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Prefatory Note

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God and being – being and God: this constellation, as ancient as western thought, calls for radical contemporary reflection.¹ If we cease asking the question of the relation between the thinking of being and the thinking of God, do we not forget one of the most original dialogues of western civilization? It is of primary importance that we recognize and rethink our double belonging to the truth of being unveiled by Parmenides, Plato, and Greek philosophy, on the one hand, and the truth of the transcendent God announced by Moses, the prophets, and Christ, on the other. In the words of Matthew Arnold, “Hebraism and Hellenism – between these two points of influence moves our world.” Or as James Joyce jauntily put it: “Jewgreek is Greekjew.” Whence the hypothesis of an encounter between a new thinking of being and a new religious thinking which motivates an open dialogue.

Martin Heidegger pioneered an attempt to renew the question of being for modernity. His rereading of the metaphysical tradition as the history of being, and more precisely as the history of the forgetting of being, is of an order of radicality that only the twentieth century of crisis could have achieved. What does this radicality consist in? First, there is the critical dismantling of the onto-theological structure of any metaphysics inadequate to the truth which it tries to ascertain. Next, there is the invitation to take a “step back” that might initiate “another beginning,” retrieving the great pre-Socratic thinkers and the poetics of Hölderlin and Rilke. A step back which invites a more fundamental attention to the truth of being as such, epitomized in our own day in the experience of works of art. Finally, there is the task of emancipating thought from the grip of technological rationalism, bringing it into attunement with the event of being.

There is a strange coincidence between these liberating gestures and those of a religious thought, also born from crisis and thirsting for a more original

1 This prefatory note is a revised and expanded version of the ‘Avant Propos’ to the first edition of *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* (1980) by Richard Kearney and Joseph O’Leary.

truth – a thought equally radical in its re-reading of tradition and its proposal of questions without easy solutions. So we ask: what is the relation between the being unveiled by a fundamental ontology and the God aimed at by a renewed religious questioning? Heidegger, in his own style of thinking, has left us an “open question” and not a conclusion or a “thesis.” What is demanded of us is to try to listen to the question: a duophonic listening that can lead thinkers of being and thinkers of God into agreement or into opposition, but always into the unthought of the question itself. The resulting *Auseinandersetzung* is a challenge for those who enter the dialogue – one conducted in the manner of what Karl Jaspers called a “loving struggle” (*ein liebender Kampf*).

Since the gathering in the Collège des Irlandais in Paris in June 1979 this dialogue has continued in fruitful ways, including the famous theological turn in phenomenology and the subsequent explosion of fertile and robust debates in the hermeneutics of religion (deconstructive, radical, diacritical and carnal). Key figures in the original colloquy – published in *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* (1980 chez Grasset and 2009 chez PUF) are featured in the current issue (Marion, Lacoste, O’Leary, Greisch); and we are now witnessing a generation of young scholars taking these questions into new conversations, including the two editors of this special issue, Murray Littlejohn and Stephanie Rumpza. We are greatly in their debt.

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