

Roger Hazelton,

**Ascending Flame, Descending Dove,**  
Philadelphia: The Westminster Press,  
1975, 190 pp., \$ 3.75.

Why has a curious compound image like "Ascending flame, descending dove" been chosen to convey the thrust of the book's intentions? "The truth", remarks the author, "is that we live more by symbols than by explicit statement of 'what is the case'" (p. 27). The dove, this messenger bird, from ancient times had been the image of the cessation of hostilities between man and God, "the harbinger of God's 'shalom' or reconciling peace." (p. 30) The flame, corresponding to the dove, is the image of the human spirit. The title is symbolic of the human spirit's creative linkage with what has traditionally been termed the Holy Spirit.

Four chapters, well harmonized, lead us from a closer understanding of terms like "creative transcendence" (Chapter 1) to the experiencing of transcendent, and to the symbolizing of the same experience. Finally, the author helps us to realize the remarkable and arduous task of theology to translate in human words an experience that can be human only because "more-than-human".

The chapter 2 deals with experiencing transcendence. Transcendence seems to be a constant background for or accompaniment to all experience. A better starting point, in the several ways of considering the part played by transcendence in experience, may be provided by attending to artistic experience. "Artistic modes of experience are marked by an immediate and whole acquaintance, a direct participation, not different in quality from the vision of God so prized in earlier generations" (p. 42). There is in progress at the present time, a reconsideration of the interrelationship between the aesthetic and religious modes of experience. What binds art and religion most closely together is the fact that both are rooted in experiences of passionate involvement and ultimate commitment, what F. David Martin in his carefully wrought book "Art and Religious Experience" calls "the participative experience" (p. 50-51). Both aesthetic and religious types of experience "are marked by a liberating openness to the solicitations of a reality that encompasses and expands one's cons-

cious self; both foster a sensibility that is intimate and ultimate; and both are concerned "to be home in the homeland" (p. 52).

The phenomenon called inspiration "affords a highly pertinent vantage point for understanding how transcendence is experienced" (p. 54). This term, utilized for the creative process in art, is very eloquent "in testifying to the communion of the spirit with the spirit" (p. 56). The picture that emerges from the twentieth-century literature leads us to the conclusion that not all experiences of the transcendent are experiences of creativeness. The life of man is like the flight of a bird. The bird flies out of the darkness through an open window into a lighted room, where it remains for a time; then it darts back through the open window into darkness again. Though in conditions of appalling loneliness and frustration, "the deepest use of the vocabulary of transcendence", to quote G.H. Woods, "is to describe the fact of being in existence" (p. 60).

Chapter 3 is devoted to the action, "as inevitable as it is strange", of symbolizing transcendence. How does a symbol signify? The answer for Hazelton is: "Not only by denoting at corresponding object or event, but by being part of what which it is used to mean"; in this respect, symbols are inseparable from their meaning (p. 69). "Every symbol, then, is a token of transcendence by which mystery is made present to experience" (p. 73); "the symbols not only communicate the familiar strangeness of experience; they constitute its felt reality" (p. 79). Since old symbols die and new ones emerge we come to the conclusion that some kind of symbolizing will always be necessary.

Language is the very means by which transcendence can be expressed, specified and exemplified. Though the symbols cannot be comprehensive of all the truth that they mean, "they tell us much about ourselves that can be told in no better way" (p. 85). One consequence of the line of thought sketched here is to "consider how deliberately symbolical the enterprise of theology is" (p. 86). A second one is a turn or return of present-day theology to experience as the matrix of genuine theological reflection. A third observation is that theology today has begun to grasp its continuity with and responsibility for its own past" (p. 92).

Chapter 4 deals with the toil of theology to give a honest answer to the question of "God" or rather, "belief in God". There are at least three major reasons for the hesitation on the part of theologians to make God the explicit subject of their study today.

One is that religious language has generally difficult for many people to follow. "Hence it comes no surprise that contemporary theology should have turned from talking about what makes God divine to talking about what makes men and women human" (p. 95). The second reason: people are bound to misunderstand, "since they hear such conflicting things when the word 'God' is used, depending upon the whole confusing weight of dimly-recalled traditions as well as upon their own religious backgrounds" (p. 96). The third reason: transcendence, formerly regarded as the exclusive prerogative of deity, "now takes in many of the wider, deeper range of human experience itself" (p. 97).

We don't need any more for a "God of gaps", as D. Boneufer believed, but "a God in the midst of life" (p. 98). Today, however, re-orientations are at work that shift "the index pointer of reality". Old dualisms have become "polarities"; the well-known oppositions of "fact" and "value", "experience" and "real", "inner" and "outer", are no longer operational in most quarters where what is uniquely human is being investigated (p. 105). But still, as K. Barth remarked, we do not say God merely by speaking of man in a loud voice. And a further instance of the new style in theology is the Paul Tillich's analysis of "human courage" as not mere pagan virtue. He affirms that "every courage to be has an open or hidden religious root", and is therefore a "key to the ground of being" since "ultimate power of self-affirmation can only be the power of being itself" (p. 108).

"The confusion which we find in the present-day theology may indicate creative ferment in response to new occasions and duties, not merely a failure of nerve". (p. 115).

We must conclude with Berdyaev, that the word "God" has much to say regarding the meaning humanity itself. Only in this way we can begin to understand the "spiritual" character of self-transcendence. What being human means is that we are created to be creative, thus realizing our true nature as "capax Dei" (p. 119). The last and largely unexplored resource for a theology of creative transcendence lies at hand in the ancient doctrine of the Spirit. This traditional key has lost much of its earlier warmth and vigour, in christian usage. "It has become but a nostalgic anaemic echo of its former self. Its connotations seem largely negative" (p. 123). But we must say that we are spirit in so far as our being is constituted by becoming; and becoming lies within the energizing scope of transcendence. A

theology of creative transcendence will have no new lines to draw between God and man; that it will be the last of its concerns; "but it will risk and spend itself in explaining ancient meanings of grace and spirit from the home base of the mystery of being human" (p. 135).

Hazelton's work is a serious attempt to analyse the contemporary stress in theology (mainly in western theology) upon translating statements about God into statements concerning human life. What seems to be happening is that the whole God question is being re-opened in the context of the nearer, more insistent question regarding the essential meaning of our humanness. This study, clear and delightful to read, helps a lot to enter the "creative ferment" of western theology, since the author shows a wide knowledge of western literature. But at the same time this may as well be the weak aspect of the whole work: it lacks a wider context from the point of view of World Religions. Definitely the approach to transcendence would have been different.

The non-detailed structure of the book may give the impression of non-scientificity, and the analysis appears too simple; but it has the merit of being liner and leads immediately to the core of the problem on "transcendence".

*Isidore Tomasoni.*

*Bernard Haring (tr. Albert Kuuire),*

**Evangelization Today,**

Notre Dame: Fides, 1974, 182+ix pp.

The great success of the publication of *The Law of Christ* has made Bernard Haring so well-known that almost anything he writes can be published and sold. In fact, since the *Law of Christ*, the author has written a number of books and almost all of them have been well received. Most of his books, including *Evangelization Today* are based on the courses of lectures he gave at the Academia Alfonsiana, in Rome. Hence, an ordinary reader is bound to have some difficulties in understanding his writings, as they are written with a certain category of persons in view. The audience attending these courses of lectures is mainly composed