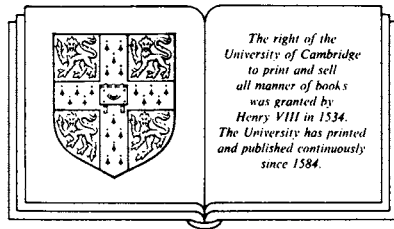


NINETEENTH
CENTURY
RELIGIOUS
THOUGHT
IN THE
WEST

VOLUME II

Edited by

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I

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

CLAUDE WELCH

In the generation following Coleridge's death in 1834, he was widely recognized as a religious thinker of the greatest significance. True, in the early nineteenth century the apologetic evidence-theology, which had been spurred to renewal (though not reform) by David Hume's essay on miracles, still so preoccupied the English theological scene that Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* (1825) at first received little notice in either the religious or the popular press. And not a few were then and later to complain of his lack of system and to accuse him variously of being confused, eclectic, muddle-headed, inconsistent, incoherent, a rationalist, a pusillanimous drug-addicted dreamer, and even a papist.

Yet in the much-quoted essays on Bentham and Coleridge (1838 and 1840), John Stuart Mill, certainly no Coleridgean himself, could say that 'there is hardly to be found in England an individual of any importance in the world of the mind, who . . . did not first learn to think from one of these two'; and again that 'every Englishman of the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean; holds views of human affairs which can only be proved true on the principles either of Bentham or of Coleridge'.¹ And in 1860 Mark Pattison, in *Essays and Reviews*, could write that 'theology had almost died out when it received a new impulse and a new direction from Coleridge'.²

Among those most deeply influenced in the nineteenth century by Coleridge were F. D. Maurice (his most famous 'disciple'), Julius Hare, Thomas Arnold, Edward Irving, James Martineau, John Sterling, Thomas Carlyle, and later P. T. Forsyth. F. J. A. Hort, of the Cambridge triumvirate, said that *Aids to Reflection* was a book to be read again and again. And John Henry Newman was impressed. In America, where an edition of the *Aids* was published in 1829, with a long introductory essay by James Marsh, Coleridge affected the course of theology through the Transcendentalists,

who read him enthusiastically, and notably through his impact on Horace Bushnell, sometimes called the 'liberalizer' of American theology. *The Friend* and *The Statesman's Manual* were also published (in 1831 and 1832) in the United States.

In the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Coleridge was less widely attended to as a religious thinker. But a powerful resurgence of interest has appeared in recent decades, marked by an extensive literature, much of it drawing on the Notebooks, the Marginalia, etc., recently published for the first time (see the Bibliographical Note). Coleridge must again be seen as a real turning point into the new kinds of theologizing that mark the nineteenth century, a thinker as important for British and American thought as were Schleiermacher and Hegel.

The context of Coleridge's religious thinking

Our concern is with Coleridge as a religious thinker, and particularly with his principles and themes as they came to mature expression in the writings from 1817. Yet Coleridge was remarkably sensitive to the many movements of his time, and prior to his decisive meeting with Wordsworth (1795) and turn to poetry rather than politics, he had gone through an intellectual odyssey that included being an enthusiast for French Republicanism, a necessitarian of the school of Hartley (even to the insistence on the corporeality of thought), and a unitarian of the school of Priestley. The years from 1795 to 1802 were the great burst of his creative imagination, the time of his best-known poetry, joyous in nature, immanent and pantheistic in outlook.

A 'middle period' culminated in the composition in 1815 of the *Biographia Literaria: Or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (pub. 1817), the climax of his literary criticism and theorizing. This was the period of his deepest plunges into Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, as well as new reading of Jakob Boehme, with whose work (along with Neo-Platonists, Scotus Erigena, and some Cabalistic writings) he had become acquainted earlier. And it was a time of intense personal struggle, not least with opium addiction, partly conquered in 1816.

In the prose writings after 1815 the religious and ethical reflections come strongly to the fore, and in the later poetry the concern with evil and with transcendence is strong. In addition to the *Biographia Literaria*, which concludes with Coleridge's identification of himself with the historic Christian faith, the principal writings in which his mature religious ideas were expressed were *The Friend* (1818, a revision of the periodical published 1809–10), *Aids to Reflection* (1825), *On the Constitution of Church and State*

(1830), and the posthumously published *Confessions of an Enquiring Spirit* and the *Essay on Faith*. In these works, above all in *Aids to Reflection*, are sounded the chief religious themes, which were also expanded and illustrated by Coleridge in his Notebooks, in the *Opus Maximum*, and in the *Letters* and the *Marginalia*.

Though the unpublished elaborations reflect Coleridge's desire to write a *Summa* for his age, it is more useful, both in Coleridge's religious ideas and in his thinking generally, to seek out themes and principles than to look for systematic completeness. Coleridge was much more interested in communicating a process of thinking than in the tidy ordering of thoughts. As he put it early in *The Friend*, his aim was to convey 'fundamental' instruction: 'not so much to show the reader this or that fact, as to kindle his own torch for him, . . . to refer men's opinions to their absolute principles, and thence their feelings to the appropriate objects, and in their due degrees; and finally, to apply the principles thus ascertained, to the formation of steadfast convictions concerning the most important questions of politics, morality, and religion – these are to be the objects and the contents of his work'.³ Despite the sometimes fragmentary or tortuous or even haphazard articulation, the principles of Coleridge were coherent and consistent. His life may have been a muddle, but his thinking was not. The distinctively religious themes and principles, moreover, need to be set in the context of pervasive and life-long concerns, which gave his thought fundamental unity.

One of those was precisely a quest and sense for the whole as a living unity. As he wrote, 'My mind feels as if it ached to behold and know something great, something *one* and *indivisible*'.⁴ Another was his deep sense of social need and his hope for the revitalization of the whole of morality and English society (including the church), a concern expressed from the time of the early political enthusiasms through the first 'Lay Sermon', *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), to *On the Constitution of the Church and State*.

In his writings on literature, grammar, biology, Baconian science, psychology, politics, philosophy and ethics, as well as theology, Coleridge was engaged in a great struggle for society and self, since he himself had to win the victory over the tradition of Locke and Hume (see esp. Chs. IX and X of *Biographia Literaria*). It was a war against the decayed rationalism of the dominant modes of thought. In theology, this eighteenth-century rationalism was supremely illustrated in the work of William Paley, notably his *Natural Theology, or Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature* (1802; 20th ed., 1820) and his *Evidences of Christianity* (1794; 15th ed., 1811). It was Paley whom Coleridge again and again identified as the theological archenemy, who had to be

fought as both unphilosophical and irreligious. Coleridge wrote in the *Aids*: 'I believe myself bound in conscience to throw the whole force of my intellect in the way of this [Paley's] triumphal car, on which the tutelary genius of modern idolatry is borne, even at the risk of being crushed under the wheels.'⁵ And he thought it a national disgrace that Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), in which it was affirmed that 'it is the utility of any moral rule which alone constitutes the obligation of it',⁶ was adopted as a text at Cambridge.

But Paley's abstract and impersonal, cold and lifeless argumentation, his natural theology to which Christianity was finally an appendage, was only an epitome of the eighteenth-century rationalism that had to be rejected as bankrupt philosophy. Behind Paley was Locke's psychology and epistemology, which had made Hume's critique inevitable. And farther back was Descartes' absolute mental/material dualism, which for Coleridge had to be rejected in favour of a principle of polarity, of unity in variety. And alongside Paley was Jeremy Bentham (1748–1831), who, if Mill was right, was the real alternative to Coleridge, the symbol in his ethical utilitarianism of what the eighteenth century stood for.⁷

Against all this way of thinking, Coleridge posed a fundamentally contrary view. It was a view informed by Plato, Luther, the Cambridge Platonists, Boehme, Kant and Jacobi, Fichte and Schelling, among others. The extent of Coleridge's dependence on some of these sources, especially the German idealists, has been a matter of lively discussion. But the matter of extent need not concern us greatly. As Barfield puts it, 'there is not much doubt that, as the law now stands, Schelling could have sued Coleridge in respect of one or two pages in the *Biographia Literaria*'.⁸ Much more important is the question how Coleridge used the ideas that he drew from many sources. That Coleridge was deeply influenced by Kant, whom he revered, cannot be doubted, but that Coleridge's philosophical orientation was provided by Kant – or by the Platonists or by Boehme – must be doubted. Too much has to be related to grounds of thought in his own existence and to many other thinkers whom he found serviceable. Coleridge's own genius and originality consisted in the power to assimilate and recreate for his purposes.

Against the dominant modes of rationalist thinking, then, which corrupted social thought and politics as much as ethics, philosophy, and religion, by limiting thought to the activities of the 'understanding', which can only distinguish, Coleridge wanted to offer another 'system', a Dynamic Philosophy. This philosophy is responsive to the hunger for unity, but a unity that is productive of differentiation. The key principle is polarity. Polarity is not to be confused with the simple opposition of contrariety, for *polar* opposites generate and interpenetrate each other, and are productive.

The importance of polarity is well put, for example, in the *Theory of Life*, Coleridge's sketch of a better science of nature. A proper theory of life does not rest on the commonplace 'mere assumption' of an arbitrary division of all into 'things with life and things without life'. Rather, he asks, 'what is *not* Life that really *is*?' If Life (= *natura naturans*) be preeminently defined as '*the principle of individuation*, or the power which unites a given *all* into a *whole* that is presupposed by all its parts'; if the 'link that combines the two, and acts throughout both' be defined by '*the tendency to individuation*'; and if 'the one great end of Nature' be 'her ultimate production of the highest and most comprehensive individuality'; then the highest or most general law of that tendency must be '*polarity*, or the essential dualism of Nature, arising out of its productive unity, and still tending to reaffirm it, either as equilibrium, indifference, or identity'.⁹

Precisely in that productive power, by which polarity arises out of unity, do we encounter 'incompatibility with mathematical calculus'. But if the 'understanding' of eighteenth-century rationalism cannot apprehend this, the act of 'imagination' can (see below). Contrary to Descartes and his successors, intelligence and nature are a unity; or better, just as *natura naturans* and the sensibly apprehended *natura naturata*, while distinguishable, are an indivisible whole, so *natura naturans* and mind or intelligence form an indivisible whole. In the science of nature, in the perception of identity and contrariety in the arts, in the distinction of thinking and thoughts, in the relation of subjective and objective, of inner and outer, thus in a dynamic or constructive philosophy generally, the law of polarity is to be recognized.

The process of religious thinking

Coleridge was above all absorbed by the question of the nature of religious knowing, which was for him a problem of the rational character of faith and of the faithful character of true reason. Though he wrote a good deal concerning theological formulations, he was much more interested in the process or principles of religious thinking. Just this was his primary theme in *Aids to Reflection*

To understand Coleridge's view of that process, we need to take account of two further bases for his mature thinking, which were at least as important as the engagement with those philosophers whose thoughts he was able to employ. One was his own sense of the quality and character of personal religion, in which prayer and the struggle of sin and redemption were at the centre. For Coleridge (in contrast to Hegel) 'let us pray' represented a higher level of activity than 'let us think about God'; the relationship with the

ultimate in prayer was too actual to be identified with mere meditation or reflection.

An hour of solitude passed in sincere and earnest prayer, or the conflict with, and conquest over a single passion or 'subtle bosom sin', will teach us more of thought, will more effectually awaken the faculty, and form the habit, of reflection, than a year's study in the Schools without them.¹⁰

Similarly, as this aphorism also suggests, moral experience was an irreducible datum. It was out of his own struggles that Coleridge understood the possibility that conscience can be killed in a man. He knew the reality of remorse, the originality of sin in the self as a conscientious being, and thus the great need and hunger in man that cries out for salvation.

Second, Coleridge's mature religious thinking was articulated from a position within the historic Christian faith. See his *Confessio Fidei* of 3 November 1816¹¹ and the conclusion of the *Biographia Literaria*. He had little interest in religion in general. Though his principles for religious thinking are of far more than Christian interest, his thought in *Aids to Reflection* moves from the beginning toward the 'Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion Indeed' (which for him meant Christianity). Coleridge's interest was in giving 'a reason of his faith' (first aphorism on Spiritual Religion). It is in the context of this life of Christianity in his own existence that the famous Aphorism 25 (of the 'Moral and Religious Aphorisms') needs to be understood: 'He who begins by loving Christianity better than truth, will proceed by loving his own sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all.' This Coleridge meant seriously, for Christianity cannot be so counterposed to truth; but for him the freedom for truth was grounded in faith rather than in uncertainty or disbelief. Thus his own aphorism was added to sayings drawn from Leighton in the preceding aphorism: 'He never truly believed, who was not first made sensible and convinced of unbelief. Never be afraid to doubt, if only you have the disposition to believe, and doubt in order that you may end in believing the Truth.'

In this connection another of J. S. Mill's comments on the difference between Bentham and Coleridge is relevant. For Bentham, said Mill, the question was always 'Is it true?' – and if it did not directly conform to his idea of truth, that was the end of inquiry. For Coleridge the great question was 'What is the meaning of it?' – since anything that had been so much believed by thoughtful men and generations had to be accounted for.¹²

On these bases, there were two opposing religious options that had to be rejected. One was the religious rationalism that had been revived most disastrously in Paley, and in other ways in unthinking orthodoxy and in the

Scottish common-sense philosophy. For Coleridge, Kant made clear that the metaphysical problems of God and the soul cannot be resolved by the categories of pure or scientific reason. But the opposition to theological rationalism was not based primarily on Kant. Kant made the weaknesses of religious rationalism evident, but more important were the demands of genuine *religious* knowing – and in general Coleridge's arguments for the 'idealism' drawn from the Cambridge Platonists and German philosophy were supports for his conviction of the shallowness and/or actual irreligion of rationalism, orthodoxy, and evangelicalism. 'Christianity is not a theory, or a speculation; but a life – not a philosophy of life, but a life and a living process.'¹³

On the other hand, Coleridge vigorously combated the nonrational idea of faith in both Schleiermacher and the evangelicals. It was not enough to assert 'I have felt' and to insist that the immediacy of religious experience refutes all doubters. The internal evidence of the spirit and the will and the sense of need and redemption are the starting point, but emotionalism is no answer to the questions of reason. No more than Pascal (who at more than one point must be recalled in connection with Coleridge) was Coleridge satisfied simply to say 'the heart has reasons which the reason does not know'. Faith must be a reasoning faith, and reason must be understood more deeply than by either rationalism or the religion of the heart. There are mysteries in Christianity, but these are 'reason in its highest form of self-affirmation'.¹⁴

In the concluding paragraph of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge affirms his object of showing 'that the Scheme of Christianity, as taught in the Liturgy and Homilies of our Church, though not discoverable by human Reason [= Understanding?], is yet in accordance with it; that link follows link by necessary consequence; that Religion passes out of the ken of Reason only where the eye of Reason has reached its own Horizon; and that Faith is then but its continuation'.¹⁵ The language of such a statement seems relatively traditional. That Coleridge's fundamental meaning was not can be made clear by identifying four levels of argument that are present in his own programme for reflection on religion, levels that seem to form an ascending spiral: (1) the crucial distinction between 'Reason' and 'Understanding', (2) the role of imagination, (3) the religious authority of conscience, and (4) fidelity in reason.

Reason and understanding

The distinction between reason and understanding was one that Coleridge returned to again and again. One main object of *The Friend*, he said in the

Biographia Literaria, had been 'to establish this distinction'.¹⁶ Failure to make the distinction was the sleeping sickness of the age. It was as important for politics as for religion.

Reason and understanding are different in kind. Though he can speak of these as 'organs', Coleridge did not mean 'faculties' but powers, modes of being and thinking, different states of mind and ways of experiencing in the world. 'Reason is the power of universal and necessary convictions, the source and substance of truths above sense, and having their evidence in themselves . . . On the other hand, the judgments of the Understanding are binding only in relation to the objects of our senses, which we reflect under the forms of the understanding. It is, as Leighton rightly defines it, "the faculty judging according to sense".'¹⁷ The distinction is obviously related to (and perhaps derived from) Kant's distinction, but Coleridge differed greatly from Kant in his view of reason's capacity to lay hold, in knowledge, of spiritual realities. He was closer to Jacobi, but even more he reached back to the realism of the Cambridge Platonists, though that also was fundamentally qualified in his conceptions.

There is, then, spiritual truth to be apprehended – laws and principles that exist outside the mind, and supremely the personal reality of God, in which Truth rests. To them are related Ideas, laws contemplated in the mind, intuitions that are not sensuous. These spiritual realities cannot be known by the understanding. Understanding is directed to the phenomenal world of sense-perception, in which it arranges and generalizes. It is the 'science of phenomena', it is (when it usurps the role of reason) the 'mind of the flesh', it is 'discursive', 'the faculty of reflection', and it 'refers to some other faculty as its ultimate authority'. Understanding is

the faculty of the finite . . . that which reduces the confused impressions of sense to their essential forms – quantity, quality, relation, and in these action and reaction, cause and effect, and the like; thus raises the materials furnished by the senses and sensations into objects of reflection, and so makes experience possible. Without it, man's representative powers would be a delirium, a chaos, a scudding cloudage of shapes.¹⁸

Understanding, simply, is the 'scientific' reasoning of the eighteenth century, of Bentham and Paley, the kind of thinking that separates, analyses, measures, classifies, knows in terms of cause and effect, is concerned with means rather than ends. It gives accuracy, it eliminates error. Within its proper limits this is an indispensable kind of thinking – for science, for much of the routine of life, for knowledge of the finite. Indeed, reason 'cannot exist without understanding; nor does it or can it manifest itself but in and through the understanding . . . or the discursive faculty', although 'understanding and experience may exist without reason'.¹⁹

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But when only this sort of thinking is recognized, when it pretends to be all, then life, philosophy, and religion are denied. And that was the consequence of the eighteenth century: the philosophy of death, ‘materialism, determinism, atheism, utilitarianism, the “godless revolution”, “moral science exploded as mystic jargon”, the “mysteries of religion cut and squared for the comprehension of the understanding,” “imagination excluded from poesy”’.²⁰

There is also, then, a knowledge of that with which the self as self is concerned, a ‘conscious self-knowledge’, an intuition of ourselves as related to the whole as a living reality, ‘something one and indivisible’, a knowing that is religious (and poetic), a seeing that goes beyond space and time, a power of acquainting the self with ‘invisible realities or spiritual objects’. This is reason, whose proper objects ‘do not appertain to the world of the senses inward or outward’. It is the ‘organ of the supersensuous’, the faculty of the infinite, the knowledge of ‘the laws of the whole considered as one’. This power, which is found only within (and as the self is fully engaged in the search for truth), is alone capable of discernment of ‘spiritual objects, the universal, the eternal, and the necessary’. And this organ is ‘identical with its appropriate objects’.²¹ Whereas understanding thinks ‘about’ things, reason is the thinking, it is being.

Imagination

The reason that is distinct from understanding also involves imagination. Imagination is a creative act of the self. It refers to the genuine activity of the mind in knowing (in contrast to the mind’s supposed passivity, in the Lockean psychology). Imagination carries reason beyond understanding. In *The Statesman’s Manual* (1816) Coleridge put it this way: ‘The completing power which unites clearness with depth, the plenitude of the sense with the comprehensibility of the understanding, is the imagination.’ By being impregnated with imagination, ‘the understanding itself becomes intuitive, and a living power’. It is thus a constituent of reason, i.e., reason ‘substantiated and vital’. ‘This reason without being either the sense, the understanding, or the imagination, contains all three within itself, even as the mind contains its thoughts, and is present in and through them all.’²²

Though Coleridge later drew back from the tendency, perhaps present here, to equate the higher reason with imagination,²³ and the direct discussion of imagination falls away in later treatments of reason and understanding (e.g., in the *Aids*), the imaginative process must be considered an enduring constituent of Coleridge’s idea of reason’s functioning. In the well-

known passage on the primary and the secondary imagination at the end of chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria* (which Coleridge promised to explicate at length in the Constructive Philosophy), the creative function was specified:

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.²⁴

Hence imagination is contrasted to fancy in a way not unlike the contrast of reason and understanding. Imagination refers to the very power of growth and production, fancy does not. Fancy ‘has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites’ and ‘must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association’.²⁵ In a marginal note, Coleridge once set down the order of these ‘mental powers’ in the following way:

<u>from the lowest:</u>	<u>from the highest:</u>
Sense	Reason
Fancy	Imagination
Understanding	Understanding
Understanding	Understanding
Imagination	Fancy
Reason	Sense

In this scheme, which is also important for its portrayal of understanding in a double form, i.e., as active and as passive, imagination marks the movement from active understanding to reason, fancy the movement from passive understanding to sense. Imagination is a creative power, fancy only an aggregating power. The double column is also significant in indicating the nearness, in terms of polarity, of reason to sense. As Coleridge put it in the *Aids*, ‘Reason indeed is much nearer to Sense than to Understanding: for Reason (says our great Hooker) is a direct aspect of truth, an inward beholding, having a similar relation to the intelligible or spiritual, as Sense has to the material or phenomenal.’²⁶

Imagination, then, is thinking as creative act. It is, to use the word Coleridge coined in the *Biographia Literaria* to denote it, ‘esemplastic’ power, the power ‘to shape into one’.²⁷ It is strictly *Einbildungskraft*. It is the

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apprehension of productive unity, that is to say, of polarity. It is the mind's approach to self-knowledge. It is the power of identification with reality beyond the self, of bringing together the opposites of subject and object. It is a dimension of reason in the special function of seeing the whole in the parts and comprehending the parts as a whole. In the way it makes things real to the self it allows objects to be living (does not kill them by dissection and analysis) and it embraces the interpenetration of the polarities of existence in man and nature. Thus it is also an act of creative interchange in the knowledge of other selves and of God.

Imagination can also be spoken of as a symbol-making power. In *The Statesman's Manual*, Coleridge wrote of the histories in Scripture (in contrast to the histories produced in the eighteenth century) as

living educts of the imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the reason in images of the sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors.²⁸

A symbol, as Coleridge went on to say, in contrast to the literal and the metaphorical, or the dead letter and the allegory, 'is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal'. Symbol 'partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible'. Thus the symbols of Scripture are a living medium of interchange with the living God. And the book of nature, too, is to be read as symbolic. Granted that Coleridge did not write much explicitly on symbol, the concept seems integral to that functioning of reason to which the word imagination directs us.

Morality in reason

In his *Confessio Fidei* (1816) Coleridge began: 'I believe that I am a free agent, inasmuch as, and so far as, I have a will . . . Likewise that I possess reason, or a law of right and wrong, which, uniting with my sense of moral responsibility, constitutes the voice of conscience. Hence it becomes my absolute duty to believe, and I do believe, that there is a God.'²⁹ Thus reason is intrinsically moral. It includes conscience or the moral sense. It is a will for the good quite as much as it is cognition of being, though the will for the good is a knowledge of being. Conscience can be called the chief witness for spiritual realities.

At the outset of his treatment of the difference in kind between reason and

the understanding in the *Aids*, Coleridge pointed to a distinction in reason itself, relative to whether we view it as the ground of formal principles, or as the source of ideas. 'Contemplated distinctively in reference to formal (or abstract) truth, it is the Speculative Reason; but in reference to actual (or moral) truth, as the fountain of ideas and the light of the conscience, we name it the Practical Reason.'³⁰ This of course is Kantian language, and as Coleridge was excited by Kant's argument that metaphysical knowledge of God, the self, freedom, and immortality could not be provided by 'pure reason', so he was also impressed by Kant's turn to the practical reason as the basis for religious affirmation. But even before he encountered Kant, Coleridge tells us in the *Biographia Literaria*, he had become persuaded of this point:

I became convinced, that religion, as both the cornerstone and the keystone of morality, must have a *moral* origin; so far at least, that the evidence of its doctrines could not, like the truths of abstract science, be wholly independent of the will. It were therefore to be expected, that its *fundamental* truth would be such as MIGHT be denied; though only by the fool, and even by the fool from the madness of the *heart* alone.³¹

Further, Coleridge made the practical reason be more than Kant was willing for it to be. In *The Friend*, after describing his metaphysics as 'merely the referring of the mind to its own consciousness for truths indispensable to its own happiness', he went on to assert that 'above all' God gave us conscience. The authority of conscience is direct and indisputable. Conscience 'unconditionally commands us to attribute reality, and actual existence, to those ideas and to those only, without which the conscience itself would be baseless and contradictory, to the ideas of soul, of free-will, of immortality, and of God'.³² Postulates are not enough. The practical reason alone becomes reason in the full and substantial sense. And to the 'ideas' should be added, for Coleridge, original sin and redemption.

The commands of conscience are not necessary in the sense of the postulates of geometry, but to reject them is to narrow and debase reason. They can be denied, but no good man will deny the premises of moral science. The fundamental truth of religion, again, is such as might be denied, but only by the fool from the madness of his heart.

Faithful reason

This brings us again to the will, and even to the will (and right) to believe. The practical reason is, of course, inseparable from the will, and conscience can be described as the point of synthesis of reason and will. But it can also be said that 'faith subsists in the *synthesis* of the reason and the individual will'.

By virtue of the will, faith is an energy relating to the whole moral man. By virtue of reason, 'faith must be a light, a form of knowing, a beholding of truth'.³³ Here we encounter a fourth and highest level in Coleridge's view of religious thinking, a level at which reason and faith become one, where reason is fidelity.

Now faith is 'fidelity to our own being – so far as such being is not and cannot become an object of the senses, and hence . . . to being generally, as far as the same is not an object of the senses'. Also, faith can be described as 'the fealty of the finite will and understanding to the reason, *the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world*, as one with, and representative of, the absolute will, and to the ideas or truths of the pure reason'.³⁴ But this means that reason itself, at the highest point, requires an act of will, a venturing forth, a throwing of oneself into the act of apprehension of spiritual truth. Just as faith must give a reasoned account of itself, so a reason that has no fidelity in it is unfaithful to reason. Only at this level do the deepest differences of Coleridge's thought from supernatural rationalism emerge – as do also his differences from Schleiermacher, Hegel, Kant, and Schelling, both in the idea of faith as fidelity (with Luther, against Schleiermacher and Hegel) and in the conception of the rationality of faith.

'Christianity is not a theory or a speculation . . . but a life and a living process.' Thus every theology of evidences (or a Hegelian proof) is both useless and a misunderstanding; it is irreligious. Or, if one were to try to speak of 'true evidences', the highest would be the experience of need in the soul of the believer for redemption and 'the actual *Trial* of the Faith in Christ, with its accompaniments and results, that must form the arched ROOF, and the Faith itself is the completing KEYSTONE'.³⁵ The life of faith cannot be 'intellectually more evident' than the law of conscience commands 'without becoming morally less effective; without counteracting its own end by sacrificing the *life* of faith to the cold mechanism of a worthless because compulsory assent'.³⁶ The faithful reason is characterized by a real venture. Here Pascal's wager must be recalled, and William James's 'will to believe' is anticipated.

In Coleridge's conception of religious thinking, there is a logical movement from the acknowledged wants or religious needs of men, through the demands of the moral sense, to the injunction: 'Try it!' The whole programme of the *Aids to Reflection*, from 'Prudential Aphorisms' to 'Moral and Religious Aphorisms' to 'Aphorisms on Spiritual Religion Indeed' is designed to elicit a kind of religious thinking which recognizes that the culminating test is of an experimental, even pragmatic, sort. As faith is properly the fidelity of man to God, so to the question 'How is Christianity to