

PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY IN BAHĀ'Ī STUDIES: SOURCES, METHODS AND FOUNDATIONS; A NOTE TOWARDS AN ORIENTATION OF BAHĀ'Ī THEOLOGY.

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A cursory reading of a number of passages by Shoghi Effendi on the theme of Bahā'ī scholarship may well indicate, either intentionally or otherwise, the pathway to the initial analysis and perhaps the further development of a particular theological interpretive strategy; namely, that of **Rhetoric** or what one could call a **Rhetorical Analysis or Theology**. In a letter, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer in 1934, reference was made to presenting the Bahā'ī Teachings "in a manner that would convince every unbiased observer of the **effectiveness and power** of the Teachings" (BS:2). In 1949 through the medium of another letter to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi asked for "a profound and co-ordinated Bahā'ī scholarship...to attract... at least the thinking world...". Further, and with reference to Bahā'u'llāh's "projected World Order", scholars were again asked to present the Teachings "intelligently and enticingly" (ibid).

In the letters partially cited above then, I suggest was proposed or rather implied, the genesis of a highly fruitful avenue of Bahā'ī theological scholarship, with implications far wider than the Philosophical and Theological scholarship with which this paper is concerned. The focus perhaps, in this proposed analysis, would not be on attempting to isolate the propositional content of the Teachings, nor again on placing the complex network of Bahā'ī beliefs in an asymptotic yet adequate and workable explanatory nexus. Emphasis would be placed on bringing about what has been termed, by one influential analytical strategy, an existential response to, and an interaction with, what is basically a **power-full** message located ultimately, for Scholarship's purposes anyway, in a scriptural **Text**. This presupposes that we not only have the ability, it seems, to understand in varying degrees the conceptual content of the Teachings, within various hermeneutical contexts of understanding, but also the capacity to respond (and interact) in multifarious ways, to a galaxy of genres. This would not be achieved simply through a sustainable re-ordering of thought processes, but in terms of sustained concrete action informed by such a re-ordering. I do not intend, however, to expand here on the framework for a potential **Rhetorical Analysis** of Bahā'ī teachings, or outline a **Rhetorical Theology**. Nor will I relate this potential interpretive strategy to aspects of a contemporary Narrative Theology, Practical Theology, or Homiletics, in the process of development by Christian theologians at present. The intention is simply to indicate what I believe to be a pathway for a valuable theological and philosophical approach to the Bahā'ī teachings. Shoghi Effendi's brief but pregnant remarks on a scholarly discourse of *effectiveness, power, attraction* and *enticement*, seem not only to home in on the performative nature of particular aspects of certain Bahā'ī texts. They also focus on a potential strand of scholarly discourse based on, or even better, extending somehow the performative nature -- the effect such a discourse engenders through power and performance -- to bring

about sustained and sustainable patterns of action (the Bahā'ī life?). A question is also raised as to the rhetorical aspects of the writings of the Bāb, Bahā'u'llāh, 'Abdu'l-Bahā and also Shoghi Effendi -- worthy, I think, of further research. Also, and of more than theoretical interest would be the thematising of the Narrative aspects of certain secondary Bahā'ī historical sources (cf. *Tārīkh-i Zarandī / The Dawn-Breakers and God Passes By*).

The title of this paper "Philosophical Theology in Bahā'ī Studies.." may seem a little out of place at this stage of the paper, given that so far we have dealt (if only very briefly) with the possibility of a Rhetorical Theology based on a few remarks by Shoghi Effendi. This has been deliberately done in order to highlight, as far as possible, the nature and method of Philosophical Theology and perhaps also to undermine some of Philosophical Theology's strategies in relation to a general Bahā'ī Theological enterprise. My aim, as stated, is to indicate in a very general fashion the orientation of an emergent Bahā'ī Theology by looking at certain developments that have grounded Christian Theological strategies. I would suggest that there are structural similarities between the Bahā'ī Faith and Christianity that may lend themselves to similar thematising; though there is certainly, on the face of it, less narrative in the primary Bahā'ī Texts, than say in the Hebrew Bible and large portions of the New Testament. The generality of the paper and its wide-ranging programmatic approach will lead inevitably to a blurring of some of the issues touched upon. All in all, as the sub-heading indicates, what follows is a note on the general orientation of Bahā'ī Theology through an analysis of the notions of Sources, Methods and Foundations; detailed work will of course come later.

Firstly though, a brief note about Philosophical Theology: As a discipline within the genus Theology¹, Philosophical Theology² comprises a fairly diverse set of pursuits. It has developed, specifically in the

¹ The word Theology, particularly Christian Theology, covers a vast area of study. Simply put I call it the articulation of the description, meaning and truth of a particular religious tradition. This demarcates it to some degree from the Phenomenology of Religion and the Philosophy of Religion; the former is largely a descriptive discipline, the latter a discipline whose evaluative criteria are coincident with its methodology, and whose quest for clarity and understanding is not a particularly religious quest. Refer though, to my proviso concerning audience. Although I have said that Theology is the articulation of the meaning and truth of a particular religious tradition, it is on the whole the articulation of particular aspects of various traditions. There is though the discipline of Systematic Theology which attempts to cohere all aspects of the Christian experience in an interrelated theological discourse. Otherwise what we have is a terrain of theologies qualified in certain ways by their particular objects of study i. e. doctrines, symbols, human experience, natural phenomena, audience. For a concise account of theology see D.F. Wright, *Theology* in S.B. Ferguson and D.F. Wright (eds.), *New Dictionary of Theology*, (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press / Illinois: Downers Grove, 1989) pp. 680-681.

² Philosophical Theology is a major part of Theology insofar as it is that aspect of Theology which attempts to ground the intelligibility, rationality and meaning of its particular subject matter in structural features that are considered to be given with human experience. In this way Philosophical Theology attempts to isolate the abiding features of its data, and shows that these abiding features are consonant and continuous (= participate in?) with the

West, over the period of over a millennium and a half as a function of a conceptually refined dialogue with and an interrogation of Christian, Jewish and Islamic texts; both the primary sources (Hebrew Bible + New Testament, Qur'ān and "sound" hadīth) and the voluminous secondary reflections on primary sources (devotional, pedagogical and analytical texts).

I need not go into any major detail concerning the origins of this refined interrogative method. What needs to be stated, however, is that such a method was not, at the end of the day, simply the transposition of the methodologies and conclusions of "mature" and dominant conceptual systems (Pre-Socratic-Platonic-Aristotelian-Philonic-Neo-Platonic-Augustinian) onto and into a group of religious traditions. It was rather, that such a method was itself the result of a sustained and tense dialogue between these dominant conceptual systems and the novel metaphysical and epistemological interpretive elements of a revealing Transcendence and a cognitive and affective Faith-as-trust (elements which were unknown to these major influential conceptual systems).

The resultant tension lay between what were virtually two "conceptualities". One, deriving its authority and coordinates from what was certainly believed to be the actual occurrence of divine revelation "recorded" in multivalent texts and subsequently received in a subjective cognitive-affective response. The other deriving from a systematic application of a human-centred trusting sense of wonder and inquiry, expressed as far as possible, after a process of rigour, in indicative sentential form to assert propositions; thereby supposedly gaining insight into the nature(s) of the manifold objects of wonder and inquiry.

It is this continuing and rigorous relationship with the propositional content of both the primary and secondary sources of Judaism, Christianity and Islam which demarcates Philosophical Theology from the subject of Philosophy of Religion. The latter has developed as a more general, non-aligned approach to the propositional content of primary and secondary sources, often abstracting from the evocative force of particular doctrinal formulations. It has also tended to reflect on traditions other than Judaism, Christianity and Islām, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Chinese religions, but this has been a relatively recent development. It may be the case though, that Philosophical Theology and Philosophy of Religion are finally demarcated by the type of audiences to which they have been historically tailored, and not by their subject matter(s) or methodology. Philosophy of Religion, moreover, has generally developed in an academic environment, but this is not to say that it has developed out of purely academic interests! Philosophical Theology moreover, also differs from the Roman Catholic studies of **Fundamental**

of the world and human experience.

Theology³ (the inheritor of the traditional task of Apologetics with the contemporary emphasis on Praxis) and **Natural Theology**. The primary intention of **Philosophical Theology** is not to commend a particular religious formulation to a situation "outside" of the religious tradition under analysis (a never ending "modern" situation). Neither does it attempt to commend a particular religious tradition through a response to questions posed by a contemporary human subjectivity. Such a commendation is often done after showing that what the religious formulation presupposes and / or proposes, remains credible in the light of "modern thought". Neither again, is it an attempt at demonstrating the existence of a Transcendent Ground from so-called evidences within creation and apart from appeals to Revelation and Mystical Experience (suspensions of normal consciousness).

Philosophical Theology, is, however, continuous with the project of **Fundamental Theology** in so far as it attempts to lay bare both the conceptual content (and its presuppositions) of a text through the use of a method and a syntax "shorn" as much as possible of evocative, elliptical, parabolic, persuasive, metaphorical, symbolic, litigious, promotional and all the other tropical devices available in discourse -- what has come to be called a rational discourse of clarity and intelligibility, which informs rational method i.e. Rationality! This laying bare by **Philosophical Theology** is more than a basic though vital phenomenological recovery. It is more than the synchronic determination of the logical geography of concepts (pace Ryle), either by locating and then highlighting occurrences in particular texts, or relating occurrences across a matrix of texts. Neither is it a diachronic attempt at a historical geography of concepts (relating concepts across time). It is though, an attempt at showing the rational structure of the text under analysis. Moreover, by exhibiting the structure underlying a particular text **Philosophical Theology** can, hopefully, retrieve the singular or polysemous meaning(s) of the text; though on the whole it has to be said, that **Philosophical Theology** is (and to some degree remains) uncomfortable with the notion of polysemy. Thus we could say that the dual themes of text -- meaning⁴ and text -- rationality⁵

³The Protestant Theologian Gerhard Ebeling has however, proposed the development of a Fundamental Theology as a discipline within Protestant Theology. He states that 'Fundamental Theology should be broadened to a total theological conversation that can never be only an inner-theological conversation' *The Study of Theology*, (London: Collins, 1979), p.161.

⁴ Meaning is a term with many associations and a vast Philosophical literature has been devoted to the development of a number of Theories of Meaning. One influential theory called the Referential Theory (also called the Naming Theory) locates the meaning of words or sentences (which have meaning as a function of the words which comprise them) in what the words or sentences stand for--either a physical, mental or abstract entity. Another well known theory, that associated with Wittgenstein, explains meaning in terms of use -- the issue here though is whether Use Theories involve attention to actual use or rules for use. Contemporary Theories however, give the meaning of a term or sentence as giving their truth-conditions. We can see how closely related the Theory of Meaning is to the Theory of Truth. A sentence expresses a particular thought because of our ability to detach its truth-

condition the task(s) of **Philosophical Theology**.

If then the task of **Philosophical Theology** is not to commend a particular religious affirmation or a particular religious tradition it seems, therefore, that we have to accept to some degree a dialectical understanding of its role, operating (in logical space) in two directions simultaneously:

A) As a specific interpretive strategy **Philosophical Theology** directs itself to a singular or

conditions from its grammatical and syntactic structure, through understanding the conventional linguistic practices which determine the appropriate utterance of the sentence. Following Frege's analysis of Sense (Sinn) and Force (Kraft), the sense(s) of a sentence are those factors which relate it to a certain state of affairs over and above the sentence. The force of a sentence is that which determines the conventional significance of a sentence in relation to the state of affairs associated by sense i.e. asserting, commanding, wishing that the state of affairs obtains (cf. Dummett, M. *Truth and Other Enigmas*, London: Duckworth Press, 1973). In a Theological context, it is for Bahā'ī Theologians to see whether the above analysis is helpful or not. There may well be mileage in an analysis of the adjective 'meaningful', where we can talk of someone realising that their life is no longer meaningful, or where an object or project means something to someone, is very much worth having or doing. In the first case we say that the point of a persons life has, for them, dissappeared; that a significance which was there is there no longer. In the second case, an object or project means something insofar as it has a value for that person, is integrated into their needs and plans. It is perhaps these senses of meaning that may provide the groundwork for a Theology of Meaning, though it is important for Bahā'ī's Interested in Philosophical Theology to be familiar to some degree with the Philosophical analyses of Meaning. Cf. the collection of influential essays by Parkinson, G.H.R. (ed.), *The Theory of Meaning*, London: Oxford University Press, 1978. See also the seminal essay by H.P. Grice, 'Meaning' in Strawson, P, *Philosophical Logic*, London: Oxford University Press, 1967.

⁵ Rationality, again is a theme with a vast literature, particularly in the Sociology of Knowledge and the analysis of Rational Action and Decision Theory. Philosophers on the other hand, have tended to deal with the terms Reason and Reasonableness as they appear in sentences. For our discussion we can bridge these concepts by saying, simply, that Rationality is Reason in thought and action. 'Abdu'l-Bahā speaks of Reason as an historically conditioned criterion (*mizān*) of human knowledge (n.b. PUP pp. 21, 254, 356-357; SAQ pp. 297-298); thereby emphasizing the historicity of reason. As a criterion, reason or rationality, has been considered as an authority, standard or foundation, whose final court of appeal lies in the so-called faculty of reason or some kind of intellectual intuition. Such a faculty or intuition supposedly generates clear and distinct ideas (pace Descartes) as raw material for Rational thought and / or Rational action. Rationality then, can be said to be tied to the notion of Justification. A major issue in the explication of Rationality has been the idea of self-reference. Briefly, the setting up of a standard would seem to require that the standard itself be justified somehow! There has been much discussion on this. I follow, provisionally at least, W. W. Bartley's account of what he calls Pancritical Rationality, which is basically a non-justificational account of Rationality unlimited with regard to criticism. What he suggests is the development of an ecology of Rationality which is basically an environment that promotes creativity and avoids error as far as possible. Again this has been the subject of much debate, and we must be familiar with this and other various theories of Rationality that have been developed. 'Abdu'l-Bahā's view of the historicity of Rationality is helpful, and his view of Reason (Rationality) as a sort of cognitive map (n.b. BWF p.383) may be of assistance in our understanding of the role of Tropes in language. This last point is how I read the passage in *Bahā'ī World Faith*. For a detailed account of Rationality cf. Radnitzky G. & Bartley W.W.(Eds.), *Evolutionary Epistemology Rationality and the Sociology of Knowledge*, (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1987); see especially Bartley's chapter 'Theories of Rationality' pp. 205-214. Cf. Wilson, B., *Rationality*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971). Also of value is Alfred Schutz's classic paper 'The Problem of Rationality in the Social World', *Economica* 10, (1943), pp. 130-149, and Garfinkle, H., 'The Rational Properties of Scientific and Common-Sense Activities', in Giddens, A., (Ed.) *Positivism and Sociology*, (London: Heinemann, 1975) pp. 53-75.

polysemous(!) text. It then attempts to lay bare as clearly as possible the meaning(s) of specific terms and sentences (the propositions and concepts they express) in order to:

- 1) understand their function(s)-use(s) as elements of description, explanation, and prescription as they cooperate in building particular World-views;
- 2) to show the intelligibility of meanings (their Rationality or Reasonableness);
- 3) to ascertain as clearly as possible the truth-value and truth-conditions⁶ of the propositions and concepts under examination;

B) As an interpretive strategy, **Philosophical Theology** will attempt to transmit the insights it has derived from scrutinizing Bahā'ī texts, to the so-called modern situation, through the medium of its specific style and method(s). Such a transmission is done in order to bring about increments in understanding of the human situation within, through and by the texts. Put in another, and perhaps more illuminating way, **Philosophical Theology**, as noted, goes beyond exhibiting a phenomenological geography of concepts in Bahā'ī texts. It tries to clarify the semantic role of concepts both within the movement of the text and within (here is a point of vital importance) the wider drive towards the Correlation (pace Shoghi Effendi) of Bahā'ī "... beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world" (BS:3). Also of relevance, by way of example, is the flow of argument in Bahā'u'llāh's *Lawh-i hikmat (Tablet of Wisdom)*; TB:137-52), which in the authors opinion is a sustained piece of such Correlation; not, however, between two structurally different orders i.e. Revelation and the "contemporary" human situation or human consciousness, but of Revelation and a human situation or a human consciousness that is unaware, through lack of proper attention maybe (has it forgotten?), that it is already oriented towards Transcendence.

⁶ Questions concerning Truth have played an important part in Philosophy, often giving rise, and certainly in the contemporary context, to a detailed logical analysis of sentences in which the word True or Truth appear. When a proposition or statement is said to have Truth-value it is capable of being True or False. The Truth-conditions of a proposition or statement are the conditions which must be satisfied if the proposition or sentence is True; that is, True or Truth is related to something being or not being the case; obtaining in some way. Questions are also raised concerning the role of Justification, adequate Evidence and Warrant, about what it is that makes something the case. Just as contemporary Theories of Meaning have tended to focus on the meaning of statements or propositions and rarely on meaningfulness as a discernable pattern in human experience. Similarly, Theories of Truth in contemporary Analytical Philosophy have concentrated on the Truth of propositions and not on the experience of authenticity and practical vision in a more holistically conceived human life; something Existentialist Philosophy noted some years ago. For an overview of the various Theories of Truth see the articles in Edwards P. (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, (New York: Macmillan & Free Press, 1967).

Interrelated objects of inquiry in a Bahā'ī Philosophical Theology would involve, through a close reading of Bahā'ī texts (both Primary and Secondary):

- The nature of God (Transcendence, Immanence) and the question of grounds; the nature and role of the Manifestation of God; the nature and function of Revelation; the examination and clarification, as far as possible, of the conceptualities utilised by the central figures of the Bahā'ī Faith, when they are referring to Transcendence, World and Human nature; questions of Theodicy i.e. questions concerning the power of God;
- Questions of Metaphysics: exhibiting and assessing categorial frameworks as expressed in Bahā'ī Texts i.e. fundamental categories such as being, essence, existence, qualities, space and time, nature, cause and effect, contingency, necessity, universals; questions of Cosmology etc. Metaphysics is certainly a broad field and its implications will spill over into the other areas of research outlined here;
- The analysis of religious experience and revelation as co-relative mediums of encounter; evaluating the nature and role of mystical experience and religious experience in general, in relation to a practical ethical-spiritual demand; the nature and role of Grace;
- The analysis of the structure, meaning and use of Religious Language (if such a concept can be delineated) and even language in general as it directs itself to explicating religious phenomena. This is a vital area of research and would involve an attempt at discerning the complex polysemous nature (and use) of this language, through a difficult but rewarding analysis of (and response to) its tropic, performative and literal senses and uses. Again, such research may be focused on the language of a particular text or its parts, or may extend to proposals about the general nature(s) of Religious Language cf. a post-modern theological emphasis on the metonymical character of religious discourse over the popular trope of metaphor. Another important area of study would involve highlighting as far as possible (without committing the genetic fallacy) the various strata of conceptual schemes in Bahā'ī texts that are themselves functions of an already historically thematised analytical strategy i.e. Platonic, Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, Scholastic (Christian, Jewish and Islamic), Illuminationist et al.

- Questions about the structures of human nature over and above indications provided by an empirically and behaviourally based Psychology; questions on the Soul, Spirit and Mind; the nature of personal eschatology;
- Questions of Epistemology, Meaning and Truth: the nature of the various knowledge-claims made in the texts; the nature of presuppositions; epistemic justification; the important question of whether knowledge has Foundations (modest or otherwise); the role and ratification of criteria and the evaluation of truth-claims; the structure of Faith (what are the pre-ambles to Faith (if any), what is the role of will in Faith); questions concerning the relativity of Knowledge and Belief; the relation between the Intentionalities of Knowledge, Faith and Belief (cognitivity / non-cognitivity); the relative weight of "knowing-how" and "knowing-that"; the vital question of the scope and nature of Rationality -- what notion is presupposed in Bahā'ī texts? (n.b. the post-modernist critique of the historical hegemony of Dialectic over Rhetoric); the need to be familiar with and to harness the positive aspects of the theory and practice of Deconstruction (it will not go away, even though the word itself may have been considerably overused in some circles, especially in the work of some American Literary Theorists!);
- Questions on the nature of history as the arena of God's Self-communication (beautifully brought into relief by Søren Kierkegaard's question of how a moment in time can have eternal significance?);
- Questions of Ethics and Human action (cf. 'Abdu'l-Bahā's emphasis of the role of knowledge in the evaluation of action SAQ: LXXXIV); Questions of Value;
- Questions of Aesthetics, Aesthetic experience and Aesthetic responsibility;
- Questions concerning the relationship of the above areas to similar areas in other religious traditions. Of particular interest to the author would be the attempt at relating Bahā'ī Metaphysics and Epistemology to the same areas in Buddhism and Taoism. Others may focus on aspects of Christianity or Islam or any Tradition whatever, provided that the Tradition in question is reflexive and has attempted to conceptualise its self-understanding. Such an attempt at relating could ground a Bahā'ī contribution to the lively contemporary debate on Religious Pluralism;
- Questions of a reflexive nature i.e. questions on Method and Foundations in a Bahā'ī **Philosophical Theology**. Is there finally one Method and one Foundation?;

- Questions on the relationship between a Bahā'ī **Philosophical Theology** and other related areas of academic interest i.e. a reflective natural science, mathematics, psychology, sociology, linguistics and anthropology et al. What does a Bahā'ī **Philosophical Theology** presuppose; indeed a Bahā'ī Theology in general?;
- Further questions of a reflexive nature involving work on the nature of the audience to which a Bahā'ī **Philosophical Theology** is directed. Is such a Theology structurally related to specific types of audience (Academy, Bahā'ī Community, Society) as a function of a particular syntactical style and method, or are its insights relatable to a broad spectrum of audiences (even a universal audience!).

This brief list indicates then, in broad fashion, the areas of study for a Bahā'ī **Philosophical Theology**. It is important to stress at this point that the enterprise of **Philosophical Theology** is a collaborative one in so far as it is firmly tied to the availability and continuing emergence of its main resource; namely, Bahā'ī texts and secondary reflections. This availability and emergence of resources will often demand a close working relationship with Scholars in Bahā'ī Textual Studies, History and History of Ideas as well as Bahā'īs working in Islāmic, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Chinese Studies. It goes without saying that there will also be a primary and necessary collaboration with Philosophical, Theological, Linguistic and Literary Studies.

Theological Method, Sources and the question of Foundations

I will refer briefly to some aspects of decision-making within a Christian Theological enterprise in order to highlight some important issues on Method, Sources and Foundations, though anyone who has read the appropriate texts will see that similar issues have been dealt with in varying degrees within Jewish, Islamic and Hindu theologies and even within Buddhist religious conceptual analysis.

Theology as a progressive specialisation within the shift towards systemisation has been seen as an attempt at thematising a text-based religious life of enactment; a life which itself is characterised by varying degrees of conscious awareness and reflexivity. Catalytic, to some degree, within this systemisation of Theology have been the deep-rooted changes and challenges that have occurred in the extra-textual cultural context in which Theology has done its work, the general dialectical nature, of which, has been mentioned earlier. Concrete historical examples of such major influential changes and challenges on a Christian theological enterprise have been, for example, the influence of Hellenism in early A.D., the mysticism of Augustinian reflections, the appeal of Aristotelianism in the Middle Ages, the

far reaching implications of the Enlightenment (late 17th century onwards) and the awareness of, and dialogue with other major Religious Traditions. Further recent developments in Natural Sciences, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Linguistics and Politics, including the challenges from within the confines of Christianity itself by Christian theologians affirming particular commitments i.e. in Feminism (Feminist Theologies), Black Theologies, Liberation Theologies, Inter-Faith Dialogue, Narrative Theologies, Post-Modern Theologies, Ecumenism and the new Jewish-Christian Dialogue have effected far-reaching changes.

As a result of such sustained changes and challenges (= developments?), theologians in the contemporary period, have to varying degrees been forced (as had their forebears) to re-examine their method(s), that is, the approaches that they have adopted with respect to their subject matter -- what is technically called Theological Method. Moreover, most contemporary discussions of Theological Method have also centred on questions relating to the sources of Theology i.e. the material objects of inquiry, which in turn lead to important questions concerning the role of Foundations in the Theological enterprise. Foundations significantly, are considered as Sources seen under a particular aspect; that of providing some sort of epistemic justification for theological assertions. Developments in the understanding of the questions pertaining to Method (= approaches) and Sources (= objects of inquiry) are related inasmuch as attention to both Method and Sources through recurrent practice yields results of a particular, significant and relevant sort. Christian Theology has exhibited, promoted and explicated a variety of sources and starting-points for its activity of systematic specialisation. Among sources an important and basic starting-point has been the texts of the Old (Hebrew Bible) and New Testaments. As far back as the 4th cent. C.E. the theologically significant figure of Athanasius (c.298-373) affirmed that "knowledge of religion and of the truth about the universe" could be discovered directly "from the words of...the sacred and divinely inspired scriptures".⁷ The emphasis on Scripture as the primary source was allied though, to the growing acceptance of official pronouncements from the Church's teaching authority -- the Magisterium. Although Scripture was considered materially sufficient, that is, complete in itself and in need of no supplementation, it was nevertheless considered formally insufficient; that is, Scripture required authoritative and normative interpretation through the continuing interpretive presence of the successive authoritative and normative teaching of the Church. Such a continuing process of

⁷ *Contra Gentes* 30 in Thomson, R.W. (ed. & trans.) *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). For an overview of the issues see, Lane, A.N.S. *Scripture, Tradition and Church: An Historical Survey*, *Vox Evangelica*, 9, (1975) pp. 37-55. Cf. also Rahner, K. "Scripture and Tradition" and 'Scripture and Theology' in *Theological Investigations* Vol. 6 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd), 1974, pp. 89-98 and 98-113.

interpretation in combination with a textual and oral residue (provided by saints and scholars and also requiring continuing interpretation) gave rise to a second major Source for theological analysis; namely, Tradition. The Reformation, however, initiated in the 16th century, brought with it a serious critique of Tradition. The focus of the critique, though, was not on Tradition utilised as a conceptual resource for Theology (the Reformation, in fact, accepted Tradition as an assist to Scripture) but on Tradition utilised as an ideological mandate for the successive authoritative role of the Roman Church in that period. However, the precise nature of the Protestant critique is irrelevant. What is significant was a growth in the acceptance of a resource alongside Scripture; a further Source for theological analysis.⁶

Christianity, Islam and post-Exilic Judaism originated and developed in the vicinity of societies whose cognitive and affective hierarchy and outlay had seemingly not been influenced by the notion of a revealing Trancendental Word. Most certainly the Graeco-Roman world had been dominated in part by a mythic and mythopoeic conciousness. The growth and development however, of certain other human capacities brought the diverse complexity of Muthos (story) in stark contrast to Logos (reason, word, mind). Other seemingly cognitive relations were also called into question and came to be contrasted with Logos, namely Phantasia (imagination), Mimesis (imitation), Aisthesis (perception) and Doxa (belief, opinion). The basic thrust of the development of a logos-based approach to experience was the desire to establish (= recognise?) a pattern and relatedness, that is, an ordering of experience as object-of-inquiry. Rationality (Logos in thought and action) became an ethical norm for the Platonic Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. A vital corollary (with ontological implications) of what could be styled a "microcosmic" rationality was the further acceptance of what was virtually an isomorphic "macrocosmic" rationality -- a rationality structurally embedded in the cosmos as an imminent principle of order and exemplified through regularity, pattern and repetition. The regularity and order of the cosmos had been observed for a long time, though the origin of such order had often been the subject of dispute. Plato's cosmological text *Timaeus*, in fact posited dual causes for the orderliness of the cosmos, namely, Mind (Logos) and necessity. For Plato though, the rationality of the cosmos was an external imposition of form on matter. Aristotle's own depiction of a universe stuctured by ends carried on the belief in the pervasive

⁶ On Sources see, Hodgson, P. and King, R. (eds.), *Readings in Christian Theology*, (London: SPCK, 1985), also Galloway A.D. (ed.) *Basic Readings in Theology*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1964). See also, Graf Reventlow, H., *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, (London: SCM Press, 1984); Reid, J.K.S., *The Authority of Scripture: A Study of the Reformation and Post-Modern Understanding of the Bible*, (Westport: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1981); Uffenheimer, B. and Graf Reventlow, H., *Creative Biblical Exegesis, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 59*, 1988; Morgan, R. with Barton, J., *Biblical Interpretation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

and peculiar nature of Rationality. Rationality not only exemplified itself in cosmic structures and in the action of a Rational person, but also in a type of language utilised as a medium of Rational analysis. The tropical use of language was also recognised, especially and specifically exemplified in Poetry, but was considered as a secondary linguistic medium liable to distort reality. The tension between such an approach to experience and a set of religious traditions which emphasised the primary role of authoritative revealed texts, is well documented from the early Middle Ages onwards under the rubric of Faith and Reason. By the High Middle Ages, Aristotelianism as a method and conceptual resource, informed much of the analysis pertaining to the Natural World, Language and Religion. This persistent though not unopposed application of rationality was allied with the effective rise in mathematical analysis and experimental sciences operating viably in "mandated territory" endorsed by the Reformation.

The ensuing Enlightenment period witnessed a gradual breakdown of traditional authority structures. It was an accumulation of a number of things. Basically of questions about what were hitherto unquestionably held to be sources of authority in many spheres of human experience. The growing natural and experimental sciences opened up on a vast arena of potential data, thereby implicitly questioning the authority of the Church (both Roman and Protestant). Increased trading brought to light textually and conceptually rich cultures, and the notion of a religiosity more "natural" to humanity, somehow more basic than the revealed Religions implicitly questioned Christianity's claim to be the sole medium of Transcendence. A slowly emerging historical criticism contributed to a growing appreciation of the historicity of human understanding, something Classical culture did not appreciate with its emphasis on norms, imitation and universality. The systematic exercise of reason coupled with an awareness of the role of sensory experience in the writings of Philosophers and Cultural critics put into serious question the cognitive (and thereby the authoritative) hierarchy presupposed and imposed by the Church and State. An emerging Empirical approach alongside a Rationalism of clear and distinct ideas demanded, in fact, as far the proponents were concerned, actually exhibited the structure of a human nature belonging to humanity by natural right, as well the structures of the ever widening natural world and cosmos. Basically a third source for Theology was emerging, namely, human experience under the guise of a serious, rigorous and systematic inquiry into virtually everything!

Even though I have briefly highlighted three major Sources for a Christian Theology, there are similarities with "theo"-logical enterprises in other religious traditions. In Islām the Qur'ān and hadīth (compiled by al-Bukhārī and Muslim) function on the interface between Scripture and Tradition. The supposedly experientially grounded texts of Sufism and the analytical works of the Islamic Philosopher-Polymaths and Scientists matches to some degree the Human Experience Source. Within Hinduism the

Śruti / Smṛti distinction; that is, the distinction between authoritative utterance (oral and textual revelation) and indirect or secondary "revelation" is similar to the Scripture / Tradition sources. The later Upanishads and Yogic writings provide material arising from a more experientially oriented milieu, which could be equivalent to the human experience source? Buddhism, however, does not fit the pattern so easily. Three major Canons comprise what could be called Scripture, that is the Pali Tipitaka, the Chinese Tripitaka and the Tibetan Kanjur and Tanjur. The innumerable commentaries and manuals could well be considered a Tradition of commentary on the Canons. Human Experience as a source derives directly from the teachings of the Canons themselves, which claim to be functions of a wider human experience and the result of a systematic application of reason (and, certainly in the Abhidhammapitaka, a much more expanded notion than the Western Logos).

To treat Human Experience, then, as a source for Theology in contemporary Western Theology means that the results of the increasing specialisation within a wide variety of disciplines (in the arts and the natural and human sciences) in the 19th and 20th centuries were, and are, very seriously considered to provide cumulative insights into the structures of human nature, culture and the natural world. Consequently, twentieth century Theology in the West has undergone a series of major methodological revisions in response both to methodological developments in non-theological disciplines and to internal discussions concerning the theological role of the sources we have outlined.

I will, very briefly, comment on what I consider to be the major methods (approaches) in Theology. What follows is highly programmatic and in no way does justice to the obvious complexity of such Theologies.

Method and sources are related. Method presupposes a prior evaluation of the sources in terms of their prospective role in Theological analysis, and in their turn sources require a patterning in terms of recurrent and related operations, i.e. method(s), if they are to be useful objects of Theological inquiry. Generalisations may or may not be heuristic. In the case of twentieth century theology, a useful generalisation is to highlight the relative emphases on particular sources utilised by, what are by now familiar Theologies. For example, Orthodox Theologies rely heavily on Scripture and Tradition remaining as faithful as possible, in their pronouncements, to the explicit meaning of the Scriptural texts and Traditional documents. Theological Methods are generally exegetical in nature and tied directly to the task of explicating an unambiguous revealing Word expressed in doctrinal form (though of course contradictions in scripture had been recognised for centuries). Liberal Theologies, on the other hand, as inheritors of certain coordinates of the Enlightenment, place a high value on culture and human experience as correlatives of religious faith. The understanding of Scripture and Tradition is considered

to be rooted in a universal religious consciousness rather than purely in an "unambiguous" and historically conditioned revealing Word. The texts of Scripture and Tradition moreover, become subject to an historical-critical method. Neo-Orthodox or Dialectical Theologies, as a "union" of Reformation and Liberal Theological tendencies emphasise the radical otherness of Transcendence, while accepting a variable and qualified role for human experience. The breakdown of cultural promise in Europe contiguous with developments leading to and including the First World War put paid to any belief in an abiding and inherent value in human experience and its various cultural expressions. Theological analysis in Neo-Orthodox Theologies revolves around bringing the decision of faith into focus -- a decision structured ultimately by the gracious activity of God. Related to the Liberal Theologies are the far-reaching analyses provided by Hermeneutical Theologies. The major aspect of Hermeneutical Theologies is the attempt at securing a valid interpretation of texts through emphasising the role of understanding as a fundamental structure of human nature. Recognition of the familiar concept of the Hermeneutical Circle as a proper description of the conditioning structure of interpretation focusses on the interplay between the inquiring human subject and a text(s). As with Liberal Theology, human experience is treated by Hermeneutical Theologies as isonomic to the texts of Scripture and Tradition under analysis, and it is generally a text that is the subject of such analysis. The theological programme developed initially by the major Protestant theologian Paul Tillich constitutes a markedly significant contribution to Theological Method. In general terms the method of Correlation, as his method is known, involves the task of correlating human questions (generated out of a philosophically, culturally and existentially reflexive consciousness) with Transcendental answers provided by an analysis of the symbolic power of the Gospels. Irrespective of the criticisms that have been levelled at Tillich, Correlation Theologies take as pivotal the role of a reflexive Human Experience and Culture (=Western!) as the starting point for a contemporary theological inquiry. Likewise Liberation, Feminist, Narrative and Post-modern Theologies, in their particular ways also emphasise aspects of succesively expanding human experience as a major conditioning point of departure for their analyses.⁹

The question of Theological Method is related to the question of sources. It is though more properly a question of proportionality, that is, the weight a theologian gives to the sources, with respect to the questions asked and the objects of inquiry attended to. Likewise the question of proportionality can also be directed at Method(s). As a point of entry into the discussion of Method I will use a preliminary notion

⁹See Livingstone J.C., *Modern Christian Thought, From the Enlightenment to Vatican II*, London: Collier Macmillan, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co..

that is initially context independent. With characteristic clarity the Catholic Philosopher Bernard Lonergan states that,

"A method is a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations yielding cumulative and progressive results. There is a method, then, where there are distinctive operations, where each operation is related to others, where the set of relations forms a pattern, where the pattern is described as the right way of doing the job, where operations in accord with the pattern may be repeated indefinitely, and where the fruits of such repetition are, not repetitious, but cumulative and progressive"¹⁰

Lonergan is concerned here with establishing a Transcendental (in both a Scholastic and a Kantian sense) analysis of Theological Method, that is he is attempting to show the conditions for the possibility of any method whatever operating on any set of data whatever. As Lonergan states, his is a "concern that is both foundational and universally significant and relevant" (ibid. p.14). I will comment on this point concerning foundations shortly.

The preliminary notion of method (Lonergan's phrase) as a normative pattern of recurrent and related operations might seem a little mechanical and algorithmic were it not for the role that he gives to "insight", "discovery" and "probability" as factors conditioning "progressive and cumulative results" (p.6). Lonergan has his own aims in discussing Theological Method, but his preliminary notion of method is helpful insofar as it highlights the theologian's attempt at patterning (=method) data (=sources) systematically.

Again, because of the programmatic nature of this paper, I can only briefly mention what I consider the major modes of patterning (= methods) which have been utilised in theological inquiry.

The use of inductive and deductive generalisations as a general method applicable to Scripture and Tradition, has conditioned theological practice for centuries. Peter Abelard's (1079-1142) "systematic" text, *Sic et Non* which contained 158 "demonstrable" propositions (derived from Scripture, Tradition and reason) grounded an early attempt at a coherent systematising of the data of Scripture, Tradition and reason. Interestingly, Abelard's strategy of securing a series of determinate propositions paralleled to some degree the Platonic-Aristotelian project of the definition of terms and names (nb. Aristotle's notion of *pros hen* equivocity i.e. reference to one), and laid the foundation for a full-blown Scholastic Theology which was to emerge later. Aquinas's own use of the techniques of the *Quaestio* demanded a clear set of terms and relationships in order to provide the systematic principles which grounded the proposed Theological solutions. To be able to make inductive and deductive generalisations workable it was

¹⁰ Lonergan, B., *Method in Theology*, (London: Darton, Lonergan & Todd, 1975) p. 4.

important not only to identify valid data through definition (i.e. clear data worth working on), but also to secure the meanings of terms and their implications. This would either be of single words or of larger units such as verses, and even of larger portions of discourse e.g. Epistles, Gospels or Council documents. Further, the whole edifice was presupposed and grounded through "laws" of Logic distilled from Aristotelian analysis. Theology had already distinguished between the literal, allegorical (criticised strongly from the High Middle Ages onwards), moral and anagogic senses of meaning. Its task was to exhibit these particular mode(s) of Meaning(s) in a text. Philosophical Theology was particularly interested and strategically involved in extricating the literal meaning of a text and with exhibiting the presence of the other modes of meaning. The literal meaning significantly, would then figure in inductive and deductive generalisations expressed in indicative propositional form to provide the data for innumerable manuals of Theology.

The Phenomenological movement initiated by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of this century also influenced the Theological programme. It attempted to establish a method for enabling items of human experience, technically called Phenomena (=percepts, concepts and meanings) to be cognised by the experiencing subject as free from presuppositions as possible. This process is analogous to a blurred perceptual object being made clear and optically well-defined by the addition of a lens. The lens simply facilitates the clear observation of the per se features of the object; here, the lens can be considered analogous to the Phenomenological method. Husserl's method was not only a means of accurately describing the objects of experience but was an attempt at grounding human knowledge, of giving it firm foundations similar to the earlier Cartesian project. It is though, through the work of Martin Heidegger, who shifted from an analysis of knowledge to an ontology of human existence that Phenomenology more directly influenced Theological Method. Heidegger influenced Rudolf Bultmann's programme of Demythologisation as well as providing conceptual resources for, among others, the Protestant Theologian John Macquarrie, the Catholic Karl Rahner and a generation of theologians, including emerging Post-Modern developments.

A focus on language considered as our experiential, interpretive and communicative medium gave rise to a Phenomenological Hermeneutics directed mainly at the explication of texts, and of texts whose origins were generally distant from the reader i.e. Scripture. The task (simplified here) was to understand the role of understanding in extracting / imposing the meaning(s) of the texts under analysis. Hermeneutics came to recognise a pluriformity of meanings (polysemy), and understanding was considered as a contextual process of interpretation directed at an always present and ever emerging contemporary audience. It is this last point which generally demarcates the Hermeneutical approach from

a subject such as Biblical Studies and Textual Analysis. The latter tend on the whole to fix on the genesis of meaning(s) in a text (as well as often on their use), through a somewhat formal analysis, while Hermeneutics attempts to understand the role of the text in providing a contemporary understanding; that is, how the text's meaning(s) can illuminate the personal lives of contemporary readers and their understanding of the world. It is interesting to note that Husserl's initial quest for a presuppositionless analysis, which was really a quest for certainty, should develop (through the work of others) into an Hermeneutical strategy (whether of language or signs in general), which itself gave an almost ontological status to a generally non-formal notion of interpretation and understanding. The development of Semiotics out of the linguistic studies of de Saussure with its analysis of signs and the signifier-signified relationship, deepened and intensified the understanding and analysis of language. The result (coupled with developments in Semantics) was a view of language as an interrelated system of signs operating with an underlying deep structure.

Any notion of language as having one primary and paradigmatic function and therefore one primary meaning (that is, bridging the gap between linguistic items and a non-linguistic reality i.e. a literality conceived in this particular way) was strongly criticised by Semiotics, Semantics as well as by the allied discipline of Structuralism. The view of a basic (=primary, paradigmatic) function and meaning with a manifold of secondary functions and meanings operating on a spectrum which took the basic as their point of departure was considered an ill-formed view of language. This had potentially serious ideological implications. Consider for instance, how the language of Science claimed authority over other discourses because it was "transparent" to the structures of reality. Language came to be seen as an active and interactive medium within and of human experience, such that a person's linguistic competence and their experience of the world was difficult to distinguish clearly.¹¹ Moreover, the work of philosophers within the analytical philosophy of language such as, among others, L. Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin and J. Searle,

¹¹ Again, the literature is vast. For Hermeneutics, see , Ricoeur, P., *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: essays on language, action and interpretation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Ricoeur, P., *The Rule of Metaphor: Multidisciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Derrida, J., 'White Mythology' in *Margins of Philosophy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Loades, A. and McLain, M. (Eds.), *Hermeneutics, the Bible and Literary Criticism*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Academic and Professional, 1991); Ferguson, D. S., *Biblical Hermeneutics*, (London; SCM Press, 1987); Thistleton, A.G., *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein*, (Grand Rapids: W.B.Eerdman Pub. Co., 1980); cf. also Ricoeur, P. 'Biblical Hermeneutics', *Semeia* 4, 1975. For Phenomenology, apart from Husserl's own generally dense writings, see the classic expository text, Farber, M. *The Foundations of Phenomenology E. Husserl and the Quest for a Rigorous Science of Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1943); cf. also the article on phenomenology in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. For the often difficult area of Semiotics, see the relatively accessible introductory work, Clarke Jnr, D. S., *Principles of Semiotics*, (London, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

emphasised the performative nature of certain aspects of language, through the notions of language-games, language-use and speech-acts. Also, analysis in the Theories of Truth found the Correspondence Theory (i.e. a belief or statement is true if it corresponds to reality) problematic, and a lot of work was done on Coherence Theories, which highlight the inter-supportive nature of our beliefs.

I have indicated, again in very broad fashion, two wide ranging methods that have been applied to Theological sources. One method utilised by Philosophical Theology, and paralleling to some degree Analytical philosophy, attempts to tease out the literal meaning(s) (as well as displaying other forms of meaning), in order to exhibit the intelligibility and rationality of a text. This enables the development of inductive and deductive generalisations. The other method, a broadly Phenomenological-Hermeneutical-Semiotic approach, responding to the pluriformity and "textural" nature of language and meaning attempts, through the process of interpretation to gain an insight into the meaning(s) of texts.

The discussion of sources and methods in Theology (Philosophical or otherwise) is not complete without an attempt at dealing with the important issue of foundations. Lonergan had, as highlighted earlier, indicated that his theological concern was with a method that was "...foundational and universally significant and relevant" (MIT p.14). To be fair to Lonergan and to make an interesting point for Bahā'ī Theologians, his understanding of foundations has to be seen as a function of his Transcendental analysis. What is foundational is not a particular Source or mix of sources, nor a particular explicit Method or set of Methods, but the conditions for the possibility for approaching a Source and utilizing a Method. Lonergan locates this in the recurrent patterns of intentional consciousness, issuing significantly after major existential and attitudinal changes in what he calls intellectual, moral and religious conversion. This threefold conversion is foundational in the sense that it does not provide a set of basic propositions or assertions, but is "a fundamental and momentous change in the human reality that a theologian is" (p.270). Lonergan's analysis deserves further study and Bahā'ī theologians would benefit from a dialogue with Lonergan's voluminous and often programmatic writings. One point to note, however, is that even though he does not propose a foundational set of propositions or premises as grounds for deductive and deductive entailment, he does attempt to secure a universal, unchanging (recurrent) pattern of conscious operations; a seeming move from foundational sources and Methods to a foundational and differentiated consciousness.¹²

The question of foundations in Theology then involves the questions of authority and sources, about

¹² Lonergan, B., 'Cognitional Structure', in Crowe S.J., F. (ed.), *Collection, Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, (London: Darton Longman & Todd Ltd. 1967); cf. also, Lonergan, B., *Method in Theology*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), esp. pp.20-27.

what counts as the epistemic starting-point(s) for a theological analysis. The issues can be illuminated somewhat by examining the problem of foundations as discussed in contemporary Epistemology. The justification or ratification of knowledge-claims has been seen as a function of the search for foundations to human knowing. The traditional framework of the necessary and sufficient conditions for a knowledge-claim or epistemic justification and bridging the Platonic analysis (cf. Plato's *Meno*) with that of a good number of 20th century philosophers has been schematised thus:

P knows that Q is true
 (where P is a subject with psychological states,
 and Q is a proposition or set of propositions),
 iff (if and only if),
 Q is true,
 P is sure or certain or believes that Q, and
 P is justified, has evidence that Q.

The schema shows the juxtaposition of three aspects of a traditional claim to knowledge; namely, truth, certainty and justification. From this, the ideal of traditional Epistemology can be seen as the co-occurrence of the psychological state of certainty with an extra-psychological state of affairs through a process of justification. Truth is supposedly the end result. Without this co-occurrence it is accepted that the knowing process or in more substantive terms Knowledge (as certainty and indubitability) cannot even get off the ground; it does not have a starting point, or in the terms just stated, a foundation. There has been much philosophical argument about the precise nature of what is or are to count as foundation(s). Major candidates for such foundations have been: individual perceptions (the sensory given), psychological states and common-sense experiences. Beliefs arising out of perceptions, psychological states and common-sense experiences are called basic beliefs or basic propositions, and are a conjunction (co-occurrence) of the truth of a justified proposition (or belief) and the act of believing it. Such beliefs or propositions are what philosophers call incorrigible; that is, they provide us with certainty because they themselves are both self-justified and non-inferentially justified. Because of this they can be considered candidates for securing foundations for knowledge.

Such a view of knowledge however, has been the subject of serious and cumulative criticism over the last thirty years or so. What is known as the Gettier argument or counter-example (propounded by E. L. Gettier) is considered to have successfully driven a wedge between the truth-condition and the certainty-condition of the traditional schema, thereby complicating the epistemic role of the co-occurrence of the two

conditions. Moreover, the notion that incorrigible propositions are the result of a direct non-inferential knowledge has come under serious attack. Likewise, the analytic-synthetic distinction (by W.V.O. Quine especially), so relished by Logical Positivism, between truths of reason and truths of empirical fact. The distinction cannot be clearly maintained because of the circularity of analyticity in which both notions imply each other. The empiricist theory of concept formation, where the learning of a word or the exercise of a concept is associated directly with experiencing features of the world has been strongly criticised. It seems that for an individual to recognise a blue object as blue, rather than say red, the concept blue has to be presupposed rather than derived. It seems that any attempt to secure foundations for Knowing faces serious difficulties, though there are philosophers who propose what has been called a modest foundationalism. I spoke earlier of work in Theories of Truth where a Correspondence theory had come under criticism from proponents of a Coherence theory which focused instead on a consistency independent of a notion of truth tied to a notion of correspondence.¹³

With respect to the problem of method and foundations in Bahā'ī Theology we may well be helped by examining the role of Foundations in a Christian Theological enterprise. In fact, I think those of us working in the West will, initially at least, have to look at Christian Theological methods, most certainly Islamic methods and we will benefit from having no initial phobias about Buddhist, Hindu and other Traditions, providing us all in all with a full programme! Although I have referred to a Christian Theological enterprise my comments will be directed more at a Philosophical Theology.

Just as the notion of foundations in Epistemology had focused on what were thought to be indubitable and incorrigible items of human experience securing a starting-point (= Foundations) for Knowing. So too have items within Theological Methods and sources been thought to secure indubitable starting-points for a theological enterprise (though more importantly from our point of view they have been considered

¹³ Valuable general discussions are found in, Lehrer, K. *Theory of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge, 1992); Shope, R., *The Analysis of Knowing*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Bonjour, L., *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985); Haack, S., 'Recent Obituaries of Epistemology', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 27, No.3 July 1990; Papineau, D., 'Is Epistemology Dead?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 82, 1982. For specific issues see Rescher, N., *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Bonjour, L., 'The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge', in Moser, P.K. (ed.) *Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*, (Totowa, NJ.: Rowman Littlefield, 1986); Gettier, E. L., 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge', *Analysis*, 23, 1963; Quine, W. V. O., *From a Logical Point of View*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953); Sellars, W., *Science, Perception and Reality*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963); Harris, J. F. and Severens R. H., (eds.) *Analyticity*, (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970); Moore, G. E., 'A Defence Of Common Sense' in *Philosophical Papers*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959); Quine, W. V. O. and Ullian, J., *The Web of Belief* (2nd.ed), (New York: Random House, 1978); Wittgenstein, L., *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Blackwells, 1968).

proper sources for Theology's work).

Doctrines, Narratives, Myths, Symbols etc., extracted from texts of Scripture and Tradition have been acknowledged (in varying degrees) as providing foundations for the theological enterprise. It is irrelevant for the moment, whether, for example, doctrines are used to develop a Theological or Philosophical conceptual scheme (e.g. Thomist, Neo-Thomist or Process Theologies), or whether by focusing on Narratives, Myths or Symbols an illuminating analysis of human consciousness in its responsive and creative aspects can be developed (Demythologisation, Existential and Narrative Theologies). In both cases a foundation is supposedly secured. Similarly, Theologians who utilise the Human Experience source as data for their work will treat specific items of experience as foundational i.e. morality, meaningfulness, feeling, language, contingency-historicity, freedom, justice, aesthetic and mystical experience, value, death etc. (Correlation, Hermeneutical, Existential, Post-Modern, Liberation, Feminist and Inter-Religious Theologies). In the majority of cases there will be a foundational blend of sources, certainly in the work of the latter. Methods too could be regarded as foundational, if through their exercise a theologian believes that the results of application are going to have a secure starting-point (in much the same way that someone might believe that sensory observation [= a particular Method] brings data to light.). For example, a strict Phenomenological Method could be considered as providing the best means of accessing the essence(s) of objects or things under inquiry. However, irrespective of analogy, in both cases i.e. sources and methods, what is at question is basically two sets of propositions operating in a linear, one-directional relationship. That is, there will be a set of propositions that are basic or foundational (requiring no independent justification) and a set of non-basic propositions that are justified by the former.

Relating this to the question of Theological sources, are we to say that the sources I have outlined are to be regarded as foundational and basic in the senses that a traditional Epistemology understands the terms foundational and basic? I shall leave this question open to further more detailed analysis, though I want to make some points for discussion.

The question of sources for Theology is really, after reflection, a question of authority; of how the sources authorise the activity of Theology, more though of how they authorise results and conclusions (provisional or otherwise). Earlier I spoke of Theology operating in a logical space between religious texts (= Scripture and Tradition) and an ambiguously termed modern situation. This tensive relation is now further heightened by whether (and in what way) the religious texts authorise the meaningfulness, intelligibility and truth of theological conclusions? The question is further sharpened by asking whether the sources operate as a Criterion? For a Christian Theology, I would venture to say that they could not be considered as such! The often narrative and story-like nature of the texts (and here I am referring

primarily to the Gospel accounts and thereby touching on the issue of a Canon within the Canon) could certainly be considered as primary authority for Theology, but not sufficient authority! The texts could be considered primary insofar as they provide a means for securing and ensuring an appropriate Christian witness by a Christian Theology, but not a sufficient authority for securing and ensuring the meaningfulness, intelligibility and truth of theological conclusions. These are to be assessed by justificatory and clarificatory procedures developed and refined over centuries and which are believed to be structural to human experience. The question is obviously different for Bahā'ī Theology where the religious texts contain a vast range of already highly developed theological assertions (= propositions) readily insertable into progressive and developing theological arguments. Again, though the issue is raised of whether and in what way these assertions or propositions are to be treated as foundational or basic in our Epistemological sense, and whether they are to be accepted as a *de facto* or *de jure* authority for theology. That is, are the high level theological assertions in the Bahā'ī texts to be accepted by the Bahā'ī Theologian as authoritative i.e. foundational *per se*, and therefore *de facto* authoritative, or are the assertions subject to a rule i.e. subject to a matrix of justificatory or clarificatory procedures, and thereby *de jure* authoritative? This is a vitally important question.

Developments over the last thirty years in the Philosophy of Language, Deconstruction, Literary Criticism and Theory, Structuralism, Linguistics and consequently Theology have witnessed a further and deeper turn to language as an object of study and medium of encounter. The areas of particular development have been in the areas of Polysemy (multiple meanings), Tropes (figures of speech), Rhetoric and Story¹⁴. The following discussion can only hint at the complexity of these issues

The notion that words have different ways of meaning was acknowledged long ago. Aristotle recognised that "every name is either a standard word, or a foreign word, a metaphor or an ornamental word, an invented, expanded or altered word" (*Poetics* 1457b1). The later use of allegory via a Philonic Hermeneutics grounded a figurative theology which took as its goal the overcoming of contradictions

¹⁴ I have selected a number of texts which I have found valuable in the area of Tropes and Rhetoric. Miall, D. S.(ed.), *Metaphor, Problems and Perspectives*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982); Ortony, A.(ed.) *Metaphor and Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Lodge, D., *The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy and the Typology of Modern Literature*, (London: E. Arnold, 1977); McFague, S., *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language*, (London: SCM Press, 1982). On Rhetoric see, Vickers, B., *In Defence of Rhetoric*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); Wicker, B., *The Story-shaped World, Fiction and Metaphysics: Some Variations on a Theme*, (London: The Athlone Press, 1975). See also the discussion in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 51, 1990, Munz, P., 'The Rhetoric of Rhetoric', pp. 121-142, McCloskey, D. N., 'Reply to Munz', pp.143-147 and Vickers, B., 'The Dangers of Dichotomy', pp.148-159; Searle, J., *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

posed by literal readings of religious texts. A consistent figurative reading, however, could not be sustained without reference to the notion of literality. As indicated earlier, Scholastic Theology was concerned with securing the definition of terms and thereby fixing their referential meanings. In this they were only following and perhaps improving Plato's distinction between the surface features of terms and their deeper or inner meaning(s) (hyponia, cf. *The Republic* and also *Gorgias*). Also of relevance is the Platonic conception of names as expressing i.e. naming the essence (ousia) of (or in) a thing or object, (cf. *Cratylus*). Thus the Scholastic project of fixing the meanings of terms enabled the further fixing of the meanings of sentences and propositions. These in their turn came to be considered as preferred meanings. Therefore, language in Theology came to be seen primarily as a referential system expressing as far as possible the preferred literal meanings of sentences and propositions, at least those which came under the purview of the Theological project.

Literality as a concept is not easy to unpack. Firstly, it has little if nothing to do with the empirical, spatial or temporal actuality of an event obtaining. Such an event as expressed by the sentence "He jumped up and literally stomped out of the room!" is not what is meant in the specific sense of the term, although a peculiar analogised fixity can be gleaned from the sentence. Literality (or Literal meaning) has to do with meaning of a particular and compounded sort; what is called univocal and conventional meaning. Univocal meaning is the singular meaning a term or proposition has each time it is uttered or written or subsequently heard or read. Conventional meaning is the possibility of reiterable univocal meaning; that the univocal meaning is expressed and expressible each time a term or proposition is uttered or heard in a pattern of speech and written or read in texts. These two aspects of meaning then, make or compound literal meaning. As stated earlier the strategy, certainly of Scholastic Theology and perhaps implicitly of contemporary Theology as a whole, to stress literal meanings implied that these meanings had a temporal and semantic priority. I would say that this strategy has certainly conditioned the work of **Philosophical Theology**, both past and present.

The growing acceptance of Polysemy (multiple meanings operating at a number of levels in language, generally in a text or pattern of speech), the interest in signs and symbols and the more detailed analysis of the tropical aspects of language (particularly Metaphor and Metonymy as more than stylistic ornamentation), has contributed to a keener and more thematised awareness of the linguisticity of our experience. Earlier, the Wittgensteinian emphasis on use, the Austin-Searlean theory of Speech-acts and the more holistic Theories of Meaning and Coherence Theories of Truth had provided a notion richer than a purely referential theory. Further, the analysis (and experience) of Polysemy and Tropes highlights (

= reveals?) the creative, participative and yet sometimes cognitively disturbing aspects that lie at the root of our experience of the world.

I said at the beginning of this paper that, based upon a few remarks by Shoghi Effendi, I wanted to hint at the possible development of a Rhetorical Theology or Analysis. This was done not only to suggest a particular interpretive strategy with its own inner dynamic, but also to undermine a strategy (or perhaps the strategy) of Philosophical Theology. It is at the level of Polysemic and Tropical analysis that Philosophical Theology's general quest for univocal and conventional meanings for indicative sentences and propositions is put into question. I shall say no more at this stage, but I will make a few comments on the growing interest in a new non-stylistic Rhetoric that has grown out of an older and more stylistic Rhetoric which took as its point of departure Aristotle's definition of it "as the power of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (*Rhetoric* 2, 1355b27 cf. also 4, 1359a30). Contemporary developments of Rhetoric have emphasised and attempted to map the transforming effect of discourse (written or spoken) on a reader or auditor (whether hearing a speech or reading a text), in bringing about commitment to a particular view; this will be more than a naively theoretical or "intellectual" adherence. One of our tasks as emerging Bahā'ī Theologians is surely this: to present and re-present in our writing the "effectiveness and power of the teachings" (BS:2), their attractiveness and their capacity to entice! This may well issue in a particular type of Writing, what I earlier called extending the performative nature of the Bahā'ī text(s) under study.

There are two issues here: Firstly, as I suggested, a Rhetorical Theology could be developed in order to present the Bahā'ī Teachings in a particular way so that their value as modes of transformation can be better appreciated and appropriated by an audience (whether readers or listeners). Secondly, a Polysemic and Tropical analysis could be utilised in order to examine the Rhetorical nature of aspects of the Bahā'ī texts themselves.

In any case, whatever Theological work Bahā'īs undertake, they will, I suggest, be working within the horizons of a Philosophical Theology and a Rhetorical Theology. Both are valuable and pervasive and both are equally compulsive. Why this should be so is another matter, and is not a question in Theology or Philosophy as they stand.

Concluding remarks

This essay has been deliberately programmatic, partly because of its scope and partly due to the intrinsic difficulty of some of the issues I have touched upon. I focused on a particularly Western and

particularly Christian approach to Theology. I believe that, initially at least, the Bahā'ī Teachings lend themselves to the interpretative strategy that has come to be called Theology, particularly that which has been developed in the West by Christian, Islamic and Jewish practitioners. I also focused upon Philosophical Theology, because, of all the particular types of Theological analysis one can do, this one has developed into the most robust, demonstrative and assertive type, attempting as it does to serve 'two masters'. It tries to remain appropriate to the religious texts themselves, and on the other hand, by operating within certain structurally human criteria of justification, it attempts to show the meaning(s) and truth-values of the texts (or aspects of the texts).

The tasks of such a Philosophical Theology were enumerated, with some additions that a more traditional Philosophical Theology would not have attempted. This I indicated to be a function of the wider scope of data available to the Bahā'ī Theologian. I went on to highlight the issues of sources, methods and foundations, and showed that discussions about them had developed over time as a function of systematic responses to texts, within the wider sphere of increments in human understanding. In showing the role of sources, methods and foundations, I wanted to indicate what Bahā'ī Theologians may well have to deal with in developing their strategies, especially given the problems associated with the notion of foundations and Theories of Reference after philosophical scrutiny. One thing which is certain, is that work in a Bahā'ī Philosophical Theology will have to broach the issues of the relationship between sources-as-foundations and Theological conclusions (again, provisional though they may be); the issues will be primarily epistemic, that is of how, and in what way, the sources-as-foundations warrant the conclusions.

Finally, richer conceptions of language were seen to have been emerging within the last thirty years or so, and which could ground a Rhetorical Theology based on a new and deepened Rhetorical Analysis. It is this richer understanding of language that we should be examining, if only to truly understand whether the notion of non-conceptuality (an important issue in any theological analysis) makes any sense, but certainly to experience those aspects of language which open us up, as individuals, to new personal and corporate opportunities -- the Bahā'ī life. Theology as Theo-Logos will always remain speech, a conversation utilising concepts of one sort or another and, as I hope to have indicated, tropes of one sort or another. So it seems that Theology's tasks will be a tensive blend of systematic, 'cartographic', evocative and suasive Language. All we can do as emerging Bahā'ī Theologians is witness appropriately and truthfully in our asymptotic language, to what 'Abdu'l-Bahā states is "...above words

and letters and...the murmur of syllables and sounds..."¹⁵ Theology cannot, however, remain silent but it can be responsive to a better appreciation of its raw-materials; namely, Language. And behind, above, below and within Language, the Speaker of Language.

ABBREVIATIONS

BS = *Bahá'í Scholarship*, Auckland: NSA of Bahá'ís of New Zealand, Inc., 1985

TB = *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.

SAQ = *Some Answered Questions*, Wilmette, Illinois: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981.

MIT = *Method in Theology*, Lonergan, B., London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975.

¹⁵ Prayer by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Bahá'í Prayers*, (London: BPT., 1975) No. 99. p.104.