

Blessed Negativities: The Contribution of Deconstruction to Theology

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Abstract: *In the first and largest section of this article, I would like to present a limited but critical appreciation of what deconstruction can contribute to theology. I aim to do this in reference to Kevin Hart's justly celebrated book, The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy.¹ The second, biblically based reflection, aims to stimulate an often neglected consideration of the 'negative theology' of the New Testament itself, and so poses the question of how deconstruction in some form is inherent in the life and expression of faith.*

Key Words: deconstruction; negative theology; *via negativa*; Kevin Hart; New Testament

CRITICAL APPRECIATION OF DECONSTRUCTION

Kevin Hart explores the inter-relationship of deconstruction, theology and philosophy. The position he outlines is one of delicate nuance, especially if compared, say, with Pope John Paul's encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (1998)² which, despite its timely concern to underscore the value of intelligence in the life of faith, tends to see in deconstruction a tendency to nihilism, or at least a manifestation of a loss of confidence in critical rationality.

Differing Perspectives

Let us note briefly the following points at which discussion is likely to occur concerning the respective positions of Hart, and the more general Catholic tradition as expressed in this recent encyclical. The Pope speaks of 'the deep-seated distrust of reason which has surfaced in the most recent developments of much of philosophical research, to the point where there is talk at times of "the end of metaphysics" ' (*FR*, §55). He considers that 'a radically phenomenalist or relativist philosophy would be ill-adapted to help in the deeper exploration of the riches found in the word of God' (*FR*, § 82), for the Scriptures themselves know the difference between truth and lying, and the confessions of faith and so forth found in the New Testament certainly presume an ontological, objective realism. He calls, therefore, for a philosophy of 'genuinely metaphysical range, capable, that is, of

¹ Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign. Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign. Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), with important new introduction and conclusion. My references are to this latter edition.

² Hereafter, *Fides et Ratio* will be cited as *FR*.

transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth' (*FR*, §83), even though no reference is intended to a specific school of metaphysics or to a particular historical current of thought. The Pope wishes only to state that philosophy needs to 'transcend the factual and the empirical, and to vindicate the human being's capacity to know this transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that is true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical'. In this regard, 'metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature'. In such an interplay, 'the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry'.

The papal author goes on to refer to the postmodern situation. He allows that the thinkers most associated with this complex turn in thinking 'merit appropriate attention' (*FR*, §91). Here, he refers to the extreme end of the spectrum, namely, to those suggesting that 'the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral'. He concedes, however, that the nihilism of some such approaches has its source in 'the terrible experience of evil which has marked our age', giving rise to not only existential, but also to a kind of intellectual despair. In a later paragraph, John Paul II concedes, despite his basic concern for the absolute truth of the word of God, that it is not 'any one people or to any one period of history' to which divine revelation is exclusively addressed (*FR*, §95). Dogmatic statements reflect 'at times the culture of the period in which they were defined', so that there is an inevitable 'historical and cultural conditioning of the formulas which express that truth'. Yet what is known and revealed in history 'also reaches beyond history', unconfined by any one time or culture. Hence, 'one must reckon seriously with the meaning which words assume in different times and cultures', even if a transcultural communication is not only possible, but is also an historical fact. This is to say that 'the hermeneutical problem exists, to be sure; but it is not insoluble' (*FR*, §96).

We can appreciate in such references, and in the many others that could be given, the pastoral concern of John Paul II to encourage confidence in the capacities of human intelligence, and to emphasise the synergies of faith and reason in the theological enterprise. Still, the papal author and this Australian Professor of Religion and Literature at Notre Dame at South Bend seem to be moving in different spheres. Clearly, dialogue is needed and, indeed, possible, especially given Hart's own Catholic faith and the refined literary, theological and philosophical culture his writings exhibit.³ The following brief consideration is one step along the way.

Hart's Deconstruction

Hart gives a positive, yet critical, appreciation of deconstruction. Undoubtedly, most theologians would be impressed by the far-ranging literary, philosophical, mystical and theological references of his text, even if it is predictable that that the literary-technical language of largely French origin will pose difficulties of one kind or another. Moreover, a work that commends deconstruction as of positive value for theology will tend to leave

³ For Hart's difficulties with the encyclical as well his deeply theological response to it, see especially his article, Kevin Hart, 'Fides et Ratio et ...', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 76.2 (2002): 199-220.

undefined what practitioners of a more formal philosophy and theology, especially that of a Thomistic provenance, have spent a lot of time clarifying, namely, philosophical notions such as knowledge, truth, meaning, value, objectivity and subjectivity, and theological matters such as the incarnation, grace, faith and sacrament. Moreover, a theology working within and intending to serve the communal reality of the Church formed by its sacred scriptures and its sacraments, all deriving from the key doctrine of the incarnation itself, and set within a hope of the transformation of all creation, may feel justified in bypassing the seeming inconclusiveness, tentativeness and relentless deconstruction of this newer mode of interpreting human discourse: the level of relativity is too great, the negations hovering over hallowed notions such as presence, representation and signification are simply too negating; and for that matter, so unproductive when it comes to a deeper understanding of faith in its cognitive, or moral or even mystical reaches despite Hart's impressive familiarity with numerous rich veins of the theological and mystical tradition. This present period of history is in fact marked by the collapse and destruction of traditions, be they literary, philosophical or religious. It is not clear that this is a propitious moment for introducing deconstruction when so much destruction is evident. When the texts of the tradition have not been read, deconstruction would seem rather *de trop*.

Deconstruction Positively Considered

On the other hand, granting that key texts of the theological tradition must continue to be read, something akin to deconstruction as Hart has presented it may help in the reading. It will inspire a healthy sense of a *via negativa* as it operates in scriptural discourse, in doctrinal development, and in sacramental theology. But the precise correlation of this general sense of the *via negativa* with deconstruction and the negative theology that Hart argues for, is best left as an open question for the moment. It should not go unnoticed, however, that inscribed on the frontispiece of Hart's justly influential book is the Ignatian motto, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*. Any theological reading of Hart's far ranging reflection on deconstruction, theology and philosophy would do well to keep this in mind, as he labours to allow 'God' to be God. As a scholarly representative of Catholic faith in dialogue with postmodern literary and philosophical perspectives, Hart aims to promote a more authentic faith, and a more assured kind of theology, even if more modest and critically attuned. Not only must theology be alive to the risk and darkness inherent in the life of faith itself – in line with the *aporia* of faith,⁴ but also must recognize the historical context in which it operates. Hart quotes Derrida's pithy observation, 'No meaning can be determined out of context, but no context permits saturation.'⁵ This is to say that no context exhausts all the possibilities of interpretation; nor, we might add, does it forestall the variety of evaluative 'pretexts' in which classic texts will be read in the future. Any kind of failure to acknowledge this necessitates a deconstructive reading. If the overflowing inter-textuality of signification congeals into only one context of meaning, something is being suppressed – or even repressed.⁶ In short, only some form of deconstruction, however implicit, can counter fundamentalism in any of its guises,

⁴ Hart, *Tresspass*, 296.

⁵ Hart, *Tresspass*, 273.

⁶ Hart, *Tresspass*, 288.

including those of an orthodox or scientific variety. Yet it is not as though genuine faith need forever to be looking over its shoulder for a deconstructive critique. Such possibilities are furthest from the mind of most believers. But that is not to say that those whose business it is to interpret to the community of faith the living significance of its sacred texts need to counter the danger of over-familiarity with them through discerning dialogue with those most expert in the practice of deconstruction.⁷ Hart strongly contests any implication that deconstruction is inimical either to faith or to genuinely theological thinking, despite the fact that the earliest reception of Derrida's writings took place in circles hostile to theological tradition, especially in the English speaking world.⁸ In this regard, one must suppose that anti-religious deconstruction is just as much a fundamentalism as religious anti-deconstructionism.

True, Derrida can be on occasion frustratingly ambiguous on such matters, but Hart is able to show that the Derridean style of deconstruction is designed to subvert ideology of whatever kind, be it religious or anti-religious. Indeed, as an array of practices, deconstruction conspires with the mystical dimension in the theological tradition. Here, Hart calls on various notable instances of negative theology, especially from in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius. These are of special significance to the Catholic theological tradition - even if other mystical writings can and should be considered. Pseudo-Dionysius was in fact a powerful influence on Aquinas as the four hundred pages in the Latin text of his commentary shows.⁹ He is quite aware of the Platonic tone of Dionysius' writings, and allows that this is a bit odd for moderns (*apud modernos est inconsuetus*).¹⁰ Nonetheless, it remains for him a prized resource.

Deconstruction and Conditioned Thinking

But to return to Hart. He firmly reminds us that to theologise without close attention to cultural, historical, and literary frames at every moment would expose oneself to promoting what Harnack has called a 'supposititious Christ', and so run the risk of confusing orthodoxy with both ideology and fundamentalism.¹¹ Hart locates his approach as a variant of what is implied in the Scholastic adage, *Quidquid recipitur, recipitur per modum recipientis*: the human mode of reception, in experiencing, understanding and responding to divine revelation, must be respected. Though God gives faith, the same God also gives us 'flesh and blood - a time and place and perspective.'¹² Later in his book, Hart cites Duchamp's illustration, 'since a three dimensional object casts a two dimensional shadow, we should be able to imagine the unknown four-dimensional object whose shadow we are.'¹³ There must be a continuing and critical effort to imagine the multi-dimensional subjects we are, in our knowing, acting and believing, if we are to accurately read what we are, as we find it objectified in the linear black and white of the cultural and social texts.

In inviting the reader to reflect on the fact and limitations of our theological reception of revealed truth, and to acknowledge the relativities and conditions that

⁷ Hart, *Tresspass*, 294.

⁸ Hart, *Tresspass*, 43.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio Super Dionysium, De Divinis Nominibus in Opuscula Omnia II*, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris:Lethielleux, 1927).

¹⁰ Aquinas, Prologus, *Expositio...*, 220.

¹¹ Hart, *Tresspass*, xiv.

¹² Hart, *Tresspass*, xiv.

¹³ Hart, *Tresspass*, 130.

inevitably affect the receptivity of faith, Hart tends to concentrate directly on cognitive issues. He treats of affective and effective or praxis-related dimensions of faith only indirectly. Here we can let a question linger: Would his treatment be different if, instead of privileging the 'negative theology' of Pseudo-Dionysius, he had given us a deeper reading of other mystics to whom he refers, e.g., Dame Julian of Norwich, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*¹⁴ and St Teresa of Avila¹⁵ in the course of his dense exposition of the post-Kantian problematic? I think so; nonetheless, the cognitive issue has been the major problem in the history of Western thought, not the genuineness of Christian praxis, living from the love that 'bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Cor 13:7). I do not mean that the tradition presents us with a luminously evident praxis, since it always requires a humble confession of sinfulness on the part of all. Furthermore, spiritual directors within the Christian tradition understood progress in prayer in terms of a growth from the way of 'purgation', to the 'illuminative', and only then to the 'unitive' way. Neither the confession of sins nor the path of growing union with God were primarily a theoretical problem. That arose more in regard to the multiple senses of scripture, the development of doctrine, the meaning of analogy and the manner in which the truth of revelation was related to theological and philosophical modes of intelligence.

Deconstruction and Metaphysics

On this cognitive level, Hart often stresses that it is a mistake to view God through the lens of metaphysics.¹⁶ In some measure, an awareness of this mistaken course is quite central to the Christian doctrinal tradition. For instance, it was precisely the dominant cultural philosophies which could not allow for the trinitarian or incarnational reality of the God of Christian faith to be adequately affirmed. An uncritical theological collaboration with any metaphysics radically incompatible with the data of faith, found pre-eminently in the *donum*, the divine self-giving in Christ and the Spirit, eventually produced problems for itself. On the other hand, if faith loses contact with philosophical thinking, the philosophy concerned will tend to supply its own version of what faith means, by reducing it to some form of mythological projection to be deplored, or to some popular version of itself, a Platonism for the masses. It became evident in the emblematic doctrinal struggles of the first five centuries of Christian history that, if theology is to work with any given philosophy and its attendant phenomenology, it will need to make room for the distinctive data of faith, lest the new wine be poured into old wineskins with wasteful results. Faith and its theology needed to find their own space, lest both be neatly sewn into the homogenous fabric of a given philosophical system.

Yet this is not to say that theology can or ought avoid philosophical contamination. If theologians are to think seriously, it would be culturally silly for them to start from scratch; and so there is a long history of theology's association with Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, then, through Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel and Wittgenstein, to more recent phenomenological, personalist, existentialist, socially-critical and process kinds of thinking; and now to engagement with postmodern forms of thought. Any serious effort to address questions of meaning, value, moral responsibility, is immediately caught up in an exploration of what reality, truth, goodness, the goal of human history and the character of the universe might mean. On the other hand, deconstruction, as Hart presents

¹⁴ Hart, *Tresspass*, xvi.

¹⁵ Hart, *Tresspass*, 224.

¹⁶ Hart, *Tresspass*, xv.

it, is a practice of healthy critical relativising: it is a mistake to view God through, and only through, the lens of metaphysics or any philosophical system – even one, we might add, that is anti-metaphysical. This relativising activity is made possible when the metaphysical moment of theology is set within a larger field of experience, and in touch with the mystical dimensions of faith – that is, when it is set within ‘a grander and more sublime vision that exceeds and troubles’¹⁷ systematic philosophical thought, of whatever kind.

Deconstruction and the Mystical

For this reason, Hart values the mystical tradition especially to counteract any kind of theology that, having uncoupled itself from its inherent intentionality, seeks some form of external assurance in philosophy. He prizes, therefore, a ‘negative theology’, not as a vague corrective to positive theology – as he considers happens in the case of Aquinas – but as a more general economy pervading all religious thought, to unsettle metaphysical and systematic pretensions. Indeed, a mystical mood suffuses the work of the later Heidegger, to such a degree that many if not all his key concepts have their parallels in Christian theology and spirituality, in their respective, equivalent usages of such terms as revelation, grace, conversion, waiting, surrender and vocation. Likewise, Derrida, though less mystical – at least in terms of expression – is constitutionally averse to any form of ideological closure. In this regard, he shows some sympathy for ‘negative theology’, as long as the God beyond ‘God’ is not simply ‘there’ all the time as an available referent. For example, Derrida detects this superintending presence of the divine in the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius as he begins his treatise, *The Mystical Theology*, with a Trinitarian prayer.¹⁸ Hart faults Aquinas on this point as well,¹⁹ and finds himself in opposition to the Thomist tradition: ‘Contrary to the Thomist tradition, I argue that negative theology does not correct positive (or metaphysical) theology but supplements it at its ground and origin’.²⁰ Whilst one may well ask whether the Thomist position is quite as Hart deems it, you can see what he is getting at. Negative theology, with its deep moods of silence, darkness, surrender, should suffuse all theology, rather than be added as a mystical extra at the end; or to assert itself, as Caputo has suggested, only when Aquinas had some form of breakdown was he a true theologian.²¹

Deconstruction and No-Thing

Despite Derrida's criticism of Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology, Hart gives a more positive assessment. He finds passages in which God is described as endlessly self-communicating, ever on the move – never the hardened presence of onto-theology, for, as we find in *The Mystical Theology*, ‘God is free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial’.²² This ‘beyondness’, or excess, is what Hart aims to affirm, for ‘God comes only from God; certainly not from being. For without God there could be

¹⁷ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxvi.

¹⁸ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxiv.

¹⁹ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxi.

²⁰ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxxv. See also 256.

²¹ Hart, *Tresspass*, 66; 102. Cf. John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: an essay in overcoming metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982) 246-287.

²² Hart, *Tresspass*, xxi.

neither being nor beings.²³ While in agreement with Marion's *God without Being*, Hart can ask who it is with whom one is united. His answer underlines the value he puts on the negative:

Certainly not with a supreme being. Mystical theology does not allow us to figure the deity as a cause, ground, or source. Being is finite; the deity subsists "beyond-beingly" (hyperousias), and mystical ecstasy is a union with no-thing.²⁴

When Hart puts things this way, it is legitimate to ask whether or not he is privileging Platonic mysticism of a certain kind, one that is especially sensitive to the cognitive limitations that are experienced in mystical prayer. We can agree that mystical theology is not interested in metaphysical categories – God as cause, ground, etc. – though it is unlikely that Pseudo-Dionysius or any other non-metaphysical mystic would wish to say that they were themselves the cause or ground of God. On the other hand, metaphysics, at least in its implicit sense of reality and being, deeply structures any language. But, Hart goes on to say, 'Being is finite', whereas the deity exists 'beyond-beingly', in supreme indeterminacy. He goes further. Given his interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius, Hart avers that 'Mystical ecstasy is union with no-thing'. This is an arresting statement; and in the cognitive domain, it does make a point. But the life of faith is not one of cognition alone. For in the mystic's union with God there is an interpersonal communion involved; the believer is united to the self-revealing God. Neither the believer nor God are dissolved into 'no-thing'. In a theological sense, union presupposes different subjects in some way: I am not God, God is not me, and neither is nothing. A communion of two subjects is the radical presupposition, even if no term of the dipolar relationship is clearly definable – neither the being of God nor that of the human subject, nor the manner in which, in the familiar Johannine trope, God is in us or we in God.

Behind all this lurk large questions: What does 'is' mean in such a context? What idea of 'being' is being presumed? Such questions we will reserve till later. In the meantime, Hart observes that, 'A general negative theology can be overheard even in a positive theology; it whispers that God is neither a being nor being itself'.²⁵ God exists *a se*, outside the created universe of causes and the relationships existing between beings. Essentially unconditioned by any finite categories, God can only be revealed by God himself, not anticipated or affirmed in terms of being or any notion that depends on it.

Even though he contests Derrida's reading of Pseudo-Dionysius, Hart still aligns himself with Derrida, the yeast in the thick lump of so much current discussion. The French philosopher's special target is metaphysics and its influence on theology. Fixing on the same target, Hart aims to contribute to a non-metaphysical theology – one that would escape the hegemony of any metaphysical system, even while inevitably involved with it.²⁶

Here Hart can expect wide agreement with his position. Metaphysics can, indeed, work negatively. For it can saturate any given historical context with an immobile, logically totalising system which exercises an overbearing influence in theology. Such a metaphysical domination mutes the otherness of revelation, restricts the ability to respond to it, and occludes the flow and fusion of contexts in the historical experience of faith itself.²⁷ The complex mediations of faith can therefore be arrested by a theoretical

²³ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxii.

²⁴ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxvi.

²⁵ Hart, *Tresspass*, 22.

²⁶ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxxiv.

²⁷ Hart, *Tresspass*, 275-276.

system pretending to publicly present or represent 'reality', on the word of the philosophical establishment or by the sheer force of its particular logic. Thus, to counter any expectation of empiricist immediacy or ideological mastery, theology, in its positive intent as the intelligence of faith, must admit into its life and fabric a *via negativa*. A certain 'way of negation' affects its contemplative experience of things divine and its discernment of God's will and intention, just as any positive articulate reflection on the meaning of the mysteries of faith must confess a fundamental inadequacy at each stage of such a project.²⁸

For Hart, since theology is inextricably involved in the shifting interactions of presence and absence, it is a *speculative* discourse. Its truth is accessible only in the *speculum* of language, symbol and sign. It can never escape the play of signs and the multiple contexts of their significance. To be unaware of this is to run the danger of an ideological, conceptual or theoretical reification of religion,²⁹ thus to objectify the reality of God in such a manner that both the event of revelation and the personal decision of faith are extruded from consideration. The objectivity of what is believed and understood to be revealed can never be detached from the subjectivity of faith: whatever is received is received in accord with mode of the recipient: *quidquid recipitur ...* Consequently, a properly deconstructive theology will work against any conception of revelation as an uncarved block of reality as *there*, already-out-there-now, immediately accessible to intuition in some fashion, which is then signified in an more or less fixed array of signs and vocabulary. On the contrary, it is only through the interplay of signifiers, in all the variety of their uses and registers, that the 'traces' of the God who is at once self-revealing and concealing are discerned. In contrast, an undeconstructed metaphysical theology would imply that our knowledge of reality precedes its signs, just as prior perceived presence defines a later absence. In contrast, a more phenomenological mode of analysis will take the sign as preceding the reality – which can only be known through its sign. What is absent, is affirmed through a complex of significations as a presence, yet only as discerned in the risk and decisions of faith.

The Meanings of Theology

Hart indicates that in the very word, 'theology', two deconstructive strategies are signalled. Most obviously, as theo-*LOGY*: the *logos* of theology cannot be allowed to be logo-centric, working in a centripetal reduction of all thinking to some ideological system, to fuel a 'logomania' of some kind. Deconstruction, in its contestation of logocentricity – or logomania – does not mean that that thinking is futile, or that a nihilistic flight from meaning is progress. It does demand, however, that the search for meaning must acknowledge its own history – and so escape the tutelage of a fossilised metaphysics incapable of registering the temporal play of contexts and historical perspectives. Still, in the continuing history of interpretation, intelligence would be untrue to itself if it did not use, in content and method, the best kind of thinking available, even as it realises that there remains an irreducible excess of otherness. God is not like anything in the world. The mystery of the cross will always be foolishness to the Greeks, to those who look for divine transcendence in some far more exalted sphere.

²⁸ Cf. Hart, *Tresspass*, 175-6.

²⁹ Hart, *Tresspass*, 289.

Hart appositely cites F. Schlegel in this regard: 'It is equally deadly for a mind to have a system or to have none. Therefore it will have to decide to have both'.³⁰ How it will decide to have both, at the same time and in whatever combination, is of course the problem. But it is a problem to be embraced, rather than rejected or repressed. Moreover, as Derrida would concede, not every interpretation is of equal value. Some interpretations can be shown to simply miss the point, or to be so constricted by either doctrinaire empiricist or idealist standpoints as to preclude any awareness of the manner in which we come to know. In this regard, it is the conceptuality and problematics that have to be deconstructed – not faith or philosophical wisdom – the better to allow for the conditions in which true faith or wisdom may emerge.³¹ Derrida promotes the possibilities of deconstruction working to 'free theology from its metaphysico-philosophical superego', be it Aristotelian or Thomistic, to say nothing of ecclesiastical ossification, so that faith is liberated to live 'a venturesome, dangerous, free way'.³²

Closer to the bone is the deconstruction of theology as *THEO*-logy. God must be left free to be God in incalculable freedom – surely a thoroughly biblical attitude (see below). To allow the notion of 'God' to congeal as an element within any religious or philosophical system would be idolatrous. In his appreciation of the writings of the mystics, Hart finds the most sturdy protest against such a metaphysical or religious incubus.

Gains for Theology

Even while plenty of questions remain, the deconstructive turn of recent times promises positive benefits for theology. Hart quotes Claude Geffré in this regard.³³ In agreement with both, it can be suggested that theology has nothing to lose if it is radically and primarily attuned to the data of revelation, and not straight-jacketed from the first by a particular metaphysical system. Nor is theological enquiry frustrated if its deepest intentionality is focused, not on our current theologies, but on the eschatological advent of God in human history. Theology must allow 'God' to be God; it must give 'God' time to be God, even if faith must suffer through a history of divine absence associated with all the modes of God's advent. Theology must cultivate a patience, under the sign of the cross, with the utter otherness of the divine, and not pretend to any familiarity with the mystery other than what adoration, praise and unreserved self-surrender allow. God's gift is always unmerited and incalculable. It does not promise a system of salvation, present and available, to be administered by religious or ecclesiastical practice. The way a believer believes in God is not the same as believing in any particular theology, nor in any religious or ecclesiastical institution. We might say that the gift of God, rather than being a system of salvation, is more the salvation of the system – here understood as the whole complex of our ways of speaking about and even living what we mean by 'God'. In more familiar theological terms, the Church must resist any tendency to identify itself with the Reign of God, even as it gives itself in history to be the sign and agent of the divine advent.

God and Being

Central to Hart's position is his refusal to name God as the supreme being, or even 'being itself' within a universe of beings known in the 'calculative thinking' of pure reason .

³⁰ Hart, *Tresspass*, 105.

³¹ Hart, *Tresspass*, 144.

³² Hart, *Tresspass*, 276-6.

³³ Hart, *Tresspass*, 168.

Hence, God is 'beyond being'. Along with Heidegger and Marion, Hart considers that the notion of being has no place in theology, despite Macquarrie's efforts in this direction.³⁴ Aquinas, of course, holds that God is best defined as sheer 'To Be', *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*. Yet infinite Be-ing can be known only through the effects of the divine actions in the realm of nature and grace, so we are united to God as one unknown.³⁵ But a deconstructive theology focuses more on the traces of divine withdrawal, at the point where system, concept and practice have proved incapable of presenting or representing the mystery.³⁶ It is not denied that, preceding and affecting one's personal encounter with the text, there is an immemorial fund of other texts and interpretations affecting the occurrence of any given context.³⁷ There is a promise contained in the whole historical process, however implicit and inconclusive,³⁸ inviting one to the decision of hope. Where Aquinas would say God can be known only through the effects of divine action, Hart appeals more generally to 'the God effect' in a much more general way, as is evident in the final chapter of his book.³⁹

Hart offers a helpful distinction. He distinguishes 'theology', the study of the highest grounds, from 'theology', the study of God.⁴⁰ Whilst the former is content to function within the thrall of metaphysics, the latter, accenting personal faith and conversion, is the way of a more reflective faith – a thinking-and-praying-faith. Yet, the degree to which theology can or should avoid all metaphysical contamination, remains a question, as Hart readily concedes.⁴¹

Some Questions Remaining

Before concluding this impressionist overview of Hart's richly nuanced position, I would like to formulate a number of observations from a more general perspective, though every point would demand an article in itself. First, in his efforts *ad maiorem dei gloriam*, to allow 'God' to be God, does Hart sufficiently allow for the differentiations of consciousness that a theologian might bring to the task? A theologian at prayer may well cherish a silent, loving objectless absorption in the 'No-Thing' that is beyond anything in the world of sense, feeling or thought. But the same theologian, speaking and writing in a scholarly or theoretical mode, necessarily reflects on sacred texts and the key doctrines of the tradition. This activity takes place in a world of human communication, not silence, which may well be hostile to the folly of the Cross. In that case, the task is to show that the idols of worldly power and possession are 'nothings', and that what is revealed is not nothing, but the One Thing necessary. In short, is there not some danger of confusing these two mentalities or differentiations of consciousness? I think there is, and that such a danger would be overcome by simply spotting the potential confusion.

Secondly, the theoretic context of one period can in fact become a fundamentalism for another. What was previously hailed as an impressive adventure in thought, to a later age appears as routine, since the previous gain has been absorbed into the fund of traditional resources. Given this tendency to domesticate the adventurousness of any

³⁴ Hart, *Tresspass*, 254-55.

³⁵ STh I, q. 12, a. 13 ad 1.

³⁶ Hart, *Tresspass*, 254.

³⁷ Hart, *Tresspass*, 278.

³⁸ Hart, *Tresspass*, 284.

³⁹ Hart, *Tresspass*, 273-298.

⁴⁰ Hart, *Tresspass*, 282-283.

⁴¹ Hart, *Tresspass*, 284.

past, a deconstructive attitude is most helpful in vivifying a tradition. It can point back to a particular moment or turn in thinking when it was at its most creative, and the outcome was at risk. Such great breakthroughs can never be exhausted in their significance, even when absorbed all too blandly into what becomes known as a particular classic tradition. A particular example of overfamiliarity with original texts of adventure is the manner in which the scriptures themselves were read, and to a lesser degree, the texts and commentaries that have derived from them. Is the continuing change in styles of exegesis not an indication of a healthily deconstructive attitude at work?⁴²

Hart has made his basic point: God gives faith, but also gives 'flesh and blood – a time and place and perspective'.⁴³ The awareness of such relativities gives rise to deconstructive readings, especially when the relativities in question tend to be suppressed. From a conservative standpoint, one might well fear that too much deconstruction could end simply in destruction and nihilism. But there is another perspective. It would suggest that we do not need less deconstruction, but more – in as much as potential sources of pluralism in thought need be recognised in all their variety. Confining ourselves to Lonergan's terms, we could study the differences and conflicts that arise from different stages of historical development, different perspectives in judging them, the different phases, dimensions and carriers of meaning, the variety of differentiations of consciousness, differing methodological specialisations, and, most sensitive of all, differing levels of religious, moral and intellectual conversion.⁴⁴ We might also add different vocations, gifts and concerns. I find myself wondering, in the face of these possibilities, whether deconstruction is still too narrow and limited in its range, and not quite fully aware of all the factors that condition the horizon of our knowing and searching. Hart might well object that the play of differences I allude to are all stemming from some implicit superintending philosophy or psychology. I do not think so, since the multiple conditioning factors I refer to are not fixed philosophies, but verifiable aspects of any conscious existence – as human beings sense, feel, imagine, inquire, reflect, judge, decide, love and even pray. The flow of life does not await, and usually cannot afford to await, a philosophical ruling to legitimate these levels of conscious experience. I repeat with Hart an axiom with a long pedigree, *Quidquid recipitur recipitur per modum recipientis* – 'whatever is received, is received in the mode and measure of the recipient'. And with him too, I point out the multitude of variations in the actual historical situation of our theological and philosophical knowing. My question is quite simple: would not closer attention to the experience of self-transcending consciousness inscribe the need for deconstruction more naturally into theological thinking, and render it less an exotic option?

Further, it can be asked whether Hart tends to confuse the traditional *triplex via* of spiritual development – the purgative, unitive and illuminative ways – with the threefold path of theoretical theology, namely the paths or *viae* of affirmation, negation and eminence. As I suggested above, this lack of differentiation is apparent in the manner he employs the citation from Pseudo-Dionysius's *The Mystical Theology*: 'God is free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial'. If these words refer to mystical experience, theology can readily take the point. On the other hand, in the ecclesial communication of faith, where would the Gospel narrative be located in this

⁴² Cf. Hart, *Tresspass*, 294.

⁴³ Hart, *Tresspass*, xiv.

⁴⁴ See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972), especially the chapters, 'Meaning', 57-99 and 'Dialectic', 235-266.

regard, or, for that matter, the formal doctrinal pronouncements, or the sacramental reality of the liturgy? A mystical mood pervading theological thinking is one thing. But a fusion of mood and thinking is another. Taken to extremes, the collapse of one into the other would render impossible much of the dialogical capacity of theology in relation to the discourses of science, ethics, interfaith communication and that of deconstruction itself. In other words, is the salutary role of negative theology located with sufficient precision?

More particularly, one particular and radical aspect of Christian theology needs mention. How does a deconstructive, negative theology deal with the key Christian doctrine of the incarnation and the personal faith from which it arises? In some obvious sense, an incarnational faith precludes a fundamental negation, for 'in the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1). More obliquely, it deflects the presence/absence dichotomy of a generalised religious philosophy into a context in which both presence and absence come to have different meanings – something other than the light and darkness of mystical discourse. After all, Hart concedes that Dionysian Christology is rather thin in comparison with the wider Catholic tradition.⁴⁵ Christian theology, with its focus in Christ, is certainly other, and even alien, in regard to, say, a Jamesian account of religious experience. For the Johannine *Logos* is extended into an incarnational narrative: 'and the Word became flesh and lived among us' (John 1:14). Though 'no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is turned toward the Father, he has made him known' (John 1:18). Significantly, the first words of this Word in the Gospel of John are, 'What are you looking for?' (John 1:38). Faith is invited along the path of its own deconstruction, within a drama in which no one can be a spectator.⁴⁶ Oddly, Hart considers that the Bible contains little theology, save for Paul.⁴⁷ His lack of advertence to the Johannine writings is surprising. Though the scriptures are not seminar papers written by theologians, they do supply data for theological reflection, to be constantly interpreted in the life of the community. Yet there are instances, as with John 16:12-15 – in reference to the Spirit's relationship to Christ – of what can only be described as a quite formal turn toward theological discourse. Within the fundamental witness of the scriptures to the mystery of Christ, a creative kind of theological thinking is going on. John's Gospel means something, and the way it means the truth it witnesses to, is complex and multidimensional. My concluding note will emphasise this point.

Of related importance is the ecclesial experience and practice of faith. Given the intense individualistic rhetoric of the language of deconstruction, the Church appears, if at all, as a restrictive system of presence, an onto-theological objectification of a faith that has been captured by metaphysics, in its concern to define doctrines, to administer sacraments and to celebrate a formal liturgy. Hart in fact opts for the 'messy' but deep and broad 'catholicism' of the Gospels⁴⁸ over the revisionism of radical orthodoxy. On the other hand, the co-intentional praxis of ecclesial catholicity, more messy in the event, would seem to require a more comprehensive treatment. It is difficult to see how the community of faith can thrive if its faith is primarily one of mystical negativity, and if the

⁴⁵ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxiii.

⁴⁶ For a larger treatment of this point, see Anthony J. Kelly and Francis J. Moloney, *Experiencing God in the Gospel of John* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 2003), especially the first two chapters, 1-55.

⁴⁷ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxiii.

⁴⁸ Hart, *Tresspass*, xxxii.

reality of its communion is as individualistic in tone as deconstruction seems to imply.⁴⁹ In other words, while negative theology may be ostensibly the mark of an individual mystic, does not this have to be set more clearly within the field of ecclesial faith?

There arises, then, a question concerning the kind of subject that deconstruction typically presupposes. Is the dominant metaphysical reality and experience of the Derridean deconstructionist simply the solitary, subversively cognitive individual? Or is it the shared coexistential experience of persons in conversation? There is a latent irony here. While a deconstructive approach tends to restore the buoyant, experiential reality of conversation to cognitive discourse, it seems to suppose that the interpersonal and the communal is somehow a consequence of individual experience, and thus to overlook the creative side of the tradition animating a given community.

Deconstructing the Extremes

The critical realism of Christian theology, open to the excess of the data, especially when there is question of divinely given *dona*, can find much to learn from Hart's non-metaphysical theology. A superintending or overbearing metaphysics typically ends with a choice between empiricism and idealism. The empirical alternative speaks of presence, experienced in the manner of sensation and imagination, with a strong emphasis on intuition – in terms redolent of an ocular or visualist model of knowing. In that case, the experienced, sensed or imagined data are immediately present, to represent nothing more than what can be immediately intuited or felt. On the other hand, the idealist option necessarily identifies presence with what can be thought, that which is attainable only through thinking. It allows for the pretension of a system designed to capture reality through its theoretical constructions, or at least to mimic its contours. To that degree it is not likely to acknowledge any absence, nor appreciate the complex mediations that enter into any particular perspective, nor operate in an horizon in which what is absent can nonetheless become an object of thought and a truth to be affirmed. In the idealist system there is simply no room for absence, nor for signs and the modes of signification. Everything is in the thinking. Nothing can be left unthought and unmastered.

The deconstructive criticism of both these alternatives is suggested in Hart's reference to Gödel's mathematical theorem.⁵⁰ It states that, in any given system, not all propositions can be proved. It must look beyond itself for its justification. But empiricism would here content itself with flat conviction that reality is what there is for all to see in its sheer unmediated evidence. On the other hand, an idealist metaphysics would seek to intuit an ultimate ground or foundation to obviate the infinite regress of signification that either Gödel's axiom or Aristotelian causality might imply. Given these unsatisfactory alternatives, is deconstruction not the voice of a larger wisdom? It suggests there is a promise, however immemorial or elusive, inscribed in the search for truth that can never be totally contained in human words or thought – even if the decision to live in such a hope can never establish itself through some irrefutably public evidence.

It is a tradition that appears too in Aquinas who states, as we have already said, that God can be known only through his 'effects', and that we are united to God as to one

⁴⁹ Note Hart's own perceptive remark: 'Unless "faith and reason" is embedded in a context that shows its connection with love and sacrament, and commendation of it by the Church can give the false impression that Christian existence has neither flesh nor blood' in Hart, 'Fides et Ratio et...,' 207.

⁵⁰ Hart, *Tresspass*, 83-84.

unknown, for God remains outside of every genus, every kind of being.⁵¹ In this sense, God is not a supreme being in a categorical sense, or an instance of being in general as in a Scotist approach so characteristic of Marion's *God Without Being*.⁵² Whether Hart is open to the suggestion that the Thomist *Ipsum Esse subsistens* is precisely employed to underscore the transcendence of God – as Marion *now* sees it⁵³ – is a question that awaits an answer. I would see that answer including a rediscovery of genuinely analogical thinking and a more critical understanding of the notion of *ipsum Esse subsistens* (Aquinas) and its function in theology. But neither of those matters can be treated here.⁵⁴

What I can suggest, by way of a concluding note, is a renewed sensitivity to the special negativity exhibited in the Scriptures themselves. In what follows, I will refer mainly to the New Testament, where this point emerges with even greater force. It is tempting to read Hart as an exegesis of what now follows.

A CONCLUDING SCRIPTURAL NOTE

The Via Negativa in the New Testament

Any assessment of deconstruction might do well to note how negation of a particular kind is evident in New Testament rhetoric, and that to a surprising degree. It is one thing for Christian hope to anticipate an ultimate fulfilment 'that God may be all in all' (1 Cor 15:27). It is another matter to fill that expectation with definite objects of shape, colour and temporal sequence, and to describe them in the language and imagery of a provisional world. For all the explicitness of their promise of eternal life, for all the variety of images they employ, the scriptures in fact exhibit a marked reserve in describing the realities they most witness to. Biblical faith is familiar with the double silence in the narrative of its hope: the dark silence of the dead body of Jesus on the cross; and the luminous silence of the resurrection in which faith trembles at the dawn of the new creation. Though the death and resurrection of Jesus constitute the basic parable of Christian existence, it takes none of the waiting or darkness out of our hope: 'Eye has not seen nor ear heard nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor 2:9). Compared to human perceptions, the ways of God remain inscrutable and his judgments unsearchable (Rom 11:33). Believers are reminded not to settle for any provisional version of human identity, no matter how secure the promise of eternal life, for 'it has not yet appeared what we shall be' (1 John 3:2). The way God acts is not designed to fit into human calculation. The most eminent witnesses to God's revelation, even when, after his death, Christ 'had presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs' (Ac 1:3), had asked, 'Lord, is the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' (Ac 1:6). Jesus' answer is instructive: 'It is not for you to know the times or the periods that the Father has set by his own authority' (Ac 1:7). These disciples are commissioned to witness to who he was and to what had happened – 'in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Ac 1:8). Yet they are clearly not able to speak of an immediate demonstrable presence. Hope moves toward the fullness of life, but 'the Resurrection and the Life' (John

⁵¹ See Anthony J. Kelly, "A Multidimensional Disclosure: Aspects of Aquinas's Theological Intentionality," *The Thomist* 67.3 (July, 2003): 335-374.

⁵² Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, translated by Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

⁵³ Jean-Luc Marion, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-the-logie," *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 31-66.

⁵⁴ For a fuller treatment of these points, see my "The "Horrible Wrappers" of Aquinas' God", *Pacifica* 9.2 (1996): 185-203.

11:25) is never an object of matter-of-fact description. Jesus is not seen as a presence, but believed in and loved in his absence (Cf. John 20:29-31).

Paul's Negations

The oldest recorded prayer in the New Testament is, 'Maranatha! Our Lord, come!' (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20). While it expresses a special longing and hope, any attempt to understand what is to come is more like description of what is being left behind, by looking into a rear-vision mirror, rather than clearly mapping what lies ahead. Paul's impatient effort to give some kind of answer to the Corinthian query is noteworthy: 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' (1 Cor 15:35). The risen body can be described only in negative terms: what is 'perishable, ...dishonourable, ... weak, ...physical' (1 Cor 15:35). Yet hope anticipates that, through the creative power of the Spirit, it will become 'imperishable', 'glorious', 'powerful', 'spiritual' (1 Cor 15:42-44). Christian intentionality reaches beyond faith's capacity to understand, or to present or represent the future, to await a fulfilment in him who 'by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think' (Eph 3:20). Paul confronts the believer with the transcendence of God's wisdom, as he quotes prophet (Isa 29:14) and Psalmist (Ps 33:10) alike: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart' (1 Cor 1:19). He goes on to say, 'For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided through the foolishness of our proclamation to save those who believe' (1 Cor 1:21). He points to the source of true wisdom which is beyond human measure and control: 'And we speak of these things in words not taught be human wisdom but taught be the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual' (1 Cor 2:13). A certain negation or 'deconstruction' – at least in a general sense – is demanded. The ever-new gift is not a simple datum, present and represented in accord with the calculations and categories of any systematic comprehension. If 'the Jews demand signs and the Greeks desire wisdom' (1 Cor 1:22), Christ crucified will be a stumbling block to the expectations of the traditional religion, and appear to the philosophers as an extravagant folly: 'For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength' (1 Cor 1:25). Even though Paul himself is justified in invoking the riches of the tradition of Israel as his own – 'a Hebrew born of Hebrew, as to the Law, a Pharisee ...' (Phil 3:4-6), he has come to regard all this as 'loss' (Phil 3:7) and 'refuse' (Phil 3:8) that he might gain Christ and find justification in him alone (Cf. Phil 3:7-11). Faith has led him into a 'deconstructed' life.

It follows that neither faith nor hope allows the future to be reduced to any category within the present sphere of our experience: '...hope that is seen is not hope' (Rom 8:24). Hope expands to its proper proportions only by yielding without conditions to what only God can bring about. Even the object of prayer for that fulfilment remains undetermined, and subject to the inspiration of the Spirit: 'for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words' (Rom 8:26). Christian consciousness must learn to live with not only not-understanding and not-representing, but also with a certain not-willing. It must yield the mundane desires hidden in prayer to the incalculable dimensions of the Spirit.

Negation in John

There is another, related dimension of a 'Spirit-ual' *via negativa* in the Gospel of John. Even while encouraging the disciples to accept his word, Jesus allows that they cannot bear, in their historical present, the full reality of what is being revealed: 'I still have many

things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now' (John 16:12). His followers must go beyond their present apprehension to await an as yet inexpressible future: 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth... and will declare to you the things that are to come' (John 16:13). Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus has declared to the Samaritan woman that 'you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem' (John 4:22). The true worship of God will not be conditioned by sacred places, but 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23-24). The horizon of faith is neither geographically nor ethnically bounded; it opens onto the indefinable reality of God himself.

This confidence in the continuing revelatory power of the Spirit is compatible in Johannine theology with a warning against believing every kind of spirit. The First Letter of John advises caution, as the community of faith begins to experience its complications inherent in its ongoing history: 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see if they are from God... By this you know the Spirit of God : every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God' (1 John 4:1-2).⁵⁵ Such a demand for discernment is not without its difficulty. It entails holding together in some way the truth of God's self-giving love, and the human character of its revelation. But once faith tries to come to grips with that ever-elusive and opaque human reality of 'the flesh', discernment becomes complex. To a lofty Gnostic transcendence, everything is clear and pure, and the self is untroubled by the presence of the other. For the discernment of faith it is otherwise: 'We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought lay down our lives for one another' (1 John 3:16). This demand anticipates a larger insistence: '...for those who do not love a brother or sister who they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen' (1 John 4:20). The letter has a stark but not altogether surprising conclusion: 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5:21). Some kind of orientation beyond neat religious notions or consoling interpretations seems to have been envisaged all along: 'let us love, not in word and speech, but in truth and action' (1 John 3:18). This is the original emphasis of the Gospel itself. To know God is not a matter of 'seeing' the divinity in some immediate gaze. A decisive involvement in the other-directed 'way' (John 14:6), as it is opened up by Jesus and revealed in the narrative he enacts is the essential point, for 'no one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is turned toward the Father, he has made him known' (John 1:18).

Synoptic Negations

The Synoptic Gospels do nothing to lessen this distinctive Christian sense of negativity and provisionality. Despite the evidence that the earliest witnesses were dead sure of the all-deciding event that has occurred in Christ, they left plenty of room for what has not yet been realised. The believer cannot simply appeal to the arrival of the Reign of God for some comprehensive evidence of how God acts. Such a 'totalisation' is not possible. The growth and seasons of the Kingdom are not in human hands, nor subject to human law or prediction (Mark 4:26-29). The scope of the Kingdom allows for wild aspects of ambiguity, as it nets fish of all kinds and qualities (Matt 13:47-50), and permits the weeds to grow alongside good grain (Mat 13: 24-30). To be familiar with this Kingdom is to treasure new things and old in a proportion that remains unclear (Matt 13:51-52). For Luke, it means refraining from judgments and the condemnation of others, in an effort to enter into the impenetrable inclusiveness of God's mercy (Luke 6:37-42). The true

⁵⁵ See Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit. A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Valley Forge, PN: Trinity Press International 1994).

relatives of Jesus are not those represented by family relationships, but those who do the will of God (Luke 8:19-21). Most notably, the separation of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25 is disconcerting to all believers – and non-believers too – who have allowed a cultural form of religion to obfuscate the revealed God (Matt 25:31-46).

A telling metaphor for the distinctive intentionality of Christian faith speaks of putting the fresh wine of revelation into fresh wineskins (Matt 9:16-17; Mark 2:21-22; Luke 5: 36-39). The old wineskins are always available, and the old garments can be patched with new cloth. But neither meets the new situation in which the old skins would burst and the old cloth would tear. The novelty of Christian revelation, though in different ways it is a continuance and fulfilment of the old, must be left free to be itself.

Conclusion

More radically still, the demand for a complete self-dispossession pervades the New Testament. Only by losing one's life for the sake of the Gospel can one truly save it (Matt 16:24-25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; John 12:25). The moral and spiritual implications of this radical demand have, rightly enough, been the focus of commentators throughout Christian tradition. But there are also implications of a more intellectual character, as faith-inspired thinking seeks to go beyond the conceptual and theoretical systems which, incapable of allowing for 'God's foolishness', tend to become idolatrous. It is especially here that deconstruction is a bracing reminder for theology to take seriously the 'negative theology' of the New Testament.

I have tried, then, to present in these few paragraphs, not so much a formal example of deconstruction, but something altogether more simple. It is commonly termed the 'now but not yet' of biblical affirmations. In their eschatological reserve, the biblical authors defer not only to a fulfilment and justification that only God can give, but also exhibit a deliberate 'unknowing' evident in their witness and embedded in its most confident testimony. Paradoxically, this very confidence at once allows for and inspires the instances of negation, dispossession, reserve and waiting we have summarily cited. There is no need, therefore, to restrict this kind of 'negative theology' to mystical writings, pre-eminently those of Pseudo-Dionysius. These latter are valuable outgrowths, at least in the cognitive and experiential realm, of a dimension of the rhetoric of the New Testament itself. But even these few remarks on the 'negative' character of the Scriptures themselves suggest a positive appreciation of deconstruction as Kevin Hart's book has so admirably presented it.

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