WILLIAM BLAKE AND THE RELIGION OF ART

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THE relationship between art and religion has always been ambiguous. In primitive society the two are almost inseparably interwoven. Where the basic activities of society have not reached the stage of self-consciousness all must appear largely undifferentiated, but even at high levels of culture the frontiers between art and religion fail to be demarcated. It is only very recently, in an environment of high sophistication and much confusion in the categories of thought, that they have been put into entirely separate compartments. Their sundering, in the attempt to make them conform to the atomistic pattern of modern life, has only succeeded in making both more elusive. Most attempts to understand the nature of either have the effect of making them coalesce again, as the mercury pellets in a child's puzzle run together at a tap of the finger after they have been manoeuvred successfully into opposite corners.

Ever since art and religion have been distinguished at all there has been a consciousness of rivalry. For Plato, the poet's role in society was important precisely because he was the interpreter of the gods to men. The poet as such was not exiled from the *Republic*—he was too indispensabe, not to say sacred a person for that—but the poet who allured by imitating the things of sense was. While the poet mediated the Divine, and the forms of the good were to be sought through an education that, by means of music and the plastic arts, was grounded in the harmony of the universe, Plato was very far from allowing the artist autonomy. It was the philosopher who decided what the true health of the community required and the poet who must obey. In the Middle Ages the artist found free expression in the service of religion, though strictly as a servant. Renaissance secularization appeared at first merely as a change of masters — the princes and the merchants instead of the Church. The artist was still essentially a workman, his art a craft. Only gradually the distinction between fine and useful arts was made firm and elevated into a theory of aesthetics. In the eighteenth century "taste" came to be recognized as a distinct department of human life. The social position of the

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artist changed as actor, painter, musician, or even the humble engraver, ceased to be regarded as a mechanic or a vagabond and became the practitioner of a refined cult. By the nineteenth century men were ready to agree that the diverse techniques that produced the varied objects of taste were the manifestation of one expression of the human spirit—Art, with a capital A.

Under the broad classical view the poet, the painter and the sculptor shared the general end of instructing and pleasing. Yet the poet had a special dignity. He was no workman, using muscle and matter, but rather a species of prophet, dealing in the coin of the spirit. Even in the seventeenth century Milton could make claims for poetry as divine—claims that would not have been possible for Rubens or Christopher Wren to make for their arts, even when they were employing them directly in the service of religion. The Muse and the Word were not incompatible, but rather varied revelations of spiritual reality. Certainly, Christian orthodoxy set limits to the divinity of poetry and a growing rationalism went hard with the claims of poetry to be at home in the sphere of religion. Rational man and the social theme became poetry's province until the Romantic Revival proclaimed the autonomy of poetry and its identification with religion.

The conception of the "creative imagination" was the means by which this autonomy was asserted. Poetry was no longer an accomplishment added to life, but one of the prime elements of life itself. For Coleridge creative imagination was double: in its secondary form, the means whereby we ordered the phenomena of sense; in its primary form, the heart of reality, the image of the great I AM. For De Quincey it was the source of the literature of Power. For Shelley it was the quality that made the poet a seer, the true principle of creation and the means of the preservation of the cosmos.

In Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* there can be found a complete account of the romantic view of poetry as the true expression of the creative imagination, of which religion is a partial and warped reflection. The whole subject is, however, set out far more fully, pungently and controversially in the writings of William Blake. Apart from the Romantics himself, Blake shows the inner logic of romanticism. For Blake there is no doubt that art swallows up religion and takes over its functions without remainder:

> Prayer is the study of art. Praise is the practice of Art . . . The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination, that is God Himself—The Divine Body—Jesus: we are his Members . . . Jesus and his Apostles and Disciples were all Artists . . . The Old and New Testaments are the Great Code of Art.
>
> ("The Laocoon Group")
>
> The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nation's different reception of the Poetic Genius, which is everywhere call'd the Spirit of Prophecy.
>
> ("All Religions are One")

The presentation of art-become-religion is Blake's central theme. It is set out for us in the aphorisms of "There is no Natural Religion" and "All Religions are One", is developed in "The Everlasting Gospel" and "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell", and underlies all the *Prophetic Books*. It is essentially a doctrine of pure immanence. The intellect is solely derivative; its function is restricted to arranging the counters of sense-perception in a finite world. Through the poetic (or creative) imagination alone man has access to the Infinite. The imagination is the reality of which the world of common-sense experience is the appearance. True knowledge of the real world is thus the end of art and art its sole means; it is also salvation, so that art is true religion. Reality has meaning only in the inner, imaginative nature of man:

> As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various), so all Religions &, as all similars, have one source.
>
> The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius.
>
> ("All Religions are One")

National religions are abstractions from reality and poetic myths taken literally. Art, on the other hand, accepts all experience, interpreting it through mythology and thus grasping the total reality it expresses:

> He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God . . . Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is.
>
> ("There is no Natural Religion")

The rejection of religion is explicit. The great religions of the world all assert transcendence. They all maintain that, though God reveals Himself in experience, yet not all experience is an equally valuable revelation of the Divine. They claim that a special revelation of God shows where the Divine is to be sought. They demand that the Divine shall be sought in a special relationship where man realizes his dependence. They

make absolute claims that are expressed in the activity of worship and are recognized by the adoption of a rule of life or a divinely sanctioned morality. (Even primitive Buddhism, which would seem to be an exception, falls within this general pattern). The Romantic doctrine of the religion of art denies the truth-claim made by the religions and reverses their aims. Worship is seen as a misdirected notion of artistic expression, and morality as a perverted limitation of artistic creativity. Religion's attempt to winnow the good from the evil in experience is the great apostacy.

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
>
> From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason. Evil is the active springing from Energy.
>
> Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.
>
> ("Marriage of Heaven and Hell")

Blake knew that Heaven and Hell were both necessary, but as a good artist he took his orders from Hell.

There are points of contact between the religion of art and what Aldous Muxley has called the *Perennial Philosophy*, i.e., the belief in the Divine Ground of the universe, grasped without special revelation through the "divine-spark" latent in the human soul and discovered by mystical experience or direct intuition. The differences are also great. Mysticism finds the universe of experience chiefly a material disguise of spiritual reality. Its ultimate goal is union with, or absorption into, the spiritual so that the world of sense displays its unreality and worthlessness. The Fall is ultimately cosmic, a Fall *into* matter. For the religion of art the material world is not an illusion to be discarded, though it is not the real world. Blake's *Prophetic Books* tell of the Fall of Man, Albion, which involves the fall of the universe, being essentially also a fall into the body. But the result is that the world appears opaque to the imagination and the chief illusion of fallen nature is that body and soul are separate, whereas the body is simply the outward form of the soul:

> If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.
>
> ("Marriage of Heaven and Hell")

So far from escaping from the figment of matter by ascetic discipline we should see that salvation can come about only by "an improvement of sensual enjoyment". "For everything that lives is holy". The artist, after all, works through the senses, using them for the purpose of expressing the imagination. The dualism of the "spiritual" interpretation in which "spirit" is burdened by the dead weight of an incomprehensible "matter" is for the artist as far from satisfactory as the dualism of the materialist, who regards matter as "real" and the consciousness that apprehends it as a valueless by-product. Blake derided Locke and also left Swedenborg behind.

Religion meant for Blake Christianity, since Christianity was the religion of his nation, the local adaptation of the One Religion. Blake also found there the cardinal point of his "Everlasting Gospel"—the forgiveness of sins. His insistence that morality is not religion is much to the point and some of his remarks seem to anticipate modern biblical criticism. This should not blind us to the fact that the central Christian tradition—the unique revelation of a personal God, revealed in the history of a Chosen Race culminating in the Messiah, and the regeneration of mankind through a historical act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ—is totally rejected. Christ is simply the eternal embodiment of imagination. The Bible is the purest embodiment of poetic imagination, the most complete representation of poetic myth and an accidental preservation of an original tradition. (Blake believed in a historical Golden Age)

> The Antiquity of every Nation under Heaven, is no less sacred than that of the Jews. They are the same thing, as Jacob Bryant and all antiquaries have proved. How other antiquities came to be neglected and disbelieved, whilst those of the Jews are collected and arranged, is an enquiry worthy both of the Antiquarian and the Divine. All had originally one language and one religion: this was the religion of Jesus, the everlasting Gospel. Antiquity preaches the Gospel of Jesus.
> ("A Descriptive Catalogue")

The Apostles preached what they believed to be the revelation in history of the Transcendent God to men. The Everlasting Gospel of Blake was the unchanging revelation of the Eternal Man to himself.

Artistic experience knows the self only from within, and the external judgments of metaphysics, religion, or morality are all equally remote from its essential awareness. The conscious self

for the artist is an extension of the self discovered in imagination; it is always suspect and sometimes a declared enemy. In his annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems* Blake commented:

> I see in Wordsworth the Natural Man rising up against the Spiritual Man continually, & then he is No Poet but a Heathen Philosopher at enmity against all true Poetry and Inspiration . . . I do not know who wrote these Prefaces: they are very mischievous & direct contrary to Wordsworth's own Practise.

The artist, like the psychologist, sees the real man in the unconscious self and has as his mission the revelation of this "true" self to the consciousness, which would either deny or disown it. To both, conscious reasoning usually wears the mask of rationalization. Before any general understanding of the unconscious mind, the Romantics saw that the distinguishing mark of poetry—what previous ages had called its "divine" power—was its effective functioning, in Shelley's phrase, "above and beyond consciousness". (It is a commentary on present-day assumptions that we invariably picture the unconscious as *below* consciousness). Both Shelley and Blake praised Milton for contradicting in his poetry his consciously held beliefs.

Now Milton would have been coldly contemptuous of the suggestion that he really belonged to the Devil's party. Yet Blake and Shelley as judges of poetry cannot simply be dismissed. Satan in *Paradise Lost* is theologically unambiguous; he is not the thinly-disguised romantic hero that many have assumed because they have swallowed the romantic tradition uncritically. Milton knew very well what he was about. At the same time, Milton's Satan is more than a theological entity. He is given an anthropomorphic reference, which leads us to conceive him continually in human terms. Thus he becomes also a symbol of the human spirit, Blake's Eternal Man, so that he can be identified with the revolt of the imaginative powers against the restrictions of reason and morality—part of a common myth that by Blake was expressed in the opposition of Orc to Urizen, by Shelley of Prometheus to Zeus. It is exactly here that the contrast between art and religion is seen. For the romantic artist every religion is a myth conceived literally, with greater or less harm, according to the degree in which its literal acceptance reacts on its imaginative force:

> The distorted notions of invisible things which Dante and his rival Milton have idealized, are merely the mask and the

mantle in which these great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised.

(Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*)

At first sight it might seem that psychology would support the claims of art to be the true religion. Psychological interpretations of religion certainly often lead to the discovery of something very like the religion of art. This is because psychology, as R. G. Collingwood used to insist, deals with the *psyche* and not with the whole mind as such. The experience of art, the self revealed to the self, is the subject-matter of psychology also. But psychology aspires to be a science; it refers its findings about the *psyche* to the deliberative and conscious mind; it has no jurisdiction over logic or any power to make judgments of value; it simply supplies the data from which the whole mind builds up some understanding of some of its processes.

It is no accident that Blake's symbolism yields readily to analysis along the lines of Jungian psychology and indeed takes the form of an almost exact replica of Jung's picture of the domain of the *psyche*[1]. It is no accident either that Jung is the protagonist of the Collective Unconscious, revealed in universal patterns of myth, and one who assigns an important place to religion in psychotherapy, without explicit recognition of the truth-claims of religion. This correspondence does much to vindicate Blake's vision of the nature and the scope of art and the accuracy of his mapping out of the kingdom of immanence. Unfortunately, it does not prove the divinity of Blake's god. Instead, it shows the mechanism that selects and delivers its deity. It is psychology's function to bring to light the processes whereby men adopt, deny, or utilize their religion. The truth of any particular religion is a matter that lies within the province of the conscious mind to decide, using scientific method to discover the nature of the world of its awareness—which, of course, includes the *psyche*. The claim of any religion to be true becomes gravely suspect if it can be shown to be adequately explained by unconscious motives derived from the *psyche*. That is what Freud attempted to prove against religion in general in *The Future of an Illusion*, without success; the method is double-edged and applies equally to the motives of scepticism. Now if the Gospel of Immanence were indeed true, then psychology as a science could have no possible relevance. It could only be regarded as a "Heathen Philosophy", not simply false, but blasphemous. Newton

1. See W. P. Witcutt. *Blake, a Psychological Study* (1946).

and Locke were, for Blake, supremely the enemies of art, servants of "Antichrist Science". Therefore, in spite of Surrealism and the Freudian colouring of much modern poetry, Blake could have taken no delight in psycho-analysis. Any attempt to examine the self from the outside assumes an objective viewpoint. Freud's personal philosophy, exalting the unconscious mind over the conscious, could not compensate for that fundamental betrayal; and Jung, while ready to agree about the oneness of the subject matter of all poetry, would tell Blake that the latter preached the Everlasting Gospel, not because he was an inspired prophet, but because he was an intuitive introvert.

Thus psychology cannot support the romantic contention that religion is merely fossilized myth, though it can point to the elements of myth inevitably present in all religions as well as in art. The artist's relation to myth is completely distinct from the believer's attitude. For the former, myth symbolizes all truth—truth being viewed subjectively from the point of view of the immanentist. For the latter, myth is just the human way of interpreting supra-natural reality and is never more than a relative approximation to the reality postulated. Thus Milton, as a poet, may well be partly of the Devil's party (in so far as Satan is more than evil hypostatized), yet his status as a believing Christian is not thereby affected, far less the truth of historical Christianity. Shelley's contention that Milton was a genius, because his imaginative treatment of a mythological theme was the reverse of his declared theological intention, is a poetic judgment, showing that poetry can speak only its own language and cannot be used to translate directly the language of religion. His contention that Milton's religion was a distortion of eternal truth is a religious judgment and one that deserves respect only to the degree of our respect for Shelley's understanding of religion and his capacity for unprejudiced appraisal of the facts.

It might be thought that, for a poet, the religion of art is relatively justified and that the conscious adoption of any other creed will only lead to a division of loyalties which will handicap him as an artist and as a man. This does not seem to be supported by the facts. In the Romantics (and their present-day successors) the belief that the religion of art must eventually replace the superstitions of institutional religions has led to contradictions of thought that have undermined the foundations of art itself. With Blake, singleminded worship

of the Everlasting Gospel produced a great achievement—but at great cost. Blake had virtually to cut himself off from all human companionship, except that of a submissive wife and any disciple ready to submit without question to his enormous (although unselfish) egotism. His contemporaries who thought him mad were technically wrong, yet, in common-sense usage, right. Blake was unlucky in living in a time when freedom of thought was politically dangerous. He was probably more unfortunate still that his age had not yet been convinced by Romanticism that the artist was to be accepted as irresponsible, while rationalism had banished a literal belief in genius as divine madness. Even so, it was his religion and not his age that chiefly caused his isolation and turned his work into an esoteric mystery to be unravelled by experts. Shelley's romanticism was the cause of much personal and intellectual unhappiness. Keats, less metaphysically inclined, was able in a shortened life, to make the world of poetry an end in itself. Wordsworth among the Romantics stands as a reminder that artistic daring can go hand in hand with religious conservatism. He was happier, both in art and life, than most of his fellows. His "pantheism" may be the religion of art peeping through his background of Anglican Christianity, but is more probably the result of the dominant enlightenment of his early years, which tended to oppose the particular and general revelations, making the latter seem incompatible with the former.

The religion of art is thoroughly ill-adapted to serve as a total philosophy. It means the acceptance of total experience, good and bad together (Blake: "everything that lives is holy"); the principle that full expression of the self is the final good, so that energy is deified and all restraining elements condemned (Blake: "Damn braces, bless relaxes"); the need to transcend morality, in order to see the necessity for evil (Blake: from *Innocence* to *Experience*); the acceptance of conflict as the mode of creative activity (Blake "Mental fight"); and salvation through the entire re-making of the natural order (Blake: Albion and Jerusalem re-united). Subjectively meaningful, these terms breed endless misery when placed in an objective world. In every romantic conception of life we find them constantly appearing. They lie behind the cult of the "dark Gods" of D. H. Lawrence—Lawrence, who valued the tenderness of Christianity (identified with his mother and childhood memories) but rejected it because he deified the artist's need for expression (identified with the sexual urge)—"What we want

is the fulfilment of our desires." They lie behind the pursuit of evil prominent in Byron, Baudelaire and Swinburne, and their lesser brethren, that has been analysed at length in Professor Mario Praz's *Romantic Agony*. They lie behind the Dionysian megalomania of Nietzsche. The aesthetic basis of Nietzsche's philosophy is confused because he could never rid himself of the urge to include morality in his "transvaluation of values" and, seeing clearly that self-expression without limitations must be evil, he insisted that it also should be accepted as good. Yet how much of Nietzsche is in these few sentences of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*:

> The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence, and now seem to live in chains, are in truth the causes of its life & the sources of all activity; but the chains are the cunning of weak and tame minds which have power to resist energy; according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning.
>
> These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.
>
> Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two . . .
>
> One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression.

The "war' and "ruthlessness" that Nietzsche proclaimed, and shrank from, are exemplified far better by the behaviour of the mythological Supermen of Blake's *Prophetic Books* than in the shabby barbarism of an historical Borgia.

After the first wave of Romanticism, Ruskin and Morris and, less wholeheartedly, Matthew Arnold, sought to subject the autonomy of art to the moral and social purposes of civilization. Ruskin in particular tried to find a direct relation—too direct and over-simplified—between good art and the good society. In the "Art for Art's sake" reaction, art withdrew its pretensions to empire on condition that the boundaries of the aesthetic realm were withdrawn within an iron curtain. This reduced romanticism, preached more recently by Roger Fry and Clive Bell, has been the commonly accepted background of our times, until the religion of Marxism won the allegiance of many artists in the inter-war years and the servile role of art was once more emphatically asserted. In a new reaction we are witnessing a revival of neo-orthodox romanticism.

The most conspicuous prophet of the religion of art at the moment is Alex Comfort. In *Art and Social Responsibility* (1946) he rejects the retreat into pure aestheticism in its contemporary manifestations of Surrealism and Constructivism.

He equates romanticism on the sociological side with anarchism, but insists that it is primarily a metaphysic, a world-view that finds human values in man but not in the Universe. In the complete lack of any concern for the metaphysical consequences of this assertion, however, and for the grounds of his accompanying assertion that this philosophy is proved by empirical considerations, it becomes clear that the true basis for this full-blooded neo-romanticism is a religious attitude. In its pessimistic conclusions it has affinities with Existentialism, differing from the latter in its frank disregard of philosophical justification. It may yet, of course, develop a philosophy of religion, which was the original starting-point of Existentialism. At the moment it appears chiefly as an emotional repudiation of the Marxist pretensions and despair of Western civilization. Alex Comfort looks back particularly to Shelley, though without the prop of Shelley's Platonism, falling back on individual integrity as the only locus of value, because society seems totally corrupt and incapable of regeneration. He maintains that classicism is when men (falsely) believe themselves in control of their environment and that romanticism is the true acceptance of the fact that man is a victim, struggling (in vain) against death and barbarism. This pessimistic romanticism is in fact a primitive religion, born of the same mood as the old Nordic gods, who battle against the Giants of formless Nature, though doomed to ultimate defeat.

Such fighting romanticism is not yet a popular creed. We live in the wake of a debilitated romanticism where the banner of "Art for Art's sake" still flies, though there is the desire to relate art somehow to society. A recent example of this indeterminate romanticism appears in Mr. Herbert Read's *The Grass Roots of Art* (1947). Mr. Read writes:

> For many people, especially in Protestant countries, a sundering flood seems to flow between art and religion. I can only say, in this brief aside, that in my philosophy the two realms are not separable: the beauty of holiness is but the reverse aspect of the holiness of beauty. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty."

This philosophy is denied seven pages earlier:

> The two activities (art and religion) are wholly autonomous . . . It is only an analogy that exists between the *Summa* of St. Thomas and a contemporary cathedral. What they have in common is a groundwork, a social unity and integrity which permit them to exist side by side, parallel but separate manifestations of the same group consciousness.

The problem of relating religion to art is not solved by a convenient romantic formula or, more "scientifically", by referring both to the realm of sociology. "Group consciousness" is made conscious in religion. It is inadequate to say that in the Middle Ages art and religion met and "seemed to coalesce". The cathedral, after all, owed its existence and its intention (though not the form in which the intention was realized) to the religion of which the *Summa* was a direct reflection. "A group consciousness or brotherhood expressed in art alone" is "conceivable" to Mr. Read, though it would appear quite inconceivable except in the case of the religion of art; in which case the sociological criterion would not, of course, be considered valid by "the brotherhood". A half-hearted romanticism makes the worst of all worlds. You must be a romantic, a believer, or an aesthete believing in water-tight compartments. This is clear at the present time to the Marxist—and somewhat less clear to the Christian.

Marxism has been the most conspicuous factor in the situation of recent years, because the most dogmatic. Christian convictions in general have become as diffused and confused as the pure milk of romanticism. Yet Christianity, particularly in the Catholic tradition, has not been without influence. In contrast to the Marxist, who can find room for art merely as propaganda, the Christian can grant the complete validity of aesthetic considerations, provided that they are subordinated to the total demands of Christian living. If the Catholic wing of Christianity, rather than the Protestant, has been clear on this issue, it is because it has recognized the "sundering flood" between art and religion and insisted on the division, whereas Protestantism, with good intentions, has yielded to an immanentism that has blurred the issue. The place of art within the Christian scheme can be established, but only when romantic pretensions have been quashed. The Christian, as T. S. Eliot has remarked, cannot take art as seriously as the romantic. Contrast the following statements, the first by Dr. Northrop Frye, who in his recent study of Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*, has shown himself to be an eager disciple of the Everlasting Gospel, and the second by Eric Gill, whose Roman Catholicism underlies his belief in the instrumental value of art:

> The value of a conventional religious symbol depends entirely on how good it is as art. Our response to the tremendous Madonnas of Cimabue may be healthy and fully imaginative,

> not because we believe in Madonnas, whether we do or not, but because we can see the picture, and enter into the vision. But the notion that a Madonna by a bad artist can be of any religious value to anyone, however ignorant of art, because it is a Madonna, is unhealthy and cramping to the imagination.
> (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 89)

> If we put a painting of the Madonna in our art gallery, it is not because the painter has succeeded in conveying a specially clear view of her significance, but simply because he has succeeded in making a specially pleasing arrangement of materials. A Raphael Madonna! But it is as Raphael we honour it and not as a Madonna; for Raphael is, or was until recently, held by the pundits to be particularly good at making pleasing arrangements, and we are no longer concerned with meanings.
> *Essays*, 1947)

Eric Gill has "Art for Art's sake" romanticism in mind, but his case still holds good where meaning is restricted to subjective significance. The romantic simply equates the religious sphere with the aesthetic and so destroys it. The man of religion values each, the one absolutely, the other relatively to it. Of course, aesthetic health is desirable as well as religious integrity. The therapeutic power of art is undoubted. Clearly, lack of correspondence between the conscious and unconscious self can be the basis of religious, as well as of purely psychic, ill-health; and the use of symbols in art is a real factor in the relationship between the explicit and the hidden factors in personality. Religion, which can use art to serve its purposes, cannot dictate the means to be employed. Art speaks its own language, addresses its own audience, refers to its own universe of discourse. The aesthetically deplorable Madonna can serve its religious purpose fully; its aesthetic influence will still produce its effect and so infect the total personality of its maker, or worshipper, to that degree. The symbol of conscious beliefs and the symbol that speaks to the *psyche* are entirely distinct, though both are united in one object and both are taken up into the one self. The good proper to art and the good proper to religion are necessarily distinct, a fact that eludes the well-meaning people of fixed beliefs who complain that the artist will not be content with "the true, the good and the beautiful". The good of art is what emerges in artistic activity. It is just as foolish to expect the artist to know his end before he has reached it as to expect morality and religion not to rest upon certain postulated convictions about the nature of ultimate reality. A mushy confusion that imagines art and

religion to be two sides of the same coin does no honour to either. Romanticism and religion both insist that there cannot be two Popes with an absolute but vague sovereignity over overlapping territories.

Man must reach outside of himself, pursue some consciously chosen end, recognized by reason and accessible to logic. The sphere of religion must take precedence over all his activities, otherwise individual life becomes irrational and society anarchic. Pure romanticism has to face this. "I say emphatically that war is wrong, and do not know why I say it," writes Alex Comfort. "The position is illogical, but I see no way out;" and he falls back upon "an agathistic utilitarianism", "an ethic derived entirely from man"—which means that some unrecognized religious standard, acknowledging more than man in splendid isolation, has crept in. Alex Comfort gladly adopts anarchism as his social philosophy, though a completely logical anarchism is probably impossible. Romanticism is nearly always a protest, a voluntary renunciation of the guides who would lead us to freedom—the only guides who *can* lead us—on the score of their being not always reliable and frequently turning out to be the dupes of the forces they are endeavouring to control.

Among the great artists, romanticism often seems to spring from the difficulty of integrating their creative urge and the apparently restrictive effects of accepted moral and religious codes. Blake is the supreme example of this process. His isolation made him willing to cast aside the thought of compromise. (His one serious effort in this direction, his *Descriptive Catalogue* shows how pathetically impossible such an attempt was for him.) He was not therefore misled into starting a new religion or a new philosophy, though endowed with a stronger religious sense and a more acute mind than many "prophets" or philosophers who have externalized their aesthetic intuitions and projected the inner logic of art improperly in the form of creeds, or metaphysical and ethical systems. Blake withdrew wholly into the realm of art, finding within the immanent self his entire universe. It is this that makes him so invaluable a guide to the foundations of romanticism, since in other romantics the religion of art is found muddied with attempts to apply it to levels of experience where it has no validity. Blake exposes these pretences. In *Jerusalem* he makes Los, imaginative energy, say to his Spectre, "Holy Reasoning Power":

> I must Create a System or be enslav'd by another Man
> I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.

This is a confession of strength, but also the admission of limitation. In the objective world, creation is a social act in which our dependence upon one another is the condition of liberty, not of slavery. Art as a religion must remain shut up in itself or appear self-contradictory.

Although art can have meaning for the full human life only in the context of religion, religion can ignore art, or make use of insincere art, only at its peril. Art as a religion is self-destructive, but art is a real element in the total man who aspires to true religion and often achieves little more than self-deception. Great art does not necessarily arise from a full religion, neither is sainthood the pre-requisite of artistic genius—history proves the contrary theses too frequently. Yet the healthy development of the one is essential to the other. If they are not the products of a unified group-consciousness, they are the conditions of its existence. The individual artist or saint may triumph in spite of, or because of, the defects of the tradition in which he is set. But human values can prosper only when the nature of reality is recognized, both at conscious and at unconscious levels. The immanental world is mirrored in art. Religion points to transcendent reality. The total self belongs to both.