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## Paul Van Buren's Secular Salvation

Roger D. Haight

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## *Paul van Buren's Secular Salvation*

ATTENTION has been focused recently on a group of Protestant theologians labeled the "Death of God" theologians, proponents of the new "radical theology." These men, while professing to remain Christian, feel that any theology or talk about God must be carried on in a radically different fashion today, in a world "come of age," than it has in the past.

Such phrases as "the Death of God," and "Christian Atheism" could be dismissed as simply illogical and meaningless by the believer, but this would be a rather superficial reaction for at least two reasons. Firstly, a great portion of the world today is Godless, either explicitly or implicitly, so that the presuppositions out of which this theology arises are often accurate, and thus provide something to be reckoned with by all theologians. It might be added that the aphorism that all error contains some truth is very much to the point here.

Secondly, these theologians, taken together and looked upon as a phenomenon within Christianity, are one representation or reflection of "modern man" (whoever he really is) and it is this mentality that these men are trying to formulate theologically both for themselves and for others. It is true that these men represent a very small element of Protestant thinking and tradition, but this does not prove that radical theology does not represent the incipient stages of a much larger and thoroughgoing movement.

The following pages present very schematically the main lines of Paul van Buren's position to date and surveys some of the criticism he has met, chiefly within Protestant circles.

### THE PROBLEM

Van Buren's problem in *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* most simply stated is this: "How can the Christian who is himself a secular man understand his faith in a secu-

lar way?"<sup>1</sup> He writes as a modern man committed to secularism, as agnostic to other-worldly powers and beings. Modern man is pragmatic, a man of action, for whom the word *God* has lost its meaning. The empiricism of modern man questions less what is said about God than the very act itself of talking about God. What does *God* mean? If what God is is unknown, all language involving this word is meaningless.<sup>2</sup>

Van Buren's solution to the problem involves the following choices. He chooses Christology over Theology. Since God has become a meaningless term, there can be no more Theology. The problem must be solved in terms of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, this Christology must be carried on in a fashion consistent with and with deference to history. Christianity is historical and must be studied in dialogue with biblical and patristic tradition.<sup>4</sup> What van Buren attempts to do, then, is to reassert both the Gospel and patristic thought as represented by Chalcedon after demythologizing their cosmological statements which are meaningless to modern man. Fidelity to the intention of the Bible and historical Christology, he feels, demands this transformation of language.<sup>5</sup>

#### METHOD OF RECONSTRUCTION

Van Buren feels that the method of reconstructing a secular meaning of the Gospel must be one that is frankly empirical, one which takes the modern scientific mind ser-

<sup>1</sup> Paul M. van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1963), pp. 2, 11. Van Buren is admittedly a secularist first and a Christian second—this he feels is the way it must be. *Ibid.*, pp. 99, 195.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84. Van Buren uses words like "the Transcendent" and "Ultimate Concern" as simply God-substitutes and consequently just as meaningless.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 102-4, 196.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-3, 157-8. In other terms, Barth represents orthodoxy and fidelity to Christian tradition for van Buren, whereas Bultmann represents an attempt at relevance. Van Buren tries to synthesize these two aspects.

iously. And what other means than language analysis is possible when dealing with historical records expressed in human language? It is important to realize that van Buren besides using language analysis as a tool is opting for the assumption of positivism that only the experienced is meaningful and for the identification between this pre-supposition and the mentality of modern man.

Borrowing from other language theories, van Buren first defines what the language of faith is by opposing it to factual language. Secondly, he lays down the principle by which this language must be understood. And thirdly, he shows how this understanding can be empirically verified.

First, borrowing from Ramsey and Hare, van Buren describes the language of faith. The language of faith, says Ramsey, has two components: it is made up of the language of discernment and the language of commitment. Language of faith directs our attention to situations of disclosure—where we see. And because of our commitment to life, to the world, we are inclined to believe in such “odd” things as God. Such a situation as this exceeds empirical verification and the ultimate basis for such belief is simply the self; I believe because I’m I. From Hare van Buren borrows the concept of “Blik,” which is a personal attitude towards a thing or situation. Everyone has these basic predispositions towards objects of perception. They cannot be termed right or wrong, they are not explanations, nor are they verifiable; they are simply presuppositions we have about the world.<sup>6</sup> Then, combining and adapting the above to meet his own presuppositions, van Buren describes what he feels a Christian is: He is one who discerns Jesus through a “blik” and then commits himself to all that this entails.<sup>7</sup>

Having defined what faith is, two problems arise regarding the language of the Bible and Christological tradition—problems of all language. The first is to determine what kind of

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85-8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91. Ramsey does not of course deny reference to Transcendence as van Buren does.

language is being used and the second is to verify empirically its meaning and factualness. Van Buren attempts an answer to these questions by addressing to them his fundamental methodological tool, the verification principle:

For the particular language-game which we are playing, imprecisely identified as "seeking the secular meaning of the Gospel," the heart of the method of linguistic analysis lies in the use of the verification principle—that the meaning of a word is its use in its context. The meaning of a statement is to be found in, and is identical with, the function of that statement. If a statement has a function, so that it may in principle be verified or falsified, the statement is meaningful, and unless or until a theological statement can be submitted in some way to verification, it cannot be said to have a meaning in our language game.<sup>8</sup>

What this principle does, in practice, is, firstly, to enable one to separate and distinguish different kinds of speech. For example, there is a difference between the statement 'John is heavier than Mary,' which can be assumed to be empirically verifiable (and knowable precisely through observation), and the statement 'John loves Mary,' (which can only be considered empirical on the basis of overt behavioral manifestations). When the verification principle is applied to the Gospel and to the credal formulas of tradition, it will be seen that these statements, in their historical context, are faith statements, statements of personal discernment and commitment, much like 'John loves Mary' and not 'John is heavier than Mary.' They are faith statements because this is how they are used, that is, to express what "I believe."

The second problem, the problem of meaning, arises from the fact that a statement of empirical fact and a statement involving human commitment are verified differently. That John is heavier than Mary is knowable empirically, as indicated above, and has meaning is obvious enough. But the fact that John loves Mary is not obvious. In fact this has empirical meaning only through or as a function of the overt behavior of John in relation to Mary. Thus both the factualness of the statement and what the statement 'John

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

loves Mary' really means is dependent on or is a function of John's behavior. Van Buren's principle of verification thus involves two things; criticizing the use of words in their historical context and when it is found that non-empirical language is used, reading their meaning from the empirical behavior of those who used them. Just as hypothetical meaning cannot really be prior to verification, so too, religious assertions are factual insofar as they express intentions to act and their meaning is to be read off empirical behavior.<sup>9</sup>

It is crucial to van Buren's whole reconstruction that statements of subjective conviction be considered empirical in this way. If this were not so, then his whole attempt at making Christian faith empirically meaningful will have failed.<sup>10</sup>

#### JESUS AND CHRISTIANITY

Once van Buren has laid down his principles, the development of his reconstructed Christianity flows with the simple logic of applying the principle of verification. He first describes the historical figure of Jesus in terms of freedom; "He was free from anxiety and the need to establish his own identity, but he was above all free for his neighbor."<sup>11</sup> This was the man who was the object of the remarkable testimony and devotion recorded in the New Testament by the men who had imbibed this freedom. And yet the fact is that during Jesus' lifetime this was not their reaction; this faith in him, the freedom they shared with him, was not possessed by his disciples during Jesus' lifetime. During the events of the Passion Narrative they turned and ran. The inescapable conclusion is that the Easter event stands between the his-

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-6, 105-6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 139-40, 195-99.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123. We pass over the failure of the quest of the historical Jesus which van Buren also considers. As will be seen, a clear picture of Jesus is not necessary since Christianity will be based on two elements, Jesus and the Easter event. The fact that Jesus was, however, is obviously very important. "...faith is not based simply on a picture of the historical Jesus, but the historical Jesus is indispensable for faith." *Ibid.*, p. 126.

torical Jesus and Christianity. On the one side of Easter there is Jesus dead and buried and the disciples disappointed and discouraged men; on the other, the disciples appear to have been caught up in something like the freedom of Jesus himself. What happened?

Van Buren brings his verification principle to bear on the language used to describe the 'something' that happened at Easter. The most basic expression in the New Testament accounts for this happening is "he appeared." The objective character of the experience is expressed in the active role of Jesus, the passive role of those apprehending. Now since this is a statement regarding subjective sense-content, and since it is personal experience, it cannot be verified by a common sense. "The way to verify a statement of sense-content is to see if the words and actions of the person who makes the statement conform to it. The test is one of consistency."<sup>12</sup>

What then was the Easter event? Verifying the meaning of these statements from the behavior of the disciples one can say that they underwent an awakening of faith—a dawning. They saw the Jesus of history in a new way—"he appeared to me"—so that all history now had meaning in him. It was the experience of a situation of discernment and commitment. This is not merely a subjective experience for it had the real, although dead and past, Jesus and his former freedom as its object. What Jesus was happened to them. Van Buren uses the expression "the freedom of Jesus began to be *contagious*," carrying the idea of catching something from another person not by our own choice but as

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129. Another resurrection assertion is "Jesus is risen." This is a linguistically odd assertion because it mixes two different language games "Jesus" is an historical word; "is risen" has its setting in Jewish eschatology and is an end-word, i.e., pertaining to the end of time. Such a statement cannot refer to any *thing*, nor can it be empirically verified in its literal sense and hence is not an empirical assertion. It can only be verified by the conduct of the one who uses it. *Ibid.*, pp. 130-2.



something that happens to us.<sup>13</sup> This, then, is the meaning of the Easter event seen through the resurrection language as empirically verified in the disciples. What can be said of the disciples can be said in an analogous way of all Christians except that the mediation of Jesus is through the Gospels, through preaching, the testimony of the word and example whereas the disciples had the Jesus of history to recall.

#### SECULAR SALVATION

Van Buren's aim is to keep the New Testament and theological tradition intact while at the same time giving a meaning to its various statements which can be empirically verified. His method, he says, "has led us to an interpretation which may claim for a secular Christianity the full tradition of the faith."<sup>14</sup> Any statement regarding what cannot be empirically verified, however, cannot be asserted with any meaning. About anything concerning the "beyond," or "what is to come" the secular Christian can only remain silent, and only qualify this silence by the history of the man Jesus and how his freedom became contagious at Easter.<sup>15</sup> It is obvious, then, that on principle there can be no talk of an eschatological redemption; redemption is in the here and now.

Of every soteriological expression, whether in the New Testament or in theological tradition, van Buren asks, according to his verification principle, what its meaning is as shown by the empirical behavior of men. Thus, "Reconciliation, for the Christian, will always have something to do with the freedom for which Christ has set men free, with being

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133. "Bonhoeffer's words are suggestive in this connection: 'The experience of transcendence is Jesus' being-for-others. His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence arise solely out of his freedom from self, out of his freedom to be for the others even unto death. What happened to the disciples on Easter was that they came to share in this freedom to be for the others.'" *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144. Cf. also pp. 147-9 for "Son of God."

free for one's neighbor."<sup>16</sup> Insofar as Christians are thus set free, the force of Jesus' freedom will have wide social and political consequences, and in this sense the world will be reconciled. This is the empirical meaning of Paul's "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself." "The 'word of reconciliation' expresses a perspective which leads the Christian to understand and act in the world under the criterion of the freedom of Jesus for his neighbor."<sup>17</sup>

"He died for our sins" becomes, in context, a statement expressing the measure of the extent to which Jesus' freedom allowed him to live in solidarity with and for other men, even in their weakness and wrong (sin), so that this death epitomizes the freedom by which he has inspired others.<sup>18</sup> For the sins of the "world" is an expression of the universality of Jesus; he was free for every man.<sup>19</sup> Van Buren describes sin as the fundamental condition of man; his fear, anxiety, distrust and self concern measured by the standard of Jesus' freedom. It is basically a bondage, and to the extent we have been caught by Jesus' freedom, to the same extent we have been liberated from this condition of sin.<sup>20</sup> Justification means, empirically, that man is just to himself, before himself and others. He is free so that he no longer has to prove himself. Sanctification means a life of true humanity, one lived for others. The fruit of faith is love of other men and love of God is love of other men.<sup>21</sup>

It should be emphasized, since van Buren himself emphasizes it, that in every case of Christian liberation it is

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151. Van Buren never uses the word "inspire," but it does not seem out of place.

<sup>19</sup> The note of the universality of Jesus' force is carried empirically by the universal experience of love. This is an important element in van Buren's exposition because the *Agape* or disinterested love of Jesus is what makes him different from another "liberating personality." *Ibid.*, pp. 138-40.

<sup>20</sup> Original Sin is man's condition of sin. The doctrine of the fall is a comparative statement showing the universality of this condition as opposed to Jesus' freedom. p. 179.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-3.

the Jesus of history who is responsible and to this extent there is a sense in which he can talk of objective redemption. There is a passive element in the "blik" of faith;<sup>22</sup> there is an active element in all history before which the reader is claimed;<sup>23</sup> the contagion of Jesus is as it were forced upon the believer;<sup>24</sup> all of which emphasizes that the Jesus of history is necessary for Christian belief and it is he that begot Christian salvation.

The path which we have described for the secular Christian in the secular world is clear and wide enough to carry the whole Gospel along it. Although we have admitted that our interpretation represents a reduction of Christian faith to its historical and ethical dimensions, we would also claim that we have left nothing essential behind. This claim stands or falls with our interpretation of the language connected with Easter.<sup>25</sup>

#### SALVATION IS SECULAR

The reaction to van Buren has been for the most part negative. But for all its limitations, he has preserved one essential element of Christian redemption, the fact that here and now Christians are redeemed and that this should manifest itself in one's freedom *from* self and freedom *for* others. Christian salvation now, the being a saved Christian, is most characteristically manifested by a freedom for the other, by service of the neighbor. However, in choosing to keep this core of Christian secular salvation while at the same time lopping off its source, God, it seems that van Buren has set himself an impossible task. This is the essence of the criticism levelled against him and it seems justified. The question is, then, can there be a Christian redemption or salvation that is secular, as van Buren understands this word, alone?

#### CHRISTIANITY MORE THAN EMPIRICAL

The key issue here is the relation between the Christian and Christ and it has focused on the word contagion as van

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 199-200.

Buren uses it to express this relation. Mascall insists that it is impossible on empirical grounds to speak of Jesus as redeemer of men. If a man, and only a man, it cannot be said that He who no longer exists influences men today; nor, similarly, can it be said that Jesus, while He lived, set free men who as yet did not exist. How can Jesus be contagious if He no longer exists unless by some sort of nominalism and in no real sense? Van Buren, then, in order to preserve the Gospels and a Christianity grounded in the real life of Jesus has resorted to a metaphor, and by exploitation of this notion of contagion he can *speak of* faith and salvation as dependent on Jesus, but this is not the way it really is.<sup>26</sup>

Langdon Gilkey, who is entirely sympathetic to van Buren's attempt at least, asks:

Unless, of course, this word "contagion" refers to some sort of supra- or extra-human "virus" that grasps or captures us whether we will it or not—and if it does not refer to some such "something," what sort of word is "contagion" anyhow, how is it understood and used here, what sort of "analogy" is at work here, how is it testable and so meaningful, etc., etc.? And if the word "contagion" *does* refer to some such power to grasp us, have we not with its use jumped back into the murky unempirical depths of theological meaninglessness and illusion?<sup>27</sup>

Mascall sums the problem up when he says "Van Buren is, in fact, trying to be two incompatible things, a radical linguistic empiricist and an evangelical Christian."<sup>28</sup> As a philosopher, an empiricist and a secular man, van Buren will not accept any meaningfulness in the word *God* or any divinity in Jesus. As a Christian believer, he feels forced to recognize that it was Jesus who has set him free, who is the source of his secular salvation. The only way to reconcile these two attitudes is to create a correspondence between the statements of the New Testament which are in their

<sup>26</sup> E. L. Mascall, *The Secularisation of Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1965), p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Langdon B. Gilkey, "A New Linguistic Madness," *New Theology* No. 2, Martin E. Marty, and Dean G. Purman, eds. (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> Mascall, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

literal sense meaningless and his own way of seeing the world by a tortuous process of reinterpretation. And the only way he can maintain a bridge of real connection between the Jesus of history on whom tradition is grounded and his own belief is to lapse into metaphor, a description of Easter as some sort of psychological contagion.<sup>29</sup>

Van Buren claims, of course, that through his verification principle he has been faithful to the logic and intention of the New Testament and patristic tradition, that is, not to their language but to what they could only have meant empirically. But the fact remains that the intention and logic of a proposition which is counter to what it actually says is even more illusive than the unverified literal meaning. How does one determine such a thing from behavior? Is there *any* equivalence between what van Buren says and what the Gospels say? Is it possible to drop out God and still preserve the 'meaning,' 'intention' and 'logic' of the New Testament? It seems, then, that van Buren must admit that this is *his* understanding of the secular meaning of the Gospels and not the meaning or the intention of the New Testament writers or Fathers themselves. It is something different, something which cannot claim authority from ancient tradition.<sup>30</sup>

From another point of view, but basically the same criticism, is that of Paul Holmer who claims that van Buren is giving or supplying meaning for theological words. He distinguishes the use of the word *God* by the ordinary believer and its use by the theologian and maintains that most Christians make no distinction between the word *God* and God as existent. They simply use the word referringly of God in whom they do believe. Everyday use of the word is not the use of the metaphysician and theologian and consequently the latter has no right, as van Buren has done, to presume

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Gilkey, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-9. Mascall simply denies that the way to verify a statement of sense content, as for example, "He appeared to me," is to see if the words and actions of the person uttering the statement conform to it. This was one use of the verification principle as employed by van Buren. *Op. cit.*, pp. 81-2.

to give, assign or supply such meanings.<sup>81</sup> There seems to be basis for this criticism.

Since his book, van Buren, perhaps realizing that any real influence by the Jesus of history on later Christian faith was logically impossible in his framework, modified his position. "...in fact it is not the historical event which becomes an occasion for 'discernment' for the believer, but rather the *story* of the event, or even the image of Jesus which is portrayed by the contemporary church in its preaching and worship."<sup>82</sup> It should be noted, however, that by minimizing the objective element in the story of Jesus and admitting that the historical Jesus can have no real influence on the generations of Christians who live after Him, van Buren has merely solved a logical difficulty in his initial framework and that by so doing he has pointed up its main difficulty, as will be seen. In this same article he redefines the purpose of his essay: "My interpretation of Christian faith, therefore, is an attempt to portray the contribution it makes to a believer's network of understandings, in so far as it does not provide new 'facts,' new information, or assume the presence of entities (such as gods or God) lying beyond the general framework of the descriptive metaphysics of our time and place."<sup>83</sup> This framework of the contemporary mind he describes as the metaphysics of the "So What?", that is, the general attitude of today's secular man, his understanding of what is important and real. It is basically, therefore, a pragmatic and relativistic and empirical attitude towards the way things are. In this context, van Buren feels that faith enables the Christian to see what he already knows in a new way.

By thus making explicit the lack of any real influence of Christ on the Christian, something that was implicit in his book, van Buren has lost the essence of Christianity and

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<sup>81</sup> Paul L. Holmer, "Theology and Education," *Religious Education*, XL (January-February, 1965), pp. 29-30.

<sup>82</sup> Paul M. van Buren, "Christian Education," *Religious Education*, XL (January-February 1965), p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

Christian salvation. Is Christian faith "a way of looking at things," an attitude, or is it a personal and existential relationship with the existent, risen Christ? The Gospels, the whole New Testament is a witness to a real Christ, and a living relationship with Him now.<sup>34</sup> Christian faith cannot be just a new way of looking at things where everything except ourselves remains the same. In the words of I. T. Ramsey, "...van Buren, it seems to me, is creating a modern version of what in earlier times was called 'natural religion' and the novelty and originality of van Buren's position is that he is, on this view, creating a natural religion from the Gospel."<sup>35</sup>

This leads to the fundamental critical question in van Buren's system: Why Christianity? For if Jesus himself is dead, and if it is only the story of Jesus and not Jesus himself that saves men and sets them free, why Jesus? Why not the story of any other man? Van Buren faces this question but does not seem to have a satisfying answer to it. "There is no empirical ground, however, for the Christian's saying that something of this sort could not happen to a disciple of Socrates. Reading the history of Socrates might conceivably have a liberating effect on a person..."<sup>36</sup> The only universal claim on men that Jesus has is the disinterested love which motivated Him and which can and should appeal to all men. But if it is the idea of love (for it cannot be the actual love of Jesus for all men) alone that makes a Christian, why Jesus? Not only is there no object of faith, no ground for faith, but also if faith is without justification as van Buren says it is,<sup>37</sup> then on principle one guides his actions for no legitimate reason and for a human being this would be unreasonable.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Bernard Cooke, "Personal Relationship," *Religious Education*, XL (January-February, 1965), pp. 26-7.

<sup>35</sup> Ian T. Ramsey, "Discernment, Commitment, and Cosmic Disclosure," *Religious Education*, XL (January-February, 1965), p. 12.

<sup>36</sup> Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel*, pp. 138-9.

<sup>37</sup> Van Buren, "Christian Education," p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Fredrick Ferre, "Paul M. van Buren's A-Theology of Christian Education," *Religious Education*, XL (January-February, 1965), p. 25.

This leads to the conclusion that without God there can be no Christianity, at least in any proper manner of speaking. The story of the Gospel does not contain a mere idea or an attitude toward the world. There is something objective that commands and generates a response. Surely most Christians would claim to cling to more than knowledge about love "For they would say that this Love... points to and is fulfilled in the cosmic disclosure which occurs around Jesus of Nazareth who, while having undoubtedly a historical strand, expresses a transcendence and divinity through it. . . . It is this element of objectivity and transcendence which I am not sure that van Buren acknowledges or perhaps wishes to acknowledge."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, if the Gospel is to be relevant, it must have bearing on human suffering. "But if that suffering is to be redeemed," says Ramsey, "there must be an element of transcendence in both the objective reference of disclosure and in our own subjective response and commitment."<sup>40</sup> Humanity, even the highly developed and technological man of today, cannot redeem himself. If anything is empirical, this is. This moreover is the essential context of the Johannine salvation that van Buren omits: *Eros* springs from the center of man. But *Agape* has its source outside of man; originating from the transcendent Father it comes to man through Jesus, and through men to other men, even in the pragmatic conduct of daily living. Only if this love has a transcendent source can Christianity make any sense.

Van Buren has called his work up to now an attempt at, or an exploration of, a secular meaning of the Gospel, one which he will abandon, presumably, if it fails.<sup>41</sup> Many consider that his attempt has failed, laudable as it was. This seems to be the case, not because of his failure, but because of the impossibility of the task. He has accepted without qua-

<sup>39</sup> Ramsey, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>41</sup> "My point is that I do not want to begin an attack on the 'common sense' of our form of life until I have a clearer picture of this and until I see what theology looks like in this context." Van Buren, "Christian Education," p. 42.



lification the empirical standard for reality and in so doing has capitulated to the secular. Beginning with the secular mentality that van Buren describes, with only empirical norms for what is, one cannot reach a Christianity which has its foundation in Jesus and its transtemporal significance in the divine. Faith in such a Christianity is precisely that which cannot be empirically verified. However if one starts as a Christian, then the secular and its meaning is truly seen "in a new way."

The secular and the Christian in van Buren are at war. If he is a Christian first, then there will be peace. It is quite possible that, in spite of Mascall, van Buren does not really believe that "God is dead." In the words of Holmer, "I miss . . . the note of tragedy, the ache and care, that would be due such solemn reflections. . . . Admitting that God is dead is made a rather light matter—almost as if it were trivial news of the day. This is why I am not so sure he really means what he says."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Holmer, *op. cit.*, p. 31.