

LOUIS DUPRÉ ON TRANSCENDENCE

Savio D'Souza, SDB

The world today seems to be characterized by a certain absence of transcendence. Transcendence, which in earlier times seemed to be evident and obvious, now seems to be hidden and difficult to detect. Western modernity, despite its rational and technological sophistication, demonstrates a lack of the 'beyond.'

The human being is himself estranged from his origins. He is alienated from himself, from the world and from the transcendent. Indeed he is alienated from the exercise of religiosity itself. The interiority that could make him aware of his transcendent groundedness is usually not experienced. Religion, and specifically Christianity, struggles to be the mode of interiorization and integration of the self. In this situation, the human person yearns to find meaning and significance in life.

Louis Dupré, who has been writing widely in the area of phenomenology and philosophy of religion for over 50 years, believes, however, that there is still a natural longing for transcendence in human beings. In significant works such as *The Other Dimension* and *Passage to Modernity*¹ he has examined the foundations of the present crisis regarding transcendence. He believes that it is possible to collect the fragments of earlier syntheses and build up a more mature and modern culture through a new synthesis. He does this through a philosophical and phenomenological reflection on religion, specifically reflecting on the religious attitude and on faith.²

The present essay aims to examine Dupré's thinking on the subject of transcendence and his attempts to suggest a new synthesis.

1. Dupré: A Biographical Sketch

Louis Dupré was born in Veerle, Belgium in the year 1925. In 1950 he obtained a Licentiate in Philosophy at the Berchmanianum in Nijmegen, Netherlands. A Doctorate in Philosophy followed from the Higher Institute of Philosophy in

Louvain in 1952. His dissertation, *Het Vetrekpunt der Marxistische Wijsbegeerte*, was published in 1954 and was awarded the J. M. Huyghe prize in 1956. Migrating to the United States of America, he taught philosophy at Georgetown University from 1959 to 1972. In 1973 he was appointed the T. Lawrason Riggs Professor of Philosophy of Religion at Yale University; he helped found here the Humanities Programme. In 1971 he was the President of the American Catholic Philosophical Association and in 1972-1973 he was the President of the Hegel Society of America. In recognition of his contribution to philosophy he has received honorary doctorates from Loyola College in Baltimore, Sacred Heart University in Fairfield and from Georgetown University. In 1996 he was awarded the Phi Beta Kappa Medal as Teacher of the year at Yale University, and in 1997 he received the Aquinas Medal from the American Catholic Philosophical Association for outstanding work in philosophy. He has now retired from his teaching obligations, but still directs doctoral dissertations and occasionally gives lectures.

Dupré's works fall into three broad phases. The first phase began with the publication of his doctoral thesis in 1956 and culminated in 1972 with one of his most important works, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes*. During this period he also wrote *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence*; *Contraception and Catholics: A New Appraisal*; and *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*.³ It was this period that prepared the ground for most of his later works.

The second phase, from 1972 till the mid-eighties, is characterized by a number of books, the most significant of which are two collections of articles, *Transcendent Selfhood: The Loss and Rediscovery of the Inner Life*, and *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant*.⁴ During this period it is interesting to note that Dupré also published two books on mysticism, *The Deeper Life: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism*,⁵ and *The Common Life: The Origins of Trinitarian Mysticism and its Development by Jan Ruusbroec*.⁶ Besides, he also edited *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian*

*Mysticism.*⁷

The third phase, beginning in the early nineties, is marked by the publication of an important book, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*.⁸ A lecture published in 1994, *Metaphysics and Culture*,⁹ could be seen as an introduction to *Passage to Modernity*, which demonstrates a special emphasis on history. This period sees Dupré making a comprehensive study of the crisis of modernity, especially from the point of view of the religious self. In 1997 he also published another collection of articles, *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection: Excursions in the Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion*.¹⁰ In 2000 he published *Symbols of the Sacred*,¹¹ which to an extent is a re-working and repetition of some sections of *The Other Dimension*. In 2004 he published another book which could be seen as a sequel to *Passage to Modernity*, entitled *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundation of Modern Culture*.¹²

While we have mentioned only the books that Louis Dupré has published, it is impossible not to mention the more than a hundred and fifty articles published in various scholarly journals and periodicals.¹³

A number of themes recur through the phases of Dupré's work. He often speaks, for example, about the 'crisis of culture,' originating in a new way of conceiving the relation between the self, God and the world. Another theme is the religious dimension of the self in the context of the present crisis. Since he speaks of the religious dimension, Dupré often examines the forms of mediation that take place in religion, especially the religious use of language, symbol and myths. He gives special attention to the use of symbols in religion.¹⁴ Apart from religious themes, a significant part of his writings is concerned about the Western philosophical tradition, as is evidenced in *Passage to Modernity*. He shows a special interest in Kierkegaard and Hegel, but he has also studied Karl Marx. His leaning toward phenomenology comes from his interest in Husserl. Of late, however, "an increasing interest in Neoplatonism comes to the fore along with explorations in late medieval nominalism and Renaissance humanism."¹⁵

2. The Crisis of Transcendence

We have said that the world today seems to be characterized by a certain absence of or else a crisis of transcendence. Dupré tries to explain this crisis by studying the development of the concept of transcendence.

The ancient Greeks had an all-comprehensive creative principle of nature or *physis*. Thales was perhaps one of the first to speak about it. Later this principle developed into the term *kosmos* as an ordered totality of being which included the transcendent, human and cosmic dimensions.

This notion of a harmonious, all-inclusive whole was threatened by the concept of a God who creates the world and yet remains outside the cosmos. Human beings and nature became subservient to God. One of the factors that contributed to this separation was the causal relation between God and the world. Christian thinkers of the middle ages, especially Thomas Aquinas, explained the relation between God and world from the Christian point of view through a synthesis with Aristotelian efficient causality. But then Aquinas had to balance this concept with the Platonic idea of participation.

Later the Aristotelian framework was abandoned and the synthesis that recognized God as the cause of creation and human action deteriorated. Some of the theories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries developed the idea of an unrestricted divine power with practically no relation between Creator and creature. God was banished from creation and the transcendent which had been separated from nature was moved to a 'supernatural' domain.

With God in another realm and separated from nature, man became the sole meaning-giving agent, and this signalled the dawn of modernity. Dupré explains:

The divine became relegated to a supernatural sphere separate from nature... This removal of transcendence fundamentally affected the conveyance of meaning. Whereas previously meaning had been established in the very act of creation by a wise God, it now fell upon the human mind to interpret a cosmos, the structure of which had ceased to be given as intelligible.

Instead of being an integral part of the cosmos, the person became its source of meaning. Mental life separated from cosmic being: as meaning-giving “subject,” the mind became the spiritual substratum of all reality. Only what it objectively constituted would count as real. Thus reality split into two separate spheres: that of the mind, which contained all intellectual determinations, and that of all other being, which received them.¹⁶

Humankind was the sole master of nature. And nature, separated from its transcendent and human elements was reduced to merely the cosmos. The cosmos was only an object while the human subject was the exclusive source of reason imposed upon reality. As a consequence the human subject was reduced to a mere function in the process of objectification. As the real had no meaning of its own, the only encounter with transcendent meaning was in the lived experience of one’s own subjectivity.¹⁷ From an all-comprehensive principle to the loss of transcendence has been a long and interesting journey.

3. Religion: An Experience of Transcendence

The concept of transcendence is obviously connected with the concept of religion. But what exactly is this connection?

There have been many attempts to define religion. Giovanni Magnani, for example, describes religion as a personal relation with God that is only merely individual but also communitarian. Through this relation, the whole person in all his/her dimensions comes into an integral relation with God. Magnani goes on to describe the religious experience as having an intellectual component, a voluntary or volitional component, an affective component and an active component.¹⁸ This explanation highlights two important aspects of religion: first, the acceptance of an ultimate reality in a possibly trans-empirical realm; and second, a relationship with this realm, the experience of which leads to certain emotions, behaviour or attitudes in the person.

For Dupré, instead, “Religion has no definable ‘essence’, for religion never *is*—it always becomes.”¹⁹ Religion is not purely objective, nor is it purely subjective, but rather a complex dialectical

relation of the mind to reality, a dialectic that opens up a new dimension in human existence. He writes in *The Other Dimension*:

The religious act is not a simple experience, but a complex movement by which the mind discovers a new reality which, although lying beyond the phenomenal and contrasting with it, ultimately integrates all reality in a higher synthesis. This other dimension of consciousness is the same today as it was in the past. Yet on the whole the sacred is no longer directly experienced. Modern man has access to it in the more reflective and deliberate attitude of faith. Yet, in faith, however unemotional, he achieves the same all-comprehensive unity... It is essential to the religious experience to overcome the opposition between subject and object. The religious symbol and its mythical explication bring this subjective-objective unity to expression... the concept of God originates exclusively in, and is developed solely by, the religious act.²⁰

Thus for Dupré religion is not constituted by an object that is sacred in and of itself; still, religion requires the full involvement of the human subject. The “religious attitude is dialectical insofar as it is a relation (and therefore an opposition) to a transcendent term.”²¹ The religious act “is not a simple experience, but a complex movement by which the mind discovers a new reality which, although lying beyond the phenomenal and contrasting with it, ultimately integrates all reality in a higher synthesis.”²² Hence there is not merely a reaching toward, but an attainment of the transcendent and a personal relation with it. Besides, this religious attitude also integrates opposites under an ultimate unity.²³ Thus this attitude gives coherence and a new dimension to the empirical life in the hope of attaining ultimate liberation. But at its foundation, religion is an experience. This does not mean that philosophy has no role to play at all in religion. It does have a role and a place in religion, yet philosophy alone is insufficient to grasp the entirety of religion.

3.1 Philosophical attempts to prove God's existence

According to Dupré, metaphysicians often deal with the object of the religious act as if they had invented this object. They

dealt with natural theology or what is called theodicy as a branch of philosophy that is totally independent of man's religious activity. In contrast Dupré is of the opinion that "philosophy by itself has never reached the idea of God, that it has received it from religious faith and that the time has come to acknowledge fully this debt."²⁴ To reinforce his words he quotes Duméry: "The philosopher encounters this idea; he is not the author of it. He must therefore seek to know what it signifies and what role in life can be assigned to it. But he is not to mold it as he pleases... One pretends to believe that the idea of God is the property of philosophy, whereas it is borrowed from the religious life."²⁵

Even if philosophy is able to attain an ultimate, absolute principle of meaning and of value, according to Dupré it has not yet attained the Divine. The principle of value, like the principle of meaning, does stand close to the idea of God, but we must be careful about identifying them. Hence we cannot accept 'purely rational' arguments for the existence of God. Most such arguments are always in connection with a religious experience and their aim is to find at least some rational justification for religious beliefs. What they wanted to show was that the existence of the finite and the contingent requires the existence of an infinite necessary being. Once the finite's need of the infinity is established they did not hesitate to identify this infinite with the religious idea of God. Dupré rejects such arguments which by pure reasoning pretend to arrive at full fledged religious conclusions because they fail to adequately distinguish the transcendent from the phenomenal and misrepresent the relation between the finite and infinite.²⁶

Instead Dupré proposes that we should show that the finite is in the infinite. This would mean that the initial affirmation of the finite must be followed by a negation of the finite's independent being. A purely phenomenal starting point does not allow for such a negation. Taking a cue from Hegel, Dupré says that rational proofs are unable to describe the mind's elevation from the world to God because they fail to bring out the moment of negation which is implied in this elevation. "The meaning of the elevation of the spirit is that the world possesses Being but Being which is only appearance; that true Being, absolute truth, is beyond

all appearances in God alone, that God alone is true Being.”²⁷ Yet Dupré goes on to say that even if purely rational arguments were able to prove the existence of an infinite, perfect Being, they would still not reach the ‘object’ of the religious act. Philosophy must study God from *within* the religious experience because the absolute of philosophy solves an intellectual problem and is a product of speculative thinking, whereas the God of religion brings salvation and is revealed in the religious experience. As Dupré says, “In the case of God we cannot talk *about* him except in a context of talking *to* him.”²⁸ The religious person follows a path of rational reflection on the phenomenal experience, but the movement is driven by religious power rather than by logical necessity.²⁹

Rather than a proof for the existence of God, Dupré holds that we should try to show the transcendence of Being or at least the rational acceptability of a religious interpretation of this transcendence.

Some scholastic philosophers influenced by Maréchal’s theory of the ‘dynamism of the intellect’ consider the encounter with the transcendent as an apprehension of infinite Being. Karl Rahner too discovers the existence of the transcendent reality in the pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of Being which accompanies every assertion. Because of a horizon of affirmation, Being suggests a *beyond*. Dupré disagrees, because that which exceeds every conceivable finite being need not be infinite in itself. The ‘surplus’ of being need not be an infinite actuality. “That the mind affirms Being infinitely does not imply that it affirms *an* infinite Being.”³⁰ Yet at least it affirms the notion of the infinite horizon. Dupré agrees that the metaphysical horizon of affirmation necessarily raises the question of transcendence and what lies beyond the horizon. Insofar as the mind focuses on the beyond aspect of the horizon of Being it raises the question of transcendent Being and the way religious man speaks of this is by means of negation.

The religious affirmations of the transcendent may not provide new philosophical knowledge of the transcendent, but they give a positive description of new experiences in man’s relation to the transcendent although couched in negative terms.³¹

3.2 Critical reflection on the religious experience

After all has been said about philosophy and rationality and transcendence, it is clear that philosophy can do no more than articulate the primal awareness of transcendence; only the religious act can transform this into an awareness of God. We can establish the notion of transcendence independent of the religious act, but its positive content is a religious matter. Philosophy can only reflect on a given non-philosophical experience of religious faith; it cannot constitute this experience.

Still, the content of faith must remain accessible to a philosophical critique, else the sacred remains meaningless. The task of philosophy is to analyze the intrinsic coherence of the God-hypothesis as it is presented by the religious man. In doing this, metaphysics develops into a philosophy of religion, and its main objective is to determine the specific nature of the religious act in and through its various expressions. This is achieved through a study of symbols and the symbolic activity. Faith needs reflection and hence, far from threatening the religious act, Dupré says that philosophical reflection brings the religious act to a heightened awareness of itself. Yet he says we should distinguish between philosophy of religion and general metaphysics, because general metaphysics remains with pure thought while philosophy of religion “descends to the religious representation in order to study thought in its external manifestation.”³² Philosophy of religion, in other words, is a critical interpretation of a received experience.³³

According to Dupré, to understand the transcendent dimension we need to understand religious expression because, “the concept of God originates exclusively in, and is developed solely by, the religious act.”³⁴ The religious act has two important aspects: experience, and the symbolization of this experience.

3.3 Three significant facets of religion

Dupré makes an analysis of three facets of religion namely, religion as feeling, freedom and representation because they enable us to understand religion especially from the perspective of human

autonomy.

Through the feeling of dependence man is able to surrender to a totality which transcends the self. This comes through in Dupré's study of Schleiermacher. The dialectic of consciousness between feeling and intuition makes us realize that religion is subjective as well as objective. The feeling of dependence unites consciousness and being.

Kierkegaard's analysis of the dialectic between human autonomy and theonomy expresses the aspect of the self as free choice. When the self is accepted as dependent, it is able to confront the transcendent; for this we need an attitude of faith.

Finally, when speaking of religion we cannot avoid the use of symbols, language, rituals and art.

3.4 A method based on experience

The phenomenological approach helps us to grasp the religious act through experience and a transcendent intentionality. Dupré draws from the thought of three diverse philosophers to highlight his thesis that the study and understanding of religion is a method that is based on experience. To this end Husserl's concept of 'intention' help us to understand the need of faith and belief to grasp the immanence and transcendence of the Religious Object. Intentionality is directed towards an infinite perfection which he calls the transcendent *telos*. Dupré also makes reference to Blondel who speaks about the reflection on experience and the dialectic of action that allows for our ability to have an experience of the supernatural especially in the experience of our existential insufficiency. We need to reflect on the religious consciousness as it really exists. To complete his analysis of the experience of religion, Dupré speaks of Duméry who through his explanation of the reductions of experience, especially the transcendental reduction and henological reduction, demonstrates the mind's striving for unity. Autonomy, the act-law and the creative self, help to present the experience as a balance between 'givenness' and 'projection'.

It is the symbolization and the expression of this experience that indicates its meaningfulness to man and which allows for a

communication and sharing of the experience and even allows us to go beyond the experience.

3.5 The expressions of religion

When we speak about the use of symbols and symbolization, we do so in the light of the form which is used to give appearance to the content of that which is symbolized. The form and the content are always taken in conjunction. Hence symbols have an ontological nature but they are a deeper reflection of the religious experience. They point beyond themselves and evoke transcendence. It is the representation of the experience that enables a link between thought and reality, and this makes symbolization possible.

With regard to transcendence, symbolization is useful but not sufficient. We have to use words when images are insufficient, and hence we make use of religious language. Dupré says that religious language is *thetic* and hence reveals the meaning and significance of the beyond. Religious language uses analogy as well as paradox, which are tools that are necessary to describe the beyond. Of special significance is the use of negative theology which uses negation, but always a negation that leads to a new affirmation. In this context Dupré also speaks about the myth which is able to overcome the flux of temporality and give permanence and necessity to the transitory phases of life. Memory, recollection and a strong sense of the sacred in the myth enables an integration of opposites.

Finally, when speaking about giving expression to the experience of transcendence Dupré feels that we need to utilize religious art. It is difficult to arrive at a consensus about which work of art is really religious; but the capacity of a work to point beyond toward a transcendent reality is naturally an important requisite.

Religious art aims at giving expression to transcendence, but it is the sacred rite which is described as the first among religious symbols because it helps to structure, articulate and support the life experience of man. In the 'sacrament' and through 'sacrifice' Christianity has attempted to grasp the religious object and also in a way to transmit and communicate this experience of religion into acts of everyday life for the believer.

Hence symbols have a meaning of their own. They do not merely express or copy a pre-existing reality but they structure, re-structure and constitute reality. They are the building stones from which the real is constructed. The symbol contains within itself what it reveals and so it has a dynamic, expressive power because of which it cannot be translated into non-religious language. Symbols serve to make us aware of something that does not appear directly by highlighting the discrepancy that exists between what we perceive and that which is intended. With religious symbols, the meaning lies beyond the symbol. Rituals, liturgy and religious language point away from themselves to a totally non-empirical reality, but these are what help us to move towards and to attain transcendence.

4. Towards a New Synthesis

4.1 The genesis of the reunion

In Dupré's works we see a movement towards a new synthesis based on a concept of the self that allows for the inward turn of religious recollection. For this Dupré turns to mysticism because in the concept of transcendence we concentrate on the spiritual content. It is when we go deepest into the self that we discover its transcendent dimension. Dupré points out three efforts that were made which tried to overcome the theological dualism, namely that of humanist religion, the early reformation and Jansenist theology. Christian humanists like Valla, Erasmus and Ficino held that there was a universal divine attraction which sanctified natural order and drew it back to its source. Most religions responded to this divine impulse. Luther and Calvin on the other hand rejected any theologically neutral concept of nature. They held that grace, which they saw as an addition to nature, deprived nature of its transcendent dimension. The difference in nature before and after the fall seemed to cause a historical dualism within nature. Jansenius and his early disciples held that human nature was intrinsically redeemed, but objective, historical redemption was not sufficient, and actual redemption required a personal election which is not granted to all. But this prevented a genuine reintegration of nature and grace.

4.2 A provisional synthesis

Based on these Dupré speaks of three responses to the religious predicament.

A provisional synthesis can be seen in the devout humanism of Ignatius of Loyola and Francis de Sales, in the religion of the heart as seen in the Reformation and the last synthesis in the Baroque. The devout humanism of Ignatius of Loyola placed the person at the centre of the universe. Grace was necessary to help nature to reach its own natural potential and to this end Ignatius developed a spirituality of action and opted for the primacy of grace.

Francis of Sales too believes that human nature is dynamically oriented towards love of God and that it cooperates with the love of God.

The Reformation placed the stress on justification by faith and also propagated the religion of the heart. God's inner presence instructs and sanctifies from within. There was a general return to the word of scripture in order to restore the direct contact of the soul with God. In general the Reformation stressed religious inwardness and the preservation of the image of God in the soul.

It was the Baroque that attempted to develop a cultural synthesis. While it was far from religious, according to Dupré it demonstrated a comprehensive spiritual vision. At its centre was the person, but the person was seen as vertically linked to a transcendent source. It had therefore a dual centre, human and divine. Its dramatic tension and dynamic unity allowed for an open-endedness that could even be considered spiritual.

4.3 Mysticism: The path towards a new synthesis

The new synthesis of God, man and the world that Dupré is attempting to arrive at makes use of the path of mysticism. For Dupré it is mysticism that allows us to live the deeper life that is the genuine way to transcendence. It is this path that will lead us to the 'greater' reality. According to him, "mysticism consists in an expansion of the conscious self beyond its ordinary boundaries to a

point where it achieves a union with a 'greater' reality. The experience is accompanied by a new feeling of integration both with oneself and with that reality."³⁵ It is the way inward that is the preliminary condition for the regaining of transcendence. It helps in creating the inner space in which true transcendence can be recognised. Dupré points to recollection and memory as helping one to move along the way inward. From our limited view point we make a distinction between God's temporal manifestation and his eternal manifestation. While the 'isness' of God is in a way also the 'isness' of man, still God's Being surpasses all our possibilities of giving it sufficient expression that would do justice to his being. So the soul aims at this 'poverty of God', a deprivation of all possessions and all attachments. To arrive at this point, mere negation is insufficient. We need a negation of the negation, what Dupré refers to as the 'second negation,' so that we completely abandon ourselves to the divine love. Here the human viewpoint is overcome and a divine attitude toward creation is adopted. Dupré believes that God gives the creatures a created existence by efficient causality, while at a later stage the Word is the prototype of the creature's internal and uncreated essence. The true being of the creature is its essence which is timeless and never leaves its divine origin. So true human understanding is the eternal, uncreated and unintelligible presence of God to the soul, and in its essence the creature is a living idea of God and is identical with him. The relation with the infinite is one of identity and of love which Dupré explains through love mysticism.

4.4 The threefold path of transcendence

Dupré concludes the synthesis through the threefold path. This leads through the way of purgation, illumination and union with God. The way of purgation is a gradual purification of the soul. It consists of privations of every type which takes place through awareness; awareness in turn leads to detachment which removes all obstacles that block spiritual progress. The way of illumination enables the perception of a transcendent reality. This illumination takes place on different levels of sense perception, imagination and understanding and leads to a total awareness of God's presence.

Illumination generally takes place through visions and their subsequent interpretation which is an inflowing of God into the soul and in fact are a union between the soul and God. As a consequence the soul sees itself as well as other creatures as existing in God. The third aspect of the threefold path is the ascent of the spiritual life as a 'living toward the Image' which is an increasing awareness of, and growing toward that divine Image. This takes place through a divine gnosis which is becoming aware of God's presence. Through a mystical reflection man is gradually transformed into that which he seeks. Through knowledge man attains a union with God and grows toward the divine Image. This is achieved in many ways, and in particular it involves a becoming aware of and recognising the blessed image in ourselves above all things. Following the three stages of the spiritual life as spoken of by Ruusbroec, the virtuous life of the heart, the interior God-seeking life of the mind and the contemplative stage of the God-seeing life of the Spirit, one is able to attain total union without any intermediacy. This is ultimately what leads us to transcendence.

5. Conclusion

Today there is a radical change in the way of looking at the relation between the cosmos, its transcendent source and its human interpreter, and consequently there is a shift in the overall structure of the synthesis. Earlier there was only one centre namely, the transcendent source of power. In laying the stress on human creativity a secondary centre was added by the humanists. Later, the philosophy of the subject would convert this secondary centre into the primary one. The future is heading towards a diversity because the development of society has been due to a change in the relation between the components of the synthesis: no single factor dominates. This change in the relations has a richer and more complex potential than what has already been realized. So the modern programme is not so much obsolete as unfinished. And according to Dupré, "[i]ts completion will require a more equitable recognition of the meaning-and-value-giving function of all three of the component factors than the absolute dominance of the subject has hitherto admitted."³⁶

This would mean that the physical cosmos has a deep meaning and cannot be reduced to only the meaning that is given by pure objectivity. Also, the transcendent factor cannot be neglected in the meaning-giving process. As Dupré writes, “Transcendence is not merely what lies beyond the world, but first and foremost what supports its givenness.”³⁷ Hence arriving at this synthesis is one of the goals of the modern age. Each of the components of culture has a certain amount of autonomy. Man is seen as an ontological principle that is free and spontaneous. The cosmos is seen as self-supporting and sufficient. And transcendence is seen as distinct and as fully encompassing the finite realm while at the same time intrinsically sustaining its autonomy.³⁸

The rethinking of the self, the cosmos and transcendence has not yet come to an end in our age. There is a constant effort to redefine the meaning of contingency and necessity, of autonomy and dependence, which has led to new ways of conceiving the ontological limits of the real. This change has led to a revision of the accepted concept of transcendence. The traditional concept of transcendence was that of a power that was hierarchically transmitted from *beyond*. This concept was changed to transcendence seen as a source of power *within* the universe. Hence God’s presence permeated all parts at once. For panentheistic philosophers the being of the cosmos is a disclosure of God’s being. Their ideas are slowly resurfacing and hence Dupré says the search for an adequate conception of transcendence continues. As he writes in *Passage to Modernity*, “While anxiously seeking a new wholeness we must nevertheless carefully protect those fragments of meaning that we possess, knowing that they may be the bricks of a future synthesis.”³⁹

The effort to arrive at a concept of transcendence can be seen as a journey that has to be undertaken with the help of religion and the religious attitude. It is through these that one is able to arrive at a synthesis that can be put together from the various fragments that are at our disposal in the universe. Dupré himself has not yet arrived at a final synthesis, but his writings are the building blocks on which we can build up our own concept of transcendence.

While we accept that the transcendent must by nature be beyond our reach, nevertheless we believe that as human beings it is our nature to strive to understand it and describe it in ways and methods that are in keeping with our limitations and possibilities. The failure to make an attempt to attain transcendence would be considered a meek surrender to an inferior existence. Hence this article can best be described as a journey of exploration through an examination of religion and the religious attitudes, and also the expressions and rituals of the religious act. It is therefore a search, a search that indicates an openness to the beyond, an on-going search for a concept of transcendence.

Notes

¹ Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Doubleday, 1972); Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

² Cf Peter Casarella and George Schnier, ed., *Christian Spirituality and the Culture of Modernity: The Thought of Louis Dupré* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 227.

³ Louis Dupré, *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectic of Christian Existence* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963); *Contraception and Catholics: A New Appraisal* (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1964); *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966).

⁴ Louis Dupré, *A Dubious Heritage: Studies in the Philosophy of Religion after Kant* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977).

⁵ Louis Dupré, *The Deeper Life: An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

⁶ Louis Dupré, *The Common Life: The Origins of Trinitarian Mysticism and its Development by Jan Ruusbroec* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

⁷ Louis Dupré and James Wiseman, eds, *Light from Light: An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

⁸ Cf above, note 1.

⁹ Louis Dupré, *Metaphysics and Culture*. The Aquinas Lecture, 1994. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Louis Dupré, *Religious Mystery and Rational Reflection: Excursions in the Phenomenology and Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

¹¹ Louis Dupré, *Symbols of the Sacred* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

¹² Louis Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundation of Modern Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹³ A complete bibliography of the works of Louis Dupré until 1997 can be found in Paul J. Levesque, *Symbols of Transcendence: Religious Expression in the Thought of Louis Dupré* (Louvain: Peeters Press, W. B. Eerdmans, 1997) 281-328.

¹⁴ These themes in the writings of Louis Dupré have been identified by George Schnier, "Louis Dupré's Philosophy of Religion: An Indispensable Discourse on Fragments of Meaning," Casarella and Schnier 226.

¹⁵ Casarella and Schnier 227.

¹⁶ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* 3.

¹⁷ Cf. Paul Levesque, "The possibility of encountering God in Postmodernity: A return to Apophatic Theology," *The Presence of Transcendence: Thinking 'Sacrament' in a Postmodern age*, ed. Lieven Boeve and John C. Ries (Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 108-109.

¹⁸ Cf. Giovanni Magnani, *Filosofia della Religione* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993) 114-115.

¹⁹ Dupré, *The Other Dimension* 19-20.

²⁰ Dupré, *The Other Dimension* 10-11.

²¹ Dupré, *The Other Dimension* 15.

²² Dupré, *The Other Dimension* 10.

²³ Dupré, *The Other Dimension* 18.

²⁴ Louis Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith," *The Human Person and Philosophy in the Contemporary World: Proceedings of the Meeting of the World Union of Catholic Philosophical Societies, 1978*, ed. J. Zycinski (Cracow: The Pontifical Faculty of Theology, 1980) 353.

²⁵ Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith" 353.

²⁶ Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith" 353-357.

²⁷ G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830) ed. F. Nicolin and O. Pöggler (Hamburg: Meiner, 1959) 50, as quoted in Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith" 382, footnote 7.

²⁸ Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith" 359.

- ²⁹ Cf. Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith" 358-360.
- ³⁰ Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith," 363.
- ³¹ Cf. Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith" 361-365.
- ³² Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith," 376.
- ³³ Cf. Dupré, "Philosophy and Religious Faith," 368-377.
- ³⁴ Dupré, *The Other Dimension* 11.
- ³⁵ Louis Dupré, *The Deeper Life* 20.
- ³⁶ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* 251.
- ³⁷ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* 251.
- ³⁸ Cf. Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* 249-251.
- ³⁹ Dupré, *Passage to Modernity* 253.

