From Existential Feelings to Belief in God

Submitted by Gorazd Andrejč to the University of Exeter
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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been
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the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: .................................................................
This thesis is dedicated with deep gratitude to my wife Žaklina, my son Natan, and my parents Alojz and Jožica Andrejč. Their love and immeasurable sacrifice made this work possible.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr Mark Wynn whose guidance, expertise, encouragement and friendship was invaluable; and to my friend Bradley Arnold, who spent countless hours discussing and critically engaging with the ideas presented here.
ABSTRACT

The question of the relation between religious experience and Christian belief in God is addressed in radically different ways within contemporary theology and philosophy of religion. In order to develop an answer which avoids the pitfalls of the ‘analytic perception model’ (Alston, Yandell, Swinburne) and the ‘over-linguistic’ model for interpreting Christian religious experience (Taylor, Lindbeck), this thesis offers an approach which combines a phenomenological study of feelings, conceptual investigation of Christian God-talk and ‘belief’-talk, as well as theological, sociological and anthropological perspectives.

At the centre of the interpretation developed here is the phenomenological category ‘existential feelings’ which should be seen, it is suggested, as a theologically and philosophically central aspect of Christian religious experiencing. Using this contemporary concept, a novel reading of F. Schleiermacher’s concept of ‘feeling’ is proposed and several kinds of Christian experiencing interpreted (like the experiences of ‘awe’, ‘miracle of existence’, ‘wretchedness’, and ‘redeemed community’). By way of a philosophical understanding of Christian believing in God, this study offers a critical interpretation of the later Wittgenstein’s concept of ‘religious belief’, combining Wittgensteinian insights with Paul Tillich’s notion of ‘dynamic faith’ and arguing against Wittgensteinian ‘grammaticalist’ and ‘expressivist’ accounts. Christian beliefs about God are normally life-guiding but nevertheless dubitable.

The nature of Christian God-talk is interpreted, again, by combining the later Wittgenstein’s insights into the grammatical and expressive roles of God-talk with Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on linguistic innovation and Roman Jakobson’s perspective on the functions of language. Finally, the claim which connects phenomenological, conceptual and theological strands of this study is a recognition of a ‘religious belief-inviting pull’ of the relevant experience. Christian religious belief-formation and concept-formation can be seen as stemming from ‘extraordinary’ existential feelings, where the resulting beliefs about God are largely but not completely bound by traditional meanings.
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### BIBLIOGRAPHY
ABBREVIATIONS

Only abbreviations for the works of F. Schleiermacher, L. Wittgenstein, and M. Merleau-Ponty are used without explanation and throughout the chapters of this thesis. A few other abbreviations that appear in the text are clearly explained and do not extend beyond the immediate context.

The following abbreviations of the works of Schleiermacher, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty, respectively, are used throughout the thesis:

Works of Friedrich Schleiermacher:


The number indicating the place where a text is to be found in Schleiermacher’s works normally refers to the relevant page number, accept in the case of CF where it refers to the relevant chapter and section.
Works of Ludwig Wittgenstein:


The number indicating the place where a text is to be found in Wittgenstein’s works normally refers to the number of the remark, unless the work is not structured by numbered remarks (then it refers to page number or, in the case of MWL, to the date of the lecture).

Works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty:


The number indicating the place where a text is to be found in Merleau-Ponty’s works always refers to the page number.

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