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Uppsala Lecture

I want to begin by telling you how absolutely thrilled I am to be standing here today, receiving this most prestigious honor. No honor or accolade that has come my way in my long career as a scholar and educator surpasses the significance of this one. And I believe you know the reason why. Nearly one hundred years ago, my grandfather, who was born in Vasteros, and my grandmother, who was born in Vastervik, journeyed from Sweden to their new home in the United States, specifically, to the city of Omaha, Nebraska. When I was born some thirty years later, to a mother whose family name was Bildt and whose first language was Swedish, I was told, from as early as I can remember, that I was Swedish. It didn't matter that the name Capps is not Swedish, for my mother had married into an English-Welsh family by that name. I was still Swedish. In fact, when we were asked the tough, identifying questions: are you Protestant or Catholic, Democrat or Republican, the answer, for my brothers and me, was always the same: no, we are Swedish.

So I have enjoyed this heritage, and worn this label, with the greatest sense of pride. And to be included, even honorifically, among those who have received academic degrees from this institution is a very magnificent tribute.

When President John F. Kennedy was awarded an honorary doctorate from Yale University, some years ago, he commented that he now was the recipient of the best of both worlds: he had a Harvard education and a Yale degree. After these days here, I will have a Yale education, a thirty year career in the University of California, and a degree from Uppsala. For me it is the

best it could be, for it brings components of one and the same world into a harmonious completion. I somehow think that my grandparents and parents are joining in this commemoration today. For this high honor I will always be deeply grateful.

I have been a professor of religious studies for more than thirty years in the University of California, Santa Barbara. In fact, I came the year the academic program in religious studies was founded there, in 1964, and have been there until I took academic leave, just a few months ago, to be a Member of the United States Congress. The subject I have chosen for my remarks today has been prompted from both vantage points. I will be making but a rather simple point, which is this: that the distinction between theory and practice, or, as we say it, between theoria and praxis deserves to be analyzed critically. Even in this era, on the threshold of the twenty first century, we tend to employ this distinction frequently, both in our theological work and in our political deliberations, as if it is correct to begin with theory, then think about how theories are put into practice. I want to suggest today that the situation is much more subtle, supple, and complex than this. And to properly come to terms with these subtleties it is time to develop conceptual frameworks which acknowledge that the processes of understanding, interpretation, and communication are much less uniform, much less monolithic, much less dissolvable into cause and effect relationships, and, therefore, much less contrived than the simple and simplistic theory-practice formulation allows. My intention today is to develop a clear alternative that functions both more accurately and more resourcefully both theology and politics. But I shall state the thesis in more comprehensive form at the end of the paper.

Alternative Ways of Interpreting Plato

I wish to begin with Plato, for the distinction that is the object of our concern has its roots in the fundamental distinction between forms and particulars. I need not reiterate this well-known distinction here. But I should like to recall that it was Alfred North Whitehead who observed that "all of western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato." As I illustrated in my book, Religious Studies, which is dedicated to the late Professor Geo Widengren, who proposed to me that I write it, I prefer to approach historical figures as having formulated responses to key questions. Plato's key question was the one he identified in the Timeaus: "what is it that abides when all else passes away?" Within the framework of this question, it is clear that there are at least two ways of interpreting Plato. The first (which I shall call the more static viewpoint) refers the relationship between "being and becoming" to the distinction between forms and particulars, regarding all of this as a situation that can be delineated, say, in several paragraphs of an explanatory textbook. The second way of reading Plato (which I shall call dynamic to distinguish it from the static viewpoint) was first suggested to me by my graduate teacher at Yale, Robert S Brumbaugh. This interpretative slant begins in the same way, namely, with the relationship of "being to becoming," but uses the dialogue Parmenides as its primary sourcebook. In this treatise, Plato analyzed all possible relationships between "the one and the many," a subject that required eight distinctive theses. From the four theses that are constructive affirmations, Brumbaugh locates the roots of four distinctive schools of Greek thought. These four were Plato's own philosophical system, the alternative provided by Aristotle, and then the two critiques presented by the Stoics and the Epicureans respectively. Thus, when Whitehead said that all western philosophy is a footnote to Plato, according to Brumbaugh, this footnoting

began with the production of philosophical orientations that were necessary to give adequate expression to Plato's fundamental insight.

My own doctoral work under Brumbaugh, as well as George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, and Jaroslav Pelikan at Yale, extended this fundamental fourfoldness from Greek philosophical history into medieval and Reformation Christian theological formulation. Here, in the medieval theological framework, the fourfoldness was represented first by Augustinian theology (corresponding with philosophical Platonism), second by the theological orientation of St. Thomas Aquinas (corresponding with philosophical Aristotelianism), and third and fourth by the orientations of both methodological and theological critique: Lutheranism (corresponding to the methodological orientation of the Epicureans), and Calvinism (corresponding to the methodological orientation of the Stoics). I recognize that this may sound overly speculative and, perhaps, a bit far-fetched. But the fact is that there are resounding temperamental similarities between the Stoics' devotion to "anangke" (or necessity) and John Calvin's process formulation of the fundamentality of divine providence. So too are there clear lines and degrees of temperamental similarity between the philosophical atomism of the Stoics and the repetition of sola injunctions -- sola fide, sola scriptura, sola fide, sola evangelio, and sola gratia -- in Luther's theology.

The Greek philosophers were attempting to delineate the relationship of "being and becoming." The theologians used the same conceptual structure to delineate the relationship between "creator and creature," or, in the terminology used most frequently, "God and the world." This dynamic reading of Plato's influence allows more than one philosophical school, and more than one comprehensive theological position, to proceed from the same set of orientational principles. In short, once the relationship between "God and

the world" was modelled according to Greek philosophical conceptualization concerning the relationship between "the one and the many," no one theological system was sufficient. Rather, the dynamic interaction that was invoked required a succession of theological viewpoints.

Nygren's Motif Research: An Example of a Dynamic View

It was at about this point -- I am sketching in certain autobiographical references -- during my years in seminary and graduate study, that I became acquainted with Anders Nygren's comparative motif analysis. All of us in my generation who studied theology at Augustana Seminary in Rock Island, Illinois, read Nygren, Gustaf Aulen, Yngve Brilioth, and Ragnar Bring -- and because I had the great privilege of studying there under Nils Arne Bendtz (who is here today, and was a graduate of Uppsala University), I also learned about Martin Nilsson, Geo Widengren, and Helmer Ringgren. I fully recognize that Nygren's theology has not always fared well in subsequent discussion and deliberation. I am well aware of Gustaf Wingren's criticisms, and I know the points of objection that have been raised by Martin D'Arcy and others. I can tell you that not even on first reading was I entirely taken with the product of his analysis: I judge Nygren's descriptions of the philosophical orientations of Platonism, Judaism, and Christianity are a bit too facile and uncomplicated. But I did recognize that the effort at comparative motif research was itself most worthwhile. Indeed, I continue to judge that Nygren created an analytical tool of considerable comparative promise.

Nygren's key insight, in my judgment, was his treatment of religion as a necessary and indispensable sphere of human experience and activity, and his understanding that religious traditions are not just sources of religious

truth claims, but they are also composed out of art, morality, and culture. Though he didn't produce the full portrayals himself, Nygren also affirmed that the religions of the world are driven and organized by distinct motif powers. Further, he understood that the religions are conceived and shaped in context with one another. I would go further than he did: I would say that no religion can be defined alone; rather, a religion can be defined and described only in reference to other religions. To try to define it as a self-contained entity is to invoke misguided static conceptual expectations. When Nygren approached religion as an a priori form of life, even as an essential ingredient or modality of human consciousness, it was necessary for him to utilize a dynamic point of view. In his own published analyses, Nygren applied his methodological insight in three instances, that is, to the examples of Platonism, Judaism, and Christianity, each of which was described in relation to the others. And he gave strong hints that the analysis he restricted to these three traditions could be fashioned and extended to deal with additional traditions. In some of his final written work, I am referring to his writings in 1972, Nygren specifically mentions Buddhism and Taoism. Each of these Asian traditions, presumably, would be approached in terms of respective fundamental motifs which serve as bases around which its art, morality, culture and belief systems are organized. Notice that in all of these instances, the religions are being approached as social and cultural constructions that derive content from the circumstances into which they have come into being, but are always shaped by an identifiable motif power that also serves as the fundamental organizing principle. There is no taking of a religion as some static ideology or dogmatic construct that can be conceived in its own terms, as some self-contained entity.

Since Nygren's time, other comparativists have contended that it is possible to identify philosophies and schools of thought by means of a commanding interest, tendency, conceptual disposition, which, in principle, is what he said. In religionsgeschichte scholarship, this position has been advanced by Huston Smith who believes that the religions differ from one another because they are organized around different aspirations and objectives. The same is true of Arvand Sharma of Montreal, who believes that full human expression requires all of the major religious traditions, since no one of them could have said it all on its own systematic terms. The same is also true of the point of view of my esteemed colleague, Ninian Smart, who talks fondly and quite seriously about being "an Episcopalean Buddhist." Others have concentrated on differences between western and Asian religions on the bases of a kind of comparative motif research, which, in these instances, is manifest in variant and/or alternative patterns or systems of ratiocination. Examples here are Hajime Nakamura's study, Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples (1964), which stands as a more precise extension of F. S. C. Northrup's The Meeting of East and West (1979), and Diana Eck's Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras (1993). In this collective viewpoint, the religions of the world differ from one another not simply in putting forward alternative points of view, but also in being directed toward distinctive interests, advancing distinctive aspirations and values, and in recognizing that cultural constructions are motivated by distinctive and yet identifiable objectives. And they do all of this in relationship with one another. That is, Buddhism is Buddhism because it both is and is not Hinduism. Christianity is Christianity because it both is and is not Judaism. Why make reference to this ongoing body of analytical material in a paper that intends to criticize the theory/practice distinction? Because the

kind of motif research that is possible today is fully capable of approaching the religions of the world as something more variegated and more multi-dimensional than the idea that they are primarily sources and residues of self-contained, competing ideological truth.

The Dynamic View Extended to Temperaments

But, before going any further with comparative motif research as a clear example of dynamic analysis, allow me to introduce another consideration of a slightly different order. When assessing Nygren's comparative analysis, we tend always to concentrate on the replicated content of the religions, or traditions, he attempted to compare and contrast. And our assessment of his work usually derives from an evaluation of how well he depicted these traditions, for example, whether he was fair or not, biased or not, objective or not, and so forth. Relatively little attention has been accorded to the sort of instruments he selected as the bases of his comparative work. To get the full force of this insight, simply ask these questions: what do eros, agape and nomos have in common? What kind of entities are they? We have referred to them as dispositional factors, but, if so, they are aspirational factors that have acquired dispositional instrumentality. They also connote motive forces that connote motivational orientations. Agape, eros, and nomos must be defined as distinctly directed life instincts, or harnessed human energies. How, for instance, can one describe eros without considering what Sigmund Freud said about human psychology, and, specifically, what he said about the workings of libido, which carries direct reference to drives, urges, or, more precisely, emotional and psychic energy? Agape, the word selected to identify the highest form of love, pertains to the ways in which the desires, passions, yes, the energies of attractions are directed, organized, and constellated.

Perhaps I am working too diligently to find appropriate correlates, but I cannot escape the thought that the lecture given in this great university by the great Archbishop, Nathan Soderblom, when he acceded to the professorship in "History of Religions and Theological Pre-notions,"-- I refer to Soderblom's analysis of "Luther's Humor and Melancholy" -- carried certain similarities. That is, both Soderblom and Nygren were focusing on temperamental realities, which reference how the interior life is constituted, how the human organism achieves and expresses character balance, emotional and psychic equilibrium. Isn't this, too, about approaching religion in terms of modalities of consciousness, which most certainly has directly to do with habitual inclinations. And when we push the subject in this direction, we are on firm ground to consider that eros, agape, nomos, anagke, or, for that matter, Buddhist compassion or even the power of the oscillation between "yin and yang" in Asian thought, has to do with temperaments, moods, dispositions, sensibilities, all of which are distinctively dynamic qualities or realities.

My point, once again, is that this discussion makes it apparent that religions are something much more multidimensional and multivalent than being mere sources of religious truth claims. And I believe it is accurate to report that it has been here in Uppsala that hermeneutical considerations of this description have been taken with utmost scholarly seriousness.

Additional Evidence of the Propriety of the Dynamic View

I'd like to go further before drawing the appropriate implications. English ecclesiastical history offers the brilliant example of Cardinal John Henry Newman, who devoted much of his writing to analyses of normative faith. But notice how he approached this subject? When describing the

characteristics of true doctrinal development from false doctrinal development, Newman did something far more than certify the presence of orthodoxies. Rather, he provided criteria of discernment by means of which true doctrinal development could be differentiated from false doctrinal development, and he identified these criteria as "notes." Furthermore, when trying to offer an etiology of belief, Newman focused on an instinct or intuition he called "the illative sense," to distinguish this sense -- indeed, this consciousness, this mode of intelligence -- from, say, reasoning from premises to conclusions or accepting the contents of belief on the basis of empirical evidence.

Why do I cite the insights of John Henry Newman in this context? Because he too approached the subject of religion as a distinct modality of consciousness which exhibited its own intrinsic logic, its own schemata of organization, yes, even its own nuancing characteristics. And Newman's "illative sense," which pertains to the way in which the impulse toward religious belief employs and guides inferential determinations, stands as a compelling example of a dynamic view, which, like the other points of view I have referenced, stands in sharp contrast to the theory/practice distinction I have taken upon myself to sharply criticize.

Time doesn't permit me to run this analysis through the expansion of critiques and symbolic forms that occurred in the Neo-Kantianisms of the Marburg School, under Herman Cohen, Paul Natorp, Ernst Cassirer, and others. But I do wish to pause long enough to pay tribute to Wilhelm Dilthey, whose work stands as basis for much of what Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas subsequently affirmed. Desiring to understand the workings of the human spirit in its utter concreteness, Dilthey came to focus on "lived experiences" and "life relations," which focus led him to consider the specific forms or modes through which the human spirit gains expression.

With details that must be left to another time, I simply want to register that Dilthey provided impressive analyses of "symbolic life forms," which stand as indices into the workings of the process of understanding. As Dilthey put it: "understanding is our name for the process in which mental life comes to be known through expressions of it which are given to the senses." And these expressions, in his view, are "manifestations of life." In the end, Dilthey was approaching a comprehensive "morphology of human understanding," so as to make the inner life of human beings (which he referred to as "the human spirit") transparent. Why consider Dilthey's work in this context? Because he too represents a dynamic point of view that stands in sharp contrast to the theory/practice distinction we are criticizing.

Politics: The Art of Compromise

As I have already indicated, I have not been in politics very long. I was elected last November, and took office in January, so my experience as a Member of Congress is not even a year old. But I have been at it long enough to know without question that politics, as Aristotle reinforced, is the art of compromise, and that the world of politics -- like the other worlds I have referenced today -- carries its own codes of entry, its own means of operation, its own forms of expression and modes of communication. In politics, it is virtually impossible to set one's sights on some absolute ideal, and then try, without loss, reduction, or modification, to instantiate that ideal in the world of particulars. In other words, in politics too this static view of the situation simply does not work. Rather, political achievement or success can only be understood in approximate, graduated, specifically measured terms. Thus, positive political force can only be understood within an intrinsic working context which is shaped dynamically by opposing gives and takes as well as

contrasting, competing, and recurrent systolic aspirations, interests, and intentions. Approved legislation is almost always the product of arrangements in which opposing sides come to terms with what each one most fundamentally desires, which desires are nearly always neither in agreement nor congruence. In this sense, the world of politics qualifies fully to stand as one of the symbolic life-worlds, as one of the "manifestations of life," that Wilhelm Dilthey sought to include in his "morphology of human understanding."

Theology as Life World Analysis and Representation

Let us now turn directly to the subject of theology. If our analysis to this point is substantial, it is entirely appropriate to consider the workings of theology in the dynamic terms in which we have analyzed moods, temperaments, intrinsic powers of reasoning, life forces, emotional and psychic energies, and the like. This is not at all to suggest that the substance of theology reduces to any of these elements or factors. To move in this direction would subvert the profound workings and intentions of theology. But it is to assert that theology, too, is reflective of a dynamic view of the world in which a number of entities and components must be affirmed simultaneously, not all of which are in perfect balance or equilibrium.

My own view is that theological affirmations can hardly be made except within the context of the lived experience of the people for whom theology is a meaningful form of expression and communication. Thus, it is not a matter of starting from some pre-set comprehensive ideological premise, and then working from that high point to less abstract and less theoretical points and places of application. No, this is not how theology ought to work. Rather, the biblical affirmations, the doctrinal statements, the creedal

reference points, the legacy of ongoing critical commentary, together with the verses and songs of the liturgical seasons belong to and are inherent within the broader scheme or mode which represents the life of the people. This collective expression exhibits both apriori and synthetic qualities. On the apriori side lie a host of assumptions and presumptions about how life ought to be lived, how it is to be constituted collectively, what is valued most highly in both individual and collective terms, and what holds all of this together. Some of these assumptions and presumptions can be made explicit. Others are more implicit, as is evidenced by the response to the tragic, tragic Estonia sinking, when citizens processed almost instinctively to their houses of worship as soon as they heard the awful news.

I can tell you that I have keen interest in this subject, because I have spent more than two decades teaching American students about the impact of the Vietnam War. And the event that has influenced my thinking about this comes from the classroom in which I was teaching. One day one of the students in the class, who was a veteran of the War in Vietnam, asked if he might tell the other students what the war was like for him. He told of episode after episode in which there was grave danger and extensive loss of life, concluding this series with a description of a battle in which 500 Americans were reduced to only thirteen. Some 72 hours later he was back in the United States, the war being over for him, when someone accosted him in the airport in Seattle. He had such rage toward his assailant that he went after him the way he had been going at the enemy during the war. Then he told us, "all I wanted was to see my grandfather when I got back home. I wanted him to hold out his arms and welcome me back home." As the veteran was telling this story, one of the students in the class, who, at the age of nineteen, was the same age as the storyteller when he went off to Vietnam,

said: "John Murphy, all of us who are here want to welcome you home today." Yes, I am proposing that it is within this collective life world, this world of what we might call ordinary human experience, that theological affirmations find expression. And they become part of the continuing dynamic process by which this fundamental world is constituted.

Implications

If I am correct in the analysis I have offered, we have a lot of good work to do, and we have only begun to get started. Here's a short list of items on the work agenda:

First, the comparative study of religious traditions to which reference has been made is still a young discipline. But there is no reason why a methodologically circumspect comparative motif-analysis can't do more than it has to date to manifest differences and similarities between the world's religious traditions. The work that I am doing in the United States Congress today, concerning the viability of "human rights" in China, for example, has forced a discussion instead concerning "humanitarian ideals," because of obvious cultural, social, and religious differences. Or, to take an example closer to home, differences between Swedish and American Christianities are remarkably similar to social and cultural differences between Sweden and the United States. Differences between Japanese Buddhism and Buddhism in California reflect differences between Japan and California. In short, a dynamic view of these situations recognizes the formative and integrative power of the interdependencies between symbolic life forms in specific social, cultural and historical situations.

Second, everyone seems to be telling us that we are fast advancing into a post-ideological world, in that human thought and behavior seem to be in decreased dependence upon the dictates of the great ideological isms. This situation invites research and analysis of the prevailing, intrinsic collective life views, and by what means, on what bases, and for what objectives they are being organized. How does one discern what substitutes for ideology in a post-ideological world? Once again, such a question cannot be answered without due regard for the details of the ordinary life world.

Third, by intention and design, theological reflection has been understood to be recuperative, that is, retrospectively analytical. That is, it does not substitute for the matters of faith it seeks to make intelligible; rather, it elucidates this faith. So, we say that theology is "language about" the faith, and not, in a primary sense, the "language of" faith. However, if theology is really composed within a process that is dynamic and multivalent, and if religion is composed of belief, art, music, ethical norms, culture, all somehow working interactively and inter-dependently, then theology can become part of a more deliberately constructive or creative process. That is, theology need not be restricted to being retrospectively analytical, but can also be an instrument in giving shape to the contents of our life together.

This, finally, is where I come out. I see people around the world today searching for ways to include a strong religious component in the way human life is being addressed. I was in China in December, meeting with

students in Beijing, where, over and over again, I heard reference to the need for a "spiritual civilization." When I inquired further, I learned that they are reading Confucius again, Lao Tzu, and the I Ching. A week ago I had conversation with Vaclav Havel, the president of the Czech Republic, who proclaimed that "the era of bipolarity" is over, and the world is now on the threshold of extensive "multipolarity," which means that we must find ways to meet the needs and challenges of the planet as a single human family. Indications such as these are coming from every quarter now, as we approach a period of extraordinary human promise. My own ambition is that the tested wisdom of the ages, embodied in our religious traditions, might come to the forefront of this conversation more and more, in terms that are appropriate to the conversation. And this is why it is important to envision this public discussion in dynamic terms, a matter that is not at all finished, a matter that has not been determined in advance, but a prospect that will be determined by the depth and strength of the truth we bring to it.

This, by the way, is what Uppsala tradition means to me. I came here years ago in search of it, and it has never ever let me down. It is the tradition of Nathan Soderblom, and, of course, of that superlative statesperson, Dag Hammarskjold, and so many others, whose guidance and inspiration I have discovered to be trustworthy. To now be associated with this remarkable tradition in this formal way is a honor I had not anticipated, but for which I and my family will be forever grateful. Thank you very much.