledge without personal intercourse; no thought about any reality about which we can do nothing but think. Is not this the highest possible generalisation of the empirical principle? Theology must be at least as empirical as this, if it is to mediate any knowledge whatsoever. We can know nothing of God, unless we can do something about him. So what, we must ask, can we do?[98]

And if the answer given in *Faith and Speculation* is 'obey', the answer which seems more prevalent in 'The Burning Glass' is 'taste'. Taste 'the things we describe,' taste 'the fruit' of life-in-grace. Is there really no fruit to be tasted? Is there really no interaction with God in your life? Then perhaps you should *not* believe, no matter how good the philosophical arguments may be. The saints provide vivid external examples of incarnate arguments for God, but—as already stated repeatedly above—they are only persuasive if we can also discern, however faintly, an answering and echoing incarnate argument in our own lives. Without that echo, the evidence is lost and useless. In the end, if anything is to be 'solved by sacrifice,' we must solve it for ourselves, by our own self-sacrifice. The saints may show us the way, but they cannot walk it for us.

Moderate fideist or not, Farrer never avoided 'the empirical demand'—he simply expanded what that could possibly mean in order to maintain the *possibility* of the rational truth of theism. Rather than fit his religious beliefs into a predetermined philosophical system, he tried to let them take their natural shape and then test them, not

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[98] Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, 22.

merely by rigorous conceptual analysis, but by *living* them. His great insight was that some things can *only* be known in this way, from within a commitment to them, a commitment which may be called 'faith'. But he also recognised that such tests may lead to a negative result, in which case faith should be abandoned—and he never flinched from that possibility. 'We must have no bogus history,' he claimed, and would certainly say the same for philosophy and theology as well.[99] On the other hand, he also maintained that belief in God, if accepted, called for far more than mere intellectual assent, but rather demanded the entirety of our lives. Indeed, he said, 'we shall not achieve full intellectual belief unless we live by it. Who can go on believing in a supreme Good which he makes no motion towards embracing?'[100]

[99] From the essay, 'On Credulity,' originally published in *Illuminatio* 1 (1947), 3-9; reprinted in *The Truth-Seeking Heart*, 190-195 (citation on 195).

[100] Farrer, *Saving Belief*, 183.

APPENDIX: LETTERS OF AUSTIN FARRER

(A)

AUSTIN FARRER'S LETTER TO HIS FATHER ON HIS EARLY PHILOSOPHICAL 'BREAKTHOUGH' REGARDING FAITH AND REASON

This letter, dated 14 March but without indicating the year, is placed by Philip Curtis in 1927—i.e., in Farrer's fourth and final year studying 'Greats' at Balliol (when he was 22 years old) before proceeding to Cuddesdon later that year to study theology and train for ordination. This proposal finds support below in Farrer's reference to 'these four years': he is reflecting on what he has come to understand towards the end of his 'secular' education. The letter covers folios 29-30 of Bodleian MS. Eng. lett. c.270. Philip Curtis reproduces most of the letter in pages 30-32 of *A Hawk Among Sparrows* (London: SPCK, 1985), but with several minor mistakes, omissions, and alterations, and with at least one major error: in the eighth line of the first paragraph he transcribed 'belief' instead of 'disbelief' (see page 30 of the biography), which of course entirely changes the meaning of the sentence, robs it of force, and in fact makes it rather nonsensical. Partly for that reason, but primarily for this letter's great importance in understanding the early Farrer's thinking on the relation between faith and reason, a corrected transcription is here provided (which follows Farrer's usage of underlining for emphasis). I have received permission to transcribe and cite this letter from the Farrer Estate and the Bodleian Library.

March 14th [1927] Balliol College, Oxford

Dear Father

You may congratulate me on having just come out of an enormous bout of philosophising, which has had tiresome effects on my powers to sleep and do regular work, but admirable ones on my general state of mind: especially in establishing faith on its own foundations, where the ebb and flow of metaphysical speculations ought not to be able to touch it any more. This is a great gain, since even when you are not sure it stands condemned, still you feel its position to be problematical, and dependent upon any turn your theories may take in the future: which is just as disastrous as disbelief and less progressive. So now I am going about saying to myself, that if only people would think their philosophy out they would discover the scope of its view, and realise that it does not touch religion. This little victory pleases me a great deal, because the curse of this intellectualism is, that it destroys desire by challenging the grounds of it before it has time to act; and then leaving it hanging on an infinite regress of problems to be considered. All this and how bad it is I see more and more through the present example of the people I live with here, whom I am constantly envying for their impulses, without seeing a way to liberate my own. For instance, a man ought to <u>desire</u> this or that career: he ought to <u>love</u> God, not think it right to get into harmony with the universal values, and that with reservations: he ought to be simply dependent on the affection of his friends, and at least be free from the miserable fear of being unfelt by and unfeeling of the world of his fellows, a sort of moral solipsism. Hodges encourages me, who having gone (Heaven knows) far deeper into his shell than ever I have done, now finds himself coming out through the full thinking-through of his philosophy, even to the recovery of a religious sense which had run dry for years. To the great amusement of mankind, he is beginning a

campaign against rationalism which he calls 'the enemy everywhere.'[1] Well, with such an example before me, I hope to get back freedom inch by inch. Inter alia, I am going to give myself bodily into the hands of the Cowley Community to do with me what they can for three days after the Jenks is over, to say the hours with the brethren there and be put through a systematic course of meditation between.[2] You don't know how happy I am: I feel less the slave of Reason than I have done any time these four years I should think. I tried a great cul-de-sac in religion, of the universal 'ought,' saying to myself that [faith] was a divinely-given thing, and that all the recipient could do was to practice those things which on full consideration he believed right in religion as much as in other things, since nothing is in our power but our moral will.[3] Which was, no doubt, St Paul's view before he was converted. But 'full consideration' yields no positive results such as to be a ground for action, still less the power to perform them. Whence this palinode at last. But don't suspect me of plunging into irrationalism: philosophy is the deliverer and not the chain, and I more and more want to go through with it. It is absurd, that no warnings are any use in these things: here have I been living on the simplest fallacies, with warning-boards stuck up all over the New Testament against the attempt to live by the good rational

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[1] H. A. Hodges (1905-1976), one of Farrer's closest friends at Balliol and afterwards; a fellow Anglo-Catholic and Christian philosopher; eventually Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading. In a much later letter to Curtis, Hodges says that the result of the 'bout of philosophising' described in this letter was that Farrer 'was now ready to join me in acknowledging the insufficiency of human reason and accepting the light of faith.' See Curtis, *A Hawk Among Sparrows*, 33.

[2] 'Cowley Community': the Society of St John the Evangelist, also known as the Cowley Fathers: the oldest religious order for men in the Church of England, then based in Oxford. 'Jenks': the Jenkyns Exhibition, one of Balliol's classical scholarships, which Farrer sat for at this time and subsequently received.

[3] Farrer began a word, scratched it out, and scribbled something over it that is not entirely legible. Curtis reads it as 'faith' (*A Hawk Among Sparrows*, 31) which both looks likely and makes good sense of the passage.

will. I used to be enormously baffled by our Lord's sayings, to the effect that good deeds must proceed from the heart, from a love of them, and that this Pharisaic attempt just to do as an outward thing that which is according to your notion of right is a mere hypocrisy, after all. So Aristotle is proved right against this damned Kant, and all the moderns who uphold the latter against the former.[4] But I used to ask 'Though this is all very well, how does it help us to decide what we ought to do, and that is all that is in our power?' I am most grateful to Joyce for having once defined to me what sincerity is, and how it excludes the suspended judgement.[5]

[Farrer here begins a new paragraph, in which he criticises a visiting preacher in Balliol's chapel for his 'pious rationalism'—i.e., for holding a basic stance of agnostic naturalism mixed with a touch of mystical piety. Farrer concludes his critique, and the letter, as follows:] This sort of thing will convince no one. We must (I am a prophet already!) go through with reason and see what it does, and then just say of faith, that it too does and says these other (not contradictory but supplementary) things.

I suppose now I shan't be home till Friday week. The Jenks starts tomorrow.

Your loving son

Austin

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[4] Curtis omits 'this damned' here, but whether out of respect for Kant or Farrer is uncertain: see page 31 of *A Hawk Among Sparrows*.

[5] Farrer's older sister (born the year before him, on 31 March 1903).

(B)

AUSTIN FARRER'S LETTERS TO DIOGENES ALLEN

In September 2003 Diogenes Allen sent eight letters from Austin Farrer to the Department of Special Collections and Western Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Photocopies of these letters are also held at St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Wales. Allen's description of this unpublished Farrer correspondence—included with the photocopies at St Deiniol's—reads as follows:

> During 1963-4 Austin Farrer supervised a dissertation that was to be submitted to Yale University for a Ph.D. degree. Its thesis—that the response of faith to the gospel was not based on evidence but on the needs it met and the nourishment it provided—greatly stimulated Farrer. In addition, it argued that this nourishment was a sufficient reason to affirm the gospel, provided that it was possible to rebut various objections to it. As long as the gospel was not shown to be false, it was rational on the basis of the nourishment the gospel provided to affirm it as true.
>
> Farrer invited his student to present his thesis to the Metaphysicals, and unbeknown to the student he used it as the jumping off point of his book, Faith and Speculation. Farrer generously acknowledged his use of the material in the Preface to the book and in a footnote in Chapter One.
>
> The first three letters contain several of Farrer's formulations of the thesis in his own words, with some criticisms and reservations
>
> The fourth letter contains Farrer's suggestions to meet the objections one examiner at Yale raised.
>
> The fifth letter acknowledges Farrer having written a letter of recommendation, and mentions, rather wryly, his forthcoming trip to Texas, a placed [sic] he told me that he loved to visit because of its rawness in contrast to the over-civilized character of Oxford.
>
> The sixth letter mentions the receipt of an offprint of an article that contains the core of the dissertation he supervised, and which he cited in a footnote of Chapter One of Faith and Speculation, and the news that a copy of that book was being sent. Farrer also comments somewhat caustically on the former student's move from one university to a theological seminary. He again mentions his forthcoming visit to Texas.
>
> The seventh letter concerns the abridgement of his edition of Leibniz's Theodicy by the same former student, explaining why it was a rushed job. He also complains about headaches that were, unknown to him, caused by a brain tumor [this diagnosis is uncertain].
>
> The eighth letter again mentions his debt for the opening chapter of Faith and Speculation, and complains of his weariness with Keble's Centenary Appeal.

After submitting these eight letters to the Bodleian, Allen found an additional letter which he sent in separately in February 2006. This letter, although simply dated '3 Feb' is clearly from February 1964 (both from Allen's recollection in a personal letter to me and also from the sequence of events), and so is included below in due chronological order but without re-numbering the sequence outlined by Allen above. In this letter, Farrer asks Allen to present a précis of his dissertation to the Metaphysicals. In a personal letter to me, undated but received in February 2006, Allen recalls that those present were Basil Mitchell, Helen Oppenheimer, J. L. Lucas, I. M. Crombie, and G. C. Stead. He reports that while one member present was resistant and 'took it as Barthianism,' another was 'quietly interested,' and that Farrer was 'very lively and defending the position.'

Letters 5 and 7 as described by Allen are omitted as irrelevant to this dissertation, as well as some brief personal passages within the letters transcribed. Omitted passages are marked by an ellipsis; the only original ellipsis in the correspondence is the long one in point (c) of Letter 3.

Letter 1

[*Allen's handwriting: 'written sometime in Nov. 1963'*] Keble College, Oxford

Dear Mr Allen

…Your ideas keep expanding in my head. One of your main points is, I think, that there is no 'evidence' for faith because mental and volitional response to God is the <u>initial</u> response: Contrast response to physical environment, when the initial response is sensory, so that we can appeal from intellectual decisions to self-evident 'facts'. Only, this consideration is general, and does not prove the particular point, that this initial (mental and volitional) response is made in answer to <u>a Gospel</u>: it

might be made in face of physical existence and moral duty. I made the general point in the 5th lecture of the Glass of Vision, but (however wrongheadedly) separated it from the particular point: a point which needs to be commended by particular arguments.

Starting from here, I find myself articulating your position as follows:

(1) The apprehension of God (or of our relation to him) is the act, or activity, of faith. (Apprehension is a bad word: all I mean is, that faith here plays the sort of part played by sensation + immediate supposition, in physical experience.)[6]

(2) There are always 'motives' leading to faith, since that act arises in a context, both subjective and objective; and in relation to that context. Motives can be appropriate, they cannot be 'sufficient reasons'; for faith is (in the sense explained) its own evidence.

(3) Faith may be sound without any rational critique or justification; much as our everyday response to our physical environment may be.

(4) If, however, the question of validity is raised, a critique must be endured and justification offered. The critique, and the consequent justification, are of two kinds: a distinction of valid from invalid religion ('prove the spirits'); and an examination of the religious claim as such. It is with this that philosophy is concerned. Justification ought not to construct bypasses to God, but to test the roads by which he comes to us.

Is this at all what you want to say?

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[6] These two sentences are cited by Charles C. Conti in his 'Study Notes' to Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Charles C. Conti (SPCK, 1972): 'In using the word "apprehension" in connection with theistic apprehension, Farrer wrote (in a letter to Diogenes Allen, sometime in November 1963): … ' (224). As the full context makes clear, however, here Farrer is expressing Allen's position, not necessarily his own.

Yours sincerely,

Austin Farrer

[Metaphysicals Letter]

3 Feb [1964] Keble College, Oxford

Dear Diogenes,

May I ask of you an extreme favour? There is a small group of philosophizing Christian dons, the same indeed which produced Faith & Logic, though the membership has since altered a little. We should very much appreciate the opportunity of hearing your views about the distinction between motives and evidences for belief.

The group will meet in my study on Tuesday Feb 11th at 8.15 p.m. Could you join us? We do not wish to burden you with special preparation. If you have on this side of the Atlantic a copy of the first part of your thesis, nothing would be better than for you to read us the pages which contain the vital statement of your own position. The rest would come out in discussion. It is not usual in these occasions for the opener to read a long formal paper. – If you have nothing ready to read, we can proceed Platonically from the very start.

Supposing you are ready to face this, would it be convenient for you to dine in hall here first? If so, call at our house about seven o'clock.

Yours sincerely,

Austin Farrer

Letter 2

2 April 1964 Keble College, Oxford

Dear Diogenes,

I have read your thesis through. You have succeeded in bringing the second half up to the level of the first, both in cogency and style.

May I clear my mind by stating your doctrine in my own way?

1. Religious belief is one of those immediate interpretations which are their own evidence (We 'just make' the religious interpretation as we 'just make' the personal interpretation of our neighbour's conduct). It does not rest on grounds, like a scientific hypothesis. ('Immediate' merely denies this: it does not deny that such a way of interpreting is <u>learnt</u>.)
2. But an interpretation which is self-evidencing in this sense is open to <u>critique</u> (in Kant's sense). How do we commend it as a valid form of thought, when we are not under the spell of it? (It is no answer to say, that we cannot both practise it and disbelieve it at the same time). You proceed in several stages:
    A. It appeals to us as providing our true 'form of existence'.
    B. This existence lies in a relation to a believed-in-God, etc (and so Braithwaite is refuted).
    C. If God is what our faith asserts him to be, it is proper that we should 'know' him in responding to him. (The point can be put in terms of either Efficient, or Final, First-Causality. The wellspring of existence is known in being drawn upon; the ultimate good is perceived in being embraced.) [*Farrer originally wrote 'responded to,' marked through it and replaced it with 'embraced'*]

D. The evidence that we are drawing on that Source is that it enlarges our existence: the evidence of our embracing the Good is that it blesses us.

It seems to me that your account of rationales might be better integrated with this position, than it is. It is fair enough to say that any rationale, however bogus, may give subjective comfort; also that a believer may do without them. But if the account of belief which you give is the true account, it is the account which you think ought to be accepted by (Christian) philosophers: and in that case the rationales which ought to be valued are those which are properly related to such a position. They ought all to presuppose your doctrine of faith-assurance and intrinsic evidence: and should deal with the peripheral questions which arise on such a supposition (E.g., Will the world as we know it bear the religious interpretation—I am livingly related to a living God, but what about sticks and stones, sinners, etc? Do the data of revelation deserve the attention and the credit faith accords them?)—I would say that the discussions in Finite and Infinite are a proper attempt to show that the whole universe of existents, so far as we have any clue to their natures, is fitly seen as dependent on divine creativity.

I think that a long and very subtle discussion would be needed to settle the 'read in or read off?' issue. St Thomas would begin by pointing out that the very nature of things finite must surely be related in fact to their dependence on God (a believer must believe): why then is it denied that it can be 'read off'?—Only on the Calvinistic dogma of man's 'deformity.'—But if it can be 'read off' why do not all philosophers achieve the 'reading'?—Why not compromise, and say that those who do 'read off' are making an incipient move towards religious belief, and that the believer really does and can 'read off', just as he really does and can interpret his own

standing in relation to God? But perhaps you would not want to exclude this possibility: you only want to deny that the philosophic Christian is necessarily committed to it. Well, but of course he is not: he may be a believer in 'deformity.' That does not prevent us from reasoning with him, and considering which story is more true to experience.[7]

But this is a side-issue.

Now I will write to your two Americans: I shall not say a word to them about the imperfect organisation of your account of rationales because it is so marginal to a strong and original thesis.

Yours,

Austin Farrer

P.T.O

P.S.

The most naïve and vulnerable page in your whole thesis is (I think) p 150. The philosophers have recently spent endless pains on the states of moral judgements and are perfectly satisfied that the so-called 'objectivity' of standards can be accounted for without supposing a cosmic basis. [*Farrer wrote and then marked through the following parenthetical comment: '(To argue as thought they had not written will arouse prejudice against your thesis.)'*] It is the way you put your case, which is so odd: no one who is willing to consider your argument seriously will be a philosopher who thinks that moral choices are questions of personal taste. The real question involved in your thesis is whether and how far the acknowledgement of a 'good' involves the acknowledgement of a state of affairs. I.e., what you have to

[7] All of this paragraph except the last three sentences is cited by Charles C. Conti in his 'Study Notes' to Austin Farrer, *Reflective Faith*, 223. As argued in the dissertation, they refer to Allen's discussion of the work of John Hick.

argue is that seeing the good of the Christian life is like seeing the claims of your neighbour on your friendship (he exists!) and not like seeing the advantages of forming a lunch-club (it doesn't!).[8]

I have made a few grammatical and typological corrections on your script.

I have now written to your two Professors.

AMF

Letter 3

19 April 1964 Keble College, Oxford

Dear Diogenes,

Thank you for your very fair and reasonable letter.

Now what are we to say about publications? It was very stupid of me to let the copy go out of my hands before answering you on this point (for you did ask me). Of course you would like to publish it much as it stands….Only…wouldn't you have a wider public and a more effective influence if you pulled it round a bit and made it more positive and systematic; roughly in the form

(a) Belief without extrinsic evidence is justifiable and alone indeed proper

(b) In the court of Reason it should be and can be justified

(c) The justifications offered should be appropriate to the nature of belief, and would be….. (I.e. you would concentrate on stating or at least sketching the rationales you require yourself, showing that the choice of them follows from the doctrine of belief which you define).

[8] An examination of this page of the 1964 version of Allen's dissertation indicates that he revised it in light of Farrer's criticism.

I think you would find that, if you sat down resolutely to your thesis with a pair of scissors and a paste-pot, you would get a straight book like this out of it without a great deal of actual rewriting.

…Ever yours,

Austin Farrer

Letter 4

15 June 1964 Keble College, Oxford

Dear Diogenes,

As to the technical points of scholarship or of exactitude which your judges raise, it is just a matter of your revising the criticised details with good care. As to the complaint that you shift your ground, when you face the accusation that the truth of religious beliefs is irrelevant (according to your theory), this is really equivalent to my complaint, that your almost-dismissing account of 'rationales' in the early chapters is out of line with the later chapters. I cannot see why you should not state from the beginning the position which in the end you are bound to take, i.e., that while

(a) the believer's motives are practical, he

(b) assumes that the life of religion is a contact with the true God, which entails that he

(c) supposes that the case for taking religion to be veridical is sound and that

(d) it can be properly defended, whether he personally can make the defence or not. Psychologically the believer need never have attended to the question, whether adequate rationales can be produced; but logically he is committed to the belief that, ideally, they can.

The most misleading point in the early part of your thesis is that insistence on the purely subjective comfort offered by rationales, good or bad.

Put in a nutshell: faith's being its own evidence implies that a certain metaphysical interpretation of finite-experience is true—not in the sense that we are bound to be Thomists, Hegelians, or any other brand of metaphysician, but that certain broadly-stated metaphysical positions must be asserted, and others must be denied: 'must,' logically, of course, not psychologically: a person can believe and be saved, who (like my daughter Caroline) is quite incapable of abstract argument.[9]

Ever yours,

Austin Farrer

Letter 6

29 June [1966]

Dear Diogenes,

Thank you for the offprint of your very substantial paper, which I have read with high appreciation.[10] By the time I received it I had completed the MS of a book containing the Deems Lectures of 1964, in which your ideas (not unacknowledged) furnish the substance of the first chapter. I do not altogether agree with you but I think what you say is very important. I think it comes to this: The believer, qua believer, rightly says 'I believe because the grace of God' (or the like) 'persuades

[9] Caroline Farrer (b. 1939), Austin and Katharine's only child, 'did not seem to learn' as she grew older (so Curtis, 143), and was eventually diagnosed—rightly or wrongly—as what would now be classified as mild mental retardation. There is some debate among Farrer's living friends as to the extent of her disability.

[10] Here Farrer refers to Allen's article, 'Motives, Rationales, and Religious Beliefs', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 3, Number 2, April 1966. Farrer also cites this article on page 10 of *Faith and Speculation*.

me.' But the philosopher's business is not (mainly) to say: 'Quite right, my boy, that's how believing goes' but to examine the assumptions upon which the facts through which 'the grace of God persuades' come to be taken as instruments, effects or evidences as the Grace of God.

…Yours sincerely,

Austin Farrer

Letter 8

12 May 1967

Dear Diogenes,

I have told them to send you a copy of a book called Faith and Speculation and goodness knows when you'll get it, but this is to warn you in case a mistaken feeling of friendship should have led you to buy it: for one copy is a misfortune but two would be a disaster.

Nothing much has happened to us lately. The College is making horribly heavy weather over its Centenary Appeal, which will be a damp squib anyhow.

The only tolerable part of the book, as you will see, is the part I stole from you. I have made a few grudging acknowledgements.

Ever yours,

Austin Farrer

Letters 1-4 (marked 'Keble College' above) are on official, letter-sized stationery which says in the heading:

From THE WARDEN **KEBLE COLLEGE**
OXFORD
Telephone 59201

The Metaphysicals Letter is on different, note-sized stationery which just says:

KEBLE COLLEGE

Telephone 59201 OXFORD

As stated above, this letter is simply dated ‘3 Feb’ but is clearly from 1964. Letters 6-7 are written on blue aerogrammes. Letter 6 has the day and month but not the year, but is definitely dated to 1966 based not only on the aerogramme postmark, but also on internal evidence in an omitted passage described above by Allen (i.e., Farrer’s visit to Texas in September 1966). Farrer used underlining for emphasis and that convention has been retained here as opposed to italics.

I am immensely grateful to the Revd Professor Diogenes Allen for sending me photocopies of this correspondence, the originals of which are now located in the Bodleian Library. I am also grateful to the Revd David G. Attfield for his help in deciphering some difficulties in Farrer’s handwriting. One or two words are still obscure, but the overall sense is always clear.

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I. Austin Farrer

Primary Farrer sources—(A)—are arranged in chronological order of publication; secondary Farrer sources—(B)—in alphabetical order by author. Some of Farrer's books in (A.1) have been subsequently reprinted by other publishers, but all citations in the dissertation are from the editions listed here, unless otherwise indicated. With the exception of books revised or reprinted by Farrer himself, all citations are from the original—or at least the British—version. Some of the essays in (A.3) have been reprinted in various of the collections listed in (A.2). None of Farrer's sermons, encyclopaedia articles, or posthumously-published essays are listed separately here, but may be found in the cited collection. Although I include all of Farrer's books, I omit from (A.3) and (A.4) most essays and book reviews dealing with biblical or theological topics not relevant to this dissertation. However, in (B) I list of all the secondary literature on Farrer that I consulted during the course of my research. For a more complete bibliography see 'A Chronological List of Farrer's Published Writings' in Charles Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism* (277-287), and for a 'Bibliography of Writings about Austin Farrer with Other Research Aids,' see Hein and Henderson (eds.), *Captured by the Crucified* (197-208).

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A collection of Farrer's correspondence and family papers is held in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Most of the correspondence with his parents (although just from Farrer's side) has been catalogued and foliated in MS Eng. Lett. c. 270 and 272. Other letters from Farrer may be found elsewhere in the Library's collection, although some important letters such as those to David Attfield and Diogenes Allen have not yet been catalogued and foliated (for the former see Appendix 1 to Charles Conti's *Metaphysical Personalism*, and for the latter see the Appendix of this dissertation). Most of the family papers, which include correspondence, are un-catalogued and are kept in twelve boxes. Citations are given whenever possible from the Bodleian reference system, otherwise by citing the box number, or date of composition, or conventional publication information (e.g., when cited in Curtis's biography).

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