

To pursue the content of this concept even further, we must ask, What are the basic tenets of this viewpoint? Langdon Gilkey briefly summarizes them for us:

Let us, say these men in various ways, cease to talk about God or the divine, for the universe around us is absurd and only the void is real. And let us speak only of the figure of Jesus and his call to love. For all else in theology is meaningless and leads us nowhere.

More explicitly, William Hamilton, in an article entitled "The Shape of a Radical Theology," succinctly expresses the three main themes of this viewpoint. The first is, of course, that of the death of God. The second is that of obedience to Jesus. In discussing the question, "Why Jesus, rather than Albert Camus, Martin Luther King, or Francis of Assisi?" he answers:

Jesus is the one to whom I repair, the one before whom I stand, the one whose way with others is also to be my way because there is something there, in his words, his life, his way with others, his death, that I do not find elsewhere. I am drawn, and I have given my allegiance. There may be powerful teachings elsewhere, more impressive and moving deaths. Yet I have chosen him and my choice is not arbitrary nor is it anxiously made to avert the atheist label. It is a free choice, freely made.

The third theme which Hamilton enumerates is that of a new optimism, "a conviction that substantive changes in the lives of men can and will be made;" and a confidence that this new movement in theology "can work out a new way for men to be Christians in the kind of world we live in today."

In the statements of these and other contemporary theologians, certain common presuppositions are seen to underlie this radical "death of God" view. Among others, the following may certainly be enumerated as crucial:

- (1) The final triumph of empiricist epistemology
- (2) The final collapse of traditional metaphysics
- (3) The final destruction of transcendent theology and of absolutistic ethics
- (4) The complete uselessness and irrelevance of "God" to contemporary human experience
- (5) The resultant emptiness and meaninglessness of all theological language about "God," the divine, and the super (or supra) natural
- (6) The consequent need of a radical reconstruction of theology, in the form of a new humanism

These presuppositions, viewed as indisputable by those who hold them, combine to form, in the judgment of the "Death of God" theologians, a mandate for their view. In addition, they happily suggest a transition to our second major consideration.

II. FACTORS CONTRIBUTORY TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE "DEATH OF GOD" CONCEPT

These include philosophical as well as theological factors, as has already been suggested in the aforementioned enumeration of presuppositions. Of the two classes of factors, the philosophical clearly predominate. As a matter of fact, it is possible to describe the entire history of modern liberal theology (1800 to the present) in terms of the controlling influence of philosophy over theology.

First of all, then, let us consider some of the less recent factors which have contributed to the contemporary theological dissolution in general, and to the "Death of God" view in particular.

Any such consideration must begin with the modern view of the possibility, source, instrument, scope, and certainty of knowledge; i.e., of epistemology; and any consideration of the modern view of epistemology must begin with John Locke.