

Review Article

HOLINESS AND CULTURE

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It is a pleasure to introduce this good book to readers, as it was a pleasure to read through it.* The jacket says that Mr. Pelikan, Professor of Historical Theology in the Federated Theological Faculty of the University of Chicago, is one of the distinguished younger scholars of America. A reading of this book will confirm the description that he is distinguished.

The book is essentially a critique of value, that is of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. In fact it is a critique of value from the standpoint of the Holy. The subject-matter of the book is the central ideas of six thinkers, Kierkegaard, Paul, Dostoevsky, Luther, Nietzsche, Bach, each of whom have pointed up 'either the impossibility of equating the Holy with one or another value, or the necessity of subjecting all values to the Holy' (p. ix).

Of these six men, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were clinically insane and because of their very insanity gained insights into the nature of the Holy and knew that it was impossible to domesticate God in a value; the other three, Paul, Luther and Bach, who were not mad in the clinical sense, still 'evidenced madness of the Holy', and represent, so to say, the other side of the relation between God and value: every value has to be subordinated to God, thus allowing value to be reshaped by the Holy.

As the author presents it, each one of these thinkers evidence an identical pattern of development: in his early stages each somehow equated one value or another with God, by treating the ultimate or absolute of that value as the same as God the absolute, but they all reached a point where this equation broke down, as the result, surely, of a direct confrontation with the Holy, and thenceforward began ruthlessly to demolish all of his former equation. They all gave testimony to the utter otherness of the Holy, of God.

KIERKEGAARD

Kierkegaard is studied in the context of the *hubris* of systematic theology. 'To the extent that Christian thought has fallen

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into this (Greek) fallacy of equating knowledge and virtue, it has thereby committed the error of identifying the Holy and the True. It has assumed that a knowledge of certain truths about God provided the knower with a relationship to God he could not otherwise secure, and has made the inoculation of such knowledge its principal aim and purpose' (p. 12). The author tells us that in this kind of confidence in knowledge Christian thought surpassed even the Greek and 'became more guilty of the *hubris* in Greek philosophy than that philosophy itself had been' (p. 12). 'To Soren Kierkegaard must go the distinction of having penetrated more deeply than any other Christian thinker, at least since Luther, into the subtle fallacy of identifying the Holy and the True' (pp. 12-13). Kierkegaard 'had been brought up in a tradition that promised absolute intellectual assurance to its adherents.' To this was added Hegelianism that was, if anything, more extravagant in its claims' (p. 25). This assurance was taken to be 'God's means of granting the certainty of salvation'. But, although Kierkegaard himself disliked systematic theology in any form, the author here suggests that there are ways in which systematic theology can be pursued without lending itself to *hubris*. Thus 'Kierkegaard's realization that the Holy cannot and dare not be identified with the True is a necessary prerequisite for thought and work in systematic theology' (p. 26). As a matter of fact what Kierkegaard has to say relates to the problem of systematic theology; and the burden of his thought is 'the impossibility of thinking from the True to the Holy' (p. 27).

PAUL

In the essay on Paul, the author deals with the problem of thinking from the Holy to the True, which is the constructive problem of theological method. This reversal of procedure is necessary if systematic theology is to be really Christian. Paul had been exposed to the True in Greek thought and to the law in Jewish religion. 'Tempted though he may have been to find a Christ in truth, that is to find the ultimate fulfilment of his existence in the possession of Greek wisdom or Jewish revelation, he nevertheless went beyond the truth of both to the truth which he had found in Christ' (p. 33). But, the author tells us that Paul takes us beyond this. If the first two chapters of Romans impress upon us the impossibility of going through truth to Christ, through the True to the Holy, 'because the truth of law and the truth of being issued only in despair and wrath,' the eighth chapter assures us, 'that given the truth in Christ and the redemption which He offered, somehow all other truth became meaningful, for He was the Lord at whose name every knee had to bow' (p. 48). 'Not through the True to the Holy, then, but given the Holy in Christ, there was no True which did not acquire, by reflected light at least, a radiance and a glory' (pp. 48-49). In this very connection Mr. Pelikan is a little critical of Barth and Brunner. Thus he

writes, 'Whatever one may term it and whatever one may seek to do with it, the plot of the eighth chapter of Romans did contain the makings for an ontology of the second article, asserting as it did that what Christ had assumed was "the likeness of sinful flesh"' (p. 49). But this was expressed by Paul and by others, in 'that almost hymnic period', in liturgy, for 'some of the most profound statements of the Christian faith have been not dogmatic, but liturgical' (p. 51).

Although the True does not lead to the Holy, the Holy leads to the fulness of truth. 'Almost everything which the searchers for truth have tried to find in an equation of the Holy and the True (and more) is available to those who spurn such an equation and seek instead to find the True only dedicating themselves completely to the Holy' (pp. 54-55).

DOSTOEVSKY

In Dostoevsky and Luther we find the Holy ranged against the Good, just as in Kierkegaard and Paul the Holy was pitted against the True. Like the True, the Good has been taken by many as the same as God or the Holy. 'This is the danger confronting anyone who devotes himself to the implications of the Christian faith for the problem of life rather than of thought' (p. 57). Moralism and pietism have always been peculiarly susceptible to this danger, although they, especially the latter, have been perfectly legitimate developments which have 'arisen in protest against a dead orthodoxy' and against barren intellectualism. And although the Good pertains to the practical religion rather than to theological thought, in fact it can, like the True, be traced to Greek philosophy and it has been extremely important in the history of philosophy and theology. Besides it has worked itself into thought and language so completely as to change even the meaning of the word 'holy' into the 'morally good'. Reference is made in this connection to Rudolph Otto's work in establishing the distinctiveness of the Holy as an *à priori* category.

The chapter on Dostoevsky describes the great Russian's discovery 'that sin was primarily not a moral, but a religious fact' (p. 72). Sin is 'the assumption: I am God' (p. 74). Some of the famous characters of Dostoevsky are brought to bear on this. Especially of the Grand Inquisitor he says 'The story of the Grand Inquisitor is easily one of the most profound parables in all literature, and there are many aspects of the faith it enlightens. It is a terrible denunciation of moralism . . .' (p. 78). Some observations of the author about Dostoevsky are so penetrating that they ought to be quoted for the sake of appreciation. 'The ultimate and most profound critique of the identification of the Holy and the Good comes in the realization that the demonic in man transcends the moral sense and the ethical consciousness' (p. 81). 'As a matter of fact accepting and living up to a (moral) code can be and

often is the device by which the demonic ego defends its autonomy against the claims which the Holy lays upon it' (pp. 81-89). 'Dostoevsky may have been mad, but just for that reason he saw through the mask of moralism covering the identification of the Holy and the Good and recognized it as a mark of the Anti-christ' (p. 82).

LUTHER

The discussion on Luther is the sequel to the foregoing. It is observed, 'Though an identification of the Holy and the Good leads to moralism, the Holy does create its own distinctive category of the Good, even as it sets its own particular qualifying mark upon both the True and the Beautiful' (p. 85). The mediaeval tendency to make a God out of goodness was in Luther's eyes one of the basic heresies. After rejecting moralism Luther 'posited a morality in which goodness was absorbed into holiness and thus raised to a higher power' (p. 99). Luther's ethic was, in the words of Mr. Pelikan, an 'ethic of the first commandment'. That which we should really counterpose to sin is not goodness, following the mediaeval fashion, but faith. And faith is not another form of righteousness, but obedience. 'It was obedience to the God who forgave sin, an obedience that accepted the Good from the Source of all Good because it had no good of its own to offer' (p. 99). 'For Luther, the Good became the Holy not by an idolatrous identification of the two, but by inclusion in the obedience of faith' (p. 99). This realization of the genesis of true Good in the Holy required for Luther 'a thorough re-interpretation of the Good as it worked itself out in the context of nature and history' (p. 117).

NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche and Bach are discussed in the context of the effort in history to absorb the Holy into Beauty. 'Like moralism and intellectualism, aestheticism gained currency among the Greeks' (p. 118). 'Greek tragedy embodied the best that Greece was able to discover about the paradox of human life in its relation to the ultimates under which it is lived' (p. 119). This aestheticism of the Greeks persisted in the West and entered into the Christian tradition. 'As Greek Philosophy provided the metaphysical framework within which much of Christian theology was cast, so Greek drama was instrumental in the development of Christian devotional and liturgical forms' (p. 120). This identification of the Holy and the Beautiful was especially seen in mysticism. Even the understanding of pain and suffering was put into the framework of the Beautiful.

It is a good work done by Mr. Pelikan, like several others, to rehabilitate Nietzsche and put him back into the Christian-existential tradition. Nietzsche had been earlier drawn to aestheticism, but later revolted against it in every detail. His work of

trying to destroy the prevailing Christianity was then indeed a very religious work, a battle for the Holy. 'Once he had involved himself in an existential encounter with the Holy, which, like Don Juan, he sought in the Beautiful, there was no retreating and no relenting until the power of the Holy which had been unleashed overwhelmed him. This was no mild flirtation but an overwhelming passion, and once passion was turned to hatred, this too was existential' (p. 137). This insane man, the author thinks, is like the others a "fool for Christ", though he refused to be called a Christian' (p. 143).

BACH

The discussion of Bach follows the pattern, according to which the second of each set is placed as complimentary to the first. In our study of Bach we are to see how from the Holy we can pass to the Beautiful. Here then is 'a possibility of a positive relation between the Holy and the Beautiful, in which the priority of the Holy would itself be productive of an interpretation of the nature of the Beautiful' (p. 145). The beauty of holiness and the holiness of beauty are antipodes. Beauty has to stand in a derivative relation to the Holy and not as genus of holiness in and of itself. It is in this context that the historical significance of Bach becomes clear (p. 146). A brief but good study of Bach's work in music is undertaken to illustrate this point. 'Bach was led by the overpowering mercy and overwhelming grace of the Holy to acknowledge a new dimension of life and value' (p. 171).

Summing up the efforts of men of all ages, particularly of Christian men, to take the Holy captive and to tame it, with their categories of the True, the Good and the Beautiful, the author observes that in fact the Holy 'is not the answer to every riddle but itself the enigma in every riddle', and then goes on to assert that 'the Holy has been made flesh and has dwelt among us in Jesus Christ' (p. 171). This is the stone that the builders rejected, 'but has become instead the corner-stone for the dwelling-place of the Most High and Most Holy, from whom there proceeds all that is True and Good and Beautiful'. Lastly, 'those who have despaired of the effort to domesticate the Holy, those whom He has led to know True and Good and Beautiful in Him—those are the fools for Christ' (p. 172).

SOME COMMENTS

I want to add a few words to this summary by way of comment. At the very start I must admit that this is a good book, one well worth reading. Mr. Pelikan has expanded a single insight into a nearly exhaustive work, and done it in such a good way that he deserves acclaim. It is a book dominated by the Holy, it is a kind of application of that discovery of Rudolph

Otto to six leading thinkers of Christianity, chosen in a fairly representative way.

But because it is a good book it deserves to be criticized. The theme he speaks about is so very true and a Christian thinker can ill afford to neglect it. But because the author is dominated, almost taken hold of, by that theme, by the Holy to be more correct, he permits himself a certain one-sidedness which is to be perceived by the reader who wants edification by reading this book so admirably presented to him. The Holy is pictured sometimes as an existential category, sometimes as an experiential category and sometimes as the uniquely Christian category, and in some places, particularly at the conclusion, as Christ Himself.

In the first place, I find it hard to equate the existential with the experiential. I know that this can be done but only by so defining experience as to change its accepted meaning. But throughout Mr. Pelikan seems to assume that the existential somehow is also the experiential. This identification is reached by treating the existential and the category of the Holy as the same. The Holy has been defined by Otto himself as the *à priori* category of religious experience. This identification is one of the implicit theses (and there are others) in the book, or perhaps one might say this is an omitted thesis. No one has said quite the same before, and it is a thesis in itself, needing a lot of proving, to establish that the existential is the same as the Holy ; surely it is no matter to be assumed and passed over.

In the second place, the author's equation of the Holy with Christ seems much too simple and hence much too complicated. Are Christ and the Holy equivalent to each other without remainder? What is, again, the real content of the Christian faith? The Holy or Christ? Does the historical in Christ come under the category of the Holy? I am aware that the author would answer, as he has already said, that Christ is the Holy become flesh. One can only counter this by asserting that the Holy can be apprehended, and has been apprehended, quite apart from Christ. It seems to me that for none of the things that the author depicts as unique and distinctive of the Holy a knowledge of the historical Christ is indispensable. The book as a whole would give the impression that Christ has been superimposed on the Holy—the Holy itself incidentally is so convincingly portrayed—because Mr. Pelikan is a Christian. But what is the logic that links bindingly the Holy with Christ apart from the historical and empirical reason that the men he is discussing also thought their thoughts in a religious environment that was Christian? This is what the intelligent reader would like to know.

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What I feel about all this I will state below. To talk about the Holy is to talk about God ; and of Christ only by reason of

the identification of Christ with God, which is not an essential implicate of the Holy. To talk about the Holy as Pelikan does is to talk about God theologically (or better, religiously) and is not to talk about God christologically. In other words, what I mean is, while it is an essential and the highest theological or religious category, the Holy is not an essential christological category. To use it so is a mistake.

As the ultimate category of religion the Holy is to be used, as it has been used, by these six men, as the dynamic for the apprehension of Christ. (But we must maintain that they used other categories too.) And yet could we say that the awareness of the Holy is the direct product of the historical events of Christ's birth, death and resurrection? The Holy can be used in other types of religious experience also, as Otto has clearly shown. It is by definition generic. Does this not show that Christ really transcends even this category? The Holy as the highest category of religious experience is the ultimate principle of the inner criticism of metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics as forms of religious experience, as they as such are in turn principles of inner criticism of metaphysics, ethics and aesthetics *per se*. Likewise we may say that the existential is the principle of inner criticism of all experience (this is just to show that the existential is not the experiential) and this includes the Holy. There can be an existential apprehension of the Holy, as in Kierkegaard. Yet Christ transcends even this. Some existential awareness of the Holy, as also some other forms of religious experience, may indeed refer to Christ. But this is only an empirical fact of high historical importance but of no *à priori* and essential significance. By the same token, the experiential aspect of Christ can be inverted. It can be extended beyond the Holy, to the metaphysical, ethical and aesthetic. And yet Christ is not any of these, as Mr. Pelikan himself very lucidly shows.

However, when we speak of experience in this context, it is clear that we use the word in the narrower religious sense, connoting definite events producing objective and indubitable knowledge, and not in the broader sense of empiricist philosophy, as including thinking. If so, do we all at some time or other cut through the veil of unknowing and stand face to face with the Holy and are able to say, 'Now I see, therefore, I Know'?

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In this connection the question of the dynamics of religious life and knowledge seem very serious to me. Where do we begin and how? And who initiates, we or God? I do not want a great deal of talk about God being the initiator and then to notice that it is put up to me to do some beginning. The truth is that I cannot escape the dialectic between God's initiation and mine.

I cannot see the existential resting anywhere in an actual experience (say the Holy) except in so far as the idea of such an experience constitutes a pivotal element in my thinking and talking. Is there then such a thing as existential experiential? My answer is, it cannot be. Maybe my existential is somebody else's experiential, perhaps Paul's, Kierkegaard's or Mr. Pelikan's, but not mine. Yet I know that my all-absorbing thoughts and concerns with the things that Mr. Pelikan is talking about are as though I have experienced and am experiencing them. Yet in all honesty I am not experiencing them directly and objectively as for example the Holy is to be experienced, except through the media of those things that Mr. Pelikan condemns, namely Truth, Goodness and Beauty. These last three are things about which I can think and talk without any special objective experience. The transcendent subject of experience, the Holy, thus appears to me somehow through the integrity of my thought, or if someone would object to the last word, then through the integrity of my self or personality. Thus it appears that the Holy and the integrity of thought or Self, as including Truth, Goodness and Beauty, stand to each other in some relation. This too is dialectical. Mr. Pelikan would allow that these three are legitimate, but maintains that in order to be valid they must come from the Holy and after the Holy has been apprehended. The trouble with this idea is that it makes the relation between the Holy and these three sequential or even chronological rather than dialectical.

The author is concerned to interpret the scandal of Christianity, which he thinks is the Holy. The Holy indeed is a unique religious insight, which surely it has been the portion of the Judeo-Christian tradition to discover and help all the world to see. But once all the world has seen it, they can do without the help of the Judeo-Christian tradition as they manage to do on other insights. Religious insights have no copyright. There is something in the very nature of these insights that makes them communicable without hindrance and assimilable by all without acknowledging copyrights on their discovery. This is indeed the picture that we have seen all along in history, and those of us who live in this country are seeing today. The question can repeatedly be asked, what is the scandal of Christianity? Is it the distinctiveness of its religious insights? I say, no. The only scandal of Christianity is Christ. The old question still remains unanswered, even with Mr. Pelikan's best efforts, 'what think ye of Christ?' Some of these men whom Mr. Pelikan discusses were indeed 'fools for Christ', but not simply because they knew the Holy. For them the realm of history is supremely the medium of God's revelation in Christ. It is this knowledge that makes them 'fools for Christ'. Again there is a difference between 'fools for Christ' and 'madmen for Christ', or better 'madmen for the Holy'.

Now, this critical appraisal of the central arguments of the book is the highest compliment that I pay to the author. He has said something new and provocative and original, quite different from the contents of usual theological dishes. One would like to read more of this author. Lastly, let me say that except on these points that I have raised, I am in complete agreement with him. Mr. Pelikan's is one of the really stimulating books that one nowadays chances to come across.

GRACE

'Does our doctrine of grace abolish free will? That is the last thing we wish to do: on the contrary we establish it the more firmly by this doctrine. Faith does not abolish the law: no more does grace abolish free will: because grace heals the will, by which righteousness is voluntarily loved.'

ST. AUGUSTINE