

STUDIES IN CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGY

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D.Litt.

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2004

Main Books:

Theology of the Love of God, London: Collins, 1980

God in Christian Perspective, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994

Generosity and the Christian Future, (Henson Lectures, Oxford) London: SPCK, 1997

John and Donald Baillie: Transatlantic Theology, New York: Peter Lang, 2002

The Transformative Imagination-Rethinking Intercultural Theology, London: Ashgate, 2004

Shorter Books:

The Church of God, London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1984

Making Christian Decisions, London: A.R. Mowbray, 1985

(Hilary of Poitiers: a Study in Theological Method. Berne/Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1978)

Edited Books

G. W. H. Lampe - Explorations in Theology 8, G. M. Newlands (ed.), London: SCM Press, 1981

“Introduction”

Scottish Christianity in the Modern World: Festschrift for A. C. Cheyne, S. J. Brown and G. M. Newlands (eds), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, 135-154

(Collection jointly edited)

“John Baillie and Friends, in Germany and at War”

Believing in the Text: Essays in Literature, Theology and the Arts, D. Jasper and G. M. Newlands (eds), New York: Peter Lang, 2004, 177-197

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“Theology, Culture and the Arts”

Fifty Key Christian Thinkers, P. McEnhill and G. M. Newlands (eds), London: Routledge, 2004

“Introduction”

Articles shared equally – G. M. Newlands entries:

“Aquinas”, “Augustine”, “Baillie”, “Barth”, “Boethius”, “Bultmann”, “Fiorenza”, “Harnack”, “Introduction”, “Justin Martyr”, “Kierkegaard”, “Luther”, “Newman”, “Niebuhr”, “Origen”, “Pannenberg”, “Rahner”, “Reimarus”, “Ritschl”, “Ruether”, “Schleiermacher”, “Scotus”, “Strauss”, “Tertullian”, “Tracy”, “Troeltsch”

Articles in Folder

“The Old Testament and Christian Doctrine”, *Modern Churchman* 16 (1973), 238-244

“Incarnation, Myth, and God”, *New Studies in Theology* 1 (1980), 181-192

- “Systematische Theologie in Grossbritannien in den siebziger Jahren”, *Kerugma und Dogma* (1981/4), 309-17
- “G. W. H. Lampe—A Memoir As A Theologian”, *G. W. H. Lampe: Christian, Scholar, Churchman: a Memoir by Friends*, C. D. F. Moule (ed.), London: Mowbrays (1982), 54-63
- “Gott (Mittelalter)”, *Theologische Realencyclopaedie* 13 (1986), 657-662
- “The Sense of the Presence of God”, *Christ, Church and Society*, D. Fergusson (ed.), Edinburgh: T & T Clark (1993), 155-169
- “Schleiermacher at Vatican X”, *Schleiermacher Essays*, J. Pugh (ed.), American Academy of Religion, Washington (1993), 1-11
- “Theologies at Glasgow in the 20th Century”, *Glasgow Theology*, I. Hazlett (ed.), Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press (1993), 99-106
- “The Love of God and the Future of Theology: A Personal Engagement with Juengel’s Work”, *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Juengel in his Sixtieth Year*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark (1994), 190-205
- “What can be Affirmed in continuity with the Tradition Today?” *Essays in Ecclesiology*, A. F. P. Sell (ed.), Geneva: WARC (1995), 14-21
- “Prayer in Contemporary Perspective”, *The Presumption of Presence: Essays for D. W. D. Shaw*, G. Hall and P. McEnhill (eds), Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press (1995), 7-13
- “Divinity and Dogmatics”, in *Disruption to Diversity* (New College Anniversary Essays) G. D. Badcock and D. F. Wright (eds), Edinburgh: T & T Clark (1996), 117-134
- “Christianity and Marxism”, *Christianity for the Twenty-First Century*, P. F. Esler (ed.), Edinburgh: T & T Clark (1996), 95-120
- “Reformed Confessionality and Ecumenical Union”, *Reformed and Ecumenical: On Being Reformed in Ecumenical Encounters*, H. M. Vroom (ed.), Geneva: WARC (2000), 103-121
- “Rudolf Bultmann for the Twenty-First Century”, Nicol Festschrift, *Toronto Journal of Theology* 18:1 (2002), 65-78
- “Theology and Cultural Change”, *Theology between Church, University, and Society*, M. E. Brinkman et al. (eds), Assen: VanGorcum (2003), 164-175
- “Human Rights and Transcendence”, *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, A. Morton and W. Storrar (eds), Edinburgh: T & T Clark (2004), 123-141
- Additional Bibliography (not submitted).

I hereby declare that the submission embodies the results of my own work and that it has been composed by myself, with the exception of the items where joint authorship is clearly and precisely indicated.

Studies in Constructive Theology

This submission centres on substantive issues of constructive theology, and particularly on interpreting the love of God. The focus is on the multi-layered impact of a Christology of divine love, developed through five monographs (I began to look at concepts of love as key to exegesis in theology in my Ph.D. thesis, published as *Exegesis and Method in Hilary of Poitiers*, 1978).

Theology of the Love of God (1980) explores concepts of the love of God as the basic structuring element of Christian theology. In engagement with interpretations of love in the tradition, and with contemporary use of concepts of faith, hope and history, it is proposed that the nature of God *as* love shapes every aspect of theology. This is exemplified through analysis of the relationship between creation and redemption, understood as one dynamic movement, disrupting boundaries of redemption.

In *God in Christian Perspective* (1994) the enterprise is developed further. An understanding of God as a multi-faceted model draws on Christology and Trinity, faith and practice in community. God is personal, self-differentiated being, transcendent, yet also immanent in the created order as hidden divine presence. The core elements—faith and revelation, divine action and Christology—are reappraised in the light of current theological proposals. Doctrines interact in a web of connection to shape Christian practice. A Christian understanding retains the basic core of unconditional love, Christologically characterised. A contemporary concept of God draws upon these core elements, and upon a retrieval of the historical traditions from which they arise. It can be articulated in language intelligible to contemporary citizens, and its consequences spelled out within the complexity of contemporary cultures.

Generosity and the Christian Future (1997) carries this thesis to a further stage through engagement with the emancipatory theologies, postmodernity, and political theory. The study re-imagines the framework of the divine love conceived as generosity. The need to be as alert to potential future as to past developments, and to relate doctrine to political theory and cultural issues, is grounded in theological—more precisely kenotic—Christological argument. Attention is paid to issues of human rights, violence, gender and the power structures of the churches themselves.

John and Donald Baillie—Transatlantic Theology (2002), built on first access to the Baillie Papers, lies at the heart of this submission. I regard the work of the Baillies as seminal to the understanding, justification and revisioning of a progressive Christian theology. This is a theological biography of the Baillie brothers. It traces in detail the interaction of their theology within the cultures in Europe and America in which they worked—notably in the circle of the ‘critical realists.’ It sheds light on the huge influence of the Baillies in Scotland. This tradition is a trajectory *against the stream* today. I judge it to offer significant resources, combining conceptual plasticity with distinctive direction, for the future.

The Transformative Imagination—Rethinking Intercultural Theology (2004). This comparative study of connections between theology and culture, through the arts, the sciences, political and human rights issues, shapes reflection on the mystery of God in a postfoundational frame. Reciprocity between ethical issues and questions of transcendence is explored. This yields a reconception of theological methodologies, in which theology, and paradoxically Christology, is seen as a catalyst rather than a trump card in interdisciplinary projects—exemplified through specific instances in the humanities, the sciences and in politics.

The central theme of the divine love is spelled out in two shorter studies in less technical style. *The Church of God* (1984) comments critically on traditions of church, ministry and sacraments in denominational cultures, stressing the Christological imperative to be an always outward looking church. *Making Christian Decisions* (1985) assesses Christian input into specific ethical issues. I include also the jointly produced collections *Studies in Scottish Church History* (2000), *Believing in the Text* (2004), *Explorations in Theology 8* (1981), and *Fifty Key Christian Thinkers* (2004), together with a **selection of published articles**. The submission documents a project with a distinctive accent on the love of God as Christological *leitmotif*. It conceives theology as a generous approach to the transcendence of God and the consequences of incarnation.

Articles in Folder

(These have been photocopied to conform as far as practicable to binding regulations and the appropriate permissions obtained.)

- “The Old Testament and Christian Doctrine”, *Modern Churchman* 16 (1973), 238-244 P.1
- “Incarnation, Myth, and God”, *New Studies in Theology* 1 (1980), 181-192 P.9
- “Systematische Theologie in Grossbritannien in den siebziger Jahren”, *Kerugma und Dogma* (1981/4), 309-17 P.22
- “G. W. H. Lampe—A Memoir As A Theologian”, *G. W. H. Lampe: Christian, Scholar, Churchman: a Memoir by Friends*, C. D. F. Moule (ed.), London: Mowbrays (1982), 54-63 P.32
- “Gott (Mittelalter)”, *Theologische Realencyclopaedie* 13 (1986), 657-662 P.43
- “The Sense of the Presence of God”, *Christ, Church and Society*, D. Fergusson (ed.), Edinburgh: T & T Clark (1993), 155-169 P.50
- “Schleiermacher at Vatican X”, *Schleiermacher Essays*, J. Pugh (ed.), American Academy of Religion, Washington (1993), 1-11 P.66
- “Theologies at Glasgow in the 20th Century”, *Glasgow Theology*, I. Hazlett (ed.), Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press (1993), 99-106 P.79
- “The Love of God and the Future of Theology: A Personal Engagement with Juengel’s Work”, *The Possibilities of Theology: Studies in the Theology of Eberhard Juengel in his Sixtieth Year*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark (1994), 190-205 P.88
- “What can be Affirmed in continuity with the Tradition Today?” *Essays in Ecclesiology*, A. F. P. Sell (ed.), Geneva: WARC (1995), 14-21 P.105
- “Prayer in Contemporary Perspective”, *The Presumption of Presence: Essays for D. W. D. Shaw*, G. Hall and P. McEnhill (eds), Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press (1995), 7-13 P.113
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- “Reformed Confessionality and Ecumenical Union”, *Reformed and Ecumenical: On Being Reformed in Ecumenical Encounters*, H. M. Vroom (ed.), Geneva: WARC (2000), 103-121 P.166
- “Rudolf Bultmann for the Twenty-First Century”, Nicol Festschrift, *Toronto Journal of Theology* 18:1 (2002), 65-78 P.186
- “Theology and Cultural Change”, *Theology between Church, University, and Society*, M. E. Brinkman et al. (eds), Assen: VanGorcum (2003), 164-175 P.200

“Human Rights and Transcendence”, *Public Theology for the 21st Century*, A. Morton and W. Storrar (eds), Edinburgh: T & T Clark (2004), 123-141 P.212

Additional Bibliography. P.232

Articles in Edited Works

“Introduction”, G. W. H. Lampe - *Explorations in Theology* 8, G. M. Newlands (ed.), London: SCM Press, 1981

“John Baillie and Friends, in Germany and at War”, *Scottish Christianity in the Modern World: Festschrift for A. C. Cheyne*, S. J. Brown and G. M. Newlands (eds), Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000, 135-154
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THE
MODERN
CHURCHMAN

The Old Testament and Christian Doctrine*

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I

'SYSTEMATIC PEOPLE ALWAYS are able to write far more about the Old Testament than Old Testament people—so why should you and I be any exception!' Such was the wry reply from a colleague in the Old Testament world to my innocent request for some professional comments on 'The Old Testament and Christian Doctrine'. There lies the rub. For just as generations of dogmaticians have found their favourite (and often mutually exclusive) systematic patterns in Luther's Works, only to have them exploded derisively by Church historians, so often it has been with systematic theologians and the Old Testament.

Sometimes of course arguments in systematic theology will stand even without the garnishing of Old Testament interpretation with which they have been fondly adorned, but more often than not partial demolition brings on total collapse. Vulnerability increases in proportion to the level of consciousness of the need for biblical orientation. Better, then, for the maker of doctrine to leave the Old Testament well alone, or at very least, to confine himself to the bare repetition, where relevant, of information provided by Old Testament scholars.

The more tough-minded dogmatician may be inclined at this point to challenge the techniques used by his colleagues, reconstructing for them a method of textual interpretation which will yield results appropriate to the nature of the doctrinal enquiry being pursued. He may well be justified in so doing. But it seems to me, in the light of the recent history of doctrine, that he is more likely to end only in spectacular flights of theological irresponsibility. The more rope he takes, the more surely he hangs himself with it in the end, and without any outside assistance.

For his part, the Old Testament scholar may well have his own reservations about relations with doctrine. *Quid Hierosolyma cum Athenis?* He may or may not himself profess the Christian faith. He may or may not be interested in doctrine. But he may feel that the modern history of Old Testament scholarship has been not unlike the cleaning of a painting, opening up a world overlaid and obscured by many coats of doctrinal varnish. The new varnish seems little better than the old, the God who acts, revelation histories and theologies of confession proving brighter, but not lighter, than the Noahic covenants and the like of palmier days.

*This article was originally written for a projected collection of essays on the Old Testament in relation to the other theological disciplines.

If the scholar has successfully resisted the take-over technique indicated above, he is likely to see doctrine as a balloon that has burst under over-inflation, and rest content with textual studies, supplemented by an independent 'Theology of the Old Testament', built up from the many designs available, and perhaps with some assistance from comparative religion and the philosophy of religion. In this case too he may feel, at least *qua* Old Testament scholar, that the value of dialogue with doctrine has still to be demonstrated. In the following pages the attempt will be made to indicate, from the standpoint of the systematic theologian, ways in which such dialogue might be fruitful, though not indeed to anticipate the dialogue in all its aspects (if one may speak of anticipation of something which has in various shapes and forms been going on for a long time!).

II

Doctrine has been made at different times from many different recipes. It appears to many today (and I share this belief) that the most adequate doctrine is likely to be produced from the sifting of data gathered from a variety of sources—from the traditions of the Churches, from the contemporary Christian communities, from personal faith, from the development of human reason through the whole range of academic disciplines, and from the Bible. The Bible is always included because, even if seen only as a fund of information, it contains data which are available from no other source. Within the Bible, an adequate understanding of the New Testament as a collection of historical documents requires awareness of the contents of the Old Testament. To say this is of course not yet to say whether the Old Testament is to be brought into all areas of theological inquiry, or brought in to the same extent everywhere, or held to have a uniform status throughout, all parts of the Canon being usable in the same way in any doctrinal discussion.

From Origen's shadows to Augustine's efficient signs, doctrine in the early church consisted to a very large extent in scriptural exegesis. Much of Luther's christocentric theology came out of wrestling with the Psalms, his '*kleine Biblia*'. In our own day Karl Barth's God who acts in moments of self-revelation is pre-eminently too the God of Israel.

It is no secret that each of these hard-won interpretations stands sorely in need of revision today, as a result of new developments in historical and theological scholarship (a fact which should be seen as a sign of life and so a tribute to the Fathers, rather than, as often, a cause for alarm!). The Word of God, seen in Philonic, Augustinian or Barthian terms, needs to be rescued from the onset of 'verbalisation' to which it has become prone. The *Heilsgeschichte* theologies seem due for a complete revision, in terms both of *Heil* and of *Geschichte*. Much more attention needs to be paid to the analysis of style and literary technique in such areas as allegory and typology, in terms

of general linguistics.¹ Even the hallowed *sola scriptura* itself, sacred to many who would have no compunction about ditching the rest, probably needs to be redefined within a more comprehensive '*sola traditione*'.² *O tempora!* On the other hand, to ignore completely all previous suggestions on the ground of proven inadequacy might be thought to indicate either fanatical faith in the long term viability of one's own proposals or none at all. It may be better to opt for a programme of gradual development rather than one of planned obsolescence.

How then, to come to the point, may the Old Testament be used in the making of doctrine? There is a famous comparison of the dogmatician to the conductor who directs the theological orchestra, summoning music from the various instruments in their due places and times. To my mind, the figure has its *particula veri*, but this should not be over-played. Often the systematic theologian must sit in the audience and listen. The listener must of course develop his own musical taste, exercise his own judgement in preferring some groups to others. But the suggestion that it is given to conduct without first learning to listen is surely as absurd in the realm of theology as it is in music. At the same time, few Old Testament scholars themselves claim to approach their texts with 'an open mind': all of us work within traditions, historical and other, though we can hope to enlarge the horizon as it were of our understanding by moving from the more to the less familiar: our commitments are part of the condition of finitude, of the radical historicity of all understanding. To deny this is to enter the world of make-belief. To affirm it is to affirm not total relativism but a belief in the general soundness of the academic tradition and, *mutatis mutandis*, in the *communio sanctorum*.

The Old Testament, it would I think be agreed by most Old Testament scholars today, is a collection of documents gathered together and edited at different times for various, usually theological and cultic, purposes, by different groups of people in and around the area known in the period of its classical theology as Israel. It provides evidence of the life, literature and worship of some of the peoples of the ancient Near East, notably of those groups which developed, despite many interruptions, a tradition of worship of one God whom they knew as the God of Israel. As faith in this God developed, so reflection gave rise to theologies, and to the attempt to live, on a personal and a national level, as the chosen people of the God of Israel, subject to his laws and confident in his promises.

For the Jewish theologian who understands himself as standing in that same tradition of the people of God through the ages, the Old Testament

¹E.g., along the lines of A. J. Børndalen's 'Allegorier i Det gamle testamente', in *TTK*, 1966, pp. 146-66.

²The point is made, from different perspectives, by, e.g., W. Pannenberg, *Grundfragen systematischer Theologie*, Göttingen, 1967, pp. 11 ff., and D. E. Ninham in *The Church's use of the Bible*, SPCK, 1963, pp. 145 ff.

acquires its special status in doctrine because it is the historical witness to the growth of a bond between God and his people, and is also the unique source of the law and the promise of God, however these may have to be interpreted today. For the Christian theologian, perhaps the more immediate significance of the Old Testament is that it was within the world which it brings to expression that the gospel arose. This is part of the information which is relevant to doctrine as intelligent reflection on faith, even for theologies in which the gospel is everywhere contrasted with its background, as light rising from total failure and darkness.

The historical framework within which Jesus understood his own mission was then largely the world, and even the documents, of the Old Testament. It appears likely that he did not always contradict the teaching of the documents, but rather offered a radical reinterpretation in terms of the coming of the Kingdom of God. But still, Israel's God was his God, Israel's law was God's law, though its interpretation was altered by his own life. And the Churches, in the New Testament and beyond, have with few exceptions continued to link Old and New Testaments in the theatre of salvation.

Now Christian faith is not required or authorized to act or to think always in the way it believes Jesus of Nazareth to have thought or acted. Faith in the living Christ is not limited to a pallid imitation of the dead Jesus. But at the same time, justification by faith alone does not debar us, as has sometimes been thought, from attaching a very considerable importance to what Jesus himself thought and did.

Taking this approach a stage further, it has often been claimed that Christ is the key to the understanding of the Old Testament—we look to see, in Luther's phrase, '*was Christum treibet*'. It may be thought to be a fatal objection to this procedure that Christ is not in fact known apart from the scriptures, and so the suggestion involves a contradiction. But it is not uncommon for new knowledge to emerge from the correlation of a number of incomplete data, and so the practice of much Patristic and Reformation exegesis may still be worth adaptation, for certain purposes. As faith views the whole of life in the light of the gospel and *vice versa*, so it may view the sources of doctrine, the data from which it is itself nourished. Where however it is suggested that the Old Testament can always and only be understood by direct reference to the incarnation, then the results are ludicrous. There is nothing wrong with principles or systems as such, but it is simply the case that the texts, seen in the light of the best current scholarship (and we have no better light) do not lend themselves to this approach. Different sorts of text require different sorts of exegesis, for different purposes. (For this reason, too, cooperation between scholars in correlating projects in the various branches of theology may be more useful than the production of, e.g., Old Testament Theologies as entities complete in themselves.)

A further theological explanation of the failure of exegesis with an exclusively incarnational reference might be given in terms of the trinitarian

structure of Christian faith—we are not invited to a ‘unitarianism of the second person’, as it has been called. It would be equally possible to interpret texts with particular reference to the doctrine of man—for in dogmatics there are no magic words, no prescribed methodologies, there is no single order of approach. In the Old Testament we who have come to Christian faith are able to look at the relations between God and man before God came to be known as the triune God. We see, through the theological reflection of Israel, the human situation and the communication between God and man which led up to the incarnation. Indeed we do no honour to the triune God in taking shortcuts (by incarnational analogies and the like) through the narrative of God’s dealings with man, a narrative which has not only informational but also soteriological significance, since through it we may hope to become increasingly what we are.

It is then possible to see the Old Testament in Christian doctrine particularly as the story of God’s dealings with man before the coming of the Christ. The story may be seen as the theology of the recital of the acts of God, as the narrative of the history of salvation, as God’s witness through human hands to his own acts of self-revelation in history, and so on. As we have indicated, there are snags to all these interpretations, and all ‘purist’ interpretations are likely to be inadequate, because of the wide variety and multiplex traditions of the narratives—a point which was well made by James Barr in his fascinating and profound *Old and New in Interpretation*³.

At the same time, we need not opt for the purism of non-purism, which like the systems of the non-system is liable to produce its own constraints and limitations. It may be that a combination of methods and interpretations some pluralist and some unitary, will yield different sorts of useful fruit, abhorrent to the tidy mind as the thought may be. (This without prejudice to the freedom to state that for good reasons some methods are just plain wrong!)

Despite the snags, the above-mentioned special interpretations have undoubtedly helped to open the Old Testament to many for whom it had been a source only of puzzlement. No one who has had the privilege of sitting under von Rad lecturing on the Psalms or the Prophets is likely to forget the experience, or to neglect it in the construction of doctrine. But it is primarily as a record of the experience of men, men for whom faith in the God of Israel played a major role in their lives, who saw the action of God within and outside Israel and recorded their reaction, who recorded their experience which they understood as experience of God, who spelled out the nature of their faith as individuals and as a people, and the nature of God as seen in faith, that the systematic theologian uses the Old Testament. In doctrine he is concerned with men and with God, who is known to men only under the conditions and limitations of human experience and yet who is more than human experience.

³SCM Press, London, 1966.

III

Where does doctrine begin? Anywhere you like, I am inclined to think. If we begin with the tangled area of the methodology of doctrine, then the theologian is sorely tempted to cut the Gordian knot and propose some simple formula. But any doctrinal proposal which equates all proper doctrine with assent to one particular approach, e.g., a special interpretation of the concept of revelation, will clearly be at variance with the Old Testament witness. Perhaps this constant reminder of the extreme diversity in the relations between God and men is one of the Old Testament's most valuable aids to the construction of doctrine. *Non in dialectica placuit Deo, salvum facere populum suum.*

Doctrine is concerned with God, and there are many sources for the doctrine of God. Here too the Old Testament imagery of the majesty and the mercy, the holiness and the righteousness of the one God who keeps faith and asks for faithfulness, justice and mercy in his creatures, is a part of the data which is simply not repeated elsewhere.

God the Lord is also the Lord of creation. The universe, however it came into being, is characterized above all as being the work of God, God's gift to his creature man, to make use of it. However we may view the creation narratives in terms of their wider context of ancient Near Eastern tradition, they are a reminder that all that we have is God's, and what we give him as his own.

God is the creator of man, man in his glory and in his shame, capable of immense compassion and of unspeakable brutality, of faith and of disobedience, full of hope in God yet haunted by the insoluble problem of evil and of suffering, longing for community yet destructive of it. To this man, and not simply to any man, God was to come as man, and we will understand neither the old nor the new man the better for disregarding the Old Testament's contribution to the picture. Man here is subject to God's law. The law is fulfilled and the promise kept in the gospel. But the history of the law is itself that of a tension between frustration and fulfilment which may be seen as a paradigm of the relations between God and man which are reconciled in the greater fulfilment of the incarnation, but which must be continued in the changing patterns of every contemporary world.

Man and God have walked together through a history into which God came in Jesus. Exactly how the Word took flesh, as St. John put it, we do not, in the nature of the case, appear to be able to grasp fully, though intelligent faith will always try to understand more intelligently. But the story of redemption is intimately linked with the story of creation, and the story of relations between God and his people may help us to see something of the nature of reconciliation, and of the structures, the tasks, the elements of moral concern that must shape the concrete activity of Christians, both in God's present and in his future.

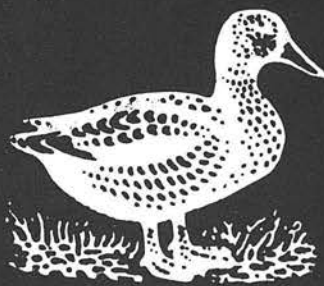
If the above were all that could be said and done in Christian doctrine,

then its scope would be limited indeed. For the exclusive construction of doctrine from the Old Testament, or from biblical imagery alone is, as I see it, not an exercise to be recommended. Doctrine which works, which fulfils its task in enabling faith to seek a deeper understanding of itself, and so to be more faithful, is of necessity a complex structure built of numerous components and regularly redesigned. This is not surprising, since human beings, for whose benefit it is intended, are complex creatures, and this is part of the glory of man. Within the structure of doctrine will be found material from each of the disciplines of the theological faculty, and beyond this from the whole range of the academic disciplines. Few disciplines, indeed, can flourish on self-reflection alone. It is perhaps not the least contribution of the Old Testament perspective that it shows how reflection upon relations between the God of Israel and his people has been carried on, on the widest of fronts and in the most diverse of ways for a very long time, and yet perhaps, for Christian faith, is still in its infancy.

NEW STUDIES IN THEOLOGY

1

edited by
**Stephen Sykes and
Derek Holmes**



Duckworth

G.M. Newlands on *The Myth of God Incarnate*

The following material, in order of discussion, is considered below: J. Hick (ed.) *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London 1977; N. Smart in *Encounter*, March 1978, 50f.; G.W.H. Lampe in *Epworth Review*, Jan. 1978, 128f.; M. Green (ed.), *The Truth of God Incarnate*, London 1977; B. Hebblethwaite in *Theology*, March 1977, 85f., July 1977, 255f. and *Rel. Stud.*, June 1978, 223f.; J.A. Baker in *JTS*, April 1978, 291f.; H. McCabe in *New Blackfriars*, Aug. 1977, 352f.; A. Heron in *Scot. Jour. Theol.*, Jan. 1978, 51f.; M. Hooker in *Epworth Rev.*, Jan. 1978, 131f.; J. Hick in *Theology*, May 1977, 204f.; K. Ward in *Theology*, July 1977, 251f.; G. Lampe in *God as Spirit*, Oxford 1977; C.F.D. Moule in *The Origin of Christology*, Cambridge 1977; M. Goulder (ed.), *Incarnation and Myth: the debate continues*, London 1979; G. Downing in *Mod. Churchman*, Winter 1977-8, 28f.; J. Ashton in *Scripture Bulletin*, Winter 1978, 32f.; H.P. Owen in *Rel. Stud.*, Dec. 1977, 491f.

Described by its publishers as 'one of the most exciting and provocative collections of studies to appear for a long time', *The Myth of God Incarnate* has been discussed endlessly and roundly condemned by churchmen high and low since its appearance. Expert observers have noted that its message is neither entirely clear nor entirely new. Ninian Smart in *Encounter* (March 1978, 50ff.) called it 'confusing and jejune over the issues it centrally hopes to deal with', and Geoffrey Lampe wrote in *Epworth Review* that 'the book is far from radical, either in what it defends or in what it attacks'. Yet it has undoubtedly provided a valuable stimulus to serious discussion of the basic issues of Christology – at least in Great Britain. The purpose of this article is to look again at the book, the discussion it has provoked, and the results of the discussion for the development of Christology.

1

The Myth of God Incarnate is a sort of manifesto, written, like many manifestos, in some haste and with a fair amount of passion, and directed towards a particular historical situation, that of theology today in England, especially in the Church of England. How far it is

relevant outside that situation is a question to which the answer is not immediately obvious. The book has been much described, but I want to go through it quickly again, and hope that my selections and comments are not too much of a misrepresentation of the whole.

According to the preface, the authors are concerned with 'a recognition that Jesus was "a man approved of God" for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate ... is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us'. '“Orthodoxy” is a myth, which can and often does inhibit the creative thinking which Christianity sorely needs today.' There are to be many uses of 'myth' throughout the book: here 'myth' appears to mean falsehood. One might ask whether talk of God incarnate and a mythical strain in language need to be mutually exclusive. 'But we have written this book in order to place its topic firmly on the agenda of discussion – not least in England, here the traditional doctrine of the incarnation has long been something of a shibboleth.'

In the first essay Maurice Wiles considers the possibility of Christianity without incarnation. An incarnational faith affirms of Jesus of Nazareth that 'while being fully man, it is true of him, and of him alone, that he is also fully God, the Second Person of the co-equal Trinity'. Is this a proper, a necessary, or a constructive question? It is proper because incarnation is only one interpretation, and it is an interpretation, of Jesus. It is necessary because incarnation is an interpretation appropriate to the age in which it arose, and today raises questions of intelligibility. It suggests the constructive alternative of seeing Jesus in a new way, as the one who embodies a full response of man to God and also the way of God to man. (It might of course be thought, *prima facie*, that we have such a contact with God expressed through the doctrine of creation, and that the incarnation implies more.)

We come to a major section entitled 'Testing the sources'. In chapter two, 'a Cloud of Witnesses', Frances Young looks at the numerous and sometimes conflicting understandings of Jesus in the New Testament. The many New Testament titles for Jesus were present in non-Christian documents before being ascribed to Jesus, and indeed they were not claimed by Jesus. Classical Christology is a Patristic development in a Platonist tradition, canonised by Athanasius in opposition to Arius. The *homoousios* is culturally determined. Still, 'for me experience of sin, suffering, decay and "abnormality" as a constituent part of the world, would make belief in God impossible without a Calvary-centred religious myth'. To reduce *all* of God to a human incarnation is virtually inconceivable.

Belief in God who loves and suffers comes not from a single, isolated occurrence but from the repeated experience of people's trust in God. So two stories are to be told, one of a man's death and the other of God's involvement, without an ontological link. Jesus is 'as if God for me'. The future lies with plurality in Christology.

The New Testament story is taken further by Michael Goulder in 'Jesus, the Man of universal destiny'. Jesus was a man whose activity shows God's loving will to men in action. 'My faith is not in the unity of substance, but in the unity of activity of God and Jesus: homopraxis, if a Greek word is wanted. Such was the understanding – so far as our documents will take us – of Jesus himself, and St Peter; and it will provide a path forward round the mountain for the Christian of today.' But if this is the centre, how did the Jesus myths grow up? Michael Goulder's answer is in 'The Two Roots of Christian Myth'. One root is the Galilean eschatological myth, taught by Jesus and the earliest Christians. The other is the Samaritan gnostical myth to which most of the essay is devoted. Its concepts of revelation, wisdom etc were taken over by St Paul. In conclusion, 'the incarnational speculations introduced into the Church by Simon Magus and his fellow-Samaritans seem to me entirely dispensable'.

The next chapter, by Frances Young, 'Two Roots or a Tangled Mass?', places the doctrine of the incarnation in 'a highly complex and syncretistic situation in the Graeco-Roman world', a world of miracle workers, incarnations and re-incarnations round every street corner, cults of rulers and of divine men. In Judaism too there was the hope of an eschatological Son of Man, a heavenly agent of God. It was natural enough in this context to speak of Jesus as the Son of God, especially in Hellenistic Alexandria.

Part II is entitled 'Testing the development', and deals with the situation after the New Testament and the Fathers. Leslie Houlden offers a creed of experience. After the Enlightenment we cannot but analyse language in a way unknown to the ancients. In the New Testament first there was living experience, then there were creeds. Experimental, imaginative expressions are probably better than factual, descriptive expressions. (One wonders why we may not have language with all four components.) We come now to Don Cupitt's interesting essay, 'The Christ of Christendom'. The doctrine of the incarnation belongs not to the essence of Christianity but to a certain period of Church history. This is illustrated from Christian art. The orthodox doctrine of Christ will not do, for four reasons. It unifies things which Jesus had kept in ironic contrast to each other, it detracts from Jesus' human nature, it appears to legitimate a cult of humanity because a man is worshipped as God, and the ultimate

mystery of God is conceived of anthropomorphically (paganism). God, whom Cupitt does not define, is with man, in man, only in transcendence, but not in incarnation.

The next chapter is welcome, and might have come earlier. Here we have a careful discussion of the term 'myth' in theology by Maurice Wiles. The use of the word in English theological literature is explored. Jesus' life can be seen as embodying a profound openness to God and also a parable of the loving outreach of God to the world in his attitudes to other men, even when the incarnation myth is seen as not literally true. Wiles does not actually offer grounds for believing *this* parable, rather than others. The christological discussion is then related to world religions by John Hick. Incarnational language was appropriate in ancient culture. Did it make factual or metaphorical statements? 'Orthodoxy insisted upon the two natures, divine and human, coexisting in the one historical Jesus Christ. But orthodoxy has never been able to give this idea any content.' It is like saying that this circle drawn with a pencil on paper is also a square, and in practice excludes most of humanity from salvation. We may hope to outgrow this sort of theological fundamentalism if we believe in the reality of God.

There remains the Epilogue by Dennis Nineham. Many scholars argue back from dogma to the historical Jesus. But how can we be sure of information about the historical Jesus, e.g. about his moral character? We cannot do this on historical grounds, and we cannot regard incarnation as normative. For Christians, Jesus is 'the lens through which all the demands and promises of God to them are focused. He can only fulfil that function, however, if he is an ever-changing figure'. He is the main figure through which God has launched men into a new relationship with himself. In a Final Comment, Don Cupitt adds that the centre of the tradition is not in the historical Jesus but in a cluster of 'principles of Spirit!' Here the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of man coincide; for this is not just a problem, but the human condition itself.'

2

We come now to the reviews and discussion of the symposium. Much of the reviewing is critical. This does not mean however that there is not a great deal of sympathy in Britain for the positions advanced. The seven symposiasts were themselves presumably barred from adding to the reviews, and this may have affected the balance. The obvious starting point is *The Truth of God Incarnate*, produced in greater haste than *The Myth*, as a reply. The standard of writing here is on the

whole in my judgment not high, and I shall deal only briefly with the book. Most of the work is by Michael Green, and offers a traditional conservative evangelical view of the Bible as a support to a doctrine of the incarnation. Stephen Neill and Christopher Butler offer conservative ecclesiastical critiques, anglican and catholic respectively. These consist more of affirmation than argument. Much more perceptive are the remaining contributions, by John Macquarrie and Brian Hebblethwaite. While fully aware of the difficulties involved, Macquarrie comes down in the end firmly for incarnational doctrine. 'I would think that *at least* three things are implied in the idea of incarnation: (a) the initiative is from God, not man; (b) God is deeply involved in his creation; (c) the centre and of this initiative and involvement is Jesus Christ.' Hebblethwaite puts it this way: 'The Christian doctrine of the incarnation expresses the conviction of Christians that this God has made himself known fully, specifically and personally, by taking our human nature into himself, by coming amongst us as a particular man, without in any way ceasing to be the eternal and infinite God.'

Hebblethwaite's strongly pro-incarnational position in the debate is interesting because he is not committed to conservatism in theology for its own sake. In debate, especially with Don Cupitt, he has developed an attractive and carefully worked out theology of incarnation (cf. *Theology*, March and July 1977, together with *Religious Studies*, 14 [June 1978] 223f.). As he puts the matter in an unpublished paper: 'In a sense the humanity of Christ mediates God to us, but in another sense God's love is communicated to us immediately by God's own incarnate presence here in our midst.' Incarnation is linked to Trinity: 'In forcing us to think of God in richer, relational terms, as the fulness of love given and love received within his own being prior to creation, it resolves that impasse in pure monotheism which results from conceiving of God on the analogy of an isolated individual.'

A more traditional Anglican critique comes from J.A. Baker in *JTS* (April, 1978, 291f.). Canon Baker objects to the attempt to preserve the religious significance of myth without the reality which the New Testament intended to interpret in using it. If the reality must go, then the myth must go too. This is recognised by Cupitt. But the basic objection to the book is the resurrection of Jesus. A conservative catholic assessment, of a sharply perceptive nature, is provided by Herbert McCabe in *New Blackfriars* (August 1977, 352ff.). He finds a number of confusions, each fatal to the argument in *The Myth*. 'At the root of all this lies a deficient doctrine of God, and this must be partly due to the authors' omission of a thousand years of hard Christian thinking on the topic.'

A further veto, from a Barthian standpoint, comes from Alasdair Heron in the *Scottish Journal of Theology* (1978, 51ff.). In particular, Heron finds Wiles' and Hick's positions practically indistinguishable from those of Schleiermacher, who is never mentioned. 'Anyone who feels that the repeated protest of T.F. Torrance in recent years against "radical dualisms" are overdone might profitably think again in the light of their recurrence throughout *The Myth*.' He recommends *The Truth* rather than *The Myth* as a guide to the 'thinking Christian'. 'He will find that it gets him a long way further, and he will save himself £2.15 into the bargain.'

We shall meet other severe critics of the Myth project later. I want to turn now to commentators more favourable to its positions. Generally favourable is Geoffrey Lampe in *Epworth Review* (Jan. 1978, 128f.). 'Maurice Wiles' first essay is very much on the right lines.' Incarnation is not a necessary postulate for an anti-dualistic attitude to the created world, or for a recognition of Jesus Christ as the focal point of God's encounter with man. In Lampe's view however, 'the real question is not so much whether we can use the concept of incarnation, but who or what we think was incarnate; and it is the notion of a pre-existent divine Logos/Son, distinct from God the Father, rather than the concept of incarnation as such, which brought the classical Christology to an impasse.' In the same issue Morna Hooker provides a sharp appraisal of the work of the authors of *The Truth*: 'They do little more than skirt round the issues, claim that they have heard all the arguments before, and repeat traditional positions.' She asks, 'Is it proper to claim that "all the New Testament writers believed in the truth of God incarnate" when only one of them ever uses incarnational language?'

One notable aspect of the controversy is that whereas critics seem to regard doctrines of incarnation as virtually inevitably unintelligible, defenders seem to regard it as entirely and univocally intelligible. In reply to Hebblethwaite John Hick reminds us that 'the traditional doctrine bristles with profound and difficult problems' (*Theology*, May 1977). Keith Ward (ibid. July 1977) also suggests the complexity of the concept and in his title 'Incarnation or inspiration – a false dichotomy?' in some respects anticipates a discussion of incarnation and inspiration in Lampe's *God as Spirit* (Nov. 1977). Ward thinks it might be possible to produce an account of the person of Jesus Christ which would be incarnationalist in certain central features, but would avoid the objectionable aspects of many classical Patristic accounts. 'Incarnation might not be the subsumption of one substantial nature by another but the clear manifestation of transcendence at a point in history which draws together and gives particular expression to its

partially hidden manifestation at all times and place.' Awareness of the complexity of incarnation is also shown by C.F.D. Moule in *The Origin of Christology*: Moule comes down in favour of incarnation, suitably defined and delineated.

These then are the main lines of the published debate so far. It will be observed that the theological positions of the contributors to *The Myth*, though overlapping in some respects, are by no means identical. Nineham and Wiles are perhaps closer to traditional modernism, where Cupitt and Hick appear to retain respect for an older liberal optimism about our access to the historical figure of Jesus. Goulder and Cupitt wish to replace the ancient mythology, Wiles and Young to continue to use it but to reinterpret its significance. These differences come out clearly in a further stage of the debate in Birmingham in the summer of 1978, at which the seven symposiasts debated with seven others, in general disinclined to espouse the non-incarnational proposals. I am grateful for permission to include some observations from this discussion.

Surveying the Myth debate Wiles underlines the ambiguity of the New Testament evidence and the implications of cultural relativity. He believes that 'when the view that Jesus is to be identified with God is replaced by one in which he symbolises and expresses God's action towards the world, an appropriate reconstruction of Christian belief will prove possible'. He advises against 'an interventionist view of God' and doubts the logical coherence of a classical doctrine of incarnation. Cupitt spells out further difficulties in regarding Jesus as God. Hick regards claims for the uniqueness of God's activity in Christ as the supreme example of Christian triumphalism, arguing for God's continual engagement with evil everywhere equally.

On the other side Moule recognises the threat of incarnational language to personal values and the dangers of paradox, but believes that paradox is necessary if justice be done to the experiences reflected in the New Testament, and that it is precisely in the balance of a trinitarian doctrine that the Scylla and Carybdis of polytheism and unitarianism are to be avoided. His paper is challenged by Goulder, who reiterates his position. Hebblethwaite defends the moral and religious value of the incarnation. Frances Young argues interestingly that 'it is eschatology, not incarnation, which makes Christ final in the New Testament'. There are interesting contributions from Sykes, Lash, Newbigin and others which cannot be anticipated here.

Before offering my own reflections on the issues I want to mention one further contribution, which deals with a key area, the implications of Jesus' cultural relativity for incarnation. I refer to Gerald Downing's article, 'Our access to other cultures, past and present (or,

The Myth of the Culture Gap)' in *Modern Churchman*, Winter 1977-78, 28f. The gist of Downing's position is that arguments in *The Myth* on the basis of a wide cultural gap between the New Testament and the present are questionable and often wrong. 'What they say is distinctive of the present, demanding fresh thought forms, often turns out to be quite closely paralleled in the past.' As far as the cultural gap is concerned, 'it is difficulty with "God" as such that marks the difference, not some localised trouble in some areas of God-talk'. Downing comments that some of the contributors are quite happy to speak of providence and destiny, and of revelation through experience, while finding incarnation unintelligible.

3

I want to look now at some possible results of the debate for theology. At a popular level the result has been to polarise extremes. There has been the predictable flood of embattled reaction and furious indignation from conservative Christians throughout the land. There are no doubt also those who can now regard the most naive simplification of Christian faith into mindless religious sentimentality as having been hallowed and authorised by the highest academic theological authorities. For the debaters themselves there has been in some respects a rapprochement, as it is seen that some incarnational and some non-incarnational theological models may overlap in what they regard as indispensable to an adequate Christian understanding of Jesus Christ. This has led both to an ability to learn from opposing positions and to an accommodation of arguments to fit a new situation. It is probably not the case that there has been no full defence of a classical doctrine of incarnation since Liddon, or that Hebblethwaite et al. are arguing on a completely different basis from that of the Early Church. Of course none of us can be Arians or Athanasians in any strict sense today. But we may wish, through different concepts, to make the same sorts of affirmations about states of affairs in the world of persons and things as Arius, Athanasius, Thucydides or anyone else did. It is reasonable, too, to assert certain features of incarnational propositions in respect of the events concerning Jesus while rejecting others once thought desirable, e.g. by Athanasius. Incarnation may in the past have led to docetism in respect of, e.g., the political and psychological aspects of the gospel (I think of the work of Oscar Cullmann) but need not always do so. On the other hand, the mere use of the term incarnation guarantees nothing and brings no automatic benefits. To this inconvenient fact the unsophisticated wielders of incarnational shibboleths are naturally blind.

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It is clear that *The Myth* raises quite as many questions as it solves. This is no bad thing in theology. John Hick speaks quite naturally of Jesus as basically 'a man intensely and overwhelmingly conscious of the reality of God': here is both God talk and the immediacy of revelation. He wants us to decide clearly between the literal and the metaphorical, classifying 'the two nature Christology' and 'God the Son' as myth, but accepting a metaphorical Son of God. In other essays criteria of truth and meaning are mentioned but not explained or specified. There are no criteria to be found, it appears, except in the ecclesiastical tradition. Its justification appears to be basically that it is there. The modern empirical man, whoever that may be, sometimes seems to become the ultimate court of appeal.

Questions are raised sharply. How can we speak of one person being God and man? Clearly, talk of persons must be complex in relation to God on any account. Incarnational language can threaten personal values. Ontology invites obscurantism. But talk of God is just difficult. Literal accounts usually appear as objective, metaphorical as subjective. The Fathers appear to be incomprehensible and on occasion disingenuous. Meaning, truth and God are in some danger of becoming catch-all terms with little specific connotation. There are many sorts of relativism, epistemological, historical, ethical, metaphysical – all involved but not all distinguished. What is the logical structure of the case for non-incarnational Christologies, or indeed for incarnational? Are they equally dogmatic intuitions, promulgated without rational grounds?

The questioning of assumptions is valuable, and preferable to digging tunnels of scholarship in the wrong directions. But even when the right directions are indicated, the real work remains to be done. It may be, too, that resolution of the problems requires further interdisciplinary analysis. John Ashton noted (*Scripture Bulletin*, Winter 1978) a lack of use of *literary* analysis in the discussion of myth. Further, 'no use whatever is made of modern anthropological studies, no attempt is made to see how the myths actually function in primitive societies'. More difficult to assess is the degree to which the loss of hitherto central affirmations affects the faith of Christians. H.P. Owen comments, in the course of a perceptive review (*Religious Studies* Dec. 1977) that 'I think Wiles greatly underestimates the difference that abandonment of belief in the Incarnation would make'.

4

In conclusion I may perhaps be permitted to make some reference to ways in which I would myself want to approach the grounds of Christology in the light of this debate. First a comment on history,

relativity and God's action. It does seem to me to be important to bear firmly in mind that Christianity still has to tackle a number of intellectual issues raised since the Enlightenment and not previously acute. Here is the perennial relevance of Schleiermacher and his successors. Talk of revelation, reconciliation and salvation through Christ, not to speak of incarnation and inspiration is conceptually hard to ground in rational argument. However many reservations we may have about his theology, the legacy of Ernst Troeltsch for historical and hermeneutical method, and therefore for much of our theology, has still to be assimilated. This does not mean, however, that we need embrace cultural relativism without remainder, or indeed any other cultural or conceptual totalities. We cannot have history without interpretation, but if we give up interest in historical facts (even though in the case of Jesus these may be hard to establish) we cease to have discourse with historians, and the element of historical contingency involved in the better sort of incarnational argument becomes in principle inconceivable. Differences in historical setting can make for understanding and credibility as much as for mutual incomprehension and aversion. Despite their differences I do not see, *mutatis mutandis*, why the Warden of Keble should not have been able to embrace Helen of Troy.

I want to turn now to the differences underlying the positions of those who criticise 'an interventionist view of God' and those who sometimes appear to have an easy familiarity and association with God's daily engagements calendar. It is not so long since a robust theology of 'God who acts', often in white Anglo-Saxon Protestant opposition to Catholic 'ontologism' and natural theology, was the order of the day. The demolition of these 'assured results' is due largely to James Barr and Brevard Childs. Facing the challenge of the modern consciousness of the absence of God from the world is by no means easy. In his lucid and widely influential writing on the subject of God as agent, Gordon Kaufman has accepted that God as an infinitely transcendent source of being cannot be involved in any intervention in the world. But meaningfulness is related to correspondence with facts in the natural world; therefore God's meaning becomes highly problematic. God's action is then seen as a master act, constituting the whole of history but including sub-acts, which cannot be distinguished with certainty. This solution has been severely criticised by secular philosophers: God is either infinitely transcendent and strictly inconceivable or not and not.

At this point it may be recalled that though the Enlightenment demands of us explanation and justification of the agenda, it need not be thought of as providing the agenda in an exclusive sense. It can still

be affirmed with St Thomas that it is possible for God, as for people, to act in different ways at different times and occasionally in different ways at the same time. It can also be affirmed, with Luther and Rahner, Augustine and Pascal, that God is hidden in the world, that he works through grace, and that his activity is not to be 'read off' the external world by empirical measurement. He is not an object in the world of objects. Because affirmation of his presence is 'against the odds', this need not become an occasion for ruling out his activity. Experimental evidence does count for and against God's action. Evil counts against God's love, though it does not count exhaustively. Grace may be persuasive but can scarcely be coercive.

But grace is no substitute for explanation, and the epistemological problems remain. New analogies for better understanding become necessary. Here is the religious attraction of the incarnational parable, whether seen as 'mere' myth or as referring to what is taken to be historically and metaphysically the case in the unique involvement of God the creator in his creation. If one decides to regard the incarnational parable as mythical in the stronger sense, then it is hard, as Troeltsch saw, to justify exclusive commitment to the Christian story as such, as *the* appropriate parable for talk of the divine. If one regards incarnational language as including metaphor in the weaker sense, i.e. as seeing incarnation as a God-given parable, given through historical events and referring to God's self-giving into contingent creation, then one is still not entitled to extrapolate 'incarnation' as a touchstone for theological construction apart from the one unique historical instance. Taken too far, incarnational theology may lead away from the purpose of a unique incarnation of God with men in Jesus Christ.

To sum up, it seems to me that the grounds for christology are neither conclusive nor insignificant. They involve assessing the evidence for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament and in the Christian tradition, in relation to the Judaeo-Christian understanding of God the creator. These are rational grounds and they include historical, metaphysical and existential elements. The evidence appears to me to point to a spiritual reality, but leaves it open to maintain a measure of epistemological scepticism, to maintain truth, but not an exhaustive knowledge of how we come to learn of it. The evidence in the events concerning Jesus and their consequences in history points to a unique involvement of God in our world, in which the creator of the universe is involved in a mysterious personal act of self-giving, self-abandonment and self-affirmation. As a pointer to God's unlimited commitment to historical contingency, not in creaturely existence as such but in the life, death

and resurrection of the man Jesus, incarnational language, despite the manifold dangers, may be a powerful support to understanding the unlimited and self-involving nature of God's love. It is God's presence, then in Jesus and now in the hiddenness of the work of his grace, which remains the source of our understanding. But the imagination requires stimulation, and here the clash of concepts, incarnation and contradiction of incarnation, may be of value. Where our concepts lead to the impoverishment of vision, and so to loss of touch with reality, in relations with God or our fellow men, new directions become overdue. This can happen when we acquire an easy familiarity with God incarnate or with God anything but incarnate. The peace of God need not be thought to underwrite satisfaction with our theologies.

Everything depends on the nature of the case made for Christology, and on the details of the argument. Non-incarnational theologies may provide avenues of progress, and incarnational theologies may be comprehensive but valueless. I cannot myself think of a christology which I would regard as adequate unless it included affirmation of a unique and distinctive self-giving of God the creator through a unique personal identification of God with the human life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a self-giving which is the focal point of the salvation of mankind. Whether or not such a christology were to be described as incarnational, it would be possible for me to regard it as incarnational to that precise extent, and as adequate because it included the core affirmations indicated above. The crucial element would remain not the designation but the nature of the specification, and its further value would depend entirely on the details of the specification. Such a project would have to take full account of the enormous diversity of the historical data, awareness of which the nineteenth century owed largely to F.C. Baur, and it would have to combine faithfulness to the gospel with recognition of the pervasive presence of myth and metaphor in history, a task in the twentieth century profoundly explored by Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. How precisely to exploit the truly radical implications of Continental scholarship for all God-talk, as much as for the Christological component, while retaining a sound Anglo-Saxon impatience with ungrounded speculation, remains a wide open question.

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KERYGMA UND DOGMA

Systematische Theologie in Großbritannien in den siebziger Jahren

Von George Newlands*

1.

Jedermann weiß: Systematische Theologie in Großbritannien gibt es überhaupt nicht. Vielmehr ist allgemein bekannt, daß die britische Theologie keine Lehrsätze, keine Dogmatik und auch keine Definitionen besitzt, sondern sich vielmehr auf elegante Weise in einem Zirkel bewegt, der aus ‚common sense‘, philosophischer Spekulation, ‚fair play‘ und liturgischer Tradition gebildet wird. Es ist eine Theologie der Glorie, einer freilich etwas abgeblaßten Glorie, ähnlich dem Weltreich, dem sie einst ein beachtliches Maß an ideologischer Unterstützung lieferte.

Natürlich läßt sich in Britannien nichts mit Karl Barths „Kirchlicher Dogmatik“ vergleichen. Doch wie die Bewohner dieser Insel leben, essen und bisweilen auch arbeiten, so beschäftigen sich einige von ihnen auch mit all den Grundproblemen christlicher Lehre, selbst wenn dies bisweilen in für kontinentale Theologen ungewöhnlichen Formen geschieht. Das ist auf jeden Fall unentschuldig; denn die Universitätsbibliotheken sind vorzüglich versorgt mit kontinentaler Theologie und es gibt eine fortlaufende Flut von Übersetzungen von *Pannenberg* und *Moltmann*, von *Rahner* und *Schillebeeckx*, von *Käsemann* und *Jüngel* sowie von vielen anderen, um die Diskussionsgrundlage zu erweitern. Auf mehr indirekte Weise wird das Gespräch angeregt durch die Theologie aus Amerika und aus der sogenannten Dritten Welt, die freilich selbst vom europäischen Denken beeinflußt worden ist.

Im Blick auf die systematische Theologie in Großbritannien werden europäische Wissenschaftler vermutlich in erster Linie an Schottland denken, wo die Beziehung mit der kontinentalen Dogmatik durch die reformierte Tradition ausgebaut worden ist. Die siebziger Jahre brachten eine fortgesetzte Reihe von Veröffentlichungen von *T. E. Torrance*, Professor für Christliche Dogmatik in Edinburgh von 1954–78. Torrance, eine ebenso einflußreiche wie umstrittene Gestalt, hat eine bemerkenswerte theologische Schule gebildet, deren Grundlage seine Interpretation von *Karl Barth* ist. Als eigenen Beitrag hat er ein

* Übersetzung aus dem Englischen R. Slenczka.

originelles Konzept von Theologie als Wissenschaft entwickelt mit einer starken Betonung der konfessionellen und ökumenischen Theologie¹. Daneben gibt es in diesem Gebiet kaum noch etwas anderes in Schottland, allenfalls noch einige Reaktionen gegen die Barthsche dogmatische Theologie. Erwähnt werden sollten die guten kleineren Untersuchungen von Professor A. E. Galloway in Glasgow und von Professor D. W. D. Shaw in St. Andrews². Mit dem Tod der Professoren Ian Henderson und Ronald Gregor Smith in Glasgow Ende der sechziger Jahre wurde eine beachtliche existentialistische Tradition im Stile Bultmanns abgebrochen³; das Erbe der Brüder Baillie hingegen wird noch weitergeführt von Professor John McIntyre in Edinburgh⁴. Die Arbeit schottischer Theologen südlich der Grenze wird fortgesetzt durch Professoren wie John Macquarrie und James Barr in Oxford, oder Donald MacKinnon in Cambridge und James Richmond in Lancaster.

Der Einfluß von Barth in England – besonders ausgeprägt bei Theologen wie Sir Edwin Hoskyns in Cambridge und Professor W. A. Whitehouse in Canterbury – neigte dazu, in größeren Bewegungen aufzugehen wie dem anglikanischen Evangelikalismus oder deutlicher in der sogenannten biblisch-theologischen Bewegung, angeführt vor allem von Professor Alan Richardson in Nottingham. Die Überzeugung, daß Theologie aus entweder biblischer, historischer oder philosophischer Theologie besteht, blieb und bleibt weiterhin tief verwurzelt in dem Lehrprogramm der theologischen Fakultäten, zumal in Oxford und Cambridge, die seltsamerweise immer noch die Zentren der Theologie in England bilden. Generationen haben ihre theologischen Kenntnisse von C. H. Dodd und C. F. D. Moule bezogen.

Gleichwohl hat es immer einen starken Strom dogmatischer Theologie in anglikanischen Zentren gegeben, vor allem vertreten von O. C. Quick, Leonard Hodgson, J. M. Creed und J. K. Mozley. Dies galt es auch in den siebziger Jahren fortzuführen. Der erste Anstoß zur Behandlung systematischer Fragen kam offenbar aus der biblischen Forschung. Dennis Nineham, der die Arbeit von R. H. Lightfoot fortsetzte, brachte die Arbeit von Bultmann und die radikale hermeneutische Fragestellung mit großer Schärfe in das öffentliche Bewußtsein⁵. John Robinson, Bischof von Woolwich, nahm Anregungen von Tillich und Bonhoeffer in seine Überlegungen über die Kirche in einer säkula-

¹ Grundlegend sind seine Bücher *Theological Science*, London 1969 und *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 1980. Thomas F. Torrance ist Träger des internationalen Templeton Foundation Award und vieler anderer Auszeichnungen. Hingewiesen sei in diesem Zusammenhang auf Dr. A. R. Peacocke's Bampton Lectures, *Creation and the World of Science*, 1979.

² Allan Douglas Galloway, *Wolfhart Pannenberg*, London 1973. D. W. D. Shaw, *The Dissuaders*, 1978.

³ Ian Henderson, *Power without Glory*, Richmond 1969. Ronald Gregor Smith, *The Doctrine of God*, London 1970.

⁴ John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, London 1966.

⁵ Dennis Eric Nineham, Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge, Warden of Keble College Oxford und Professor für Theologie in Bristol. *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, London 1968; *The Use and Abuse of the Bible*, London 1976.

ren Welt auf und versetzte das kirchliche Establishment in Schrecken mit „Honest to God“⁶, gewiß nicht seinem besten, aber doch seinem einflußreichsten Buch. *Maurice Wiles*, der den liberalen Modernismus der zwanziger Jahre fortsetzt, macht ein großes Fragezeichen hinter der dogmatischen Begründung des traditionellen anglikanischen Denkens über Trinität und Inkarnation in den Kirchenvätern.

Um 1970 schien in der Tat alles fraglich, und um so dringlicher stellte sich die Aufgabe, eine angemessene systematische Theologie zu finden, um die *theologischen* Probleme in den Griff zu bekommen, die bei den Auseinandersetzungen der Exegeten, der Hermeneutiker und der Philosophen im Spiel waren. *Stephen Sykes'* kleines Buch „Christian Theology Today“⁷ war dafür ein interessantes Zeichen der Zeit, indem es sich für eine ernsthafte Berücksichtigung der Dogmatik im theologischen Ausbildungsprogramm einsetzte. Auf breiterer Basis erschien dann im Jahr darauf ein Band mit Beiträgen über „Christ, Faith and History“⁸. Christologie war vor allem anderen das dogmatische Problem, das in den siebziger Jahren mit besonderer Schärfe diskutiert wurde. Diese Debatte setzte sich durch die gesamte systematische Theologie fort, wie wir noch sehen werden. Zunächst aber soll die christologische Auseinandersetzung genauer betrachtet werden.

2.

Die Mitarbeiter des Sammelbandes „Christ, Faith and History“ haben durchweg Beziehungen zu Cambridge, und daher war die Diskussion in erheblichem Maße von Problemen der lokalen Debatte gefärbt. Freilich wurden auch die meisten der wachsenden Themen gegenwärtiger Christologie aufgegriffen. Durch den ganzen Band zieht sich der Versuch, die herkömmlichen Probleme biblischer Forschung und historischer Untersuchung mit den weiteren dogmatischen Fragen, wie sie auf völlig verschiedene Weise von Theologen wie *Troeltsch* und *Barth*, von *Bultmann*, *Pannenberg* und von *Balthasar* aufgeworfen worden sind, zu verbinden. Lange Zeit stand die Christologie und zumal das Thema Inkarnation im Mittelpunkt anglikanischer Dogmatik. Daraus ergab sich die Dringlichkeit der christologischen Debatte, die bald zu einer radikalen Überprüfung der Zentrallehre der Inkarnation führte⁹.

In der Folgezeit erschien eine Reihe von Büchern, in denen unmittelbar das christologische Thema behandelt wurde. Die britische Ausgabe von *Van Harveys* „The Historian and the Believer“ unterstrich die Herausforderung

⁶ *John A. T. Robinson*, *Honest to God*, London 1963; dt. Ausgabe: *Gott ist anders*, München 1963.

⁷ *Christian Theology today*, Oxford 1971 von *Stephen W. Sykes*, seit 1974 Professor der Theologie in Durham.

⁸ *Christ, Faith and History*. Ed. von *Stephen W. Sykes* und *J. P. Clayton*. Cambridge 1972.

⁹ Diese Entwicklung wird ausführlich erörtert in *George M. Newlands*, *Theology of the Love of God*, London 1980.

von Troeltsch. Die Arbeit an der liberal-modernistischen Tradition und im Rückblick auf die Modern Churchmen's Conference in Girton College, Cambridge 1922, verbreiterte das Diskussionsfeld. In seinen Büchern „The Making of Christian Doctrine“ und „The Remaking of Christian Doctrine“ hat *Maurice Wiles*, Regius Professor of Divinity in Oxford seit 1969, die traditionellen Voraussetzungen von Inkarnation und Trinität in Frage gestellt. 1970 erschien *Norman Pittengers* „Christology Reconsidered“, eine Neuformulierung der Christologie im Rahmen der Prozeß-Philosophie¹⁰. Die mehr konservative Theologie nahm die Herausforderung an; dies zeigt sich etwa bei *T.F. Torrance* „Space, Time and Incarnation“ (1969) und „Space, Time and Resurrection“ (1976). Mit Nachdruck warnte *D.M. MacKinnon*, Norris Hulse Professor für Religionsphilosophie in Cambridge 1961–78, vor dem Modernismus, zumal in seiner Auseinandersetzung um „The Resurrection“ mit Professor *Geoffrey Lampe*¹¹. *G.W.H. Lampe* war ein höchst einflußreicher Verfechter liberaler Angelegenheiten vieler Art. Als hervorragender Patristiker stellte er vieles vom besten der anglikanischen liberalen Tradition dar.

In 1972 erschien *John Robinsons* „The Human Face of God“, eine christologische Untersuchung, in der besonders die theologische Bedeutung der Menschheit Jesu herausgestellt wurde. Der glänzende Neutestamentler Robinson hat damit eine Untersuchung vorgelegt, die viele für sein bestes theologisches Buch halten¹². Eine Klärung der durch die Exegese aufgeworfenen theologischen Probleme kam durch *James Barrs* „The Bible in the Modern World“ (1973), dem sich unmittelbar sein großer Band über „Fundamentalism“ (1978) anschloß¹³. 1973 erschien *Robert Morgans* „The Nature of New Testament Theology“ und *Gerald O'Collins'* „The Easter Jesus“ und 1975 gewann das Buch von *David Kelsey*, einem Gelehrten von Yale, „The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology“ Einfluß auf die britische Diskussion¹⁴.

Die zunehmend radikale Neuinterpretation traditioneller Lehre im gesamten Bereich der Dogmatik wurde fortgesetzt von Professor *John Hick* in seinem Buch „God and the Universe of Faiths“ (1973) und von Professor *Peter Baelz* „The Forgotten Dream“ (1975) und „Christian Believing“ (1976), ein Bericht der Erzbischöflichen Theologischen Kommission, deren Vorsitzender *Maurice Wiles* gewesen war. Auf die Ergebnisse werden wir später noch kurz zurückkommen. Für die Christologie wurde das Ergebnis zusammengefaßt in „The

¹⁰ Vgl. auch *William Norman Pittenger*, *The Word Incarnate*, New York 1959.

¹¹ *The Resurrection. A dialogue arising from broadcasts by G. W. H. Lampe and D. M. MacKinnon*, Ed. von *W. Purcell*, London 1966.

¹² Vgl. auch *John Arthur Thomas Robinson*, *Truth is Two-Eyed*, Philadelphia 1979.

¹³ Vgl. auch *James Barr*, *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, Oxford 1962; dt.: *Biblexegese und moderne Semantik. Theologische und linguistische Methode in der Bibelwissenschaft*. München 1965.

¹⁴ Der Schriftgebrauch in der neuen Theologie wird erörtert von *George M. Newlands*, *Hilary of Poitiers*, Bern 1978. 166–199.

Myth of God Incarnate“ sowie in der darauf folgenden Auseinandersetzung in verschiedenen Büchern, Aufsätzen und publizistischen Medien.

3.

Wer J. Moltmanns „Der gekreuzigte Gott“ und ähnliche Literatur gelesen hat, wird vermutlich gewisse Schwierigkeiten haben, wenn er umschaltet über den Ärmelkanal und das Gebäude des Neuen Jerusalem in dem grünen und lieblichen Land von „The Myth of God Incarnate“ zu Gesicht bekommt. Den Verfassern geht es um „die Erkenntnis, daß Jesus ‚ein Mann des göttlichen Wohlgefallens‘ gewesen ist und für eine besondere Aufgabe in dem göttlichen Heilsplan und daß die spätere Vorstellung von ihm als fleischgewordenen Gott einen mythologischen oder poetischen Ausdruck seiner Bedeutung für uns darstellt“. Jesus ist gewissermaßen die Linse, durch die alle Verheißungen Gottes für die Menschen in einem Brennpunkt zusammengefaßt werden; er ist die Hauptgestalt, durch die Gott die Menschen in eine neue Beziehung mit sich versetzt hat. Mein Kollege in Cambridge, *Don Cupitt*, bringt das Buch auf folgende Formel: „Das Zentrum der Tradition liegt nicht im historischen Jesus, sondern in einem Bündel von pneumatischen Prinzipien.“ Christologie und Anthropologie fallen damit zusammen; denn es handelt sich nicht mehr um ein isoliertes Problem, sondern um die Bedingung des Menschseins selbst.“ Bei dem Werk „The Myth of God Incarnate“ liegt der Schwerpunkt auf einer sorgfältigen Interpretation und rationalen Begründung, während Moltmann als typischer Vertreter des kontinentalen Denkens die positive dogmatische Geltung herausstellt. Es mag durchaus sein, daß britische Theologen dazu neigen, falsche Dinge aus richtigen Gründen zu sagen, während kontinentale Denker richtige Dinge aus falschen Gründen sagen – mindestens bisweilen!

Obwohl es zwischen den Autoren beträchtliche Unterschiede gibt, ist das Hauptthema eindeutig. In der Kultur des Altertums war die Sprachvorstellung der Inkarnation für Jesus angemessen, heute ist dies aber nicht mehr der Fall. Infolgedessen muß man entweder diese Sprache aufgeben, oder sie muß als mythisches bzw. metaphorisches Verständnis dem tatsächlichen Sinn gegenübergestellt werden. (Die Definitionen sind nicht völlig klar). Zwar hat die Orthodoxie immer auf solchen Formeln wie die der zwei Naturen Christi bestanden, allerdings ist sie niemals imstande gewesen, den tatsächlichen dogmatischen Inhalt anzugeben. Der Glaube an den christlichen Gott sollte Christen befähigen, über diese Form eines theologischen Fundamentalismus hinauszuwachsen.

Dieser Band rief umgehend eine konservative Antwort hervor in „The Truth of God Incarnate“ sowie eine maßvollere kritische Würdigung in „Incarnation and Myth, the Debate continued“ und außerdem eine ganze Flut von Aufsätzen¹⁵. Die Lehre von der Inkarnation wurde von Professor *John Macquarrie*

¹⁵ The Myth of God Incarnate, 1977. Vgl. die Darstellung dieser Auseinandersetzung in *George M. Newlands*, Incarnation, Myth and God in: *New Studies in Theology*, 1, ed. von *Stephen W. Sykes* und *J. D. Holmes*, 1980.

verteidigt, implizit auch von Professor *C. F. D. Moule* in „The Origins of Christology“ sowie direkt in einer Reihe von Aufsätzen, vor allem in der Debatte zwischen *Don Cupitt*, Dean des Emmanuel College, Cambridge, und *Brian Hebblethwaite*, Dean von Queens' College, Cambridge. Selbstverständlich können bloße Schlagworte der Inkarnation in der Theologie das Denken nicht ersetzen. Allerdings könnte ich auch keine Christologie für angemessen halten, wenn sie nicht festhält an der einzigartigen und unterscheidbaren Selbsthingabe Gottes des Schöpfers durch eine einzigartige personale Identifikation Gottes mit dem menschlichen Leben, Sterben und der Auferstehung Jesu von Nazareth, eine Selbsthingabe, die den Brennpunkt bei der Errettung der Menschheit bildet. In diesem genauen Sinne wäre von Inkarnation zu reden, und so wäre es angemessen, diese Grundbehauptungen einzuschließen.

4.

Professor *Maurice Wiles* überprüfte in seinem Buch „The Making of Christian Doctrine“ die Bereiche patristischer Theologie, die von alters her in der Mitte des anglikanischen Denkens stehen; er stellte die Frage nach ihrem Beitrag für die heutige Theologie und fand sie in bemerkenswerter Weise als mangelhaft. Ein ähnliches Verfahren wurde entwickelt in den Büchern „The Remaking of Christian Doctrine“, „Working Papers in Doctrine“, „Christian Believing“ sowie in der christologischen Debatte. Freilich hatte das Verfahren auch seine Schwächen. Zwar sprach man sehr viel vom kulturellen Relativismus, doch bei dem herangezogenen patristischen Material war kaum eine Spur davon zu erkennen, daß man auch die säkulare Literatur jener Zeit vor Augen gehabt habe. Bei dem Bemühen um eine zeitgenössische Anwendung, das nahezu völlig isoliert von dem kontinentalen Denken vorgenommen wurde, erhob man die einfache und alltägliche Erfahrung der Welt zu neuen Höhen als kritische Maßstäbe für die Theologie. Allerdings lösten ein luzider Stil und das artikulierte Unbehagen gegenüber der herkömmlichen Theologie in weiten Kreisen Bewunderung aus.

In einem ähnlichen ikonoklastischen Stil erschien in den siebziger Jahren eine Anzahl von Büchern von *Don Cupitt*, der nun wieder als Vertreter der Mythen-Schule auftrat. In „Christ and the Hiddenness of God“, „Crisis of Moral Authority“, „The Leap of Reason“, „Jesus and the Gospel of God“ und anderen Untersuchungen bis hin zuletzt 1980 in dem radikalen „Taking Leave of God“ forderte *Don Cupitt* eine völlige Neuformulierung der Bedeutung und der sozialen Implikationen des christlichen Glaubens. Wir müssen den herkömmlichen Theismus aufgeben und damit zugleich allen Glauben an einen von der Welt unterschiedenen transzendenten Gott, um uns statt dessen ganz auf die religiösen Werte des Menschen zu konzentrieren. „Ein Gott ist lediglich die bildhafte Wirklichkeit der religiösen Idee.“

Gegenüber diesem Kehraus wurde die traditionelle christliche Gotteslehre in neuer Form verteidigt von *Keith Ward*, Dean von Trinity Hall, Cambridge, in

seinem Buch „The Concept of God“ (1974), einer umfassenden philosophischen und theologischen Untersuchung, sowie in anderen Beiträgen. Ferner ist in diesem Zusammenhang zu erwähnen *J.A. Bakers* „The Foolishness of God“ (1976) und Professor *David Jenkins* „The Contradiction of Christianity“ (1977).

Posthum wurden in dieser Zeit auch mehrere Bücher und Predigten von *Austin Farrer*, Warden von Keble College, Oxford, der im traditionellen thomistischen Rahmen schrieb¹⁶, veröffentlicht. Diese Position wurde ebenfalls in eindrucksvoller Weise vertreten in zahlreichen Untersuchungen von Professor *E.L. Mascall*¹⁷. Die römisch-katholische Theologie hat in Großbritannien den traditionellen Thomismus weithin überschritten. Sehr gut zeigt sich dies an den Arbeiten zu theologischer Methode und Praxis von *Nicholas Lash*, seit 1978 Norris Hulse Professor in Cambridge, besonders in seinem Buch „Change in Focus“, eine Untersuchung über die Frage der Lehrentwicklung (1975) sowie „Theology on Dover Beach“ (1979) und in seiner Arbeit über Newman. Erwähnt werden sollte in diesem Zusammenhang auch das Buch „Multiple Echo“, eine posthum herausgegebene Sammlung der Arbeiten von Fr. *Cornelius Ernst*, OP, und eindrucksvolles Dokument seiner tiefeschürfenden Intelligenz, dazu auch eine Reihe von interessanten Studien von Fr. *John Coventry* in Cambridge und Fr. *Fergus Kerr* in Oxford.

Professor *Donald Mackinnon* verdanken wir eine scharfsinnige Kritik des neuen liberalen Modernismus; von *Brian Hebblethwaite* wurde sein Buch bereits in einem früheren Beitrag zu dieser Reihe gut beschrieben¹⁸. Eine ähnliche Zurückhaltung, wenn auch aus anderer Sicht, gegenüber dem Modernismus vertritt Professor *John Macquarrie*, wohl bekannt als Interpret von *Heidegger* und *Bultmann* und Lady Margater's Professor of Divinity in Oxford seit 1970. In einer Reihe von Untersuchungen zu Theologie und Frömmigkeit hat *Macquarrie* mit Hilfe der Existenztheologie sich darum bemüht, die klassische Tradition christlicher Dogmatik zu erhellen. Besonders sei verwiesen auf seine Bücher „The Principles of Christian Theology“, „God-talk, Paths in Spirituality“ und „Christian Hope“.

Noch zu erwähnen bleibt eine Anzahl weiterer gehaltvoller unabhängiger Forschungsbeiträge. Ende 1977 erhielt die modernistische Bewegung kräftige Unterstützung durch das Buch „God as Spirit“, die Bampton Lectures von *Geoffrey Lampe*, der bedauernswerterweise dann 1980 gestorben ist¹⁹.

Das Buch von *Lampe* bestand in einem scharfsinnigen und gelehrten Angriff auf die Trinitätslehre und setzte sich ein für ein neues Modell, in dem Gott als Geist verstanden wird. 1978 erschien von Professor *James Richmond* von Lancaster das Werk „Ritschl, a reappraisal“. 1976 wurde das Lancaster Sym-

¹⁶ Z.B. *Austin Marsden Farrer*, *The End of Man*, London 1973 und *Interpretation and Belief*, London 1976.

¹⁷ *E.L. Mascall*, *Theology and the Gospel of Christ*, 1979.

¹⁸ *Brian L. Hebblethwaite* in: *Kerygma und Dogma*, 26, 1980, 303–316.

¹⁹ *Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe*, Professor der Theologie in Cambridge 1959–1978.

posium über „Ernst Troeltsch and the future of Theology“ veröffentlicht, herausgegeben von Dr. *John P. Clayton*, dazu eine Sammlung von *Troeltschs* Schriften, herausgegeben von *R. Morgan* und *M. Pye* in 1979. Hinzuweisen ist in diesem Zusammenhang auch auf die ausführliche Untersuchung zu *Troeltsch* von Professor *A. O. Dyson* in Manchester, sie spiegelt sich teilweise in seinem Buch „The Immortality of the Past“. Das Interesse an *Troeltsch* war nicht zuletzt angeregt worden durch die Entwicklung der Abteilung für religiöse Studien im Gegensatz zu dem Lehrplan der älteren Fakultäten. Zu nennen ist vor allem Lancaster unter der Leitung von Professor *Ninian Smart* und neuerdings mit Professor *John Bowker* sowie Birmingham mit Professor *John Hick*. Zwar arbeitet *John Hick* vor allem im Gebiet der Religionswissenschaft und der philosophischen Theologie, doch seine Veröffentlichungen haben stets auch Bedeutung für die Dogmatik. Sein Werk „Evil and the God of Love“ (1965) wurde zum englischen Standardwerk dieses Themas²⁰.

5.

Ausgegangen war ich von dem Einfluß *Barths*. Es ist interessant festzustellen, wie es am Ende dieser Dekade zu einer neuen Begegnung einer zweiten Generation mit *Barth* kommt, die sich in einer anderen Aufsatzsammlung, herausgegeben von *Stephen Sykes*, „Karl Barth. Studies of his theological Methods“ niedergeschlagen hat. Der Vorzug dieses Bandes liegt in einer gewissen Distanz zu seinem Gegenstand und ähnlich einigen neueren kontinentalen Würdigungen ist er gekennzeichnet durch einen neuen und konstruktiven Zugang zur Theologie *Barths*. Bereits erwähnt wurde der fortdauernde Einfluß von Übersetzungen aus der kontinentalen Theologie durch das gesamte Jahrzehnt. Daneben stehen allerdings auch wichtige Beiträge zur englischen Diskussion von Australiern wie *Gerald O'Collins*, der bereits genannt wurde, und *Norman Young*, von *Charles Davis*, jetzt in Kanada, von *Adrian Hastings* und anderen über afrikanische Theologie und viele andere²¹. Beiträge dieser Art haben vertiefend und ausgleichend auf eine theologische Tradition gewirkt, die immer noch in überraschender Weise beherrscht wird von der lokalen Diskussion in Oxford und Cambridge. Nachdem dies gesagt ist, mag es mir in treuer Verbundenheit auch erlaubt sein, zwei neuere Arbeiten aus Cambridge zu erwähnen, nämlich von *Rowan Williams* „The Wound of Knowledge“, eine Untersuchung zur christlichen Frömmigkeit vom Neuen Testament bis zu St. Johann vom Kreuz (1980) und von *Brian Hebblethwaite* „The Problems of Theology“ (1980). Schließlich sollte auch erwähnt werden, daß der stärkste Einfluß auf die systematische Theologie in dem behandelten Jahrzehnt aus dem Unterricht von Theologen kommt, die entweder überhaupt keine Bücher oder Aufsätze veröffentlicht haben – und dieser Beitrag beschäftigt sich in erster Linie mit Büchern – oder aber die in anderen Gebieten publiziert haben.

²⁰ Zu den Arbeiten der Professoren Smart, Hick und Bowker vgl. *Hebblethwaite* a. a. O.

²¹ Z. B. *Norman James Young*, *Creator, Creation and Faith*, London 1974.

In Cambridge z.B. ist der Einfluß von solchen Gelehrten wie *Gordon Rupp* und *David Knowles*, von *Owen* und *Henry Chadwick*, von *C.F.D. Moule* und von *John Emerton* ganz beträchtlich gewesen.

Die Ekklesiologie wurde bisher noch nicht erwähnt²². Aus dem ökumenischen Gespräch des letzten Jahrzehnts ist eine ganze Reihe von Berichten über die Gespräche zwischen Anglikanern und Methodisten, Orthodoxen, römischen Katholiken, Skandinaviern und deutschen Lutheranern und anderen sowie zwischen der Kirche von Schottland und anderen Kirchen entstanden. Es gab eine Reihe von Untersuchungen über das Wesen des Amtes, erwähnt seien vor allem die der Professoren *R.P.C.* und *A.T. Hanson*. Die Sorge für die rechte Art von konfessioneller Theologie führte *Stephen Sykes* dazu, ein eindrucksvolles Plädoyer für eine anglikanische systematische Theologie in „*The Integrity of Anglicanism*“ (1977) zu veröffentlichen. Zur Sakramententheologie wurde von *Nicholas Lash*, „*His Presence in the World*“ (1967) ein guter Überblick über die katholischen Beiträge aus den letzten Jahren veröffentlicht. Das Thema der Sakramente begegnet regelmäßig auch in den Arbeiten von *Donald MacKinnon* und *John Macquarrie*²³ sowie in *T.F. Torrance*s „*Theology in Reconciliation*“ (1975), einer in vieler Hinsicht tiefsinnigen Betrachtung zur konfessionellen Theologie.

Zu Beginn der siebziger Jahre war es durchaus geboten, die Frage nach der Bedeutung einer neuen Konzentration auf die systematische Theologie in Großbritannien zu stellen. Am Ende dieses Jahrzehnts hat sich diese Notwendigkeit klar herausgestellt. Neue Pläne – radikale wie konservative – wurden aufgestellt. Die Untersuchung hat gezeigt, mindestens für solche, die Ohren haben zu hören, daß auch hier keine leichten Antworten auf in ihrem Wesen schwierige Probleme zu erwarten sind. Fortschritte sind aber erzielt worden, und die Grundbereinigung läßt weiten Raum für eine weitere konstruktive Entwicklung.

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Summary

Systematic Theology in Great Britain in the 1970's

Though not an obvious source of systematic theology, British theology has always debated the central issues of Christian doctrine. In the 1970's the main focus was on Christology, and especially on the significance of the doctrine of the Incarnation. Christological reappraisal led to reassessment of the doctrine of God, the nature of divine action and the relation of theology to history and culture. The considerable interest created in doctrinal criticism, both radical and constructive, could provide a basis for solid development in the 1980's.

²² Vgl. *George M. Newlands*, *The Church of God*, London 1981.

²³ *Donald Mackenzie MacKinnon*, *Borderlands of Theology*, London 1968 und *John Macquarrie*, *Paths in Spirituality*, London 1972.

G.W.H. LAMPE

Christian, Scholar, Churchman
A MEMOIR BY FRIENDS

Editor: C.F.D. Moule

AS A THEOLOGIAN

by the Reverend G. M. Newlands, BD, PhD

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I

Geoffrey Lampe came to the Ely Chair of Divinity in Cambridge in 1959. Already an established scholar, he had succeeded in combining a multitude of pastoral and administrative duties in Oxford and Birmingham with a range of publications which, solid rather than voluminous, was to provide a secure basis for his future research. The subjects dealt with echo almost precisely the later academic interests, and provide the contours of a programme which was to be developed with formidable energy, a delicious sense of humour and always a daunting professional expertise.

Cambridge theology has taken on many different colours over the years but it has not been without distinctive character. The tradition of Erasmus, Ridley and Bucer, of Lightfoot, Westcott and Hort, has never been afraid to follow truth wherever it might lead, and to speak the truth boldly in love as the open invitation of God's love. It is my brief in this paper to confine myself to Geoffrey Lampe's theology. But his theology is perhaps best understood against the background of a keen participation in the affairs of the university, in politics and education in the region, and of a strong and constantly renewed sense of the life and worship of the Church. Not for nothing was he a canon and an honorary canon of Ely, and a devoted chairman of the council of Westcott House and member of the council of Ridley Hall. This was a passion for Athens and for Jerusalem, for the one precisely because of the other, expressed in a distinctive style. Here was humour without frivolity, commitment with a wide tolerance of other points of view, bold experiment in faith with deeply serious intention. 'Having God, he had all, and, held by God, he knew what real security means.' (Charlie Moule).

'What in all this he was concerned for was that God *himself*, and not another, had acted in love in the human scene.' (Peter Walker).

II

In 1948 there appeared in the *Journal of Theological Studies* a couple of articles by G. W. H. Lampe on patristic discussion of Baptism. There followed essays on the meaning of the Christian ministry and the significance of Word and Sacrament, culminating in the definitive study of Baptism in the early Church, *The Seal of the Spirit*, of 1951. The Spirit of God is the keystone, or rather the constantly moving impulse, of the whole corpus of Professor Lampe's writing. Concern for Baptism was linked to concern for Confirmation and to the whole question of ministry. Though we shall look in vain for ecumenical jargon in Lampe's work, concern for the unity of the Church was a major spring of his creative effort. The roots of this may lie in the war years, in Birmingham, and in aspects of his whole life and theology, and will no doubt suffer the usual fate of becoming a suitable research topic for a higher degree. This ecumenical engagement provoked a stream of papers on Church and ministry, ordination and intercommunion, and a notable participation in the Open Letter about the Church in South India. Beyond ecumenism came a catholic interest in God as the reconciler of all mankind who invites us to participate in mystery without mystification and in rationality without rationalism. The unemployed and the socially disadvantaged were in, exorcists and the Moonies were out.

Apart from the work on Church and Sacraments and on the Holy Spirit, especially in the writing of his favourite evangelist, St Luke, the Birmingham years brought a study of Luther and of the doctrine of justification by faith. This wrestling with the heritage of the Reformation was to stand Lampe in good stead in twenty years of work with the Anglo-Scandinavian conversations. It was to come out, too, in his understanding of grace in the development of his Christology, to be summed up in the first instance in *Reconciliation in Christ*, the F. D. Maurice lectures for 1955. The terms God and Christ were never to be alternatives, and so neither Barthian Christomonism nor deistic unitarianism could hold much attraction—though charity would lead him to contribute to a collection of essays in honour of Karl Barth. The search for criteria

brought up sharply the question of authority. How was the freedom of the Spirit to be related to the letter of the sacred text? A provisional answer was forthcoming in essays on scripture and tradition, on authority, and, with Kenneth Woollcombe, in *Essays in Typology*, 1957.

III

The first years in Ely saw publications spanning both the patristic and modern periods, discussion of creeds in the Fathers and the credo *I Believe* in the present, the Patristic Greek Lexicon and some short plays for children for the BBC. The juxtaposition of the Fathers and the present day has always been characteristic of the Anglican tradition. Lampe had added Luther, and the Scandinavian connection kept up this concern. In discussing the sacramental tradition he did not forget the medievals. If there was a gap it was perhaps in the spirit of St Thomas, though he was to attempt always to include the Roman Catholic tradition in the enterprises with which he sought renewed understanding and fellowship. This was a time of more articles on the ministry, the eucharist, and especially on the authority of the Bible in the modern world, together with the chapters on Luke and Acts for the new version of *Peake's Commentary*. The results for his theology of this scholarly activity can be well seen in *The Resurrection*, a dialogue with D. M. MacKinnon, 1966.

The dialogue arose from *An Easter Sermon* [to which reference has already been made by Canon Purcell, pp. 9 ff. above]. Geoffrey Lampe preached a large number of sermons, often to undergraduates, with a light touch and in a matter-of-fact style. He wanted to communicate with ordinary intelligent people, and he was deeply suspicious of anything in theology which he could not commend succinctly and intelligibly to the man or woman in the pew. Lampe always bore in mind the sort of comments that his old friend Donald MacKinnon would make, especially when he knew that they would not be of approval. There were others too—I mention only C. F. D. Moule, whose New Testament seminar kept the Cambridge biblical tradition at the centre of the enterprise, and Gordon Rupp, whose gentle humour provided the perfect mirror for ecumenical speculation. Lampe provided a curious unifying influence, being precisely himself rather than all things to all men,

and inviting others to be themselves. Fair and tolerant almost to a fault, he assumed the same qualities in others as a matter of course.

The sermon begins with Paul's preaching of the Risen Christ. 'The real Christ is not a revived corpse. He lives in the fullness of God's life. He is the life, the truth, the way for us. He lives for us and in us.' We must not ask for the wrong sort of proof. 'There was no objective demonstration at Easter that Jesus had won the victory. He was never seen by Caiaphas or Pilate or the Jerusalem mob. . . . There is no proof of that kind. Only the assurance of experience.' This was not a message of simple optimism. 'Easter does not guarantee an easy comfortable time all round. On the contrary, the unquenched light of the world shines most brightly in the long line of the martyrs, from Peter and Paul at Rome in the year 65 or thereabouts to James Reeb in . . . Alabama, in the year 1965.'

In the discussion Lampe says of the Resurrection that 'It is an assertion that is possible only to faith. But faith makes this assertion on the basis of certain things that are recorded as having actually happened at Easter.' He saw Christian experience of resurrection as 'a real encounter with an objective presence'. Professor MacKinnon had approached the matter in 1953 from a rather different angle. 'At the heart of human history, then, stands for the Christian the agony, the struggle of Christ . . . It is deed: not idea.' He later noted that 'It is because I seek after *facts* . . . that I look for a publicly observable state of affairs in the spatial and temporal world, not disclosing, nor containing, but still pointing towards (in a way that I agree remains entirely ambivalent) that which is, in my view, necessarily *unique* and creative'.

Among great differences there are remarkable convergences. Neither is looking for unmistakable signs. Both stress the primacy of faith, Lampe in the absence of visible signs and MacKinnon in the ambivalent nature of the facts. Both affirm the Resurrection as an event that happened in the public world, and both reject the existentialist understanding of resurrection as myth in a purely subjective interpretation. For MacKinnon the heart of the matter is the deed done in the active obedience of Christ. For Lampe it is the act of grace in reconciliation through the cross, the response of faith through the Spirit and the sealing of commitment in Christian martyrdom. The most striking aspect of this dialogue, at a time of the almost complete conversion of continental theology to the school of Rudolf Bultmann and the wave of secular theology which

followed the publication of *Honest to God* in Britain, is the considerable caution which both scholars exercise in relation to the classical Christian tradition. The Anglican communion has always been much concerned with the ancient creeds in its life and worship. (A minister of the Kirk may perhaps recall in brief piety that Calvin thought creeds delightful if not overdone, though he inevitably denied any such licence to others.) The subject of ingenious revision, radical rejection and glorious reaffirmation, the patristic legacy remains important as a link with the Christian past and a source of new creative reflection in the present.

IV

The next decade brought a number of extremely interesting essays. *The God of the Christians* (from *The Phenomenon of Christian Belief*, 1970) is a persuasive suggestion that trustful confidence in God's grace has nothing whatever to do with clutching at infallibilities, whether in books, formulas, or institutions. *The Limuru Principle and Church Unity* (1974, reprinted in *Explorations in Theology*, 8, 1981) extends the same dogmatic judgement to the nitty-gritty (as Donald MacKinnon might have called it) of the validity of non-episcopal ordination. *The Holy Spirit and the Person of Christ* is an important essay in Christology. The continuing freshness of the argument, despite being the subject of a decade's weary sackfuls of examination scripts, is a tribute to its quality. Even for an endlessly patient advocate like Lampe there comes a point when the fact of spiritual experience, like the universe, just has to be accepted. 'If God has, as it appears, willed that his Spirit should communicate with men and inspire them through Christ, that is, by witnessing to Christ and referring to him as the archetype and norm, then this is a fact of God's dealings with men which it would be profitless to question. Like his election of Israel, it has to be accepted.' At the same time, not out of diffidence but out of due regard for the role of the theologian as a worker *with others* he ends on a note not of apostrophe but of self-interrogation. 'Or must Spirit christology after all give way at this point to the concept of the incarnation of the pre-existent divine being, the Logos/Son?'

Christian Believing, a report by the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, was dear to Geoffrey Lampe's heart, and his response to criticism was not to retract but to wait for and to expect

better times. Produced by a very diverse group, the report's statements inevitably sacrifice something for linguistic unanimity. The individual essays are powerful pleas in favour of particular points of view. Lampe produced the Appendix on *The Origins of the Creeds*. It was quite clear to him, standing in a long scholarly tradition, that the origins and purposes of the creeds were often entirely different from those romantically imagined by theologians in whom weight of pious learning overcame critical judgement.

In his individual essay Geoffrey Lampe took up the report's theme of the Christian life as a voyage of discovery, a quest, an adventure. Revelation never comes neat and undiluted, in Bible, Church, or historical events. Concepts of authority change, but there remains 'the essentially unchanging human experience of being encountered by God . . . The centre and heart of this continuing encounter between God and man is, as I believe, Jesus Christ.' The Christian sacraments 'signify, evoke and sustain our experience of living at the present time in the Spirit of Christ' as we await God's final transformation in the Spirit.

Geoffrey would have been the first to agree that the story of human salvation has many different facets. Sometimes God's grace is experienced as a great release, when all attempt at discovery, initiative, and activity has failed, when people are broken in circumstances of mindless evil, cruelty, or futility. Here the memory of a deed done may become the centre of salvation. When the plausibility criteria of the present become too constricting, strange chords from the past may stimulate new perspectives. Sometimes the voyage of discovery may begin to resemble a pleasure cruise for successful people in a sea of structural alienation and unemployment. Geoffrey could see this, and still take delight in the sight of a small chorus leaning daringly overboard to mutter Marxist incantations of woe, while safely contriving never to fall off the first class deck. He well knew the danger of narcissism in any institution, and the other side of his vision is the large collection of sermons on Christian discipleship, very often taken up with specific practical, political, and social issues.

In 1939, when William Temple produced his admirable *Doctrine in the Church of England* there was still a certain consensus that profound experience of transcendence was to be referred to the religious dimension, to Christianity and the Church. By 1976 things had changed: the God of Hastings Rashdall was as remote as

the God of Cyril of Alexandria. Idealism was out, and critical realism was not necessarily successful either. The *fact* of Christian experience of the Spirit was not universally admissible or even conceivable. Nevertheless, for Lampe this was not to be the signal for a return to the primrose path of Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan rectitude.

V

In November 1977 there appeared from the Clarendon Press *God as Spirit*, the Bampton Lectures for 1976. On the first pages were the names of Augustine and Charles Raven. Raven and Augustine were men who knew the world of affairs and attempted to speak in universal terms without compromising the Gospel. Both were capable of breathtaking doctrinal innovation, and could easily in another age have come to a sticky or uncomfortably crisp end. The names pointed to a serious and comprehensive intention in the catholic tradition, and should alert us against any suggestion of an *agōnisma es to parachrēma*.

God as Spirit has been much reviewed and discussed. Reading again the first chapters four years on one is struck by the high incidence of biblical language. This may be seen as a precritical limitation. It may also indicate a mature employment of biblical language as an appropriate medium for doing theology. That I think is how Lampe saw the internal structure of *God as Spirit*, based as it largely was on the Bible and the Fathers. He saw the natural medium of theological discourse not in an ultra-modern hermeneutical repristination of medieval metaphysics, but in an informed and controlled employment of ordinary language. It would have been interesting to relate his narrative to all sorts of possibly cognate areas from the sociology of knowledge to the semiotic structure of Robbe-Grillet's novels. But it was not necessary. Frenetic search for exotic clothes is sometimes a sign of intellectual nakedness. He knew exactly what he was doing and why. Here was the learned simplicity which is one of the great strengths of his style.

A selection of quotations will perhaps exhibit some of the building blocks. "Incarnation" and "inspiration" are not in fact two quite different alternative models for Christology. Inspiration . . . must convey the deeper meaning of a "real presence" of God

himself. Incarnation, unless understood in inspirational terms, is equally inadequate.' An apparently easy target for conservative critics of various varieties in the *Myth of God Incarnate* controversy, Lampe always seemed to have moved on just a fraction when the smoke cleared.

'We are not saved by an event as such, not even the event of Good Friday, but by its effect upon us when it is interpreted in a certain way.' Here we seem to be in the presence of pure subjectivism, from which we may be instantly rescued by the reflection that we are saved, by definition, only by God. Through grace the continuities between various parts of acts and events come to have human significance in ways complex beyond our imagining. In the Logos theology which was the basis of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, 'The characteristic features of the life of Jesus, especially his relationship to God, are read back into the eternal relationship of the hypostatized and anthropomorphically conceived Logos-Wisdom of the Father': none of which is particularly helpful. Resurrection is not a return of Jesus to friends who had let him down but 'a taking up of those friends, and of all subsequent believers, into his life of sonship. . . . Belief in future life did not depend for the first Christians, and need not for ourselves, upon an Easter event. It rests upon the trust which believers place in the faithfulness of God; on their assurance of the creative presence of God the Spirit.' True realism is found not only in the intellectual but also in the practical resolution. Grace is given in being given away and truth is apprehended in doing the truth. Resurrection is appropriated in fulfilment of the life of sonship with Christ.

'I believe that the Trinitarian model is in the end less satisfactory for the articulation of our basic Christian experience than the unifying concept of God as Spirit.' 'It is to express the concept of the immanent creative activity of the transcendent Creator that we use the term "Spirit", referring to the one God, transcendent and immanent, as he makes himself known in his outgoing towards us which is also his indwelling within us.'

Lampe has been described as a heretic and a deist, usually by opponents and sometimes by admirers. He did indeed offer radical modification of traditional doctrine, though always as a faithful son of the Church. To find heresy where there is no heretical intention may itself be somewhat heretical. He was not a deist in the sense of preferring a *principium* of the Father and a subordination of the Son

and the Spirit. If he had felt that continuity with classical unitarianism was best he would have said so plainly. I shall not rehearse a Hesiodic catalogue of possible heresies.

VI

God as Spirit was written not to be worshipped but to be used. Observing that classical trinitarians have sometimes been unable either to forget anything or to learn anything, Lampe perhaps underrated the intellectual challenge of the trinitarian option in the present. Like Schleiermacher he had very good reasons for bracketing out the trinitarian dimension, regarding the *filioque* controversy, the very model of a modern ecumenical agenda, as much ado about nothing. Some things are better discarded than endlessly refurbished. It may be that trinitarian theology, unlike other traditional doctrines, is saved by the fact that it does continue to commend itself from the reflection on Christian experience which Geoffrey so emphasised. But if so, adequate reformulation will not come through Byzantine reiteration.

Hegel's heirs, notably in Process theology, have rather liked the Trinity: Schleiermacher's have not been so certain. But things are not so simple. For David Jenkins the Trinity is of the essence, for Hendrikus Berkhof it is not. Distinctions for excellence and dullness can be fairly equally divided between trinitarian and non-trinitarian theologies. The God who is a living fire and a refuge for the weary and the heavy laden is not easily expressed in our concepts. Much depends on the nature of the specification. The God of the Christians I understand as one who is in his essential nature love, love characterised precisely and uniquely in the self-giving of God to mankind in the events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is not *so* difficult to produce an intellectually respectable account of God as a transcendent source of self-giving love: the problems arise in the scandal of particularity.

Much in the tradition was docetic and obscurantist. Lampe sought renewal by making pneumatology the centre of theology. He concentrated on the anthropological rather than the cosmological dimension of creation and reconciliation, seeing man always as God's man, through the Spirit, and ordinary language as a check on escape into the realm of speculation, which he regarded as a form of

cheap grace. Two thousand years of doctrinal tradition are a fraction only of the history of creation, and faith is always led on to seek deeper understanding. In *God as Spirit* we may find an invaluable clue to further exploration.

Part of the foundation for this profound study has now appeared in the long section on *Christian Theology in the Patristic Period*, contributed to the *History of Christian Doctrine* ed. H. Cunliffe-Jones (1978). Based on the witty and challenging lectures from which generations of undergraduates in Cambridge and Birmingham learned much of their theology, it is constantly enlivened by the keen theological interest throughout. The Patristics card game can be played by the expert in an unlimited number of combinations to produce fury, vexation, and delight. And for the Christian tradition there is more to the Fathers than cards. These lectures over the years constituted a significant event. But as the first rule of Geoffrey Lampe's theology reminds us, events without interpretation and further engagement remain powerless. We begin to learn only as we are open to invitation.

Through books and lectures, articles and sermons, parties and quiet conversations, we may count ourselves uniquely privileged to have shared the company of a man who was wise and generous and good, and who could sum up our faith and our ultimate hope in this way: 'I believe in the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in the sense that the one God, the Creator and Saviour Spirit, revealed himself and acted decisively for us in Jesus. I believe in the Divinity of the Holy Ghost, in the sense that the same one God, the Creator and Saviour Spirit, is here and now not far from every one of us; for in him we live and move, in him we have our being, in us, if we consent to know him and trust him, he will create the Christlike harvest: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness, and self-control.'

TRE

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geschaffen hat (Conf. X,6,8f). – In der abendländischen Theologiegeschichte haben diese Vorstellungen Augustins viele Jahrhunderte lang eine beherrschende Wirkung ausgeübt.

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George Christopher Stead

VI. Mittelalter

1. Denkvoraussetzungen 2. Das Vermächtnis von Augustin und Boethius 3. Frühscholastik 4. Thomas von Aquin 5. Duns Scotus und Wilhelm Ockham 6. Das Spätmittelalter 7. Der Osten 8. Der Beitrag des Mittelalters (Literatur S. 662)

1. Denkvoraussetzungen

- Mittelalterliche Theologen wußten sich bei ihren Aussagen über Gott einem über die Väter bis in die Bibel zurückreichenden Kontinuitätsstrom eingeordnet. Gewiß hing ihre Kenntnis der patristischen Literatur im einzelnen von Zufälligkeiten der Erreichbarkeit von Handschriften und deren Überlieferungstreue ab, doch sie waren stets der bestimmenden Fragen einer durch die Antike geprägten christlichen Überlieferung gewärtig und ihnen verpflichtet. Ein bedeutsamer Zug dieser Überlieferung war die Frage der Verhältnisbestimmung des Evangeliums zu →Plato und →Aristoteles, die es jetzt noch tiefer auszuloten galt. Zudem sollten die Konturen des Gottesbegriffes nicht für sich allein herausgearbeitet werden, sondern in ihrer Beziehung zu anderen zentralen Lehraussagen über Inkarnation (→Jesus Christus) und →Trinität, →Heil und →Kirche. „Der Gottesgedanke des Mittelalters hat gerade darin sein Charakteristikum, daß er auf die Ordnung

der Schöpfung und die Heilsordnung der Kirche bezogen ist“ (Pannenberg, Gottesgedanke 32).

2. Das Vermächtnis von Augustin und Boethius

Im Abendland war ein Jahrtausend lang zumindest ein gewisses Maß an Augustin-
 5 kenntnis allen Gebildeten zu eigen. „Es wäre möglich, die ganze Geschichte der nachau-
 gustinischen Dogmatik des Abendlandes als die Geschichte ihres Augustinverständnisses
 aufzufassen“ (Weber I, 103). Der Einfluß → Augustins sowohl auf die theoretische Erörte-
 rung des Gottesbegriffs als auch auf die für die gelebte Frömmigkeit leitenden Gottesvor-
 10 stellungen ist kaum zu überschätzen. Auf der einen Seite wies sein theologisch-theoretischer
 Entwurf in *De civitate dei*, *De trinitate* und den antipelagianischen Schriften die
 Bahn, auf der anderen die gelebte Frömmigkeit der *Bekennnisse*. Sein Gottesbegriff
 milderte die neuplatonische Betonung der Unveränderlichkeit und völligen Transzendenz
 Gottes (→ Neuplatonismus) durch ein platonisches Insistieren darauf, daß Gott als das
 15 transzendent Eine zugleich auch der Seinsgrund aller Wirklichkeit innerhalb der Ord-
 nung der zeitlich-geschöpflichen Dinge ist (De trin. 5, vgl. P. Brown). In Verbindung mit
 seiner Christologie und seiner bestimmenden Sicht der Trinität als einer Gemeinschaft
 liebender Personen bietet Augustins Vorstellung von Gott als Liebe in sich selbst, auch
 wenn sie noch nicht gänzlich zu dem Gedanken der sich selbst gebenden Liebe entfaltet
 ist, einen Ausgleich zu dem ausgeprägten platonischen Zug seines Denkens, dem sich
 20 Gott als letztlich ungekanntes Geheimnis darstellt (Outka; O'Donovan). Dieses recht
 nüchterne, formale Gottesverständnis hat wiederum → Boethius in *De consolatione phi-*
losophiae herausgestellt. Der Rückgriff auf Aristoteles ermöglicht es ihm, einen weiter-
 wirkenden Beitrag zum Durchdenken der Frage nach Gottes Wesen und Wirken vor-
 nehmenlich unter der Problemstellung des freien Willens und der Universalien zu leisten.
 25 Gott weiß alle Dinge, auch wenn sie in der geschöpflichen Welt an die zeitliche Abfolge
 gebunden sind, gleichzeitig und ewig voraus. Ausgehend von Augustin und Plato ent-
 wickelt er eine Beweisführung für Gott als höchstes Gut (*melius nihil cogitari*: De consol.
 phil. 3,10), die später von Anselm aufgenommen werden sollte. Aus aristotelischer Wur-
 zel erwächst seine Lösung der im Kommentar zur *Isagoge* des → Porphyrius von ihm
 30 angesprochenen Universalienfrage (W. u.M. Kneale). Das Universale, obwohl selbst un-
 stofflich, substanziiert in stofflichen Dingen. Diese klare Entscheidung zwischen Plato und
 Aristoteles machte sich in den Auseinandersetzungen des 11. Jh. ebenso geltend wie
 schon im ersten Abendmahlstreit (→ Universalienstreit; → Abendmahl III/2). Aber auch
 für Boethius bestand eine unerläßliche Verbindung zwischen Theorie und Praxis, und das
 35 Bewußtsein dieser Notwendigkeit ist es wohl, das ihn auf möglichste formale Genauig-
 keit bedacht sein ließ. Sein *De fide catholica* ist ein beachtenswertes Zeugnis seines Inter-
 esses an der trinitarischen und christologischen Dimension der Gottesfrage.

3. Frühscholastik

In dem Zeitraum zwischen Boethius und Anselm von Canterbury vollzogen sich be-
 40 deutende Wandlungen. Eine eingehende Erörterung über ein realistisches oder nominali-
 stisches Verständnis des → Abendmahls (III/2.1) – Radbertus, Ratramnus, → Gottschalk
 – trugen dazu bei, einer neuen Theologie den Boden zu bereiten. → Johannes Scotus
 Eriugena brachte mit Pseudo- → Dionysius und → Maximus Confessor erneut östliche
 45 Überlieferung zur Geltung. Für Eriugena steht Gott jenseits alles Seienden und aller
 Vielfalt. Das Ganze der Schöpfung ist ein Prozeß göttlicher → Offenbarung, in dem jedes
 endliche und begrenzte Seiende einen Aspekt des Wesens Gottes darstellt. Die gesamte
 Natur ist ein Spiegel Gottes. Doch eine Bildhaftigkeit der Gottesvorstellung impliziert das
 keineswegs. Gott ist jenseits alles Seienden, letztendlich auch sich selbst ein Geheimnis
 (*Deus itaque nescit se, quid est, quia non est quid: incomprehensibilis quippe in aliquo et*
 50 *sibi ipsi et omni intellectui* [De div. nat. 2,28: PL 122,589. Gott kennt daher sich selbst
 nicht, was er sei, da er kein Was ist; denn der in irgendeiner Hinsicht Unbegreifliche ist

dies für sich selbst wie für jedwedes Verstehen]). Alles Geschaffene kommt von Gott und kehrt zu ihm zurück, und das Viele wird schließlich aufgehoben in dies Eine. Eriugena blieb allerdings ein Einzelgänger. Das auf Boethius zurückgehende Interesse an der Dialektik blieb wach und fand im 11. Jh. einen neuen Höhepunkt, der zugleich eine Gegenbewegung in den Schriften des → Petrus Damiani und anderer auslöste. Für Petrus Damiani war Gott vor allem ein Gott absoluter Machtvollkommenheit, der alles wirken konnte und dessen Wille über allen Gesetzen und jeglicher Dialektik stand. Wie auch später noch, konnte dabei Fideismus leicht in Skeptizismus umschlagen. Für → Anselm von Canterbury als den überragenden Geist des Zeitraums waren Glaube und Dialektik gleichermaßen wesentlich, diese jedoch fraglos im Dienste jenes (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Anselm setzt bei Gott ein und unterstellt den Vorrang des Glaubens. Andererseits aber „rechnet er schlechterdings nicht damit, in der Lehre der Schrift oder der Kirche auf eine auch noch so geringe Widersprüchlichkeit zu stoßen; er hegte vielmehr die Zuversicht, daß jede scheinbare Unstimmigkeit bei sorgfältiger Prüfung des wirklich Gemeinten verschwinden werde“ (Evans, *New Generation* 63). Entscheidend sind wieder Augustin und Plato. Trotz gelegentlicher anderer Deutungen ist klar, daß Anselm damit rechnet, die Existenz Gottes beweisen zu können – jedoch nur für diejenigen, die Glauben besaßen und willens waren, seinem Beweisgang zu folgen. Anders als Petrus Damiani betonte er im Gegensatz zu der Vorstellung, Gottes Wille könne unabhängig von dem übrigen Inhalt der Gotteslehre behandelt werden, die Einheit der göttlichen Eigenschaften. Im *Monologion* (c. 2) gibt er zu verstehen, daß die Existenz unterschiedlicher Grade göttlicher Güte ein letztes, absolutes Gutes, eben Gott, voraussetze. Im *Proslogion* (c. 2.3) erwächst der Beweis unmittelbar aus dem Glauben. Sprechen wir von Gott, so denken wir ihn als ein Seiendes, im Vergleich zu dem nichts Größeres existieren kann. Würde Gott nur als Vorstellung in unserem Geist, nicht aber in Wirklichkeit existieren, so könnten wir ein Seiendes denken, das größer wäre als Gott. Dies aber wäre ein Widerspruch, und daher müsse Gott existieren: *existit ergo procul dubio aliquid, quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re* (c. 3: Etwas, über das hinaus Größeres nicht gedacht werden kann, existiert also zweifellos sowohl im Denken als in Wirklichkeit). Es ist, wie er Gaunilo gegenüber darlegt, nicht so, daß alles, was wir denken, auch existieren muß; der Glaube aber erkennt an, daß sein Begriff von Gott Gottes eigene Wirklichkeit zum Inhalt hat. Wenn auch nicht immer explizit, so ist ihm doch auch das Wesen der Erlösung stets gegenwärtig. → Versöhnung ergibt sich nicht aus einer ewigen Notwendigkeit, sondern aus dem Wesen der Freiheit Gottes (McIntyre 204). Anselm hat seinen Gottesbegriff mit gelassener Zuversicht in einer Zeit ausformuliert, die von einer immer heftiger werdenden Auseinandersetzung über das Wesen der Universalien bestimmt war (→ Universalienstreit). Sie hatte zwar nur mittlere, aber dennoch bedeutsame Auswirkungen auf das Denken über Gott. Betonte Roscellin von Compiègne die göttliche Dreiheit, so → Abaelard die Einheit. Er wollte vor der Dialektik weder zurückschrecken noch sich ihr bedingungslos unterwerfen. Anders als Abaelard hob die Schule von → Chartres im Werk ihres großen Repräsentanten → Gilbert Porreta bei der Aufarbeitung des Boethius auf den formhaften Charakter Gottes als des Seins selbst ab. Er allein ist reines Sein. Für Theoderich von Chartres ist Gott die vollkommene Form alles Seienden. Das konnte, wie die Kritik von Robert von Melun erkannte, zum → Pantheismus führen. Es ist bezeichnend, daß Thomas von Aquin später Wert darauf legte, daß die → Analogien zwischen Gott und Mensch nomineller und nicht essentieller Art seien. Gott ist nicht der Grund des Seins, sondern → Schöpfer aus dem Nichts. → Petrus Lombardus hat den Stand der Diskussion festgehalten, → Bernhard von Clairvaux die augustiniische Tradition erneuert, und → Hugo und → Richard von St. Viktor pflegten eine mystische Frömmigkeit auf dem Hintergrund einer spekulativen Theologie. Ein großer Wandel aber kündigte sich mit der Aristotelesrenaissance an. Die in Gang kommende Auswirkung dieser Bewegung auf die Gotteslehre läßt sich an der kritischen Gegenreaktion des Augustinismus eines → Wilhelm von Auvergne, → Alexander Halesius und vor allem → Bonaventuras ablesen. Für

ihn ist alle Theologie Teil des Fortschreitens der Seele in der Liebe zu Gott. Dem Glauben bieten alle Geschöpfe Hinweise auf Gott, doch die Kenntnis von Gott an sich wird der Seele unmittelbar durch Gnadenwirkung eingegossen. Diese Unterscheidung von →Erfahrung und →Erleuchtung verschwindet bei →Albert d. Gr.

5 4. Thomas von Aquin

→Thomas von Aquin ist zweifellos der profilierteste Vertreter mittelalterlicher Gotteslehre. Er ließ die Sinne Quelle aller menschlichen Erkenntnis sein und schied Glaube und Vernunft, brachte sie dann aber doch wieder in ein Wechselverhältnis – ein Entwurf, der gleichermaßen kraftvoll wie zerbrechlich war, zerbrechlich genug, um im Zuge seiner weiteren Entfaltung nach Thomas' Tod die Mittel zur Auflösung der mittelalterlichen Einheit von Glauben und Denken an die Hand zu geben, und kraftvoll genug, um in zukünftigen Jahrhunderten als Schlüssel zu einer ausgewogenen Methode neu entdeckt werden zu können. Er bestritt vor allem die geltende Überzeugung, daß der Mensch empirisch Kenntnis vom Wesen Gottes erlangen könne. Erkenntnis leitet sich deduktiv aus der Ordnung der Schöpfung her. Sie stößt dabei auf Erkenntnisbereiche, die zu einer Überprüfung anhand der in →Bibel, →Bekenntnis und →Autorität der →Kirche enthaltenen Offenbarung anstehen, während andere Einsichten wie etwa die der Wahrscheinlichkeit der Existenz eines Gottes aus kritischer vernünftiger Überlegung erwachsen. Gott ist für Thomas der höchste Seiende, der erste Bewegter. Ihm ist wie Augustin daran gelegen, von vornherein der Verborgenheit Gottes Rechnung zu tragen. *De deo non possumus scire quid est sed solum quid non est* (S. thl. Ia IIa 2: Wir können von Gott nicht wissen, was er ist, sondern nur, was er nicht ist). Er ist reine Aktualität ohne unrealisierte Potentialität. In ihm fallen *essentia* und *esse* in eins: *Non igitur dei essentia est aliud quam suum esse* (CG 1.22: Also ist Gottes Wesen nichts anderes als sein Sein). Im Denken und Wollen verwirklicht er ein Ziel, das auf sein eigenes Wesen bezogen und in der Welt als Güte und Liebe vorhanden ist. Er könnte die Welt auf jede beliebige Weise zur Vollendung bringen, hat sich aber entschieden, letztlich durch die Inkarnation zu wirken. Gottes Sein (*esse*) meint nicht einfachhin das, was ist, sondern hebt ab auf sein Wirken im Seienden. *Esse* ist der Akt, durch den ein Ding ist. Daher besteht eine enge Beziehung zwischen den Begriffspaaren Sein und Dasein und Potentialität und Aktualität, die sich aus dem Begriff Gottes als des Schöpfers ergibt: *Creare non potest esse propria actio nisi solius dei* (S. th. Ia 45,5: Schöpfen ist keines anderen als nur Gottes wesenseigenes Wirken). Thomas redet aus immer wieder unterschiedlichen Blickrichtungen von Gott. Sein „Verfahren, nahezu wirr von einer Weise der Analogie zu einer anderen überzugehen, hat in der Literatur zur Analogie viel Verwirrung gestiftet“ (Preller). Stets aber sieht man sich mit Sein befaßt und mit dem Ausgehen von sinnlicher Erfahrung, vom Kontingenten. Es ist kennzeichnend, daß die klassischen fünf Wege (→Gottesbeweise) den Zugang zu Gott von seinen Wirkungen in der Sinnenwelt her suchen. Das bringt eine gewisse Einschränkung der Bedeutung der Christologie für den Gottesbegriff mit sich (Rahner II,149ff).

40 5. Duns Scotus und Wilhelm Ockham

Das ausgehende 13. Jh. zeigt eine Reihe verschiedener und auch in unterschiedlichem Maße Widerhall findender Reaktionen auf die von Thomas vorgetragene Gottesauffassung. Im folgenden Jahrhundert aber tritt dann im Werk des →Duns Scotus das ursprünglich gegen →Pelagius entfaltete augustianische Beharren auf dem Willen Gottes als Reaktion Thomas gegenüber entschieden auf den Plan. Das Zutrauen in die Vernunft als Weg zur Gotteserkenntnis schwindet. Die Synthese von Glaube und Vernunft beginnt auseinanderzufallen. Wo andere sich für die Vernunft und unter Umständen auch für einen Skeptizismus (→Skepsis) aussprechen, gibt Duns dem Glauben den Vorrang. Wir müssen nur lernen, Gottes Willen gehorsam zu sein. Wie Gott handelt und was er seinem Wesen nach ist, vermögen wir nicht zu sagen. Gottes Wille ist als solcher der Ausdruck seines Wesens (Opus Oxon. 1,2,2). Er kommt zum Ausdruck in Liebe zu sich selbst und zu der

von ihm geschaffenen Welt (Opus Oxon. 1,5,8). So sehr diese Betonung des Willens auch augustinisch ist, so liefert doch Aristoteles die Mittel, sowohl Augustins Theorie der Gotteserkenntnis als auch die thomistische Synthese in Frage zu stellen. Die Erkenntnis der Eigenschaften Gottes wie auch seine Dreifaltigkeit bleiben dem Glauben vorbehalten. In tiefschürfender und faszinierender Weise hat Wilhelm von Ockham die scotistische Gottesvorstellung weitergeführt (Leff, Wilhelm of Ockham; vgl. Burrell). Ihm erschien der rationale Rahmen des thomistischen Entwurfs insgesamt fragwürdig. Auch hier heißt es wieder, daß wir über die Eigenschaften Gottes nichts auszusagen vermögen und lediglich seinem Willen gehorsam sein können. Gott ist grenzenlos transzendent (Sent. 1,2,2). Das Einzelne ist die alleinige Wirklichkeit (Sent. 1,2,7). Da uns kein intuitives Erkennen Gottes zu eigen ist, ist Anselms Beweis seiner Existenz sinnlos. Man kann aber auch nicht wie Thomas von der Ursache auf die Wirkung schließen. Sein heißt für Gott Wissen und Wollen, und darüber läßt sich analytisch nicht hinauskommen. Seine Macht ist absolut und kann die Welt- und Heilsordnung willkürlich verändern (Sent. 1,17). Der Glaube bleibt allein auf sich selbst gestellt.

6. Das Spätmittelalter

Gegenüber der Behauptung eines solchen unendlichen qualitativen Unterschiedes zwischen Gott und dem, was Menschen über ihn denken, machte sich insbesondere in den Schriften des Thomas Bradwardine eine neuerliche augustinische Reaktion unter Zurücklenken auf die Autorität des Dogmas geltend. Hatte Duns Scotus von Gott als Sein geredet, so ist er für Meister Eckhart und die Mystik nicht Sein, sondern der Grund des Seins, reines Denken. Diese Linie wird in *De docta ignorantia* des Nikolaus von Kues radikalisiert. Gott ist die Entfaltung und der Sinngrund, in dem das Viele eins wird und durch den er wiederum als das eine aus einer *coincidentia oppositorum* verstanden werden kann. Auch hier hat man es mit einem Zug der christlichen Geistesgeschichte so vielfältig und fruchtbar begleitenden neuplatonischen Dialektik zu tun.

7. Der Osten

Im Osten kannte man zwar Übersetzungen Augustins, eine Schlüsselstellung aber nahm hier das Werk des während des Mittelalters in geradezu kanonischem Ansehen stehenden Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita ein (Meyendorf, Ware). Auf der anderen Seite wiederum wurde die übersteigerte mystische Transzendenzvorstellung durch die Berücksichtigung anderer, insbesondere trinitätstheologischer und christologischer Momente in *De fide orthodoxa* des Johannes von Damaskus gemildert. Der Strom reiner Mystik trat im Werk Symeon des neuen Theologen und im Hesychasmus zutage, der bei Gregorios Palamas zu voller Klarheit fand. Ihm wird Gott, der in seinem letzten – nicht mit dem philosophischen Begriff des Wesens zusammenfallenden (Meyendorf) – Sein unbekannt bleibt, erkennbar in seiner Beziehung zur Welt durch seine Wirkweisen, deren jede ganz Gott selbst ist. Mithin gibt es in der Gottheit auch keine Teilung. Es handelt sich hier nicht lediglich um neuplatonische Mystik, vielmehr hat Gregors Denken eine christozentrische und sakramentale Dimension. Theologie geschieht stets im Zusammenhang des Gebets. Auch die Eucharistie hat, insbesondere bei Nikolaus Kabasilas, als Teil der liturgischen Tradition erheblich zur Entfaltung der Gottesvorstellung beigetragen (Pelikan).

8. Der Beitrag des Mittelalters

Warum haben die mittelalterlichen Gottesvorstellungen auf die Dauer ihre fruchtbare, gestaltende Kraft verloren? „Mittelalterliches Denken und mittelalterliche Theologie gerieten ins Abseits, weil sie einerseits die Berührung mit der Welt der Dinge und Menschen, andererseits mit dem in seinem Leib, der Kirche, ihren Heiligen, ihren Lehrern und ihrem täglichen Leben gegenwärtigen lebendigen Christus der Evangelien verlor“ (Dom David Knowles 286). Die Frage, welches der bedeutsamste mittelalterliche Beitrag zum Gottes-

begriff ist, wird sicher unterschiedlich beantwortet. Gewiß eines der wesentlichen Momente ist die Herausarbeitung des möglichen Aussagehorizonts und der Grenzen der →Analogie. Gott ist der →Schöpfer, er ist größer als unsere Gedanken über ihn. Wir wissen aufgrund der →Offenbarung und als Geschöpfe nach seinem Bild (→Bild Gottes) aus dem Verständnis unserer selbst, daß personale Analogien für das Reden von Gott nicht gänzlich unangemessen sind. Gott bleibt, sei es als reines Denken, als Grund des Seins oder als vollkommener Wille, der *primus analogans*, die Quelle unseres Vermögens, ihm im Denken und Handeln zu antworten.

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George Newlands

VII. Reformationszeit

- 45 1. Übernahme der altkirchlichen und mittelalterlichen Gottesanschauung 2. Neuansätze mit Luther und den reformatorischen Bekenntnissen 3. Denkansätze anderer Reformatoren 4. Calvins theologische Denkmethode 5. Orthodoxe Dogmatik als Lehrabschluß (Literatur S. 668).

1. Übernahme der altkirchlichen und mittelalterlichen Gottesanschauung

- 50 In der geschichtlichen Entwicklung der christlichen Theologie und Frömmigkeit scheint im 16. Jh. dem Gottesbegriff eine geringe Rolle zuzukommen. Die eigentlichen Neubildungen entstehen im Austragen von Lehrunterschieden zwischen Altgläubigen und Evangelischen über das rechte Verständnis von →Glaube, →Wort Gottes, →Rechtfertigung, →Buße und neues Leben, →Gesetz und Evangelium. Die →Kirche und Staat, →Sakramente (→Abendmahl), →Kirchenrecht, →Kirchenordnungen und →Kirchen-

CHRIST,

CHURCH

Essays on
John Baillie
and
Donald Baillie



DONALD BAILLIE



JOHN BAILLIE

AND

SOCIETY

EDITED BY DAVID FERGUSON

Chapter 7

THE SENSE OF THE
PRESENCE OF GOD

George M. Newlands

I

If God is to be affirmed as the ultimate reality, and the source, sustainer and goal of human existence, then there should be grounds for this affirmation. Beyond this, the reality of God is said in Christian tradition to be experience of a personal presence. Claims to experience of that reality are hard to substantiate. Are there other grounds for the affirmation? But even if there are, how relevant to human existence is the reality of a God to people for whom he is who is rarely if ever experienced as a personal presence? These are issues which have pressed upon modern European society, and never more so than in a century which has experienced two world wars. They are issues with which John Baillie was concerned throughout his life, and to which he returned with renewed concentration in his final work, the posthumously published Gifford Lectures, *The Sense of the Presence of God*.

On first re-reading *The Sense of the Presence of God* seems dated enough. The debates of the sixties, seventies and eighties are still to come, with all their claims to seminal breakthrough in theological scholarship. Worse still, one is aware that Baillie is working out the mature fruits of his thoughts of the thirties, now even more distant. It would be wrong to assert that there has been no progress in theology in the last sixty years. What I do suggest in this essay, however, is that a reading of Baillie in the light of what has happened in the interval considerably strengthens his claim to be considered one of the most perceptive and judicious of twentieth-century theologians.

II

I come now to Baillie's text. (Ch. 1), 'Knowledge and Certitude', deals with some of the most basic problems in the philosophy of religion, introduced in more familiar form to generations of Edinburgh theological students through Baillie's 1939 volume, *Our Knowledge of God*. Knowledge seems to imply certitude but often does not go beyond probabilities. The concept of faith always contains both the idea of knowing and the idea of not knowing fully. 'No Christian, then, can say that he knows nothing.'(5) But equally, 'all human thinking is defectible'.(6)

There are indeed certainties, in the natural sciences, in moral and especially in our religious convictions. A distinction is drawn between knowledge of truth and knowledge of reality. Our knowledge of the realities is primary, and our knowledge of truths concerning them secondary. This is a neat way of affirming a position which I have described elsewhere as a combination of ontological realism and epistemological scepticism.

But does it work? Turn to Chapter Two, 'The Really Real'. Many have doubted our knowledge of any reality, certainly any beyond what can be verified by the methods of natural science. But what about the conviction that honesty and loyalty are required of us all? Moral convictions are central. Here reality presents itself to us, requiring concern for others. This phenomenon is described further in a chapter on 'The Range of Our Experience.'

Early man felt himself to be at one with nature, not alien from it. 'Our total experience of reality presents itself to us as a single experience.'(50) Analysis of individual elements comes later. This is especially true of moral convictions. The point of this train of argument becomes clear by the time we reach chapter four, 'The Epistemological Status of Faith.' How do we 'reason things out?' Procedures for verification and falsification are discussed. 'A faith that is consistent with everything possible is not a faith in anything actual.'(71) Complete agnosticism is less frequent than we often imagine. For Baillie, the ultimate refutation of doubts is theological and incarnational. The claim made upon me by the presence of my neighbour is made by unconditioned being, by God. It now becomes possible to consider 'The Nature and Office of Theological Statements'.(Ch. 5)

Faith is 'an awareness of the divine presence itself, however hidden behind the veils of sense.' God reveals himself within a tradition and a community. The indirectness of faith's apprehension of God is explored through the Bible, Aquinas and Kant. Kant was clearly of decisive significance for Baillie. But Hegel, Bradley, Mansell and Sabatier in the nineteenth century are now invoked, and then in the twentieth, 'four schools – the Thomists, the Barthians, the existentialists and the linguistic analysts.' Baillie notes affinities between the last three schools, placing Barth in his cultural context. The last witness is Tillich. The result is a division of characterisation of theological language as analogical or symbolic.

Chapter Six is then entitled 'Analogy and Symbol.' Analogy and symbol, 'in the widest sense of the term all language may be said to be symbolic.'(113) But not all theological statements are analogical. Despite being known in, with and under other realities, yet there is a certain directness in apprehension of God. However this two-way communication is in the nature of the case internal to the mind of the believer, and is always open to doubt on the part of the non-believer.

Chapter Seven, 'The Framework of Reference' seeks to relate theory to practice. Christianity is a way of living. Love of God is always related to love of neighbour, and beyond this to a new humanity. This leads on to 'meaning and reference.' The gospel needs to be translated into the language of the present. Otherwise it is inevitably dismissed as irrelevant to contemporary life. In particular, it is important not to confuse dogmas with the primary perceptions of faith. Chapter Nine raises the wider issue of 'Faith and the Faiths.' The Greeks and the Romans developed philosophies of religion. Did they have a true knowledge of God? What does it mean to speak of Salvation in a name (Ch. 10)? For Baillie, there is some awareness of God in 'the pagan religions', but the Way of Christ is decisive.' 'It is Christ himself that has created the world's desire for him.'(209)

Chapter Eleven deals with Providence. Scientific and religious accounts of the world complement one another. Through modern physics, 'contradiction has been turned into complementarity.' What others may see as coincidence, Christians will read as providential. This naturally brings Baillie to a chapter (12) on Grace and Gratitude. 'He lov'd us from the first of time, He loves us to the last.'

'Gratitude is not only the dominant note of Christian piety but equally the dominant motive of Christian action in the world.'(236) This is *imitatio Christi*. We should also recognise vestigial forms of gratitude in those who are not explicitly Christian. The last chapter 'Retrospect', reconsiders the argument. Analysis and clarity in linguistic analysis is not sufficient. But neither is Barthian exclusivism. Faith is trust. Propositions are necessary but not sufficient. We have to do with 'a God whose living and active presence among us can be perceived by faith in a large variety of human contexts and situations'. Baillie ends characteristically with Vaughan's prayer, 'Abide with us, O most blessed and merciful saviour, for it is towards evening and the day is far spent. . . .'

It is not hard to see why Baillie's classic soon appeared dated. His scepticism concerning the modern philosophy of language appeared to be the incomprehension of the older man in the face of recent scholarship. Much was still to be promised from this tradition. His argument for moral theism had the same air of *déjà vu*. He spoke of a sense of God at the bottom of men's hearts. The 'sixties were the age of secular Christianity, in the confidence of entering a completely new era. New Testament scholarship was now to be dominated by the heirs of Bultmann and the Barthians were to reach new heights of professional self-confidence. The collapse of some of these certainties in the 'seventies produced more new directions, in the search for transcendence in eastern religions, in new Roman Catholic thought beyond the Thomism which Baillie considered, in Wittgensteinian turns in the philosophy of religion. In the 'eighties narrative theology blossomed, and post-modernism became a new magic wand which could be waved over the tradition to justify any theological position from extreme conservatism to extreme liberalism. As the influence of the Christian community declined, at least in Britain, a radical pluralism in theology, with an increasingly conservative majority, became increasingly apparent. In Scotland the continuation of an creative theological tradition has become increasingly problematic, and therefore increasingly urgent, in recent years.

It is always in some respects a dubious procedure to seek to find guidelines for coping with present predicaments in past examples. For of course we are all children of our time, writing for a particular situation. On the other hand, it is precisely reflection on past thought

in the light of present issues that characterises the human being as a reflective creature. It has been through reflection on its past in the light of the present that modern scholarship in the human sciences has developed. All depends, for better or for worse, on the particular use made of the past in the present. I intend to explore and defend the view that Baillie may be a remarkably useful guide to some of our contemporary dilemmas.

III

I return to the text. Hundreds of volumes have been written on knowledge and certitude since Baillie's essay. All sorts of subtle distinctions have been recalled. But the balance which Baillie strikes in his first chapter on knowledge and certitude, speaking of the need for confidence in faith without arrogance, remains as apposite now as it was then. The next section on 'The Really Real' is perhaps less immediately cogent. Reality is referred, quite appropriately, to relationships. But the underlying questions concerning the grounds of these relationships remain on the agenda. However, Baillie is right to stress next the communal context of individual experience. I want to look more closely at the next two sections of the argument, in Chapters Four and Five.

Chapter Four deals with the challenge of verifiability. Essentially Baillie's answer to the problem is close to that of some versions of the 'forms of life' approach. He says of different sorts of experience, 'Each is verifiable only by an appeal to the experience out of which it arose.' As far as religious experience is concerned, 'It is by faith that we apprehend the things of God'.⁽⁶⁴⁾ Faith is not founded on religious experience, because the experience already contains faith. But faith remains a mode of primary apprehension of God, and it is unnecessary to be afraid of speaking of religious experience at all. Doctrine has to be related to faith. How far is faith itself justified?

'Faith would be lost only if this primary apprehension should itself utterly fail, if we were no longer able to discover any such meaning in any events but came to regard the whole of our experience and everything that has ever happened as a meaningless jumble.' Faith is sustained by what Mannheim called paradigmatic experiences, which

are not verifiable by ordinary sense perception. In fact, complete agnosticism is not common.

The comments of Santayana and others 'betray some residual presence "in the bottom of their hearts" of that primary mode of apprehension that is faith'.(81) Further 'there is some ground for believing that failure of faith is frequently associated with some failure or other of the more delicate modes of primary apprehension'. This comment is very close indeed to the main theme of George Steiner's 1990 Gifford Lectures, *Grammars of Creation*. As for doubts about the reality of the external world and of other selves, 'I shall have to confess that for me their ultimate refutation is theological and incarnational'.(85)

These reflections have direct consequences for the issue of 'The Nature and Office of Theological Statements'. What of the characteristics of the sense of God? 'Each of these perceptual modes which goes beyond ordinary sense perception calls for a characteristic response on the part of the recipient.'(89) They require a response. This response is within a long community of faith, in the context of the authority of the Bible.

What is the nature of theological statements? *Deus comprehensus non est deus*. Thomas, Spinoza and Kant are again cited. Of Kant he can say 'he has done more to illuminate our problem than any other single thinker since the middle ages.' Faith is not knowledge. Yet it relates to the practical conduct of life. But we have seen that for Baillie relations with our neighbours are a God-given structure. Therefore for Baillie, Kant's philosophy can be readily integrated with Christian faith.

Hegel provides much less scope for Baillie's reflection. We are dealing here with a period of disenchantment with idealism, associated especially with Hegel. The thought that Hegel might be a fruitful source of intense new doctrinal speculation on the Trinity and on eschatology, in the world of Moltmann and Pannenberg, Rahner and Jüngel, and perhaps most radically and surprisingly of all, in Barth, had not yet dawned. There is a distinct Kantian austerity about Baillie's theology, in contrast to the Hegelian profusion of much of the Continental theology of the next thirty years. If it sometimes fails to reflect the full register of Christian imagination concerning God, at least it respects the mystery. And for Baillie,

unlike many of the mystics, the mystery of God is centred in the mystery of Jesus Christ, in grace and gratitude.

John Baillie never produced another systematic christology after the early *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity* of 1929, though there are plenty of Christological reflections throughout his writings. Perhaps the fact that he held the chair of divinity, and christology was traditionally taught by his colleague in the parallel chair of Christian dogmatics, or perhaps the existence of his brother Donald's well-regarded *God Was in Christ* may in part have inhibited him. But these are only speculations. Certainly there was scope in his thinking for a fruitful development of the christological dimension of the understanding of God, and perhaps through his devotional writings, of the dimension of the Spirit.

Such developments might have shed light in new directions, unencumbered by the constrictions under which both the disciples of Barth and of the early philosophers of language were to labour in the following decades. We cannot speculate on how this might have been. In the process Baillie's ideas would of course themselves have developed, for he was always sensitive to the state of the art in his field. What we can say is that he made a contribution which remains a benchmark for the future.

IV

I return to some of the epistemological and semantic issues in his philosophical theology. A great deal of work has been done by philosophers since Baillie's time in exploring conditions for truth in statements, and in locating the possible meanings of statements about reality. Debates between realists and anti-realists have reached levels of sophistication unknown to Baillie. There has been, as we mentioned, the rise of the phenomenon of post-modernism in its numerous expressions, and a reaction against the 'foundationalist' views of reality common in the philosophy of the early part of this century. No doubt Baillie would have been a keen observer of these debates, and would have drawn the implications for his theology. But it is worth noting that he had already in 1960 signalled an awareness of the plasticity of the classical laws of physics in drawing attention in several places to the work of Heisenberg. He might have been able to

develop the debates surrounding Thomas Kuhn and the structure of scientific inference without great adjustment to the main balance of his theology.

He stressed also that faith involved more than rationalism, and drew attention to the many-layered quality of theological discourse. Here much has been done in recent philosophy as the strait-jacket of early logical positivism has gradually disappeared. In both areas much has been done by Baillie's pupils John McIntyre and Tom Torrance, and by their pupils in the same tradition, though always with a different perspective, since Scottish theology has not been able to afford the luxury of being an insulated or self-sufficient tradition.

Baillie's concern throughout *The Sense of the Presence of God* is to chart the relationship between faith and reason, between philosophy and theology. It is worth comparing this study with more recent work in the field. In seeking a study of a similar high standard and of about the same length, I should now like to look briefly at Ingolf Dalferth's *Theology and Philosophy*, (Oxford, 1988).

Both studies engage in dialogue throughout with the historical tradition in philosophy and theology. Baillie moved from knowledge and certitude to the really real. Dalferth began from the background of the rationality of theology, through theology in the Greek world to early Christian theology. Part I discusses the problem of perspectives, the difference between external and internal views on faith and theology, and the problem of reflection, the difference between faith and theology, between revelation and reflection. Different forms of rationality have been deployed to justify religious belief. Rational theology in the tradition of Aristotle was often preferred to the mythology arising out of religious experience. But Christian faith was more than a rational deduction, and was not easily expressed within the available conceptual options. Christology created a new theological paradigm and generated new modes of reflection.

Part II considers various attempts, all useful but none definitive, to harmonise the perspectives of faith (internal) and reason (external), in Augustine and Aquinas, Luther and the Enlightenment, Schleiermacher and Barth. Barth shows how external perspectives can be interiorised within the language of faith – 'in a very important respect theological attempts to solve the problem of perspective cannot go beyond Barth.' (We may of course reflect on the existence

of parallel models for such interiorisation e.g. in Rahner and Tracy. Though Dalferth would doubtless accept that the issues for future development could be framed in alternative forms to that set out by Barth.) The task for the future is to enable translatability between alternative perspectives, in order to move forward, in a harmony without identity.

The third and final part considers how the figurative expressions of faith are to be reconstructed conceptually. Theology 'must explicate the orientational knowledge derived from revelation in a system of doctrines, and elucidate the whole of reality in the light of it. . . . It is the tasks, not their solutions, which constitute the identity of Christian theology'.(x) Theology seeks to be true to God's self-identification in Jesus Christ. All expressions of faith are conditioned culturally, experientially and christologically. Theological statements too must insist on the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the centre of talk about a God who is for us and who is love. Such a perspective 'does not compel adoption of a single version of Christian life but allows for a great variety of Christian existence in the world.'(202) The basis remains the saving love of God in Jesus Christ, appropriated within the life and worship of the Christian community.

It is worth reflecting a little further on the similarities. Both Baillie and Dalferth consider the development of Christian thought within the classic European tradition of philosophy. Both assess the consequences for philosophical theology of the introduction of the new paradigm of Christology into the understanding of God. Both stress the multi-faceted nature of faith, its limitations and also its strength. Both rely on the constructive side of faith to point to ways of coping with the difficulties. At the risk of oversimplification, while Baillie sets out from experience and then qualifies this with christology, Dalferth sets out from christology and qualifies this with experience.

Dalferth's construction clearly owes much to Barth, as Baillie's owes much to Schleiermacher. When Baillie was writing, the exploration of the important differences between these traditions was at the top of the theological agenda. Today the attempt to create a new model beyond Schleiermacher and Barth, taking up the concerns of both traditions, is seen as an important task. To do this through minimisation of the differences would be to waste the creative effort

of a century of theological struggle. At the same time, new models may require fresh input from other traditions. The whole question of how to use creatively the various different strands of the European theological tradition in addressing the problems of theology today remains central to the theological agenda.

V

It might be thought that in juxtaposing Baillie and Dalferth I have not yet identified issues which would render Baillie's perspectives entirely obsolete. Deconstructionist and other post-modern philosophies, or perhaps new sociological and anthropological perspectives, create a new agenda for theology. Baillie's framework is simply superseded.

Without question there are important issues for theology which have arisen in the thirty years since Baillie's death. I do not believe that these render all previous work obsolete, but they certainly need to be tackled. And there is a need for a fairly immediate theological response to and development of the most contemporary intellectual issues of the day. Classic theological works always reflect live issues, and this gives them their vitality. But because they are more than simply a commentary on current issues, they do not become dated in the way that instant commentary often does. Indeed, they become themselves a focus for the resolution of issues of current debate, as in Lonergan's study of Aquinas, or Pannenberg's study of Hegel.

Without making immoderate claims, it seems to me that Baillie's work is a kind of classic of a British, and specifically Scottish, approach to theology, in which the evangelical and liberal heritage of the Scottish tradition is both defined and refined. Though he was always aware of developments in current research, Baillie was careful not to let his work depend on any particular current trend or fashion. Open to new ideas, he was prepared to give them time to mature, so that the wheat could be sifted out from the chaff. The last thing that Baillie would have imagined would be that his theology was a final definition of a tradition. But he provided a formidable example of how to produce theology with qualities that endure.

There is a further feature of John Baillie's work to which I wish to draw attention in conclusion, a feature shared with his brother

Donald. I refer to the eirenic quality which characterises much of the Baillie brothers' work, and which enabled them to draw inspiration from many sources, from the theological right and from the left, from different philosophical traditions and devotional traditions, from different cultures. There was nothing here of a fudge, a blurring of issues, of the sort often produced in committee documents. It did not mean that they refrained from adopting a firm point of view, from sharp debate, from agreement and disagreement. But they displayed a rare and remarkable freedom to choose and to communicate with different perspectives. This is not the least of the legacies of John Baillie for anyone willing to attend to what he had to say.

VI

John Baillie was intensively involved with theology. But he did not see theology as divorced from concern with social issues. The 1942 issue of the series of reports which he chaired on 'The Interpretation of God's Will in the Present Crisis', notes that Goebbels had said 'Churchmen dabbling in politics should take note that their only task is to prepare for the world hereafter', leaving the affairs of this world to the totalitarian state. The report then noted that 'It is impossible to read the Bible without realising that there are many issues in our public life which belong to God too'. It had after all been public values, like loyalty, friendship and courage, which had appeared to him to have been significant when doctrines had failed, in his early survey of the attitudes of the troops in the trenches of the First World War, reflected upon in *The Interpretation of Religion*.

Revelation for Baillie came in, with and under, our knowledge of ourselves and of our world. God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ is at one level the clue to the nature of ultimate reality, at another the clue to the understanding of ourselves and the society in which we live. The search for a deeper understanding of God is intimately connected with the search for a society in which God's love as justice, peace and humanity will prevail. Some theologians have illumined our understanding of God without much thought for humane social structures. Others have toiled for a Christian society without too much concern for the complexities of the understanding of God. Baillie reminds us powerfully of the connections. These are neither as

indirect as much traditional theology has imagined nor as direct as some modern social theology has decided. But they are there, a challenge to carefully differentiated thought and action.

We have suggested that Baillie's theological position has enduring value for contemporary theological reflection. But of course time does not stand still, and a mere reiteration of his ideas, with a sprinkling of contemporary references and a judicious admixture of the inheritance of the later Karl Barth, would certainly not represent fidelity to Baillie's vision. Baillie was always concerned to remain abreast of the best contemporary thinking, not slavishly imitating but taking cognisance of what seemed to him to be of real value. In the 1990s this would mean taking stock at least of the legacy of Rahner and Schillebeeckx, of Pannenberg and Jüngel, of a wealth of English and American theological writing, and of the whole phenomenon of what is sometimes called liberation theology.

Baillie was well aware that theology has to be done in its cultural context. The post 1918 context was for him a decisive spur to intellectual creativity. The word development is often used in relation to doctrine. It is right to pursue a wise balance, and to respect tradition, as Baillie did. But effective development often calls for more than minor modification. Sometimes a new cultural situation requires decisive change, demolition as well as construction, urgent reappraisal, in order to remain faithful to a living tradition. A tradition unable to engage in energetic criticism and renewal is always in danger of ossification.

It would be comfortable to record that the classic Scottish traditional relationship between theology and church is flourishing and moving steadily ever onward and upward. I am not at all sure that Baillie would have agreed. While the outward appearance of theology and church remains reassuringly familiar, especially on solemn occasions, the gap between tradition and reality in Scotland, as elsewhere, is probably as wide as it has ever been.

For most of the country's population, respect for theology is sometimes tempered by genuine incomprehension, and respect for the church by a lack of a point of contact with their social and their business lives. For many who are single parents, divorced, disabled, unemployed, who do not match the perceived norms of church affiliation, the invitation of the gospel is strangely muffled by our

ecclesial practice. The gospel of sheer grace, centred upon the self-giving of God for humanity in Jesus Christ, becomes a coded card which gives access to privileged persons. At this point one might be expected to note that what is necessary is not theory but practice – less theology and more action. Practice is always vital. But I should like to return to theory. Baillie was always aware of the need to think, and to think more deeply in order to reach a deeper understanding of faith. It seems to me in conclusion that Baillie's invitation to pilgrimage is always an invitation to keep thinking, to ask ourselves what we mean by thinking, and to think harder, with honesty and with critical realism.

How are we to forge new perspectives for the understanding of God in an ever changing world? My own suggestion for developing part of the legacy of John Baillie would be on these lines. Faith in God means trust in God for all things. It is from religious experience, as part of our experience of all life, that faith is formed and sustained. This is experience, we claim, not simply of experience but of God. It is based on reflection on experience, ours and that of others throughout history, and it includes other components as well. Faith means trust in one who is in important respects mysterious to us. It involves doubt and uncertainty as well as confidence. Lines of argument come up which count against the existence and activity of such a God. Others count for.

Christians understand God as at once hidden in the process of the natural order and intimately involved in the lives of all individuals in history. God is not aloof from but deeply and personally involved in his creation, he is not present exactly as one human being may be present to another, so that each may be familiar with each other's work and daily engagements diary. God's presence is a hidden presence, not at our disposal for our particular and often self-centred convenience. This is a presence reflected in the numerous world religions, and for Christianity centred in the spirit of the risen Christ.

The God of Christian faith is radically transcendent to the world. In his essential nature love, he is the hidden divine external referent. On him, we believe, the created order depends for its continuing existence. Because of the peculiar nature of divine transcendence, our theories are always underdetermined by the available empirical facts. Transcendence is interpreted in relation to particular cultural

traditions within the theological traditions themselves. In this way a multiplicity of often conflicting perspectives arises at the heart of faith's reflection upon God. Faith is driven to deeper understanding among these various perspectives.

God's transcendence is by definition unique. Christians understand themselves to be given some clues to God's nature through grace. Though God's transcendence is unique, our language about it is not. Here is a central paradox about talk of God. In the Biblical narratives, the Old Testament offers accounts of experience of God as the transcendent God who acted through a covenant relationship with his chosen people. Christians have come to trust in this transcendent God through seeing the subjects of the New Testament narrative as the providential culmination of this tradition. They understand God as the self-giving God, whose nature is characterised through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God's transcendence is a hidden transcendence, and his hiddenness is the hiddenness of presence. The sense of the presence of God is filled out for us in its objective pole through reflection back upon the Biblical understanding of God as Creator and redeemer. The subjective pole in Christian experience is the sphere of forgiveness and reconciliation. Faith believes that God is present to all humanity, even in times of apparent desolation. Wherever there is human suffering God is involved, even if his presence does not prevent the physical or mental consequences of such suffering. Here God is indeed powerless by his own choice, not intervening in the structures of his creation though present to and through them. This powerlessness is emphasised in the parable, which is not just our parable but God's substantially enacted parable, of the experience of God the creator with death on the cross of Jesus. God's power is emphasised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through suffering as through rejoicing, God brings eschatological reconciliation. God is there in suffering, silent identification wherever suffering occurs.

The presence of God may be understood as the presence of the spirit of the risen Christ. Belief in God's providential activity within the created order remains 'against the odds.' The presence of God is mediated through history but may not be 'read off' the course of events, for it is the presence, precisely, of God. God is involved in the history of the created order and in all human history, in general and

in special providence. He is engaged in all human life, in its religious and in its secular strivings. He is involved especially in the Judaeo-Christian tradition and in the influence on human life and thought of Christianity across the ages. In this process God uses men and women as the instruments of his love, wherever they are ready to be open to his service. As such God is not simply a matter of academic interest. He is the God who loves, and who continues to invite us to response, to discipleship, to pilgrimage. The theme of *The Sense of the Presence of God* remains a powerful reminder of the debt that Scottish theology continues to owe to the life and thought of John Baillie.

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SCHLEIERMACHER AT THE GROWING EDGE OF THEOLOGY TODAY

edited by

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SCHLEIERMACHER AT VATICAN X.

George Newlands
University of Glasgow

1

This paper deals with the conflict between possible and actual worlds, and the task of the theologian within the given structural patterns of church and society. Schleiermacher was followed by the Oxford Movement and Vatican 1, and by theological retrenchment all round.

His achievement was to provide an effective vision of the ideal as a spur to the transformation of the actual, in the face of adverse trends in the immediate future. His central notion of freedom was important for understanding the structure of theology, church and ethical action. There is a breakthrough in concepts in *'The Christian Faith'*, flawed and incomplete, but important for the future.

In this paper I want to reflect on Schleiermacher's possible influence on the long term future of theology, the world, let us say, of Vatican X. I shall consider the shape of systematic theology in a possible future world of radically changed paradigms, intellectual, social and ecclesial. We cannot see the future. But we can make a concentrated effort to assess the likely effects of the evolution and removal of many of the factors now largely determinative of the shaping of theology and church. We may reflect on the possibilities for change, conservative and liberal reactions, shifting patterns of pluralism and integration within cultures, religions and ideological identities, and consider appropriate theological responses to massive cumulative change.

The production of new conditions for life through technological development may produce greater tolerance, militant fundamentalisms, new conflicts. Renewal of Christian faith will require new patterns of inter-religious dialogue, reconsideration of human values, reappropriation of a sense of the presence of God. Development in cosmology, and changes in perception of ecclesial, social and physical reality will sharply alter our notions of the conceivable, forcing reappraisal in doctrine and ethics, in many areas of faith's expression in communal practice. The Spirit of the self-giving love of God will continue to invite strange transformation in specific forms of Christian discipleship.

2

In the opening sections of *The Christian Faith* Schleiermacher displays a remarkable sense of theological balance, which makes it hard for us to classify him neatly in the traditional categories, as a pietist, a foundationalist, or whatever. He recognises that theology has a particular social and cultural basis, within a specific religious community. But it must also be articulated in a comprehensible manner within the common framework, as he saw it, of academic thought. It has responsibilities both to the church and to the academy, and only in this way can it be of service to the wider community.

Schleiermacher understood THE objective experience of reality to be the sense of the presence of God, and his successors in the nineteenth century attempted to define this awareness more precisely. Impatience with this process led to the return to apparently harder perspectives, e.g. the Word of God in Barth. But it is not clear that the later imagery was

1

more successful than the former. God's presence remains a hidden presence, centred in the events concerning Jesus, and all our language falls short of definition of the mystery.

When Schleiermacher considers the basic norms of theology he turns to the threefold basis of the religious experience of the individual, the Christian community as a check against individual eccentricity, and the Christ of proclamation. He stresses the inward rather than the outward, yet he is prepared to allow roles for the New Testament and the confessions of the church as criteria for the assessment of the value of religious experience. On this basis he proceeded to create a bold reconstruction of Christian theology which served as a vision for generations to come.

Today we take for granted much of what Schleiermacher proposed, somewhat as we take for granted the omnipresence of the automobile. Yet it is important to see just how imaginative his system was for its time. In some respects, his work is as far removed in ethos from that of traditional theology as the Levitical dietary laws are from modern nutritional science. And the change is equally important.

If we look at *The Christian Faith* in comparison with contemporary dogmatic textbooks, we see that Schleiermacher does not work from proof texts and schemes of plans of salvation. His account of the nature of the human, which is where he begins, emphasises the corporate nature of sin, and abandons the notion of a mechanistic tradition of original sin. Unsurprising, we may think. Yet mechanistic doctrines of the transmission of original sin are still at the basis of much ethical teaching in church reports.

Schleiermacher's Christology offers a more convincing account of the humanity of Christ than of his divinity, and there are problems here too. Yet his account of reconciliation remains a powerful and persuasive exposition of the meaning of the Christ for human life, not least in the section in which the Spirit of the risen Christ is linked to the life of the Christian community, as the fruit of the resurrection.

Not everything in *The Christian Faith* works. The area of the relation of Christ to God, and the doctrine of God itself, are generally and I am sure rightly thought to be the least successful part of the reconstruction. The contrast between evangelical and catholic doctrine bears all the limitations of its cultural setting. But the work as a whole provides a glimpse into a new area of interpretation and an immensely fruitful paradigm shift. Jaspers has spoken of the different ages of human development, of axial and pre-axial ages and the like. Whatever we may think of the detail, he suggested there something of the achievement of breaking out of one hermeneutical circle into another. Sometimes these processes may take thousands of years, because they involve fundamental shifts in perception. I am suggesting in this paper that Schleiermacher came close to such a basic shift, and that this was in large measure not destructive of the tradition of the gospel, but an instrument of its renewal. This renewal also brought debate and argument: I include Karl Barth as part of the renewal process. I now want to suggest that far from being complete, it is a process with a considerable future still to develop.

I begin however with a reminder of a warning. We shall not make progress in theology by any sort of simple repristination of the past. Schleiermacher's views in many areas of theology have not proved to be ways forward. His searches for a single key to theological method and a single overarching concept of piety have had disadvantages as well as advantages. His Christology emphasises some areas well and is not so well equipped to deal with other areas. His idealised view of women lifted them up as a counter to male domination, but left them isolated on a pedestal which was not calculated to give them an equal and integrated stake in society. In common with most theologians up till quite recent times, the basic thrust of his thought was to emphasise the development of the relationship of

the individual with God, rather than the engagement of the individual with God in, with and under engagement on behalf of his fellow men in concern for social justice. But this does not mean that Schleiermacher's significance is somehow now exhausted.

3

I now want to turn to the future of theology. Let me offer you here a quick snapshot from theological science fiction.

The Pope put down her hair dryer. At least the voltage in Cambridge, England, was the same these days as it had been in Cambridge, Mass. It had been an odd choice to have the synod here in East Anglia this time. But it was the 1000th anniversary of the Reformation, and Cambridge had featured pretty largely in the original events, given that the last synod had been in Worms. It was also the Anglicans' turn to host the council, even if the present Pope was herself an American Baptist.

Yesterday had been a rather curious day. They had got to chapter thirteen of the draft document, and had at last agreed the entire text of a chapter without endless debate. It was about equality. A blanket declaration renouncing all forms of discrimination on racial, sexual, political or other grounds, and it had gone through without question. These were issues that would have torn the church apart five hundred years ago, as people had burned each other over views on the Eucharist five hundred years before that. The certainties of one age, the unshakeable certainties, had become unthinkable to the next. Truly the church is a most amazing institution.

It was time, she reflected, to set down her own private account of the proceedings, before the details became too obscure. What was needed was a sketch, decree by decree, of the main events and of the opinions which accompanied them. There had been thirteen main areas for discussion, each for two days of debate. As she thought of the pattern, she pressed the green button on her thought transmitter, and a text flowed crisply out of the small grey box on the corner of her desk.

Future shock. Open theology. Secular Christianity. Radical church. Liberal approach. Liberation praxis. Humanisation of mankind. Paradigm shift. Faith and freedom. The wind of the Spirit. Reconstruction, renewal, reshaping. The Churches are not short of advice on change and renewal. Indeed the words relating to change and transition are so much used that they threaten to become meaningless. We have developed such a jargon of language relating to change that it becomes increasingly difficult to take the need for change seriously. More difficult, theologians and churches have long succeeded in building into their operating structures a kind of immunity to the prospect of change. The language of change is easily assimilated and repeated, at a stroke cutting out the need for any real reassessment or reconstruction.

Most people realise that change for its own sake is rarely a good idea. The demolition of one set of ideas or structures often leads to a kind of mirror image in another style. Plus ça change, plus le meme chose. The task is not to interpret the world but to change it. But bitter experience has shown that it is much more important to understand the world as it is before changing it, than to rush into disastrous change, bringing suffering to millions. Attempts to impose utopia in history have usually led to misery. But with all due caution, it is still important to attempt to think beyond the plausibility structures of the moment. Simply to forget nothing and to learn nothing is not enough. We must at least try to look forward. In the case of Christianity, this seems to me to be an urgent and pressing task. I should like

to raise the question of the effects of massive cultural change. We cannot know how this will proceed, but we may expect that it will continue at an accelerating pace.

In this section I should like us to consider, imaginatively but as far as possible soberly, the possible and likely states of the Christian church in the longer term future. This is impossible, the stuff of science fiction, not a serious enterprise. In one sense, of course, we must grant the objection. Yet philosophers spend time considering conditions in a number of possible worlds, and theoretical physicists do similar things. Different imaginative constructs can serve to widen the horizon of our imaginations, as it were, and challenge us to deepen our thinking.

Let me recall the opening scenario. It is entirely possible that by the year 2500 Christian unity will have been achieved, at least by the major denominations. It is possible that the leader, perhaps a representative leader elected for a fixed term of office, might be a woman. Such a person might well be the Pope, in continuity with the historical papacy, but not necessarily from the former Roman Catholic tradition or indeed from Europe. Consider the possibility of such a person, we may call her Pope Flora, and think of her as a former Baptist by tradition. If we had such a person as the nominal head of the Church, that might have tremendous implications for the future of our faith.

Now we can perhaps take this a little further. Consider the possibility that the Pope is advised by a Christian Council, and that the council has called a new General Council of the Church. We may call it Vatican Ten, to add concreteness to our project. What sort of consequences would the resolutions of such a council have for the churches and for theology? What would be the implications of such a prospect for development in the churches in the interval between now and then? For the possibilities of the future certainly have implications for present action, as Moltmann and Pannenberg in particular have reminded us in twentieth century theology.

We cannot see into the future. The work of Vatican X has to remain for us a construct of imagination. But we can imagine the sort of things that we would regard as good, and those which we would regard as bad, and working out their implications in an unfamiliar framework may help us to clarify the reasons for our preferences.

We may also assume that technological development will continue in the scientific field, in the human sciences, the physical sciences and the life sciences, at the very least at the pace of the last hundred years. The consequences in medicine and in the world of communication alone are likely to have thrown up many new possibilities and many new issues. We must now turn to some of these new possibilities.

If we ask ourselves what sort of contributions to human flourishing we would like the churches to make, then one of the most important for most of us would be a contribution to the achievement of world peace, a peace which embodied, as the current phrase has it, justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Conflict often arises from fear, which is in turn fuelled by insecurity, prejudice and intolerance. Religions, and not least the Christian religion, have contributed to prejudice and intolerance through the ages, though they have sometimes also been instrumental in helping to break through prejudice, to open closed doors.

Clearly, a united church would have opportunities far greater than are available at present to make a real impact on the factors which make for tension in our world, and are to some extent at least the legacy of historical conflict between different Christian traditions.

It is also clear that a significant contribution to justice and peace will also require much greater co-operation and discussion between adherents of the major world religions than has been possible in the present, and will have to take account of the perhaps increasing

proportion of humanity who have no religious adherence at all, but who are still concerned for the development of a humane future for the planet.

Against the possibility of greater communication, and against the typically modern presupposition of an increasingly liberal approach to other traditions must be placed the reality of different sorts of militant fundamentalism as a response to radical pluralism in the modern world. We see this in Christian fundamentalism, Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox. We see it in Marxist fundamentalism. For example in China and in North Korea.

We see it classically in European liberal values which themselves are often intolerant of those who adhere to different cultures and their interpretations of society. Where there is radical difference coupled with radical intolerance, conflicts are likely to increase. There is no guarantee that we are moving towards a future of justice and peace. On the contrary, unless we take positive action to move in one direction, we may find ourselves sliding towards a future which will bring little joy to future generations. As we have suggested, few people at the end of the nineteenth century could have imagined the benefits which the twentieth century has brought to mankind, but even fewer could have imagined the catalogue of horrors which have also unfolded.

4

Faith in the Judaeo-Christian tradition has developed in different ways over many centuries. I have described faith in the present as faith after faith, faith in the God of Jesus Christ continuing to direct people's lives as a reality in the midst of accelerating change, from the religious to the secular and back again to a variety of global religious experienced, from monolithic to pluralistic cultures, within cultures which contain elements of the modern, the anti-modern and the post-modern in varying combinations.

The centre of Christian faith remains the God of Jesus Christ, experienced through faith as present in word and sacrament by members of Christian communities of every different sort. But the implications of the reality of God within the universe need to be worked out by each generation for itself. The structure of faith for a new world will be a main theme of this study. If we are to think of faith for a new world, we can afford neither to lose the heart of the Christian gospel in the quest for modernity, nor to obscure the centre of the gospel in the packaging of an age that no longer addressed us where we are. To operate successfully within these tensions is the perennial task of theology.

God is love, love characterised precisely in the self-giving of God in the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth. This is the centre of Christian faith, at one level entirely simple, and at another level susceptible of all the theoretically reflection which we can possibly bring to bear on it. To develop this theme is always to enter into dialogue in the continuing stream of modern theology, dialogue which is both grateful and critical, and again critical and at the same time grateful for the common enterprise in which it participates. I make no apology for turning at this point to some fundamental issues in contemporary theological research.

We theologians are inevitably children of our age, with all the limitations that this imposes. Most serious contemporary systematic theology continues to pursue the legacy of the European Enlightenment. Some pursue the great tradition from Kant through Schleiermacher to appeal to religious experience. Others follow the designs of Barth, much indebted to Hegel, towards what is termed post-modernism, and appears to critics to be a kind of communitarian fideism. Anglo-American scholars tend to pursue more empirical and pragmatic philosophical theologies, which are less easily related to Biblical studies than

Continental systematics, though there is a branch of empirical philosophy, with strong links to the philosophy of science, which flourishes in conservative churches, untainted by the corrosive influence of the social sciences. There remains a huge conservative evangelical theological community, which concentrates on conservative Biblical studies and is largely fundamentalist. To it correspond remarkably similar conservative groupings based on a fundamentalist approach to church tradition, in Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy.

Nineteen century liberal theology believed that its own sort of rational argument would eventually prevail, because it would be seen to be intellectually superior to the alternatives. This has not been the case. Much more conservative theologies could be intellectually sophisticated and could continue to appeal to the academic mind. Sociological, cultural and political factors could encourage various sorts of fundamentalism, not least in an age of increasing religious and ideological purism. The socialism of the Weimar Republic is replaced by Nazi autocracy. The liberal Marxism of the twenties is replaced by Stalinism. Various sorts of religious fundamentalist state have been a feature of the modern world. It is entirely possible that varieties of religious fundamentalism will increase in popularity in the future, and in time come to dominate the main-line churches, driving away more liberal options.

It is all too easy to imagine a situation in which fundamentalist versions of the major world faiths could initiate and consolidate wars of attrition, in which each side believed that it has a God-given task to subdue the other side - rather like the ideology which fuelled the medieval Crusades. While pessimism is rarely helpful, it is important to remember that unpleasant developments occur in human history with considerable frequency. It may be of course that fundamentalist religious beliefs are bound in time to collapse under the weight of their own inherent improbability. But if we may take Marxism-Leninism as a comparable belief system, it persisted in purist form for a very long time, as an intellectual as much as a social option. In Ireland, that most religious of countries, both in the North and in the South, we may see the fruits of religious intolerance. That then is one of the possibilities for the future. Against it we may place the reflection that to be religious is to value all human beings, to defend their freedom to flourish, and to be religious or not religious. To be tolerant in the face of intolerance is a basic Christian virtue, and indeed this is true of all the major religions.

5

Theology is about God and about humanity. At different times it is necessary to stress God or people. Theology is about God. In a sense it is always the same, about the same God. It is catholic, it is apostolic. Simply saying that theology is about God will not necessarily help us. It is not about our private or institutional or tribal concept of God. Indeed we need to have a certain humility about our personal concept of God. Restoration of catholicity should mean freedom from our local institutional and organisational prejudices, to reflect on God's presence as appropriated in different ways in different traditions. Historically, a divergence of religious beliefs has often lead to increased hatred and bitterness. We must turn to a new awareness of the dangers of exclusivism. Triumphalistic self-assertion, though it may be intellectually exciting, appears to lead to frequent human tragedy.

Theology is about human beings. There is no competition between true concern for God and true concern for humanity. To be religious is to value all human beings, and to defend their freedom to flourish, to be religious or not religious. To be tolerant in the face of intolerance is a basic Christian virtue. Theology is for people. It has to be done

appropriately to its subject matter and to its recipients. It is about God, who is love. It has to convey the excitement and the surprise of that love. It has to challenge people with God's love, and to overcome a history in which it has threatened people with God's wrath.

In the face of endless theological debate, it is not surprising that a certain disenchantment with the theoretical side of theology sometimes set in. In recent years, coming originally from the more liberal wings of the church, there has been a call for praxis rather than metaphysics, social action rather than academic speculation. But this can lead to an anti-intellectualism, producing a decisive shift towards church communities which are simply orientated towards management, and a consolidation of theological fundamentalism. More promising in some ways are such movements as the Celtic Christianity movement, green and environmentally friendly, though the Celtic lands have scarcely been models of religious tolerance over the centuries, with their intoxicating blends of religious and national fervour. We may reflect that one of the very few issues uniting religious opponents in Ireland in recent years has been the banning of family planning clinics, North and South. This cause has been espoused not only by bigots but by people of charm, intelligence and integrity.

The corruption of the best is indeed the worst of all. We ought, one might think, to be able to look back on a more liberal theological tradition and be proud. Yet liberal Christians in their reaction to alternative proposals through the centuries have often been as arrogant, dogmatic and intolerant as those whom they have opposed. They too have engaged in unpleasant party politics, and they have systematically excluded those whom they have regarded as less than one hundred per cent committed to the party line of the day. The politically correct have been every bit as brittle, triumphalistic and myopic as their opponents. Indeed, the historian might reflect that the weaknesses of the liberals have provided ample justification for excesses of the traditionalists, as vice versa. No wonder Pascal said that Jesus will be in suffering to the end of the world. We shall return to see what can be learned from liberal failures.

How does theological renewal take place? An important issue is the role of the Bible. Here fundamentalism is rife, but there is also movement among those who would still regard themselves as evangelicals. Let us think of a proposition on the authority of the Bible. 'The Bible is the rule of faith. It is not the centre of faith itself. But it is the best guide to ensure that all the central structuring elements of the gospel are represented to us appropriately.' It seems to me that many modern evangelicals would be willing to agree to such a position, and that there are ways to consensus here. From a pluralist perspective, it could of course be argued that the whole idea of a prioritization of the Judaeo-Christian tradition is fundamentally triumphalistic. Either we have a library of sacred books of the world, all on a par with one another, it could be argued, or we abandon the whole notion of central texts and concentrate on adoration of God as ultimate central mystery. But there is nothing wrong with difference of opinion, provided that it is accompanied by respect for other people's perspectives - unless these perspectives themselves involve exploitation of others.

Any significant future reflection on the role of the Bible will have to take account of feminist criticism. It will recognise the patriarchal framework within which much of the text is created. Paradoxically, a decisive shift away from biblical fundamentalism would also free more people to appreciate the strong points of evangelical Christianity.

Theology in the future will have to take fresh account in every generation of the Bible. It will also have to take fresh account of the issue of a theology of world religions. In such dialogue and co-operation something like a principle of subsidiarity may emerge, allowing the major faiths to work together in every way that they can, without overruling the appropriate authorities of any one particular faith. But such co-operation is easier to advocate than to

implement. The horrors of the Holocaust, and the crimes against Moslems in the former Yugoslavia, are examples on different scales, but equally unacceptable. The whole issue of tolerance is complicated by internal persecution within the major religions, where minority groups continue to be persecuted by majorities. Tensions are clearly inevitable, but the difference between constructive and destructive tensions remains crucial.

The nature of theology, the role of the Bible, inter-religious dialogue--another central issue for the future remains the nature of salvation. Christian theologians in the future will doubtless consider as they have done in the past the cosmic dimension of salvation through Jesus Christ. The problems of the interrelation of the divine and the human will remain. Doubtless in the future we shall know infinitely more about the nature of the human than we do now, if only through advances in the life sciences. Yet we may guess that the delicate balance between unique personal character and cultural determination will remain a puzzle, not least in the light of continuing intensive genetic engineering.

On the other side, the nature of God will probably remain as mysterious as it has always done for Christians. Three millennia of faith in Christ are nothing compared with the time scales which are dealt with in contemporary astrophysics. We can say that the God in whom we trust today is the creator of the physical universe, and is revealed as cosmic self-giving love in the events concerning Jesus, his life, his death, his resurrection. But beyond this we can use only the imagination of faith. Our blueprints for the risen Christ are no more descriptions of ultimate spiritual reality than the cosmologists' red anti-quarks are descriptions of physical reality.

A key Christian concept is salvation. Salvation means participation in the peace of God. Peace with God and with each other is part of the goal of salvation, and of the more perfect humanisation of humanity.

Future writers may like the general thrust towards a definition of salvation as involving the peace of God. They will make their own contribution, adding to the anthropomorphic limitation of human perception a dimension which, though it did not come close to the vision of God, at least corresponds in practice somewhat to the extra dimension which St Thomas has theoretically sketched out for the angels. Salvation in the Eastern tradition, they note, has been closely tied to a vision of pure union with God in mystical contemplation, in retreat from this world towards alignment with God. In the Western, Augustinian tradition it has been seen most often in terms of rescue from the sins of the flesh, a salvation of human biology.

Salvation raises always the question of the shape of the human. Human beings, we shall doubtless continue to believe, are created in the image of God, and sustained and directed by God towards fulfilment. Human beings may be produced in the future in all sorts of different ways. In some respects a separation of procreation from human sexuality might begin to untie some of the knots on personal relationships into which church traditions has tangled themselves for centuries. In all cases it will be important to reaffirm the basic Christian perspective, of God's initiative and God's sustaining care.

'For Christians, Jesus Christ is the basic form of humanity.' This can be a divisive statement. But when Christology is seen always as inclusive, always to be read in a charitable light in relation to non-Christians, always to be used in a non-triumphalist context, many areas of the tradition which have sometimes been discredited may be rediscovered and again appropriated, with profound implications. Christ as vulnerable, as human, as fragile, as unconditionally self-giving, will always play a role in the search for human flourishing.

We look again here at the Nature of Theology. Fundamental theology is concerned with the imaginative description of a God who is infinitely transcendent and all compassionate. Because it is an description which uses the whole scope of human conceptuality it has no preferred epistemology, no single correct method. That way it differs from numerous ideologies which have thought themselves more rigorous and scientific by adoption of an exclusive line of argument, e.g. traditional Thomism and traditional Marxism. Theology operates by analogy from the human to the divine. But for Christian theologians it gains a basis in divine reality through the revelation of God in the events concerning Jesus Christ, events which indicate the nature and character of God.

There remains a significant flaw in much theology in this area. God, we said, is self-giving, self-affirming love. But because of its own imperfect praxis, traditional theology on earth has found it impossible to express the dynamic creativity of divine love. It has been unable to take this compassionate creativity as the cornerstone of its fundamental theology. This is the basic human flaw, which is unable to match with actualisation in all spheres of developed thought and practice.

How do we develop our understanding of God? One of the most decisive breakthroughs in the understanding of God may come through the feminist movement. It is not that feminist concepts of God as such have replaced the tradition. The position is rather this. The affirmation that God is neither male nor female raises in the sharpest possible form a question about the use of two of the most important traditional grounds for the doctrine of God, the Bible and the tradition of St Thomas, underlining that God is always infinitely greater than our human thoughts of him, even the most venerated human thoughts. In this way the feminist movement may act as a catalyst for a radical reassessment of the tradition, on God, on the human, on the understanding of the church and of ethics.

God is in God's own nature self-giving love. Only God is capable of total self-giving, which is God's way of opening up relations between the divine and the human, between human beings and between us and any other beings in the universe. I am aware of echoes here of the great twentieth century scholar Karl Rahner. Rahner was an important influence back in the days of Vatican II, but has then, rather like St. Thomas, been overwhelmed by condemnations, in order perhaps to be rediscovered as a potent voice in the church centuries later.

I turn to the notion of revelation. Theology has spent a considerable time on this theme, for it provided a kind of instant test of the state of the art of current theological trends. Discussion of revelation also has ecumenical significance. The old animosities between the denominations has gone, but there is still a slightly disreputable tendency to grind old denominational axes under the polite guise of methodological programmes, notably in relation to revelation. The phenomenon is not of course new.

Revelation is linked as it has always been, to scripture and church, to text and word, community and sacrament. There is stress now on presence, on the inspirational divine presence in the community, Christian and non-Christian, in various ways. Through the ages there have been periods of stress on word, on sacrament, on text, on myth and on narrative, on history and on story. Each of these motifs has highlighted distinctive strands of the understanding of revelation. Now discussion has gone back to the nature of presence, a concept much criticised in the tradition, especially the tradition of the theology of the word. The presence remains a hidden presence, the document affirmed, but it is not a diffuse presence, for it is always the presence of the spirit of Jesus Christ. This is how God makes

himself known throughout the universe. Yet it is not an exclusive presence, for Christ involves the divine relationship to other religions on earth and in the religions of extra-terrestrial beings, though the nature of this engagement is understood differently by Christians and non-Christians.

There have indeed been historical indications of a sense of the presence of God through the spirit of Christ, notably in various charismatic movements. But here, often, the spirit is apprehended as guaranteeing an individualist piety, a centre of strength which too easily falls over into a sense of infinite moral superiority. But the kenosis of God in incarnation led to a fulfilment in the kenosis of the spirit. This is not an impoverishment. It meant that the spirit is always given to be given away. And its presence is manifest in mutual support and concern. It is this understanding of spirit, as the giver of peace, which has enabled the dialogue of religions to make progress in recent decades. It also allows a reappropriation of the Bible and the tradition of the Church which bridged the old gap between the spirit and the letter, affirming the centrality of Jesus Christ while avoiding the imprisonment of praxis in an often inhumane culture.

What are we to say about God? That is certainly THE question. All the prolegomena are nothing but the wrapping. It's the substance that matters. We may feel that if only the academics of the past had been less intoxicated with their own designer-sculpted epistemological passwords and nostrums, there might have been faster progress in the theological enterprise. There is little point in avoiding naive realism only to wallow in critical obfuscation. Whatever you do, there are problems. But at least you have to try to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches, and make a choice. When you've made it, you have to try to minimise the disadvantages and maximise the advantages.

There is, I suppose, an argument for taking on board formally a counter to the male hi-jacking of the faith which lasted for so long. God is clearly not masculine. But God is not feminine either. God is God. That is something that we rarely seem to grasp, however closely we grind the wheels of analysis. Well, I suppose we can argue that in the ancient language Latin, nouns were masculine, feminine and neuter almost be accident, and in fact didn't carry any gender connotation unless you wanted to include it. So when the ancients said *Deus est caritas*, they didn't imply that God is a male lover any more than that God is a female lover. They just meant that God is love. *Deus*, God, happened to be a so-called male noun, just as *mensa*, table, happens to be a female noun. One of the great advantages in the twentieth century abandonment of the Latin language for courses in ancient civilisation is that from then on you could argue any way you liked on the subject. In the past you might be thought ignorant. But now you are reassuringly post-modern, uninhibited and imaginatively creative. *De Dea*. God is God. God is love. God is infinitely loving, enduring, accompanying, being present, affirming.

7

This is where we come back to the significance of Schleiermacher and his work. Schleiermacher himself created a paradigm shift in theology by moving from the external to the internal, from concentration on the external observance of Bible and church to the internal persuasion of the presence of God in the individual in the community. In doing so he classically defined a trend which was characteristic of the Enlightenment

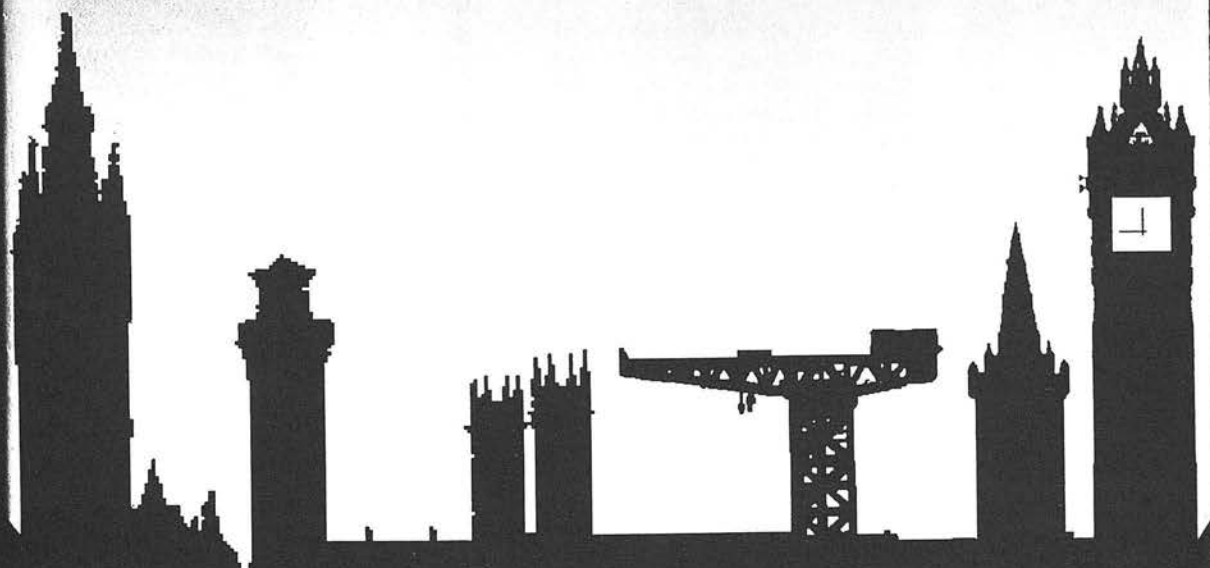
Beyond this Schleiermacher instantiates a much wider shift, the shift from the text based to the person based which is of basic significance for the future of theology. This was a shift fraught with problems. It is not surprising that some of the most acute minds in

modern theology have been anti-moderns. It is also not unconnected with the development of new readings of texts as texts in postmodern criticism. This concentration on the presence of God, of God as the self-giving God characterised through the love of Jesus Christ, has consequences which have hardly begun to work themselves out over the last two hundred years, and which are still to a large extent counterbalanced by the authoritative text and institution centred form which characterised Christianity over the previous eighteen hundred years. This shift has the power to turn the gospel from a mainly church serving to a mainly human rights serving community, whose influence on human development may well be of the most crucial significance over the next eighteen hundred years. In this way Schleiermacher's influence could, and has already to some extent had, a decisive influence not only in Protestant theology but also in Catholic and Orthodox thought. It will also be necessary to develop even further the critique of Schleiermacher, so that the dangers of his paradigm shift may be fully taken into account. Either way, it seems to me not unreasonable to predict that Schleiermacher will be the theologian of Vatican X.

TRADITIONS
OF THEOLOGY
IN GLASGOW
1450 – 1990

A MISCELLANY

Edited by Wm Ian P Hazlett



*Theologies at Glasgow in the Twentieth Century*¹

John Caird, Professor of Divinity at the time of the University's move from High Street to Gilmorehill, died on 30th July 1898, the day before he was due to resign as Principal of the University. Caird confessed to sleepless nights, then getting up at six in the morning, not least before the visits of the Government's commissioners at various points. But on the whole he managed to persuade most of the people most of the time. I shall say no more of John Caird,² on whom Professor Cheyne will write, nor of his even more distinguished brother, Edward, except that it was they who caused the University to confer an honorary degree on John McLeod Campbell.³ That would have been enough.

Caird's appointment to the Principalship in 1873 had brought to the Chair of Divinity William Purdue Dickson, who for the previous ten years had been Professor of Biblical Criticism.⁴ Divinity he was to expound as Biblical Theology, a term commonly thought to have been invented by Neo-Orthodox Americans in the 1950s. Dickson's main concern within the university was in fact for the future of the University Library as a research library, a concept for which he worked hard over many years. It is among

¹ Theology was taught in the University from the foundation in 1451, originally by the Principal (who was also Professor of Divinity from the *nova erectio* of 1577) and one or more Regents, until the foundation of the modern Chairs, beginning with a second Chair of Divinity in 1640 and Ecclesiastical History in 1716. (For John Major, Andrew Melville, and Gilbert Burnet etc. see the chapter by Ian Hazlett). Theology in Glasgow was not confined to the university or college, e.g. Robert Leighton, John McLeod Campbell, etc.

For the history of Glasgow theology the following are valuable: H. M. B. Reid, *The Divinity Principals of Glasgow University*, Glasgow 1917, and his *The Divinity Professors of Glasgow University*, Glasgow 1923. Stewart Mechie, *Trinity College, Glasgow 1856-1956*, Glasgow 1956. J. Durkan and J. Kirk, *The University of Glasgow, 1451-1577*, Glasgow 1977. *Fortuna Domus*, Glasgow 1952, essay by J. G. Riddell. See also the essays of I. Hazlett: 'The College that was: the Free Church College at Glasgow 1856-1976', in *Trinity College Bulletin* n.s. 3 (1986), pp. 7-10; and 'Trinity College Union, 1897-1980', in *ibid.*, n.s. 6 (1989), pp. 22-27.

² Cf. Charles Warr, *Principal Caird*.

³ For the details see the *John McLeod Campbell Memorials*, London 1877.

⁴ Reid, *The Divinity Professors*, p. 335f.

historians, however, that Dickson's name continues to be known — his most remarkable and enduring contribution to scholarship being his English translation of the great Theodor Mommsen's five-volume *Römische Geschichte* (*History of Rome*).

Dickson was succeeded in 1895 by William Hastie, a foreigner from Edinburgh. Apart from numerous translations from various languages and a volume of sonnets of his own composition, Hastie is best known for his Croall Lectures *The Theology of the Reformed Church*.⁵ Hastie died, in some haste, in 1903, and the volume was edited by his student William Fulton, with an appreciative preface, for the first and doubtless for the last time, by the Professor of Divinity in Edinburgh.

We still have of course the rarely activated Hastie Lectureship in the University, as well as the Bruce Lectureship in Trinity College, as memorials of these our predecessors.

Hastie was a follower of Kant and of Schleiermacher, perhaps less steeped in Hegel than the great brothers, John and Edward Caird. For Hastie, Reformed theology is naturally the best of all possible theology:

That the Church of England requires radical reform; that the pomp of its priesthood needs to be humbled, and the sound sense of its laymen elevated to their Christian rights . . . that is only what can be claimed in the name of common justice at the hands of the law which established the church (*op. cit.*, p. 96).

He begins to sound like the Bishop of Durham! The crowning glory of Reformed thought is the principle of absolute predestination, leading to 'a deepened belief in the endless development of all created souls till the absolute purpose of God shall be realised in an infinitely diversified spirit-world, reconciled, perfected and unified in eternal harmony through spiritual communion with Christ around the throne of God' (*op. cit.*, p. 283). Here Hastie comes very close to the so-called Irenaean eschatology popularised by John Hick in the 1960s. Once again, there is much more to these venerable figures than meets the eye.

While these sentiments were being expressed in the University Faculty of the Auld Kirk, great men were working across the Park in Trinity.⁶ The renowned T. M. Lindsay, Principal of Trinity College from 1902 till his death in 1914, was a Reformation historian, a theological mind of the first rank, and one of the great scholars of his time, being among many other things the translator of Ueberweg's *System der Logik*. Here too were A. B.

⁵ W. Hastie, *The Theology of The Reformed Church*, Edinburgh 1904.

⁶ See Mechie, *op. cit.* The numerous biographies and collections of correspondence for the period testify to the extraordinary vitality of Trinity College at the time, e.g. T. H. Walker, *Principal James Denney*, London 1918; S.A. Cook, *George Adam Smith*, London 1942; L. Cuthbert, *Henry Drummond: a Biographical Sketch with Bibliography*, London 1901; James Moffatt (ed.), *Letters of Principal James Denney*, London 1922, etc.

Bruce, George Adam Smith (both of whom were subject to enquiries for heresy) and James Orr, as well as James Moffatt and the magnificent James Denney. Though only Bruce and Orr were systematic theologians as such, the group as a whole were men of outstanding ability, and on balance probably more distinguished than any of the University men, with the exception of the Caird brothers and their friend the Church historian, R. H. Story, himself later Principal of the University.

Orr died in 1914 and was succeeded briefly, by David Forrest, author of *The Christ of History and Experience*. Forrest was in turn succeeded by A. B. MacAulay, best known today perhaps for his book *The Death of Christ*, but also as one of the translators of Ritschl. In 1933 MacAulay was succeeded by John Riddell, to whom we shall return.

William Fulton, who lived, I think, in that stone villa which still survives directly opposite the University Library, was probably best known for the immensely solid articles which he wrote for *Hastings' Encyclopaedia of Theology*, on the Trinity, on theodicy and on teleology; these articles are still worth reading. His book *Nature and God*⁷ was the text of his Alexander Robertson Lectures, delivered in Glasgow in 1926. Part I was entitled 'Natural theology and natural science, Part II; 'The concept of purpose and the order of nature'. His conclusion includes the following:

Although the theological notion of purpose needs to be purged and purified if it is to be freely used in theological reflection, the theistic believer may still retain a rich and full conception of the deity, even in relation to the natural world. And when he sets the divine immanence and the divine transcendence in the light of the moral and religious consciousness, which he can hardly forgo doing, nor need he, they acquire a richness and fullness, indeed a glowing warmth, such as they could not have acquired from metaphysical considerations alone.

This is the pure milk of the word of Schleiermacher. And there could doubtless be worse things. When Fulton wrote these Lectures he was actually a professor in Aberdeen, but he returned to Glasgow as Professor of Divinity in the University from 1928-47.

The Professor of Divinity from 1903-27 was H. M. B. Reid who published works on pastoral theology and homiletics, but is perhaps best known for his two volumes; *The Divinity Principals of Glasgow University 1451-1654* and *The Divinity Professors of Glasgow University 1640-1903*. These are a rich quarry for writers of after dinner speeches, but cannot detain us here. It was said of Robert Boyd, Principal 1615-21, that he was 'sometimes very pleasant and cheerful,' but on the other hand was 'not fit for all company, nor for any company at all seasons,' and of John Simson,

⁷ *Nature and God: An Introduction to Theistic Studies* (Edinburgh 1927), p.187.

the heretical Professor of Divinity 1714 to 1729, that 'he remains just as formerly, as haughty, and as much on his own vindication as ever,' etc.

H.M.B. Reid had been a parish minister for seventeen years at Balmaghie in Kirkcudbrightshire, and produced an interesting volume called *A Country Parish*. 'In parish government', he wrote, 'it is a prime maxim to have rulers who are of ourselves, who dwell among their own people, speak the common phrases, and sympathise intelligently with the common needs' (p. 97). Even in the city he did not forget the country. 'The condition of many country churchyards is a crying scandal,' he complained. 'Many Scottish villages resemble an Indian settlement, where only the squaws are left. The men are gone out into the devouring prairies of city life. Village life must be consolidated' (p. 137). Concern for the state of the rural parish is really nothing new.

I come now to what is still for many people living memory, and to John G. Riddell, Professor of Systematic Theology in the University of Glasgow and in Trinity College from 1934-1947.⁸

In 1937 John Riddell published, for the Church of Scotland, a book with the title *What We Believe*. The volume contains 404 pages, with chapters on each of the main areas of Christian doctrine. The whole is an exposition of a *Short Statement of Belief* accepted by the Church of Scotland in 1935. It is practical and straight-forward. In speaking of the action of the Holy Spirit he says this:

The New Testament tells of men and women, conscious of their failings yet seeking to live good lives not by painful imitation of the actual deeds of Christ, but by seeking continually the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is literally true that . . . every virtue we possess, and every virtue won, and every thought of holiness are his alone.

The same note of uncomplicated piety is struck in the 1937 pamphlet *Life Here and Hereafter*, also published by the Church of Scotland:

For life, with all its demands for strength of will and confidence of purpose, and its many trials and disappointments, trust in Christ is our one sure guide. For death, with all its strangeness and mystery, he is our one sure hope.

A more speculative note is struck in the 1938 study *Why did Jesus die?* which surveys theories of atonement. It ends by relating the death of Jesus to the worship of the church.

For the Church facing a troubled world, and for the world with its deep need for the gospel which is the heritage of the church, the cross still stands, the symbol of the work of Christ. No partial representation

of its message, but only the whole truth about the death of Jesus, as far as our minds can fathom it and our words interpret it to others, can lead Christians to a true sense of the unity of their faith and enable them to meet and overcome the challenge of unbelief.

It is sometimes thought, in other places, that the history of Glasgow theology is a history consisting almost solely of philosophical speculation, from idealism to existentialism and secularisation. It comes as a surprise to find detailed treatment of Christology in the lectures of a notoriously radical theologian such as Ronald Gregor Smith. But it should not be forgotten that all the dimensions of Christian theology have been consistently represented here, no more so than in the piety of the late John Riddell. In his history of Trinity College, Stewart Mechie said this of Riddell: 'To his colleagues and his last students the courage with which he fought a fatal disease, and continued to use his great talents in the service of the church down to the day of his death, remains an inspiring memory' (p. 37).

Fulton resigned his chair in 1947 and was succeeded as Professor of Divinity by the Professor of Systematic Theology, Dr Riddell. Next year, 1948, the chair of Systematic Theology was filled by Ian Henderson, and a new era was at hand.⁹

Around the year 1977, the role of myth was discovered and sensationalised in English theology. Back in 1952 in Glasgow, Ian Henderson had published a slim but seminal volume entitled *Myth in the New Testament*. This at once became the authoritative introduction to Rudolf Bultmann's famous programme of demythologising the New Testament, proposed in 1942 but delayed by the war. Henderson saw that Bultmann's proposal was anything but another 'liberal' reduction of the Gospel to a lowest common factor. Demythologising emphasised rather than diminished the centrality of a decision for Jesus Christ as the basic question for human life. Typical was this passage on the resurrection (pp. 19-20):

The resurrection is simply another way in which the eschatological influence of the cross is brought out. Bultmann does not deny that there is something 'behind' the Resurrection faith of the disciples and historical study may do something to make what he calls their historical experiences comprehensible. But Christian faith is not concerned with these experiences of a distant past. On the contrary, when the resurrection is preached to the man of today, it summons him here and now to be crucified with Christ by renouncing all claim to find security in the visible and the this-worldly and thereby to rise with Christ – again here and now – to what is his own real existence.

In an even slimmer but excellent volume entitled *Rudolf Bultmann*, Henderson gave a masterly assessment of Bultmann's significance, in 1965. 'What we have in Bultmann is something like a doctrine of the Real Presence in the preaching of the word.'

In the middle of the Bultmann study, on p. 35, there is a brief note of warning: 'One can hardly see much place for either Tillich or Bultmann in the one church that the ecumenical movement is exerting its immense pressures to bring about.' The interpretation of this text was to be given in his next book, *Power without Glory: a study in ecumenical politics*, which appeared in the year of his moderatorship of Glasgow Presbytery, 1967, and was dedicated 'To the good Christians in every denomination who do not care greatly whether there is One Church or not'. Here he castigated ecumenical power brokers, and above all the English, with a perfect ferocity:

The doctrine of apostolic succession enables Englishmen to give expression to institutional narcissism in the ecclesiastical orb just as the romanticism of Oxford and Cambridge has enabled them to do in the academic one.

And just to make sure we understand the problem precisely:

The motives which the Anglicans and their fellow travellers ascribe to themselves in ecumenical literature are of the highest, being devotion to the will of God or the Holy Spirit. Up to now this intriguing lack of modesty has paid off. It is only recently that the public has begun to react to the Ecumenical's unending professions of enthusiasm for the Will of God with faint but unmistakable signs of nausea.

There's nothing like calling a spade a spade! The theme is continued in *Scotland: Kirk and People*, published after his death in 1968.

Sadly the Professors of Divinity and Systematic Theology did not get on very well by the late 1960s and both died in 1968. Since then there has only been one Chair in the field, perhaps a wise precaution! The Professor of Divinity from 1956-68 was Ronald Gregor Smith, a man of wide fame, and the subject of a recent substantial monograph by Keith Clements, which stresses Gregor Smith's sensitivity to the element of mystery in God.¹⁰ For long, Gregor Smith was the *enfant terrible* of Scottish theology, despite the fact that he too had sat at the feet of the master* in Basel and had indeed been married by him. He became synonymous with the development of *Secular Christianity*, the title of one of his books. An Edinburgh graduate in arts and divinity, as a young man he had translated Martin Buber's *I and*

Thou, a classic of existentialist thought. In 1956, coming from editorship of the SCM Press to Glasgow, he published *The New Man*, subtitled *Christianity and Man's Coming of Age*. He traced the development of man as the centre of things to the Renaissance, and saw this development as itself a legitimate fruit of the Gospel. Others were less sure. Even John McIntyre of New College, Edinburgh, no opponent of liberal thought, once described 'man's coming of age' as a polite way of saying we don't believe in God any more.

Much more was to come. *Secular Christianity* (1966) plunged the Professor into controversy about whether Christian faith was compatible with an affirmation that the bones of Jesus might lie somewhere in Palestine – just the sort of catch-phrase to excite media attention. This was to be emphatically a Christian theology. 'The theology of faith is a theology of the cross, and thus a *theologia viatorum*. It is the theology of a pilgrim journey which makes its map as it goes.' It ends appropriately with the famous quotation from Bonhoeffer: 'Only a suffering god can help.'

This theology had deep roots in the European cultural tradition, shown in the careful study of the work of J. G. Hamann, and it continued with *The Free Man*, *Studies in Christian Anthropology*, and in *The Doctrine of God* (1970). Gregor Smith died suddenly and tragically in September 1968, and in an introduction to *The Doctrine of God* the new Professor, Allan Galloway, paid handsome tribute to his predecessor: 'Ronald Gregor Smith may well be the most important English-speaking theologian and this, I believe, is his most significant book. Graduate students in this department have recently explored further dimensions of his thought in unpublished papers.'

I have examined the subject in my own book *Theology of the Love of God*. The argument goes like this: Today there is a crisis about God. What is needed is a fresh interpretation of God's relation to human existence, and an understanding of human faith in relation to God, as God gives himself to us in history. God is involved in our historicity but is not simply to be identified with it, not at our disposal but not unknown. There was a kind of magic about Gregor Smith, which inspired some and repelled others. I heard him lecture on secularisation in Heidelberg in the spring of 1968 and I can understand the magic.

There was something of a school of existentialist theology here, with Gregor Smith and Ian Henderson, and then the advent of lecturers in the Faculty like John Macquarrie, soon to proceed to Union Theological Seminary, New York, and then to the Regius Chair in Oxford, and Iain Nicol, now Director of the Toronto School of Theology.

Allan Galloway, Reader and formerly Professor of Religious Studies in Ibadan, was and is a rather more complex thinker. Existentialism was all very well within limits, but his philosophical training in Glasgow and his

concerns for the relation between Christ and creation in Schillebeeckx and Moltmann forty years later. When he was in the old Department of Religious Studies, Allan Galloway found time to produce an elegant set of Kerr Lectures, *Faith in a Changing Culture* (1967), in which the correlation between faith and culture is developed with a mature and profound simplicity. He then gave us an excellent introduction to the theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, and finally a set of Gifford Lectures, which we hope will be published soon.

Others there were in the department in the early seventies, George Newlands, Joseph Houston (for many years the editor of the *Scottish Journal of Theology*, and later *quondam* Professor of Theology in Dubuque, Iowa), and then John Zizioulas (later to become the Metropolitan Bishop of Pergamum) with whom the Professor* worked with a charity that truly passeth all understanding.¹¹ But that is another story. And in all this time there were students studying for degrees, and large numbers of candidates being prepared for the ministry. It would also be remiss to neglect the notable contribution made to theology in the wider sense at that time and since, in the world of Practical Theology by Murdo Ewen Macdonald¹² and David Millar; in Church History by Ian Muirhead, the prolific Early Church scholar, William Frend FBA, and Gavin White; in Biblical Studies by John Mauchline, William Barclay, Ernest Best and Robert Davidson FRSE, not to speak of Robert Carroll and John Riches. *Resurgat in gloria Alma Mater! Ab antiqua Patrum institutione omnia didicimus.*

GEORGE NEWLANDS

* i.e. the author of this piece. — ed.

¹¹ Cf. J.D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, London 1985. J. Houston, *It is Reasonable to Believe in God?* Edinburgh 1984; *Reported Miracles: a critique of Hume*. Cambridge 1994. G.M. Newlands, *Hilary of Poitiers: a study in theological method*, Basel 1978; *Theology of the Love of God*, London 1980; *The Church of God*, London 1984; *Making Christian Decisions*, London 1987.

The
Possibilities
of
Theology

Studies in the Theology of
Eberhard Jüngel
in his Sixtieth Year

Edited by John Webster

Chapter 9

THE LOVE OF GOD AND THE FUTURE OF THEOLOGY: A PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH JÜNGEL'S WORK

George Newlands

1 Eberhard Jüngel has built up a formidable reputation in Germany as an outstanding systematic theologian. In a culture which retains a high respect for theology, Jüngel's work has been distinguished by its great intellectual rigour. Not for him the rush towards fashion and instant relevance. He has been concerned, with his chief mentor Karl Barth, to let God be God and humanity be humanity. Like one of his other main conversation partners, Rudolf Bultmann, he has been concerned with the relation of the gospel as Word to language, to hermeneutical structures, to the ultimate springs of human thinking in the past and in the present.

In Germany, Jüngel has been respected and read. In Britain and North America, with distinguished exceptions, it would seem that his work has been more respected than read. I suspect that there are reasons for this situation, and that despite certain difficulties there is a great deal that can be learned from Jüngel for theology outside the central European context. This is particularly the case at a time when it might be thought possible to dispense with the characteristic elements of Jüngel's traditional theological agenda, in the name of the postmodern, the narrative genre, the deconstructed construal of texts, and the turn to transformative praxis. To do this, however, it may be necessary to make some adjustments to Jüngel's arguments, adjustments which he may or may not recognise as helpful.

In considering the reception of Jüngel outside Germany, I shall take the liberty of beginning from personal reflection upon my own engagement with Jüngel's work over the last twenty-five years. Coming from Scotland through Heidelberg to Zürich in 1968, where Jüngel already

had a growing reputation as a brilliant young professor of theology, my wife and I were impressed by the sharp logic and the intellectual pyrotechnics with which he mesmerised — and sometimes terrorised — undergraduate audiences. The twin focal points of the nature of God and the nature of human thinking provided a base from which the problems of theology could be recast in a remarkable way. Whether the theme was Luther's anthropology or Barth's understanding of baptism, painstaking analysis of fundamental concepts, coupled with enviable erudition on the history of Western thought, provided an immensely stimulating diet in lectures and seminars for the student of theology — or at least, for those who did not wilt under the strain. Jüngel was interested in the relation of systematic to practical theology, as combined seminars demonstrated, and he had his own distinctive understanding of this relationship. He was also very interested in the relationship of theology to philosophy, again not in a casual but in a highly disciplined framework. The *Sozietät* on Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, nocturnal and hospitable, was a highlight of intellectual delight. Wittgenstein talked of bewitchment; Jüngel created it.

There was clearly much here already of permanent value. In his work *Paulus und Jesus*,¹ Jüngel appeared to have brought together Barth and Bultmann, for many of us in the sixties the twin pillars of theological wisdom, equally important but not easy to reconcile. (I had not encountered Bultmann, but Barth was still offering Saturday seminars on Schleiermacher.) In *Gottes Sein ist im Werden*,² Jüngel offered a fresh reading of Barth. Unlike some interpreters, instead of digging deeper foundations for a fortress mentality he appeared to hint at a plastic interpretation which would engage with the focal points of current philosophical debate, about the relation of the Word to history, to hermeneutics and to action. And in his short essay on analogy,³ he suggested the continuing value of the study of the pre-Socratics for

¹ E. Jüngel, *Paulus und Jesus. Eine Untersuchung zur Präzisierung der Frage nach dem Ursprung der Christologie* (J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1962).

² E. Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden. Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth. Eine Paraphrase* (J.C.B. Mohr, Tübingen, 1965).

³ E. Jüngel, *Zum Ursprung der Analogie bei Parmenides und Heraklit* (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1964); also in E. Jüngel, *Entsprechungen. Gott — Wahrheit — Mensch. Theologische Erörterungen* (Kaiser, Munich, 1980), pp. 52-102.

theology, when Gadamer and Picht in Heidelberg were exploring their continuing implications for philosophy. In the area of the church, Jüngel was preaching and publishing fascinating sermons.

It was difficult even for dimmest of us not to learn something. Jüngel's understanding of theological language as parable, based on the parabolic language of Jesus, was a theme I found helpful in my own dissertation on the patristic interpretation of the Bible. 'In the parables, which are a pointed, ostensive mode of discourse about the kingship of God, Jesus reveals himself as a language event.'⁴ Jüngel's stress on the internal integrity of systematic theology, on the importance of the substantive content beyond the methodological approach to doctrine, and on theology rather than the theologian, I found stimulating in attempting to provide a focal agenda for theology. 'God has defined himself on the cross as love.'⁵ My attempts to understand sacraments reflected Jüngel's suggestions: 'Christ is the primary and indeed the sole sacrament of God for the world.'⁶ I have found myself coming back to Jüngel again in recent reflection on the foundations of the Christian doctrine of God, and I have learned a great deal more about Jüngel in enjoyable discussion with the editor of this volume during our Cambridge years.

And yet 'Yes and No'. Respect for an intellectual legacy does not necessarily entail agreement. Theologians sometimes tend either to agree with each other entirely, in which case there is a certain monochrome element in their solidarity, or else they disagree so completely that they no longer find it possible to learn from the same source. I have long been temperamentally disinclined to accept either option. Without being randomly eclectic, it seems to me always to be possible and usually desirable to split up the package and re-write the rules of connection. I have always supposed that this is what some of our predecessors have actually been up to.

Perhaps because I had already developed a certain caution about the notion of a pure theology of the Word, perhaps because I was not

G.M. Newlands, *Hilary of Pottiers. A Study in Theological Method* (Lang, Berne, 1978), p. 178.

G.M. Newlands, *Theology of the Love of God* (Collins, London, 1980), p. 103.

G.M. Newlands, *The Church of God* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, London, 1984), p.

unmindful of the gentle scepticism of my historical mentor Hans von Campenhausen, I found that early admiration for Jüngel was usually qualified by a measure of agnosticism. With some amazement I had watched Gadamer pluck pre-Socratic rabbits out of textually corrupted and fragmented hats with sovereign aplomb. Now Jüngel was to do magic things with doctrines. It was never less than magnificent, but was it, in fact, the actuality?

There were puzzles about parables, and about word events in general.⁷ Perhaps the events themselves concerning Jesus, as God's self-enacted parable, were the hinge of Christian theological discourse, and the emphasis on word and language was ultimately secondary. And was it possible that Jüngel's elegant synthesis of diverse and contradictory motifs in harmonious concepts concealed as much as it revealed about the way of revelation within the created order? 'Even if it were to be argued that God had chosen some special means of self-communication ... we would not then be entitled to extrapolate the concept of parable as the universal category for language about God.'⁸ I had been working intermittently on the themes of faith, hope and love as the foundations of theology. From Fuchs and Barth, through Jüngel, there were exciting hints of a new interpretation of the love of God. But how did this theological concept relate to the history and literature of other human experiences of love, perhaps expressed in different, non-German, less general philosophical concepts? 'How is this Trinitarian, cross-centred concept of God related to men's questions about the nature of human existence in society, and the nature and purpose of the cosmos?'⁸ *Quid Jüngel cum Daniel Day Williams, etc.?*

In the following decades Jüngel developed his theological programme with vigour and brilliance, and provided further explanations of many of the puzzles which he had earlier set. Not least in *God as the Mystery of the World*, he offered a comprehensive theory of the nature of the impact of the European Enlightenment on theology, and proposed an integrated systematic response. Whether the Enlightenment is the sort of door that can be opened with a single key, even the refined skeleton key that was on offer, is an interesting question. But

⁷ G.M. Newlands, *Hilary of Poitiers*, p. 179.

⁸ G.M. Newlands, *Theology of the Love of God*, p. 104.

there is no doubt of the illuminative value of Jüngel's constructive contribution. (Jüngel's study, incidentally, was remarkably close in its judgments to Michael J. Buckley's *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*,⁹ in a different context and from a different theological angle. It is sometimes possible to arrive at surprisingly similar assessments from very diverse theoretical positions). In later collections of papers, Jüngel expounded an increasingly sophisticated account of metaphor, and especially Christological metaphor, at the heart of theology. In my own view, he tends still to write somewhat like an angel, marvellous in surveying the human scene *coram deo*, less accommodating in relating the divine *cantus firmus* to the more familiar sounds of our everyday lives on the earth.¹⁰ For guidance on some parts of the theological spectrum of explanation we may look elsewhere. But this does not mean that Jüngel can be of no further help to us. On the contrary, he may be able to illuminate issues for us precisely because of a perspective which we may regard as in some ways strange.

2. I should like now to suggest a rather different sort of question. What use will Christian theologians in the long-term future have for Jüngel's work? We cannot say. But we can at least see, even with our limited imagination, that theology is likely to go through periods of accelerated change in a swiftly changing society. Shifts in cultural, ecclesial and social perspectives are likely to have decisive effects on theology. Theology always involves a complicated interplay of theory and practice. Except in its crudest forms, there is never a simple movement from one to the other, but a subtle and fluctuating relationship. This means that the removal of some of the social and intellectual factors that inhibit and limit today's theology will enable new possibilities to arise in the future. Then there will be other paradigms and conventions, which will no doubt be exploited and developed in turn. In this essay, I propose a rewriting of one major theme of Jüngel's work, justification, in relation to another major theme, the love of God, and then suggest in conclusion some ways of thawing the ice of the winter of our postmodern discontent.

⁹ M.J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1987).

¹⁰ G.M. Newlands, review of E. Jüngel, *Theological Essays*, *Theology* 93 (1990), pp. 309f.

What are the foundations of theology? This is a question familiar to all theologians, and answered in many different ways. The Bible, the tradition, the ongoing theological enterprise, the life and worship of the Christian community, all can be said to be the basis on which theology rests today, and will rest tomorrow. In a narrower sense, the foundation is often held to be the trinity, or revelation, or the Word, or the eucharist, as manifestations of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. In the various churches, such concepts as the apostolic tradition, the decrees of the early councils, justification by faith, the notion of covenant, all play important roles. It is my contention in this section that a greater emphasis on the love of God as normative for the specification of foundational theology would shed light on many of our current theological problems and offer considerable improvements to what is at present on offer to contemporary theologians, for the theology of the future.

It is customary in theological essays to choose what the author regards as bad examples of theological practice, and then to offer critical corrections. But this is a time-consuming exercise. It may be more profitable to begin with critique of what one regards as basically good, even excellent examples. I turn, accordingly, to the foundational theology of Jüngel. Jüngel is no stranger to the theme of the love of God, and has made profound use of the concept. However, it seems to me that his is a prime example of a theology which might be much more widely appreciated if the consequences of this theme were more explicitly spelled out.

As we already noted, in his magnificent book *God as the Mystery of the World* Jüngel develops a theme of Barth in tracing the basic problems of modern theology to the role of Cartesian doubt in providing a rational foundation for knowledge of God, thereby replacing the Reformers' emphasis on justification by faith alone. Jüngel sees justification by faith as the key factor in understanding the Word as the Word of the God of Jesus Christ, the heart of the gospel. I have elsewhere suggested that the strict methodological discipline of Jüngel's approach might be softened in order to make his theology more available to people who approach the subject from other angles: 'For Jüngel, the hinge of theological discourse is provided by an *analogia gratiae* between God and man. What is difficult is the spelling out of accounts of the sort of theological constructions which are and which are not

fruitful. For it is crystal clear that theology is illuminated by many different sorts of discourse, some of which are compatible with Jüngel's model of *analogia gratiae*, but many of which are not.¹¹ I want now to take this further, and to look at justification afresh in the light of the love of God.

I begin from wholehearted agreement on the importance for the church throughout the ages of justification by faith. It has long been said, superficially, that Lutheran theologians place far too much emphasis on the centrality of justification. The Reformed claim to stress the whole biblical witness, without the constraint of a canonical instrument of discrimination. Roman Catholics believe that there are now no ultimately decisive confessional differences between themselves and Lutherans on justification, and that justification is one basic strand, among others, of the gospel message. Anglicans and Orthodox rarely use the term in contemporary theology. In my view, theologies which have ignored justification have often paid a high price for their neglect. They have lost the tension between the law and the gospel which was at the heart of Luther's contribution to faith. In this century, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer and Käsemann have contributed uniquely to Christian thought and action, largely on the basis of a dynamic understanding of justification.

What needs to be added to justification by faith alone? In the earliest volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* Barth wanted to supplement it with a threefold concept of revelation, in order to balance the potential subjectivity of justification. The danger now was of imbalance in the direction of a kind of reification of grace. My proposal appeals to a wider critical reappropriation of the notion of God's love.

Let me begin at the beginning. What is Christian life? It is, I suggest, life lived in conscious discipleship to the God of Jesus Christ. It involves a sense of the reality of God, as hidden presence, as gift, as something which need not be but is. This sense of transcendent presence is a sense of the presence of the God who is characterised in the Biblical narratives as love, instantiated in the life and activity, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Where does this phenomenon of Christian life, lived in different ways in different parts of the world, come from? Christians believe that it comes from God. It is a result in this world of the

G.M. Newlands. *God in Christian Perspective* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994) p. 28.

outpouring of the over-generous love of God. What we call faith is personal awareness of the meaningfulness for us of the Christian story, of the condition of living with this dawning and deepening recognition. Faith is recognition of the reality of God's love as a force in our lives. It includes experience and reflection on this experience. Christians reflect that God's love is the source both of our existence and of our awareness of the ground of our existence. To live as a Christian before God is to respond to God's love with love for God and for humanity. God's love is the source, the vehicle of communication and the goal of the Christian life.

What this means is that word and spirit, subjective experience and objective reality, are related elements of the effective action of the divine love in the world. This means that the choices which modern theologians have felt compelled to make between the way of Schleiermacher and the way of Barth are fundamentally misconceived. Both were dealing with particular elements of the whole dynamic of the divine love in contingent history. Both saw different aspects clearly. Both were right, and both were incomplete in their diagnosis.

To see how this is so, we need to take the argument back several stages. Communities in the Judaeo-Christian tradition have believed themselves to be aware of the reality of God as presence, largely hidden but sometimes manifest, in the past and in the present. They have understood the subject of their experience as the one referred to in the Biblical narratives as the creator and reconciler of the universe. Christians usually understand Jesus Christ as the incarnation of God, appropriating and developing the Biblical imagery of presence through word and sacrament. Through the history of European philosophy in particular, they have also understood God to be a cosmos-explaining reality, the ground of all physical reality. How do they describe the substantial reality of God as experienced? They have often found this reality most intelligibly characterised as a self-differentiated being involved in internal as well as external relationship. This is related to the Biblical story through the development of the doctrine of the trinity.

What we often call the world of empirical reality is for Christians not self-contained. It is dependent on God, who is the ground of its being. While God's being is unique and inconceivable to us, Christians understand the character, quality and purpose of God's being to be shown as self-giving love. At a fundamental level, God's love has created

the physical order, and has intended that it should develop, to express with increasing richness the character of its creator, in such a way that humanity should develop its own authentic and autonomous community of love, regard, mutual respect. This is the shape of the gospel. The substance of the gospel includes the affirmation that despite the presence in the universe of evil and suffering which appear constantly to frustrate God's loving purpose, God has himself created a dimension of reconciliation, which makes possible that to which God invites. To become aware of God's love as a factor in our world, and increasingly as the decisive factor, as the ground of existence and of meaning, is to come to faith. As we see that all that is of fundamental value in human life is based on God's love, we know what it means to speak of justification by faith alone. Aware of God's love, however intensely, hesitantly or intermittently, we may live in the freedom of the children of God. This life is the life of the Christian community, called to service in the world.

The tension between law and gospel is part of the wider tension between love and non-love, between caring and exploitation. The criterion of difference is the same as the criterion of balance between law and gospel, the love of God expressed in the life and activity of Jesus. The means of effectual differentiation is the cluster of events which we call the resurrection of Jesus.

What has been said of justification in relation to divine love, both as ultimate ground and as effectual instrument of present reconciliation, may also be said of a number of other major historical doctrinal foci. The covenant, central to much Reformed thought, is the covenant of the divine love. The apostolic tradition may be interpreted as the tradition of the interpretation of the divine love in the church, an interpretation in life and action which has sometimes been grotesquely wrong, but which has also functioned and may continue to function as a tradition of self-giving love. The decisions of the general councils may be seen as the result of debate about the implications of the divine love, debates which provide salutary lessons for the future. The role of church leadership in various forms may be seen as part of the continuing attempt to provide a framework for sustained discipleship. Through examination of the role of authority in the past and present we may draw conclusions about the appropriate shape of ecclesiastical authority as based on self-giving love in the future.

It is possible to develop models for the understanding of divine love in different philosophical frameworks in a most illuminating way. I think of Karl Rahner's understanding of the nature of God as self-giving love in the first instance, and also of much discussion of creative love in process thought. But I see the divine love as the undergirding theme of all Christian theology, manifest at both primary and secondary levels, setting the stage and maintaining, accompanying and fulfilling reconciliation. The divine love need not be an alternative to such themes as justification. But I regard it as essential for the future of an open, tolerant, truly ecumenical and socially concerned theology that an explicit articulation of God's love as focus should be present at all levels of theological reflection.

If we now return to Jüngel's work, we shall see that he himself in fact provides grounds for a great emphasis on love in relation to justification. What is required is perhaps more a change in emphasis than in substance. So, for example, in reading Luther he is struck by these sentences: 'The love of God does not find, but creates, that which is pleasing to it ... Therefore sinners are attracted because they are loved; they are not loved because they are attractive.'¹² This leads him later to consider the dynamic of freedom for love: 'If *freedom for love* is altogether an event which takes place in and is decisive for the inner man, then love itself is necessarily expressed in activities which themselves are always the action of the outer man.'¹³ The basis of human love is, of course, the love of God. This is further spelled out in *God as the Mystery of the World*: 'The love which God is cannot be understood as only a love which *radiates* into lovelessness. It *involves itself* with that lovelessness. That counterpart which it finds is not worthy of love. Rather, it makes that which is totally unlovely into something worthy of love.'¹⁴ Jüngel's intention here is not to denigrate humanity, but to stress that God's love is completely unconditional. A more systematic emphasis on the divine love might have a similar effect to that

¹² M. Luther, 'Heidelberg Disputation' in *Luther's Works* 31 (Fortress, Philadelphia, 1957), p. 57, cited by E. Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian: Luther's Significance for Contemporary Theology* (Augsburg, Minneapolis, 1988), p. 36.

¹³ E. Jüngel, *The Freedom of a Christian*, p. 77.

¹⁴ E. Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World. On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified One in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1983), p. 329.

which the articulation of justification through the existential concept of faith has for Bultmann. To quote Jüngel on Bultmann, 'If the concept of the new self-understanding brings to expression how with this Word the person of faith also understands him- or herself, then this underlines the fact that the human person as a whole is a being of the Word.'¹⁵

We may now say that the whole person is a creature of the love of God, and that his or her action in its entirety is grounded in God's love. In his essay on the interrelation of the theological disciplines of 1968, Jüngel suggests that the basic role of practical theology is to be the theological discipline of the Word of God as event, whereas the basic role of systematic theology is to be the theological discipline of the Word of God as truth.¹⁶ I should myself want to stress that the love of God is the ultimate ground both of action and of truth.

There is no Christian action, and no Christian truth, except what stands before the judgement of the unconditional love of God.

3. At this stage we should look at what may be thought to be a basic flaw in my argument. *Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum*. We do not in fact always perceive the world as sustained by the love of God. Even within the churches there have been tragic and cruel conflicts. Christians are notoriously unredeemed in the way in which they behave towards each other. Even when they believe in God as a loving God, Luther held, they are authentically Christian only when they are aware of being justified by faith alone. For justification emphasises an important characteristic of faith, namely that it is entirely unmerited, solely of grace.

We may agree with this proposition, and go on to consider its wider significance. In a previous age the confessional focal points which we have considered, such as justification, served to discriminate between true believers, those who adhered to the 'right' confession, and others whose beliefs were considered to be inadequate. We have today to learn to share in and participate in the particular insights of the various

¹⁵ E. Jüngel, *Glauben und Verstehen. Zum Theologiebegriff Rudolf Bultmanns* (Winter, Heidelberg, 1985), p. 66.

¹⁶ E. Jüngel, 'Das Verhältnis der theologischen Disziplinen untereinander' in E. Jüngel, K. Rahner, M. Seitz, *Die praktische Theologie zwischen Wissenschaft und Praxis* (Kaiser, Munich, 1968), pp. 11-45; also in E. Jüngel, *Unterwegs zur Sache. Theologische Bemerkungen* (Kaiser, Munich, 1972), pp. 34-59.

denominational theologies, while avoiding the narrowness of historical discrimination which is not relevant to the Christian future. We may continue to enjoy the distinctiveness of the various kinds of denominational witness, but we must not use them as tribal excuses for local self-righteousness.

It is largely for this reason that George Lindbeck's proposals for a culturally determined approach to theology, though instructive in various ways, appear to me to have a major weakness. They weaken the public character of theology and offer convenient excuses for regression to internal denominational self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the foundational theology of David Tracy offers a much more open attitude to the public responsibility of theology, and to that extent constitutes a better foundation for the theological future. In fact, it may well be that there is no single public, no monolithic foundation: but it remains important to seek maximum mutuality in understanding. Faith cannot entirely justify itself before the bar of reason, for it is grounded in God's love, without which there would be no reason, nor indeed anything else. But it is important always to seek to give reasons for the faith that is in us. This is the moment of *fides quaerens intellectum*, central to faith which seeks to be there for others, for service in the world. Nevertheless, Tracy's approach is itself in some danger of being so concerned for dialogue with the social paradigms of a given audience, with the necessary attention to praxis, that concentration on the substantive content of the gospel, which alone can be the source of transformative praxis, may be lost. In this situation Jüngel's passion for theological *Sachlichkeit* may be an invaluable factor.

It is easy to read Jüngel's work as simply another example of a Eurocentric intellectualism that is irrelevant to praxis, especially outside Europe. Yet a glance at Jüngel's own essay on his educational background,¹⁷ shows us that his thought is not simply a footnote to an ivory tower scholasticism, but a response to a profound experience of victimisation, oppression, and above all, suppression of truth. For Jüngel, as for others, thinking has been more than an escape from reality. It has been a response of the *humanum* to the assault of the inhumane.

¹⁷ E. Jüngel, "Toward the Heart of the Matter" in J.M. Wall, D. Heim, ed., *How My Mind Has Changed* (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991), pp. 144-57.

I mentioned Jüngel's early interest in Wittgenstein, and the pleasure that this brought to his students. Inevitably, the theologian reading the *Philosophical Investigations* will pause on the enigmatic phrase 'theology as grammar':

371. *Essence* is expressed by grammar.

373. Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)¹⁸

There are scholars who have claimed to find in Wittgenstein a key to the problems of theology today, from traditional Roman Catholics to postmodern agnostics. It is all too easy to find instant connections between supposed Wittgensteinian fideism and supposed Barthian fideism. Jüngel, like Dummett in Britain, has been more cautious. Wittgenstein is a reminder of the complexity of language use, of openness to transcendence, and of the mystery of God. For Jüngel he is an ally in pointing to surprise, alternative conceptuality, the unexpected thought.

Jüngel has always concentrated on the search for truth, as part of the particular task of systematic theology. This passion for truth energises his arguments. Yet he would probably agree with Donne that

On a huge hill
Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
Reach her, about must, and about must go.¹⁹

The truth is there before us, but as the hiddenness of God's presence through the cross. There is, moreover, a connection between text and tradition, event and truth. That is, in the Word of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, I am brought back to the love of God, which is the power behind justifying faith. 'God has himself only in that he gives himself away. But, in giving himself away, he has himself. That is how he *is*. His self-having is the event, is the history of giving himself away, and thus

¹⁸ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1953), nos. 371, 373, p. 116e.

¹⁹ J. Donne, 'Satyre III', ll. 80-2, in J. Milgate, ed., *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1967), p. 13.

is the end of all mere self-having. As this *history*, he is God, and in fact, this *history of love* is "God himself".²⁰

It is not without significance that Pannenberg ended the first volume of his *Systematic Theology* with a section on the love of God, which contains a careful appreciation of Jüngel's reflection on the subject, and like Jüngel brings in reference to the trinity.²¹ Yet in the volume on creation and reconciliation, the theme is no longer in the foreground.²² It seems to me that a more conscious reflection on creation and reconciliation as the theatre of the specificity of God's love in action would go some way towards bridging the gap between the concerns of the practical and the systematic theologian, to the awareness of the need for truth as the origin and the instrument of the service of God's love. History shows that there is a real danger of obscuring both truth and action with sentimental notions of love. But the abuse does not take away the proper use, and the good news of the gospel is precisely the message that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Jüngel writes profoundly of Christian freedom and of existential faith, out of a tradition which has taught humanity new things about both these dimensions of human life (not least in considering the significance of Luther and Bultmann). He knows that we are all too human, frail, easily deluded. As he wrote in the powerful essay on 'The effectiveness of Christ withdrawn': 'We have to endorse the modesty of an effective historical hermeneutic because of the simple fact that far too much is lost to any conscious grasp of history for any complete knowledge to be possible.'²³ Indeed, we see in a glass darkly. But the love of God, in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, remains the hidden leitmotif of history and the source of all Christian hope and action.

Sobrino has said that the greatest problem facing Christianity in many parts of the world is not atheism but the inhuman. Jüngel has spoken of systematic theology as accountable for its engagement with the Word of God as truth. Truth for Christian faith will always be

²⁰ *God as the Mystery of the World*, p. 328.

²¹ W. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* I (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1991), pp. 422-48.

²² W. Pannenberg, *Systematische Theologie* II (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1991).

²³ E. Jüngel, 'The effectiveness of Christ withdrawn. On the process of historical understanding as an introduction to Christology' in *Theological Essays* (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1989), p. 227.

bound up with the truth of God in Jesus Christ. It may be in a new appropriation of Jesus Christ as the truth of human rights, of human flourishing and of human justice that the gospel will make itself felt as an instrument of God's work of reconciliation. If that is the case, Jüngel's engagement with the truth in Jesus Christ may be a point of decisive encounter for Christians from different ecclesiastical traditions, as these seek to relate the decisiveness of Christ to the decisiveness of universal human rights as a condition of the possibility of human flourishing. For reminding us of the ineluctable toughness of the intellectual task of thinking more deeply of the significance of Christ crucified and risen, we are indebted to few in this century more than to Jüngel.

Jüngel's profound emphasis on the freedom of the Christian, based on Luther's understanding of justification by faith, needs to be widened and applied directly to the whole created order as a reminder of the unconditional love of God which undergirds and invites to fulfilment all that is. This is not enthusiasm but eschatological realism. The Reformation stress on justification needs to be directed outwards towards the service of others. The Enlightenment emphasis on universal love becomes liberating only when it is understood in the light of the self-giving and unconditional love of God in Jesus Christ. Otherwise it often tends to a moral tyranny which creates new chaos. Part, at least, of the task awaiting the Christian future is the harnessing of the whole of the tradition of the gospel in the service of justice and peace for all humanity, not as the surprising exception in society but as the normal condition of the life of the whole created order.

The centre of Christian faith remains the God of Jesus Christ, experienced through faith as present in word and sacrament by members of Christian communities of every different sort. But the implications of the reality of God within the universe need to be worked out by each generation for itself. The structure of faith for a new world will be a main theme of this study. If we are to think of faith for a new world, we can afford neither to lose the heart of the Christian gospel in the quest for modernity, nor to obscure the centre of the gospel in the packaging of an age that no longer addressed us where we are. To operate successfully within these tensions is the perennial task of theology.

God is love, love characterised precisely in the self-giving of God in

the events concerning Jesus of Nazareth. This is the centre of Christian faith, at one level entirely simple, and at another level susceptible to all the theoretical reflection which we can possibly bring to bear on it. To develop this theme is always to enter into dialogue with the continuing stream of modern theology, including Jüngel's own work, dialogue which is both grateful and critical, and again critical and at the same time grateful for the common enterprise in which it participates.

**WHAT CAN BE AFFIRMED IN CONTINUITY
WITH THE TRADITION TODAY?**

George Newlands

The Christian church is the church of Jesus Christ, the church of the love of God, brought out of and sent into the world by God, to serve as an instrument of his love for humankind.

Reformed ecclesiologies are those expressions of the understanding of the church which reflect the historical particularity of the Reformed witness. They are developed from such central features of the theology of the Reformation in the tradition of John Calvin as the lordship of Christ, the centrality of the authority of the Bible, and the place of the visible church in worship and in community. Reformed ecclesiology lays stress on the true preaching of the word and the right administration of the sacraments. It also cherishes pastoral care, and the importance of the link between belief and discipleship. It affirms continuity with the church of the New Testament, of the apostles and the fathers, and also with the Reformers. It seeks catholicity together with evangelical truth. It looks forward to development, *semper reformanda*, under the guidance of the Spirit and in discipleship to Jesus Christ its Lord.

In matters of church polity and ministerial order Reformed ecclesiology is agreeable to a reconciled diversity. The limits of diversity are the limits of faithful service in Christ, and they include internal and external constraints. Discipleship rules out exclusive sacramental practice, the marginalization of the oppressed, and the celebration of justification as self-justification.

Within the constraints of divine love, a reconciled diversity of ecclesiological understanding and practice is welcomed, as a sign of the diversity of the gifts of the Spirit. On this basis the table of the Eucharist is open, in most branches of the Reformed tradition, to all people in full communion with any branch of Christ's church. Though it is not, of course, the prerogative of Reformed Christians alone, openness in Christ is of the *esse* of Reformed ecclesiology.

Within this framework we may now seek to construct some central elements of a Reformed ecclesiology. None of these elements is exclusive to Reformed Christians, but they express a perspective which the Reformed tradition has been historically concerned to stress. It goes without saying that this project has to be seen in the light of commitment both to the WCC and to particular agreements with other traditions, e.g. the Leuenberg process in Lutheran-Reformed agreement.

We begin with Calvin on the church. The main lines of his view are readily set out. How is faith to be awakened and then strengthened? For this purpose God has given us the church. He has given us pastors and teachers to preach the gospel, and sacraments to strengthen our faith. Such is the divine plan for us, and we should be faithful members of the visible church. It is true that the church is both visible and invisible, and includes some who are bad and others who are good. But the visible church is important. As Calvin put it in a famous sentence, 'wherever we see the word of God purely preached and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, we must not doubt that there is a church.'

The church must preach the word and administer the sacraments. It must also help its members to develop in their sanctification. This is the element of pastoral care, of strengthening in discipleship. Whether the love of God or neighbour can or should ever be compelled is of course a vital question. The motive however was pastoral concern. Christians should have the right religious attitude and the right moral practice. Discipline belonged to the organization rather than to the definition of the church.

The basis of the church is prescribed in Scripture, but the external forms are subject to expediency—a balance never wholly defined. The centre of authority is the whole community of the people of God. Within the community the Spirit offers diverse gifts, with a corresponding diversity of ministries—pastors, doctors, elders and deacons. Careful distinctions are made between order, hierarchy and authority—no Christian is on a higher spiritual level than another *ex officio*, as it were.

The church is always under Scripture, which is normative. Unity among Reformed Christians is always preferable to schism. For Calvin the church is a living organism, a communion of mutual service (Inst. IV, 1, 3). This is not an exclusively Reformed view, but it is stressed by Calvin.

There is indeed an invisible church, consisting of all the elect, living and dead, for the church is more than the empirical organisation. But there is also a true, visible church. This church is the church of Jesus Christ, dependent on the Holy Spirit. External disciplines and ceremonies may be subject to change; there may be a diversity of ministries; but all must be subject to the judgment of the word of God. The visible unity of the church throughout the world is an important goal.

Calvin's teaching was to be taken up in different ways in the various Reformed traditions. In Scotland, for example, the *Confessio Scoticana* reflected Calvin, but also Bucer and other scholars, as well as Scots theologians. Here the Reformation sought, as Calvin had done, to go back to its apostolic roots, restoring the church from corruption. Later, political issues

were to play an ever increasing role in settling the shape of the ecclesiology. Presbyterian and episcopalian structures, Puritan, Enlightenment and pietist influences, battles for jurisdiction between church and state, and many other factors shaped the tradition. There were secessions and reunions, resulting in Reformed churches today with different sorts of *ethos*, and various degrees of internal pluralism.

The twentieth century brought new challenges to Reformed churches, not least in the struggle with Nazism, and more recently with racism in South Africa and the denial of justice in many parts of the world. At Barmen, Reformed and Lutheran Christians expressed a common faith. 'The Christian church is the community or brethren in which Jesus Christ acts presently in word and sacrament through the Holy Spirit'. But the church is not infallible, is always dependent on Jesus Christ. 'As the church of pardoned sinners, in the midst of a sinful world it has to witness by its faith and obedience, its message and its order, that it is alone, that it lives and desires to live only by his consolation and by his orders, in expectation of his coming'.

As regards the continuation of Reformed/Lutheran witness, we may note four topics: the practical implications of the priesthood of all believers, the relation of this to the ordained ministry, the pneumatological aspects of ecclesiology, and critical problems of the biblical foundations of ecclesiological statements. As a preliminary response, we may reflect that all Christians share in worship and service; ordained Christians support the others; the Spirit is always the Spirit of the crucified and risen Lord, producing Christlikeness; and all ecclesiological statements are made within the ongoing tradition of the gospel and are concerned with the service of Christ.

The Marks and Attributes of the Church

The church is God's church. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is the medium of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which we are sustained in and through the love of God.

The church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These are eschatological pointers, to which its particular manifestations rarely correspond completely, but they remain central in pointing to God's purpose for his church.

The church in Jesus Christ is one. It is called to express more fully that unity which it has. There will doubtless always be differences in theory and practice. But in central affirmations and discipleship there ought to be unity. To unite with other Christians is not of course just to swallow them up: we shall come to speak of practical ecumenism again.

The church is holy. The holiness of the church is in the first place not the holiness, the transparent goodness and love of its members, but the holiness of Christ. If the members fail to respond then they are members in name only.

The church is catholic. It encompasses the whole of our planet. Its concern is equally with the people of north and south, east and west, rich and poor.

The church is apostolic. It is only as the bearer of the witness of the time of the events concerning Jesus that the church can communicate a distinctive message to humankind. Though it must be rooted in the being of God, the church as such belongs to the created world and remains a highly fallible community.¹ Apostolicity is not a permanent endowment but a promise, something to which the church is constantly recalled by the word. The church may have to be critical of its own tradition, act in ways which are hard to ground in its classical texts and practices, be open to God's invitation to renewal and transformation. For example, it may be that service to the world, outside the Reformed community, must play a much larger role in discipleship that Calvin could have expected.

We may note too the conviction, deeply rooted in the tradition, that the church is indestructible. The promise is there as long as there are human beings alive, and it continues beyond physical death. God promises always to be with his people, however difficult conditions may become. However unfaithful we may be, God's promise remains with a visible community. This indestructibility is also the hope of the church. Under the Spirit, the church has the freedom to change, in order to be more faithful in God's future. The creation awaits the divine perfection and consummation, which is the fulfilment of the role of the church as a central instrument of God's love in the present. The kingdom come.

Ministry in the Reformed Tradition

The Reformation brought a new understanding of Christian discipleship as the priesthood of all believers. We must not see the clergy as the *real* church. All Christians are constantly invited to a ministry to one another and to all humankind. This is based on God's gift through grace of the Spirit of the risen Christ.

In addition to this universal ministry there has been since New Testament times a variety of particular ministries. People have been dedicated and employed, full- or part-time, to preach the word and minister the sacraments, to conduct pastoral work in congregation and community, to offer leadership

¹ cf. Colin Gunton, *The Church on Earth*, WARC, Lisbon 1988, p.28.

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and direction. Such ministries have taken different forms in different places and cultures.

The basic elements of such a structure are the ministers, men and women, at local congregational level. They may be priests and deacons, ministers, elders and deacons, bishops, priests and deacons, or other combinations. In some churches the central unit for administrative, liturgical and other purposes, is the congregation. In others it will be the presbytery, presided over by a chairman or moderator and including an equal number of ministers and elders, or a synod presided over by a superintendent, or a bishop, as in Hungary and some African Reformed churches.

Different structures encourage the use of authority and power, wisely or unwisely, in different ways. The basis of ministry remains not what we do but what God does. The service of the ordained minister is to seek to become an instrument of God's love in Christ for the world. At the same time, this ministry is not a virtuoso performance but takes place within the ministry of all Christians in and for society.

Ministry is not effectively carried out through consensus on the definition of church order. It has to be grounded in worship and in service. In worship, ministry takes place within the common stream of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and intercession. It also means preaching. If the word is not heard as living word, the church may die of boredom.

Sacraments

The ordained ministry is understood within the Reformed tradition as a ministry of word and sacrament. Calvin followed Augustine in describing a sacrament. 'One may call it a testimony of divine grace towards us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety towards him.' (Inst. IV, 13, 1). In his classic threefold structure of signification, there is the word of God's promise in the institution, then the matter or substance, that is, the Christ with his death and resurrection, and finally the effect, the benefits of Christ, the life in Christ (Inst. IV, 17, 1).

How are we to reflect this tradition today? Jesus Christ, I would myself want to say, is the one sacrament of the church in the primary sense. In his life, the mystery of God's will for men and women is made known in history and is effective in history. He is the *sacramentum fidei*. The communication of the nature of salvation through Christ is the ministry of the word and the service of the church. Jesus comes into the world and calls for faith: to this corresponds the act of God and our human response. In the celebration of the sacrament of baptism, he already operates as a living presence in the hearts

of men and women. In the sacrament of communion a new awareness of this living presence becomes possible, and men and women respond in thanksgiving for the continuation of his presence in the world.

Baptism and eucharist are understood in the light of the primary sacrament of Jesus Christ. John the Baptist prepared the people of God for God's coming; people repented, and received a baptism by water. Jesus was baptized to assume the ministry of the servant of God. After Pentecost all who join the churches are baptized. This is the baptism of the Spirit, as well as water baptism. It marks repentance, but also the placing of the baptized in the household of God. It is a work of God, and it also marks the natural response in repentance of those who hear his invitation. Those who come, as children or as adults, come to something that is already there.

The audible word is completed by the visible word. The eucharist, in Reformed understanding, is many things. It is a memorial, a deliberate recollection of the life and passion of Jesus Christ. It is an expression and anticipation of the hope that some day we shall all reach the fulfilment of God's purpose for us in Christ, when we shall be with God in the fullest sense. Through these elements we may receive through faith a deeper awareness of the real presence of Christ in the world and in our own lives as Christians. It is a presence of love, known in the sharing of bread and wine in community, a focal point of the Christian life for others. It is an occasion for thanksgiving for the presence of the risen Christ within our world, the first-fruits of that which is to come.

Our Reasonable Service

A Reformed ecclesiology arises from reflection on the service as well as the worship of the church. I concentrate on four issues, summarized as attention, thanksgiving, forgiveness and reconciliation. Listening to the word is important. Unless the church constantly attends, and allows its love to be rekindled and its faith to be inspired by the source of God's love in Christ, listening to the biblical narrative, then it rapidly becomes yet another minor voluntary social organisation.

Thanksgiving in prayer and worship is a related theme. A church without a sense of thanksgiving is likely to find itself in despair before the problems of modern society, leading to apathy and boredom.

Forgiveness is a kind of catalyst of Christian action. As individuals and as communities we have much for which to repent, much for which to forgive one another and to seek forgiveness. Here is an area where the church, based

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on God's forgiving love, may do something for its own life and for the life of our common humanity.

Reconciliation is related to forgiveness. Christians in community have often been notoriously divisive, whether in social, political, theological or other areas. The response to this is not a monolithic uniformity, but a reconciliation of diverse perspectives and life-styles on the basis of the character of God's love in Jesus Christ.

The oneness of the church means faithfulness to the one who is alone holy, Jesus Christ. The catholicity of the church means resolute action for tolerance and non-discrimination against all cultures, ethnic groups and social classes. It also requires protest against sectarianism within and without the Reformed family. The apostolicity of the church is the faithful communication of the gospel in word and action, in the continuing *communio sanctorum*.

Reformed ecclesiology has important consequences for the understanding of the Christian life, for individuals and for society. Life in the church is through justification by faith, the acceptance of the unacceptable. God has come to us with his grace, through the reconciliation made between love and justice in the life and fate of Jesus Christ. Judgement and justice are closely linked to love in Reformed thought, from Calvin to the study programme on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The Christian life issues in sanctification, in the quest for a deeper grasp of discipleship. It has its goal in the eschatological peace of God.

Life in the church is also part of the new creation, and an anticipation of God's new society. The love of God in society is always in solidarity with the suffering. It is always actively opposed to evil. It may be expressed through the spheres of politics, culture, economics, the arts and the sciences, to promote the increase among humankind of a responding love of God and neighbour.

Conclusion

All ecclesiological statements are statements of faith. They are both grounded in confidence and limited by awareness of provisionality. Faith is a completely human insight as well as a gift of God's Spirit. It reflects experience of the hidden love of God, whose presence is a mysterious and unique presence, simultaneously personal and transcendent. God is the subject and object of the church's faith, and the sustainer of its life of prayer. Basic to the church's task is the deepening of our knowledge of God. In the life and fate of Jesus we see the character of God's love. In the cross this love is expressed in ultimate self-giving and in the resurrection it is made available

to all eternity. The existence of the church, in its glory and misery, is a fact bearing witness to the faith that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, who is the life of the world.

'Where community is not only proclaimed but lived, where justice and peace are not only affirmed but become embodied, there God's coming kingdom creates for itself, even now in this world, a likeness.' (Swiss Protestant Synod, 1987—Common Testimony of Faith, 12).

It is the love of God in Jesus Christ, rather than the Reformed tradition itself, which matters to the Reformed tradition. That is why there can be a reconciled diversity in the tradition. It is of basic importance that this diversity in unity should be respected. For it is a paradox of the Reformed tradition that it is always open to unity, yet peculiarly vulnerable to internal division. We have begun from Calvin. But Calvin has always been significant in different ways for different areas of the tradition. Most of his particular family of churches have been called Reformed, rather than Calvinist, and include a variety of traditions, for example Presbyterian and Congregationalist. The Reformed tradition is inclusive rather than exclusive, as the continuing constructive dialogues with other traditions demonstrate. This is a living tradition which constantly looks for renewal in Jesus Christ, the source of its mission and unity, that it may be a better servant of God's love for all humanity.



The
PRESUMPTION
of PRESENCE

Essays in honour of D.W.D. SHAW

Edited by Peter McEnhill and G.B. Hall

Prayer in Contemporary Perspective

I

Prayer has always been at the centre of the Christian life. Through the prayers of countless generations, faith has been sustained and service has been supported. Here Christians continue in the traditions of Israel, and they share a tradition of prayer with the faithful of all religions. The forms of prayer vary widely, from the repetition of ancient prayers to the construction of informal contemporary expressions. Christians in different traditions, and with different approaches to faith, benefit immensely from the practice of prayer. It is particularly appropriate to reflect on prayer in honour of the recipient of this *Festschrift*. For his own example of the conduct of prayer in public worship, and the composition of prayers for worship, is itself an eloquent example of the effective combination of the traditional and the sharply contemporary in the formation of prayer.

If it is true that the Enlightenment rather than the Reformation constitutes the great watershed in the history of Christian thought, then this is probably the case also for the development of prayer. Before, there was, with important but comparatively rare exception, an unbroken tradition of meditation. After, there is a difficulty, a difficulty doubtless connected with the increasing questioning of the understanding of God, of divine action, or divine providence in the face of the experience of evil. Suppose we pray, and have no sense of divine presence. Suppose nothing ever seems to happen in response to prayer. As was noted, those most widely intensely prayed for, like sovereign heads of state, did not appear to live longer or be happier than others. The sense of divine absence, if not unique in the 1960's, was a widespread perception at that time. We find it impossible to pray. How are we to begin again? Can we, should we even try?

Awareness of the secular in the 1960's gave way, not to silence as some expected, but to the intensification of different varieties of traditional piety in the development of a pluralist spirituality, often in strikingly intense form. Different styles of prayer appealed to different people. What came across to some as decent and sincere appeared to others as lifeless, half-hearted and formal. What appealed to some as urgent and faithful devotion struck others as cloying, unctuous and smug. Both the politicisation and the

privatisation of prayer seemed to court the danger of cheap grace. God easily becomes the domestic property of particular interests, most commonly at the expense of other interests. One may fairly readily conclude that there are potential strengths and weaknesses in most devotional traditions. The solution is not necessarily an amalgam. The important thing is to seek to maximise the strengths and minimise the weaknesses in the traditions with which a particular community or individual feels most comfortable.

II

In this essay I shall seek to explore a contemporary liberal Christian understanding of prayer. I intend the qualification 'liberal' in a substantive sense, for I believe it to characterise fairly accurately the approach which I shall suggest. I use the word in an inclusive sense, indicating openness to both catholic and evangelical dimensions. But it does indicate also a desire for dialogue with the concerns of contemporary society as they are, and not as tradition might like them to be. In so far as we live in a post-modern environment, I see this as embracing the modern critically rather than finding new reasons for being prisoners of history. The term 'liberal' has been equally unacceptable to theologies of the right and of the left in recent years. And, indeed, sometimes liberal theology has been both shallow and intolerant. However, it seems to me that there is here a tradition with the potential for considerable development, and I am happy to reaffirm it.

Fecisti nos ad te, et cor nostrum est inquietum donec requiescat in te. It is worth reflecting on the reasons for the popularity of the prayers of Augustine's *Confessions*, and the reason for their continued appeal for at least a thousand years after their composition. They were written in a thoroughly contemporary mode. Beyond this they reflected an understanding of God which made a direct appeal to contemporary sensibilities. In other words, they had an edge, they cut ice with those who repeated them.

But in being contemporary they also echoed the already classic spirituality of the Psalms, utterances which themselves had been refined into expressions of basic religious response, and had become familiar over a very long period.

For millions of Christians, notably in the Anglican, Orthodox and Roman Catholic traditions, the ability to join in with and associate oneself with the familiar words of traditional prayers has been a great source of strength throughout the centuries. There has also been the reaction of boredom, the need to protest and to introduce a spontaneity to challenge the familiar. Sometimes this has been enormously successful, as in areas of the Reformation. At other times the loss of traditional liturgies has left gaps which modern, often less elegant substitutes have failed to fill, and the proliferation of alternatives, somewhat as in the proliferation of Bible translations, has dissolved what was once a valuable common heritage of powerful imagery. It would seem clear that space must be preserved for both

traditional and modern prayers in worship, and not simply for one or the other, or even for some timid amalgams.

Why should this be so? We are brought back to the question of God and the human experience of relationship with God. It is sometimes thought that traditional liberal theology was centred upon the notion of religious experience, and that the idea of experience of God as extending beyond the sphere of the religious is a post-liberal development. It might be more accurate to recall the stress on personal experience rather than logical deduction from the supposed nature of the universe, or from the dogmatic definitions of the early church, as characteristic of early modern theology. This is part of the positive legacy of the Western tradition, from Augustine to Luther.

Perhaps the most common characteristic of personal experience is that it varies. The nature and quality of our experience varies with our culture, background, location, age, circumstances and a thousand other factors. Different people have different sorts of experience. Our experience of the same subject, e.g. the pleasure of eating a particular food, varies on different occasions. It is hardly surprising that people's experience of God has varied, as this too is filtered through the normal channels of human perception. In the area of prayer, this is reflected both in the variety of forms of prayer and in the variety of interpretations with which we fill out the structures of traditional prayer. In that a sense of experience of God leads to response in prayer, formal or informal, experience of God may be said to include a religious dimension. Yet the notion of the religious may not be the most important element in the experience as perceived, especially if it occurs in the context of a dialectical reaction against religion.

Christian faith is concerned with experience of God, whether or not this is conceived in a religious framework. It is not concerned with experience as experience, or even experience of religion. The understanding of prayer is bound to be closely bound up with the understanding of God, and of God's relationship to us. In a framework in which God is perceived as a remote and solitary being, it will be hard to attach meaning to petitionary prayer. In a framework in which God is perceived as constantly in close personal touch with his followers, it will be hard not to see prayer as closely analogous to ordinary conversation between people. There are numerous stages between.

III

I shall now suggest certain features as central to a Christian understanding of God as I see this, and attempt to draw some specific consequences for the understanding of prayer.

God is both transcendent and immanent, utterly distinct from us and beyond our comprehension, and yet the ground and source of the being of each particular individual person. God's transcendence involves

mystery. God is perceived sometimes as present, sometimes as absent. But God is understood by Christians always to be with us, sharing in happiness and in suffering. God is creator and sustainer of all that is. God may act in different ways at different [times]. How he acts remains mysterious to us, but faith affirms that God is always concerned for the welfare of his creation.

Christian faith goes further in affirming God's reconciling presence through Jesus Christ. God is a God who has been definitively engaged with the physical order in the particularity of the life of a single human being. God has been involved in a highly particular way with the human experience of life and death, and has brought new life out of death. Within a world order too familiar with suffering and disaster there is the reality of new creation, and the hope of a future fulfilment of all creation through God's reconciling grace. Christians understand this development as the presence of the Spirit of Christ, crucified and risen. The Spirit is active both in the whole cosmos and in particular in the commitment of women and men in Christian community to service. The Spirit is present in the community in word and sacrament and in charitable effort.

It is this God, open to relationship in the simplest terms, yet so complex as to make our most sophisticated conceptuality entirely inadequate, not to say primitive, who is the subject and object of prayer. It makes more sense for Christians to speak of the triune God than not to speak of the triune God. Yet here again we must exercise care. History suggests that even our best formulations have served as a barrier and sometimes a threat to the effective communication of the gospel invitation of divine love. Many have been persecuted in the name of divine love, and we should be cautious to assume that intolerance is a thing of the past. Grace which is less than gracious is not the grace of God.

IV

This is the God in whom we trust, to whom we pray. There will be times when we wish to use the simplest language and other times when we find profoundly meaningful utterance in the complex language of some traditional prayers. It will be appropriate to use on occasion all the traditional patterns of prayer, of adoration, confession, intercession, thanksgiving.

All forms of prayer can be misused, can become dead, banal, intimidating, downright tasteless. All forms of prayer can be appropriate in a very particular context. It is possible to use the most personal prayers of intercession in what most of us would regard as a highly secular context. It is possible to use informal prayers reflecting the needs of society in a highly traditional liturgical setting. Sometimes we do not succeed in these things and sometimes we do. If we seek to attend to the God who is the ground of our prayer, then experience may suggest a sense of the appropriate in very different contexts.

Prayers are the context of communication between God and humanity, and it is entirely right that they should be said by individuals. A classic example of the pattern of individual prayer, from the first half of the twentieth century, can be seen in John Baillie's *Diary of Private Prayer*, which became meaningful and familiar to a large number of people. But prayers are also often said corporately. Here people are sometimes moved by the thought that the same prayers have been said all over the world, or in the same place, for hundreds of years. Important too is the corporate experience of prayer in community. Many of us will be reminded in saying particular prayers of the context in which we have shared worship in the past, and of those whom that shared worship was bound in corporate Christian service. Two such immediately come to mind, and others will easily suggest themselves to readers.

O God, who hast prepared for them that love Thee such good things as pass man's understanding; pour into our hearts such love towards Thee, that we, loving Thee above all things, may obtain Thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with Thee and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

It is not strange that God's love for us should reinforce our love both for God and for our fellow human beings. Indeed, it is the strangeness of the divine love that it has this effect, love to the loveless shown. In this way all Christian life takes place in the context of prayer. Yet this prayer may be all the more effective for being quietly in the background, rather than in the foreground, of Christian life. It is not an end in itself, but a means to the effective communication of the divine love through human faculties, of perception, of imagination, of action.

Prayer is a completely human activity. It partakes of all the variety, the ambiguity, the fluctuation, the hesitancy and the incompleteness of the human. And it has its own proper human validity and autonomy. But Christian faith has often perceived prayer as a particular sort of participation in the action of God's love in the world. If you had not been seeking me, you would not have found me, Augustine reflected. God is there before us, encouraging, inviting. 'Our Father, which art in heaven'. The perception of the fatherhood of God is the basic ground of trusting communication. Christian prayers are made through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is through the consequences of the life, death and resurrection of Christ, the beginning of a new creation, that Christian prayer in the face of so much that is negative in the created order can be sustained. It is with a sense of being guided by God's Spirit that Christians often feel prayer to become possible. God as

Father, Son and Spirit is perceived to be the enabler as well as the subject of prayer. The effectiveness of prayer is not dependent on the spiritual excellence of the believer, but simply involves waiting in attention to God. The dynamic of petitionary prayer is not a negotiation with the divine but a participation in God's particular presence to all his creatures. From the viewpoint of discipleship, the worship of God and the service of humanity are two aspects of this same participation in the service of God, which we trust will be fulfilled in God's future. This is a process which is only in its infancy, and in which our perception is much more childlike than we often care to imagine.

V

It may be worthwhile at this point to return to a consideration of different sorts of traditional prayer. It may seem odd in a supposedly secular age to utter prayers of adoration. Yet precisely in the midst of a complex and busy life it makes sense to pause, to concentrate on the dimension of the presence of God. For many people this attention will come most naturally at the beginning of a church service, though it need not be confined to a formal act of worship. In such a context a movement to confession, to an opening up to God of our awareness of inadequacy, of falling short in so many ways, may not be such a difficult step. Because we trust that God is a God whose nature is self-giving love, we are assured of God's acceptance of the unacceptable, his forgiving grace to take us together with our shortcomings into the communion of his love.

God's grace is given only to be given away. Reconciliation relates closely to intercession. It is in solidarity with all humanity, and especially with all who are exploited, oppressed and marginalised in our world, that God's grace is effective. There has been much debate, especially since the Enlightenment, about the propriety and effectiveness of intercessory prayer. It may be that God is not always able to intervene in particular providence directly on behalf of an individual, because of the nature of the universe which he has created, though there may be other occasions in which this is possible. We know only enough of the complexity of the cosmos to beware of sweeping generalisation. But faith understands God to be a constant, invisible presence to all humanity in all circumstances, an identifying, supporting and often suffering presence. It is in affirmation of this presence, through life and death, and through all frailties of human motivation and action, individual and social, that intercessory prayer is made through faith. Such prayer is a pointer to God's prior presence, and may itself become an instrument of grace.

Prayer remains also a means of thanksgiving. Faith relies on the presence of God, but it does not take this loving presence for granted. It celebrates, sometimes in a colourful and sometimes in a quiet way, the reality of the gospel. Thanksgiving may take the form of a large scale public service, or

the solitary reflection of the individual. It may reflect particular stages in an individual life, or in the life of a society. It may be associated with word and sacrament. This too is part of the communication between God and humanity which is initiated and sustained by God.

VI

I return in the end to the connection between prayer and theology. The possibility of prayer is itself a gift of God, and like all God's gifts in creation, something for which to give thanks. Like food and drink, personal relationships, work and leisure, it can be very good, and it can enable humanity to grow. Like all these things, it can also be subject to misuse, and indeed bad examples can have a widely damaging effect. All kinds of coercion and exploitation, on a personal or a social level, take place in a context of prayer. Bad theology as well as good theology may flourish in a framework of prayer.

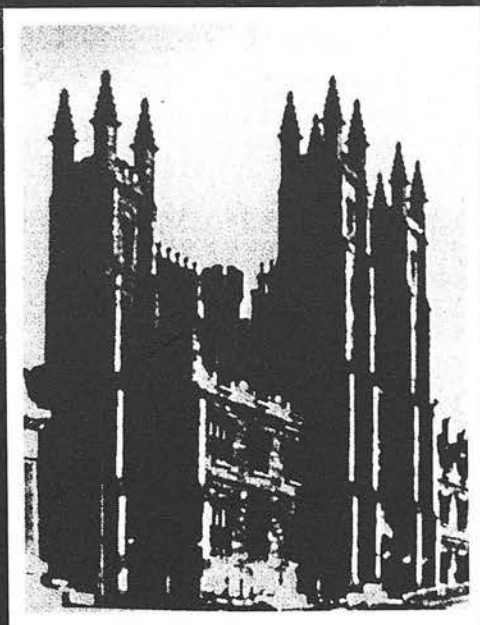
It is often said that theology should end in worship, and serve worship as the ultimate human expression of devotion to God. This may be a somewhat narrow understanding of the gospel. It seems to me that we are invited to try, however unsuccessfully, to relate our theology to all that we do, in the practice of service to others, both on an individual and on a social basis. There is a continuing reciprocity between devotion to God and devotion to humanity. This is classically expressed in Luther's aphorism that 'a Christian lives in Christ through faith and in his neighbour through love,' or in Bonhoeffer's remark that 'only he who stands up for the Jews may sing hymns in church'.

Devotion which ends in adoration of God can sometimes be fairly scornful of God's creatures, especially the most marginalised of them. The cost of discipleship lies in part at least in working out the intimate connections between the service of God and the service of man. Of course we shall not succeed in all these areas all or even some of the time. But if we try to attend to these connections, they may help us in our prayer to avoid the more selfish bounds of some strands of pietism, and attend to the participation of God in humanity as co-humanity, as the way, the truth and the life.

It may be appropriate to end with a prayer composed by Bill Shaw for a meeting of a committee, which in many ways exemplifies the gifts which its author has shared with so many over the years.

O God, in whom are united beauty and goodness, justice and truth, grant that what we do this day may help and not hinder the coming of these things among us. Give us in our thinking, clarity; in our listening, charity; in our speaking, brevity, that in our deciding we may above all respect the truth, and each other, and those whom we are here to serve. Amen.

GEORGE NEWLANDS



DISRUPTION
TO
DIVERSITY

EDINBURGH DIVINITY

1846 - 1996

Edited by

David F. Wright and Gary D. Badcock

Chapter 6



Divinity and Dogmatics

George Newlands

VARIETIES OF THEOLOGY

THE PURPOSE of this chapter is to trace the development of systematic theology, in the broader history of theology at Edinburgh, roughly from the period after 1843. This is not as easy as it sounds. At different periods, and in different centres of learning, various areas of theology are studied in different sorts of combinations. The mix is often influenced by variations in consideration of method, as well as by the accidents of the particular interests of the personnel involved at given times. For example, within the range of Edinburgh theology over the last hundred years or so, dogmatics may be thought to be especially associated with the chairs occupied by H. R. Mackintosh, G. T. Thomson, T. F. Torrance and J. P. Mackey. But other scholars also taught in the area of dogmatics over long periods, and the dogmatics specialists were inevitably involved in other areas of theology.

The word 'theology' has a long history as a general term embracing all the traditional ecclesiastical disciplines. The older UK universities had faculties of divinity. Dogmatic or systematic theology might be used to distinguish constructive theology from the biblical, historical and practical disciplines. And again divinity could distinguish dogmatic or symbolic theology from philosophical theology or the philosophy of religion, again terms which could have different nuances at different times, notably before and after the deployment of the techniques of Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy to talk of God. In the views of different scholars, these nuances could be of decisive significance for the understanding of their subject, to the extent of reflecting the

infinitely convoluted shades of meaning of the terminology of the classical doctrinal formulations themselves.

Apart from the fluctuating subject divisions within the disciplines there is another central factor for the development of theology to consider, the effect of the Disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843. From 1843 to the Union of the Churches in 1929 there had to be provision for separate theological education for candidates for the ministry in both the Established Church and on the other hand the Free Church and then the United Free Church, the one continuing over in the Old College of the University of Edinburgh, the other in the new buildings of New College. After the Union teaching was again to be concentrated in New College (though some is done today in the George Square campus). Theological teaching and research continued in the city for other denominations, Free Church, United Free, Congregational, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian and others, and institutions, from St Andrews Drygrange and Coates Hall to the famous United Presbyterian Divinity Hall, came and went.¹ All of these would have to be taken into account in a comprehensive picture of Edinburgh theology over the period.

OLD COLLEGE: THE UNIVERSITY FACULTY

This chapter begins with the faculty in the Old College, where Thomas Chalmers had been the Professor of Systematic Theology since 1828. The contributor of the *DNB* article on Chalmers, W. G. Blaikie, himself a Professor in the Apologetics chair at New College, commented that 'In the theological Chair he was more distinguished for the impulse which he gave to his students than for original contributions to theological science.'² After his dramatic departure at the Disruption in 1843 his chair was filled by the Principal of the University himself, the polymath John Lee, till 1859. From 1859 to 1875 the chair was held by Thomas J. Crawford (1812–75), who wrote a number of substantial volumes, including books on *The Fatherhood of God* and *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement*. The most substantial figure of the early part of our period, a scholar highly regarded throughout the country, was Robert Flint (1838–1910), who held the chair of

¹ See the chapter in this volume by D. F. Wright.

² *DNB* IX, 451. On Chalmers see Brown, S. J. (1982) and Cheyne (1985). *DNB* has a number of useful articles on other figures discussed in this chapter, e.g. Lee, Buchanan and Cunningham.

Divinity and Dogmatics

Systematic Theology in Old College 1876–1903.³ Flint produced a number of books on the philosophy of religion and apologetics, but he lectured on a much wider range of subjects. For example, the *University Calendar* lists series on ‘Ecclesiology and soteriology’ for 1893–4, and ‘Man, sin and Christology’ for 1895–6. Though Flint appears to have been a remarkably quiet, reserved, almost withdrawn figure, almost absent from church affairs, his writings were lucid, rational and well organised. They made their own powerful impact on his students and contemporaries.

In *Theism* (1877) Flint set out an apologetic argument for belief in God, based not on feeling, on Kant’s idealism or on Hegel’s concept of the absolute (against the currents of much contemporary thought) but on rational grounds. The traditional arguments for the existence of God are rehearsed, not to prove God’s existence, but to show the rationality of faith, in the manner of Aquinas. Sell compares him appropriately with Joseph Butler. Flint combines a strong theological sense of the sin of man, in the Calvinist tradition, with a typical nineteenth-century optimism about human progress in society. His may not perhaps have been a theology to fire the imagination, but his learning, especially in his extensive *History of the Philosophy of History* (1893), the acuteness of his philosophical argument and his resistance to prevailing fashions were much respected long after his work in the University had ceased.

Flint’s period in office coincided with the revolution in transport which was to make it easier for students to travel around the country by train and to travel abroad to attend other universities. Students from Britain, Germany and America could attend the lectures of the great men in each other’s countries. Theology attracted the interest of some of the very best minds in any student generation, and Flint was succeeded in the Old College – the Faculty of the University and the Established Church of Scotland – by another long-serving professor, W. P. Paterson (1860–1939).

W. P. Paterson

Like Flint, Paterson was best known for his work in ‘divinity’, but lectured also in doctrine – e.g. in 1923–4 he offered a course in Dogmatic Theology. Active in church affairs, he was a prolific author of many books. Perhaps the best known of these was *The Rule of Faith*,

³ For Flint see Sell (1987), 39–63.

a magisterial survey of the origins and substantive content of Christian theology which went through a number of editions from 1912 to 1932. In this work Paterson follows a historical approach to theology, which owes much to the influence of Albrecht Ritschl. Part I of the volume is devoted to 'The Seat of Doctrine'. Here he considers various theories of doctrinal origins, Roman Catholic, Protestant, charismatic, rationalist, and the approaches of what he terms 'The Criterion of Feeling' (Schleiermacher) and 'Biblical Eclecticism' (Ritschl). He concludes that there are important truths in each of the classical theories. He then turns to the substance of doctrine. This starts out from a chapter on 'The Nature of the Christian Religion', summed up in a long definition in a footnote,⁴ on the tried pattern of a modification through Ritschl of Schleiermacher's famous definition.

Paterson next considers various confessional and philosophical interpretations of the nature of religion, particular readings of the universal notion, from the orthodox interpretation (the early church) to Roman Catholic, general Protestant, particular Reformed, and rationalist readings. Finally there are chapters on 'The Theology of Schleiermacher', 'The Ritschlian Revision', 'Movements of the Twentieth Century' and an Epilogue. Paterson enters sympathetically into each of these readings. For example, the section on 'The Genius of Roman Catholicism' begins with the affirmation that 'Roman Catholicism attests its greatness by the fact that it is one of the real dividing forces in the modern world. It is easy to take up towards it any attitude save that of indifference.'⁵ The section on Schleiermacher's *The Christian Faith*, written long before English speakers had the benefit of the New College translation edited by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, is comprehensive and scholarly. The Epilogue is at pains to distinguish between the centre and the periphery of theology. 'The central content of the Christian revelation, the gospel which forms the soul and power of the Christian religion, is on an altogether different footing from the speculative utterances made by theology in the outlying provinces of religious thought.' But Paterson is much too cautious to attempt the merest hint of where the centre and the provinces begin!

Paterson was as concerned for praxis as he was for theory. In 1915 he edited a volume of academic essays on *German Culture*, in which he sought to give a fair estimate of the virtues and failings of his subject –

⁴ Paterson (1912), 199 n. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

in marked contrast with the apocalyptic tones already adopted in 1914 by Sir George Adam Smith, the Bishop of London and many others. This becomes clear from his co-editing (with David Watson) in 1918 of the Report for the Church of Scotland Commission on the War, on *Social Evils and Problems*. In the course of a long introduction Paterson surveys the sphere of the family, menaced by drink, poverty and infidelity, the wider circle of friends and acquaintances, the economic sphere, with the dangers of rural depopulation, dubious business ethics, unequal distribution of wealth and political instability. Against this he sets the Christian moral ideal, of duty given through conscience, of Christ as exemplar, of an ethic consisting 'in the main of principles, and not of hard-and-fast legislation'. He suggested the foundation of a special committee, 'a special organ whose business would be to sift and arrange the Church's own knowledge in this field, and to assimilate the important results of the investigations made by the representatives of Social Science'. It was important to have a deliberate discussion of such matters as 'the new and more hopeful methods of dealing with criminals'.

Paterson would perhaps be gratified to know that the Church of Scotland's Church and Nation Committee is actively grappling with these issues (1995), but less happy to learn that there has been nothing remotely like a uniform rate of improvement. The following chapters of *Social Evils and Problems* contain excellent material on such topics as 'The Housing of the People' and 'Industrial Problems', along with essays such as that by Dr Norman Maclean on 'The Decreasing Birth-rate' which make less convincing reading today. The results of contraception are utterly wicked; 'If Australia and New Zealand are not occupied by the British, the yellow man cannot be shut out'; Girls are to be trained 'to be wife and mother, and to reign as a queen in a happy home'. It is indeed difficult to jump out of our cultural skins.

Paterson's successor in the Old College chair, in 1934, bringing us up to living memory, was John Baillie (1886-1960). But by now the Union of the Churches (1929) had enabled the United Free Church Professor of Systematic Theology, the remarkable H. R. Mackintosh, to concentrate on dogmatic theology, and Baillie lectured in divinity or philosophical theology up to 1956. However, Baillie had already published in the field of Christology from America in 1929, and he retained a deep interest in all things theological. He was, of course, aware of the profound contributions to doctrine being made by his brother Donald over in St Andrews.

NEW COLLEGE

From 1845 to 1900 there was, of course, an independent Divinity Faculty in the Free Church, meeting during 1843–50 in temporary accommodation and then in New College. From 1900 to 1929, New College was similarly the seat of the United Free Church's Faculty. Thomas Chalmers, late of the Old College, was the first Professor of Divinity, and clearly had numerous other things on his mind. It was intended that he should be succeeded in 1847 by R. S. Candlish, who never took up office, remaining at Free St George's on the death of his chosen successor, and eventually, in 1862, combining the charge with the Principalship of New College. Hugh Watt lists James Buchanan, James MacGregor, John Laidlaw and James Wardrop as early professors of systematic theology.⁶ These men built up the reputation of the Edinburgh College, at the time when its Glasgow sister institution in the West, later to be called Trinity College, was at the height of its intellectual powers, in the hands of A. B. Bruce, James Orr, James Denney, James Moffatt, George Adam Smith and Thomas Lindsay, and in Glasgow University on Gilmorehill the Caird brothers, Edward and John, were turning doctrine into magic with the assistance of Hegel.⁷ This was a remarkable period when some of the brightest Scots of their generation would turn to theology (some falling by the wayside to become archbishops of Canterbury – Randall Davidson, Cosmo Gordon Lang), when remarkable things were to be done in all four Scottish faculties, an achievement which was all too soon to be confronted with the horrors of global war.

James Buchanan (1804–70) was Professor of Apologetics 1845–7, and then Professor of Systematic Theology from 1847, on the death of Chalmers, to 1868. He wrote books on *Faith in God and Modern Atheism Compared*, on *Analogy* in the tradition of Butler, and on *The Doctrine of Justification*. In his introductory lecture of 1847 he stressed the centrality of the Bible. 'The contents of scripture, however miscellaneous, afford the materials for a complete system of religious truth: and its topics are so related to each other, as to fall naturally and necessarily into the order of a regular scheme.'⁸ A. C. Cheyne commented that 'it should

⁶ Watt is of course indispensable; cf. too *FES*, *FUFCS* and *DSCHT*. I am grateful to Professor A. C. Cheyne, himself of no small influence on New College theology, for notes on these early figures. On A. C. Fraser, who held the chair of Logic in New College 1846–57, see pp. 38, 48–9, and *DSCHT* 333–4.

⁷ See Hazlett (1993).

⁸ Cunningham (1851), 88.

be remembered that he and traditionalists like him enjoyed a position of virtual monopoly of all the positions of power and responsibility in the Scottish Churches',⁹ while the writer of the *DNB* article observed that 'Although not eminent for his powers of originality, Buchanan had a remarkable faculty of collecting what was valuable in the researches and arguments of others, and presenting it in clear form and lucid language.'¹⁰

James MacGregor (1830–94) appears to have written little. But he supported strongly Robertson Smith in 1880, disapproved of colleague Robert Rainy's treatment of him, and emigrated to New Zealand. He was succeeded by John Laidlaw (1881–1904), who apparently gave cautious support to Smith, edited Robert Bruce's sermons on the sacrament, had his memoir written by H. R. Mackintosh but was held by at least one acute observer to have 'made a complete and lamentable mess'¹¹ in New College. James Wardrop (1821–1909) appears to have made little impact, perhaps understandably since he was seventy-nine at the time of his appointment to an additional chair (no ageism here). Mention should be made in this section of William Cunningham, resolutely conservative since as a divinity student he had gone to report the heresies of McLeod Campbell to the presbytery. Cunningham came in 1843 to the Apologetics chair, then moved in 1845 on Dr Welsh's death to the Church History chair. His *Theological Lectures* were not to appear till 1878, at the height of the Robertson Smith controversy.

H. R. Mackintosh

Facile princeps among the systematic theologians at the top of the Mound in this period was Hugh Ross Mackintosh (1870–1936), appointed in 1904, continuing in his chair till well after the Union, and retiring in 1936. Mackintosh established a well-deserved reputation early with *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ* in 1912. It is worth pausing to take in the full measure of this project, on which essays were to be set for sixty years, and which we may see as a benchmark of the quality which New College would produce. Though a work of systematic theology, it begins quite firmly with Christology in the New Testament. There are six main chapters on what he takes to be six main types of apostolic doctrine – the Synoptic, the primitive (Acts and 1 Peter), the

⁹ Cheyne (1983), 68.

¹⁰ *DNB* VII, 194.

¹¹ W. Robertson Nicoll, in Darlow (1925), 370. And see Laidlaw (1901), and Mackintosh (1907).

Pauline, those represented by the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Apocalypse, and the Johannine. These are distinctive but not contradictory. We begin with the Christ of the synoptic Gospels. Mackintosh makes the point early that the Gospels are not biographies. Their purpose is simply to convey the expression of a great personality, but they make no attempt to cover the entire life.¹² Likewise, Jesus' knowledge is limited.

It has gradually become clear that to make Jesus responsible for such things as the details of an ethico-political system, valid for all time, or to invest His words with legal authority in matters of Biblical criticism and history, is wholly misleading and irrelevant.¹³

Mackintosh then moves on in Book II to 'The History of Christological Doctrine', indicating in the notes a considerable debt to the classic German historians of doctrine. He covers the whole area from the Apostolic Fathers to Dorner and William Sanday, and then turns in Book III to his 'Reconstructive Statement of the Doctrine', and questions of method. The understanding of the person of Christ is then spelled out in two sections. In the first, 'The Immediate Utterances of Faith', Mackintosh speaks of Christ as the object of faith, as the exalted Lord, and then offers accounts of the perfect humanity and the divinity of Christ.

In the last final section he tackles 'The Transcendent Implicates of Faith', beginning from the Christian idea of the incarnation. He then considers the pre-existence of the Son, the self-limitation of God in Christ (kenosis), the self-realisation of Christ, and finally Christ and the divine Trinity.

There is an appendix on the Virgin Birth, which he regards as a wonderful symbol rather than an essential element of faith (in contrast to the contemporary inclusion among the American *Fundamentals* of the defence of it by Glasgow's James Orr). Mackintosh marshals the evidence, historical and theological, reaches his own judgment, and leaves it to his readers to make up their minds. He is not afraid of deploying contemporary historical criticism of his sources, nor afraid of bringing in philosophical and doctrinal considerations as required. There is an irenic note, a catholicity of spirit which is not dissimilar to the tone of the *Lux Mundi* collection in the revival of Christology south of the border, and which was to be echoed in the Baillie brothers

¹² Mackintosh (1912), 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 13.

and their successors. This openness to genuine theological enquiry without dogmatic censoriousness was to be valued by generations of students who flocked to New College from many parts of the world.

Mackintosh looked back with a firm sense of tradition. He was to speak of McLeod Campbell as 'the greatest of all Scottish theologians, to whom perhaps more than to any other single mind we today owe a spiritual interpretation of the central Christian ideas'.¹⁴ But he was also acutely aware of the social problems of the present – e.g. in his references to international and racial paralysis and to class war in *The Divine Initiative* of 1921.

AFTER THE UNION: JOHN BAILLIE

Mackintosh, translator and editor with J. S. Stewart of Schleiermacher in English, was to be much impressed in later years by Karl Barth, an influence heavily reflected in his *Types of Modern Theology* of 1937, and it was in this tradition that we find his successor, G. T. Thomson (1887–1958), active in beginning the monumental English translation of the *Church Dogmatics*, a task to be completed under the supervision of his successor, T. F. Torrance. Thomson published almost nothing of his own, but also translated Heinrich Heppes's *Reformed Dogmatics* – and lectured directly from it. His earlier militarism left its mark on his language and style; somewhat surprisingly, he was conductor of the College Music Society.

New College theology in the 1940s was to be almost synonymous with the name of John Baillie, active as a philosophical theologian and as a great churchman, chairman of the Baillie Commission which produced 'The Interpretation of God's Will in the Present Crisis', during the War years. The story of the contribution to theology made by John and Donald Baillie has been well documented recently in *Christ, Church and Society*, edited by Professor David Fergusson.¹⁵ Baillie's theology, though not focused on dogmatics, was of course entirely relevant to dogmatic issues, especially in his analyses of revelation. He was an appreciative but sharply perceptive critic of Karl Barth. In his own excellent chapter on 'John Baillie: Orthodox Liberal', David Fergusson discusses Baillie's early Christology, which combines criticism of the Chalcedonian doctrine with stress on the uniqueness and finality

¹⁴ Mackintosh (1929), 157.

¹⁵ Fergusson (1993).

of Christ, anticipating much that was to be developed in D. M. Baillie's *God was in Christ*.

When we turn to John Baillie's last book, the undelivered Gifford Lectures published as *The Sense of the Presence of God*, we find a characteristic combination of an appeal to experience with an exploration of rational grounds for belief in God. 'Our total experience of reality presents itself as a single experience.' But procedures of verification and falsification are required. 'A faith that is consistent with everything possible is not a faith in anything actual.' But faith remains central, as 'an awareness of the divine presence itself, however hidden behind the veils of sense'. Baillie often stresses that the appropriate human response to God is gratitude. 'Gratitude is not only the dominant note of Christian piety but equally the dominant motive of Christian action in the world.' It was no accident that Baillie was as well known for his *Diary of Private Prayer* as for his theology. His combination of openness to liberal scholarship with unapologetic devotion was immensely attractive, and did much for the reputation of New College throughout the world. There was an important social dimension to Baillie's thought, owing much to friendship with Reinhold Niebuhr and clear in the work of the Baillie Commission. This was to bear fruit in the social theology of the post-War period, and might still provide new stimulus to a tradition of socially engaged theology. But for the time being the somewhat hazardous world of the social sciences was to be overshadowed by a new emphasis on transcendental theology in the classical tradition of Reformed thought.

We should not forget here the continuing dialogue with practical theology and Christian ethics in the College (and indeed with the other disciplines; those of us who studied at New College developed our theology from discussion with a wide range of our teachers). There was early in New College a second Divinity chair, later renamed Apologetics, Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology (and later still, Christian Ethics and Practical Theology), held by William Cunningham, James Bannerman, William Garden Blaikie, Alexander Martin, Daniel Lamont and William S. Tindal. This area is explored elsewhere in this volume.

THE 1950s AND BEYOND: T. F. TORRANCE

With the coming to New College of Thomas Forsyth Torrance, (1913-), first as Professor of Church History (1950-2) and then as

Professor of Christian Dogmatics (1952–79), we reach the period when the influence of Barth in Scotland was to be at its height. This phenomenon has been viewed in very different ways, as a great blessing or as the time of the 'Barthian captivity'. (The writer is glad to recall attending with his wife Barth's last seminars in Basel, the end of a very long line of New College pilgrims to the shrine.) Like Flint, Torrance swiftly made an international reputation through the rapid production of a series of solid books. But if Professor Flint was almost invisible as a man, the same could scarcely be said of Professor Torrance. Coming into the ecumenical movement, newly resurgent with great hopes after 1945, with a strong conviction of the value of Reformed theology and a concern for traditional Christian orthodoxy, Torrance developed international theological contacts, was the chief inspiration behind the new *Scottish Journal of Theology*, helped to found a new Society for the Study of Theology, and influenced deeply generations of candidates for the ministry in Edinburgh. He was greatly concerned for theology in its purest form as a theoretical discipline, for the pastoral ministry, and for the welfare of the church and of all his students. For those who shared his perspectives, he was deeply inspiring. For those who were not persuaded, Tom Torrance was never less than impressive. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Torrance had been born and spent formative years, not in suburban Scotland but in China at a time of great political unrest, in a pious missionary culture, acutely conscious of ancient civilisation, random cruelty, and pagan immorality of biblical dimensions in the closest proximity. This dimension was continued in his experience as a war chaplain. A deep seriousness of purpose is never far from the surface of his work.

Torrance's published work effectively begins with his Basel doctoral thesis, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*. This work exhibits the keen interest in the history of doctrine which characterised much of his later work, and his confidence in reinterpreting conventional wisdom in the light of a distinctive understanding of grace. Its fruits are seen further in *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, *Conflict and Agreement*, *The School of Faith*, and *Theology in Reconstruction*. Some have seen in his controversial but always imaginative work on the history of Christian thought Torrance's most enduring contribution to theology.

Beyond dogmatics, Torrance, following the anti-modern tradition of Barth, came to develop an increasingly sceptical view of the development of the humanities since the Enlightenment, and to focus on the cosmic dimensions of incarnation in a series of studies in theology

and science. Here he is generally recognised as a pioneer in an immensely important field, to be developed (albeit often in diverse directions) by Pannenberg, Peacocke and others. On retiral from New College (after winning the Templeton Prize for theology and numerous academic distinctions), he helped to set up the Center of Theological Inquiry at Princeton, through which research on the foundations of theology and the natural sciences was to develop. In later years he continued to publish extensively, combining an appreciation of the most modern cosmological theory with patristic studies and a critique of liberalism in all its forms, maintaining a robust defence of highly traditional positions on doctrine and ethics, notably on the Virgin Birth, conservative biblical interpretation, abortion, fertilisation and embryology, and on sexuality.

Some indication of Professor Torrance's characteristic contribution may be had from the Templeton Prize volume, *Theological Science*. What is required of us here is not a philosophy of religion in which religion is substituted in the place of God, but a philosophy of theology in which we are directly engaged with knowledge of the reality of God. Scientific theology is active engagement in cognitive relation to God in obedience to the demands of his reality. How God can be known is determined from first to last by the way in which he is actually known. God reverses our whole natural relation of knowing, in directing it out beyond all possibility in ourselves to knowledge of God, altering the shape of our minds to receive and recognise the truth. Scientific activity is the rigorous extension of our own basic rationality, as we seek to act towards things in ways appropriate to their own natures, letting them shine in their own light. In theology it is by relation to the incarnation that our statements have their own fundamental ontologic. The human sciences have in large measure lost their way in the distortions created by Enlightenment thought. But there are close analogies between the methods of the natural scientist and of the theologian, properly understood.

John McIntyre

John Baillie's chosen successor was to be John McIntyre (1916–), who like Baillie came to New College after a period abroad, in this case in Australia. Here McIntyre had produced an incisive critique of Anselm's theology, especially of his work on the atonement. *St Anselm and his Critics* reflected close contacts with analytical philosophy in Sydney, and was to be read and cited widely. As with Baillie, philosophical

techniques were brought to bear on theological, and often doctrinal topics. Professor McIntyre's careful analytical approach could also be deployed in constructive theology, again with doctrinal interests, in *On the Love of God*, *The Shape of Christology* and *The Shape of Soteriology*. *On the Love of God* is a profound meditation on the heart of Christian faith. 'The love of God is what the Gospel is about. It is, then, the whole content of our faith, as it is its whole object.' The study then explores various depth dimensions of love, as concern, commitment, communication, community, involvement, identification, response and responsibility. Critical scrutiny of concepts is deployed together with an underlying pastoral motif to produce what amounts to a contemporary restatement of atonement and reconciliation. In some respects we might say that here Anselm is updated and transformed. Perhaps it may be added that the author of this chapter found the study constantly illuminating in writing on the same topic twenty years later.

The Shape of Christology was a more formally structured monograph, which exploited to the full McIntyre's philosophical gifts. It explored the given Christology, methods and models, notably the two-nature model and the revelation model. On a first reading rather skeletal, it becomes clear that it contains numerous clues to fleshing out the skeleton in the relation of the life of Jesus to the life of God. The book provided an exacting paradigm of an approach to Christology which eschewed the rather overblown rhetoric of revelation then in fashion, and called for faithful but critical discernment. The search for a more adequate and more accurate approach to God, through faith without fideism and reason without rationalism, was to issue in the 1987 volume, *Faith, Theology and Imagination*. Here 'the Parabolic Imagination' is exegeted in relation to ethical discourse, metaphysics, methodology and epistemology. We are offered no less than thirteen roles for the use of images in theology, the last being appropriately the recreative character of images, renewing and revitalising significant experience of God and of Christian community. McIntyre seeks a proper balance between the human dimensions of faith and the divine initiative, while laying characteristic stress on the links between theology and worship. *The Shape of Soteriology* continued this strand, arguing for example for the importance of the reading 'This is my body which is *broken* for you' in the eucharistic liturgy. Examination of the logic of the various biblical models of salvation shows that they complement each other, and each has a role to play in pastoral counselling. As often, a cool

sense of humour is just about allowed to emerge, in the entitling of a chapter, 'Universalisers, Relaters and Contemporanisers', and the work ends with a focus on forgiveness.

McIntyre followed John Baillie in combining appreciation of the constructive content of Barth's theology with scepticism about the doctrine of revelation which was integral to his theological programme. He reinforced the influence of the liberal evangelical tradition, and though not especially liberal by contemporary standards was widely held to represent the best of the broad church inheritance in Scotland. New College, situated in the city of Edinburgh, where the Church of Scotland office is also located, has always had close links with the Church. John Baillie, Tom Torrance and John McIntyre were all Moderators of the General Assembly and all played an active role in the affairs of the Church of Scotland. Those who had the privilege of sitting under Torrance and McIntyre had the benefit of a uniquely valuable double perspective in systematic theology.

INFLUENTIAL LECTURERS

In addition to the professors there were lecturers in these areas from the 1950s on, many of whom were later professors in other places. Though Victorian notions of professorial hierarchy still linger on in the universities, each one of the lecturers has had an increasingly deep influence on developments in theology and made important contributions to the churches.¹⁶ D. W. D. Shaw, later to be Principal and Dean both in Edinburgh and St Andrews, introduced process thought to Scots divinity, along with squash and most other essential aspects of civilisation. James Torrance reminded students tirelessly, and in view of increasing fundamentalism perhaps prophetically, of the absolute priority of grace. John Zizioulas, later a Metropolitan Archbishop, introduced Orthodoxy to an astounded Northern world. Alasdair Heron, now Professor in Erlangen, imaginatively recreated the living tradition of Reformed theology for those who knew it not. Ruth Page, theologian of 'ambiguity' and of the animal kingdom, has become prominent in ecumenical theological circles as a representative of the Reformed tradition. Alan Lewis was to write most profoundly about Christ and suffering before himself dying tragically at an early age, with immense courage and faith. At one level, if the history of New College

¹⁶ See the titles of representative publications listed under the names of each of the following in the Bibliography.

Divinity and Dogmatics

dogmatics means anything, *si monumentum quaeris*, we may remember Alan Lewis. David Fergusson demonstrated that you could utter the dreaded word Bultmann, play football, and still believe in the resurrection and do serious theology. Elizabeth Maclaren (later Templeton) was to found a lay theological institute in Edinburgh, and to make an impressive contribution as a freelance but highly professional theologian to ecumenical and doctrinal dialogue. Fr Noel O'Donoghue, O.D.C., was the first Catholic priest on the Faculty, and Canon Roland Walls the first Anglican, important signs of the times and tangible avenues to alternative rich spiritual perspectives. Beyond the traditional roles of administration, teaching, postgraduate supervision and research, the wider membership of the Departments (the two Departments of Divinity and Dogmatics were later amalgamated with the title Systematic Theology) made important contributions to the pastoral care of students, and to the rich and varied social life of the college.

It is not possible to convey the substance of the reality of New College theology by indirect description. Here is a paragraph from Alan Lewis:

Christendom's God of causal power is dead: and so too is the pagan illusion of immortality. Death terminates human life, and history is no unceasing process with its own dynamic to resist and survive the invasions of non-being. Rather, we lurch through time, impeded by a syncopated series of catastrophes: Egyptian captivity, Babylonian exile, Roman crucifixion, disasters natural and man-made, genocides particular and global. To all of this Christian theology has no principle it can synthesise about survival, only a story to tell about grace. That speaks of a triune God who does indeed create new beginnings beyond death and cataclysm. But the spirit creates such possibilities only by raising from the dead the Father's own son, in whom God allows death to work its rupturing effect, unreduced, upon himself. Only as the victim of sin's increase is he victor over the magnitude of evil, and the giver of life to his fellow-dead. Yet through this love, whose substance is weakness and surrender, he exceeds humanity's ample memory and fear of termination with an even greater promise for the future, and quietly seeks recognition as the saviour of the world.¹⁷

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

After T. F. Torrance retired, the chair of Christian Dogmatics was redesignated the Thomas Chalmers chair of Theology, after another Edinburgh professor. The new incumbent was, for the first time since

¹⁷ Lewis (1987), 362.

the Reformation, a Roman Catholic scholar, a married priest and a fairly radical theologian. The appointment was a remarkable instance of the flexibility of which an established tradition can be capable, though it was not without its critics, both in the Kirk and in more traditional Catholic circles. James Mackey came to New College with a solid reputation based on a number of studies, notably on *Tradition*, and on a newly published Christology, *Jesus the Man and the Myth*. This volume presented a theological assessment of the consequences for doctrine of the most recent historical scholarship, in an eminently lucid and persuasive form. There shortly followed *The Christian Experience of God as Trinity*, a radical reappraisal of traditional Trinitarian theory, characterised by imaginative historical interpretation (somewhat in the tradition of his predecessor but reaching different conclusions) and by a lively interest in the positive consequences of contemporary theology for a contemporary spirituality. This concern for faith in the present continued in essays on theological imagination, in a series of projects in Celtic Christianity, in a study of modern theology, and in a timely and perceptive study of *Power and Christian Ethics*. These may provide pointers to escaping the theological dichotomies which constrain much in theology and church today.

It is perhaps appropriate at the end of this chapter to look a little more closely at Mackey's *Power and Christian Ethics*, an interesting example of the ways in which the concerns of dogmatics reach out and interact with other disciplines in theological construction in ways which might have astonished William Cunningham, though we have to concede that his own grasp of the exercise of power might leave mere moderns looking like helpless amateurs.¹⁸ Mackey sounds notes that we have not heard much in earlier sections of this survey – the importance of the social sciences and cultural anthropology for Christian theology, the discovery of a hermeneutic of suspicion, typified by the work of Foucault, the need for an even more self-critical theology in the future, the centrality of Christ as sacrament. Perhaps a sure sign of the health of a tradition is its continuing innovation, reappraisal and search for better paradigms for the human experience of the divine mystery. Mackey considers the anatomy of power, power as authority and power as coercive, the anatomy of morals, powers secular and powers sacred, the Christian experience of power and the anatomy of church, and draws conclusions about the uses of power in churches and secular states. The centre of Christianity is the eucharist. 'In other

¹⁸ For a more favourable estimate of Cunningham see Macleod, J. (1943).

words, an adequate and adequately perceptive account of a dramatic, communal action with a piece of bread – taken, thanked for, broken, given – could provide a complete Christian theology.¹⁹ Here is a paradigm for the development of a communitarian structure of morality, which neither takes refuge in romantic individualism nor indulges in institutional violence. There is here too a refreshing directness which is often all too lacking in theology and church. 'In addition the very last thing we need in the Roman Catholic Church is an influx of failed Anglican opponents of women priests. Rome is only too capable on its own of inflicting the kind of communitarian damage which one can only illustrate here.' Those of us who are Protestants may ask ourselves how good we are at identifying and minimising the sources of communitarian damage through denial of justice in the sight of God.

Systematic Theology has been enriched by a series of scholars with overseas experience – Ruth Page, Bruce McCormack, Chris Kaiser, Kevin Vanhoozer, Gary Badcock, each with a distinctive contribution to make. Recent expansion of the Department into a Department of Theology and Religious Studies – with Frank Whaling, Alistair Kee and Nicolas Wyatt – has opened new horizons, from which we confidently expect fresh and once again surprising initiatives in the future. In recent years there has been a change in the balance in student numbers from a majority of candidates for the ministry, especially of the Church of Scotland, to a majority of students with other career aims. This too is reflected in the composition and work of the Department, and coincides with considerable expansion.

Looking back over the period we see a remarkable variety, both in the approach to theology and in the constructive proposals which have emerged. At some points it may have seemed that a particular perspective would prevail and would become established as *the* New College theological style. But this has not happened. Instead a succession of scholars have each made distinctive and imaginative contributions to a continuing quest for a deeper understanding of the nature of Christian faith. We may reflect that it is on the basis of a solid tradition from the past that the confidence and capacity to develop, to take risks and to seek to enlarge the bounds of the theological imagination are made possible, and we may be grateful to those who have laid these foundations so securely. For a Faculty which is only 400 years old, in systematic theology as elsewhere, New College may be said to be coming along rather nicely.

¹⁹ Mackey (1994), 178.

**Christianity
for the
Twenty-First
Century**

Edited by
PHILIP F. ESLER

CHAPTER 5



CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM

GEORGE M. NEWLANDS

The Marxist Challenge to Christianity

Few subjects might seem more dead today than the challenge which Marxism poses to Christianity. Communism has collapsed in much of the world, revealing a sham of corruption and oppression beneath a facade of fine-sounding principles. Russia sometimes seems to be returning to an imperial Christian and Orthodox past. Religious fundamentalism is emerging everywhere, in Islam, in Judaism, in Christianity. Spirituality is back. Yet it is not clear that Christians will want to rejoice in everything that has followed the collapse of Marxism. And in any case, the secularisation of Europe, which had some connection at least with socialist viewpoints, is still an important fact of our time, distinguishing the culture of Europe, for example, from the culture of North America.

A quick look through a collection of texts on religion by Karl Marx (1818–83), often written in collaboration with Friedrich Engels (1820–95), will leave the reader in no doubt of his trenchant, challenging, uncompromising style:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man . . . This state, this society, produce religion, a reversed world-consciousness, because they are a reversed world.

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

The task of history therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world. (Marx 1964a: 41–2)

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it. (Marx 1964b: 72)

The Social Principles of Christianity preach the necessity of a ruling and an oppressed class, and all they have for the latter is the pious wish that the former will be charitable. (Marx 1964c: 83)

The ideas of religious liberty and freedom of conscience merely gave expression to the sway of free competition within the domain of knowledge. (Marx 1964d: 88)

The religious world is but the reflex of the real world. (Marx 1964d: 135)

He (sc. Feuerbach) proves that the Christian god is only a fantastic reflection, a mirror image of man. (Engels 1964: 241)

Here is an unambiguous modern philosophy of freedom from oppression, an oppression in which religion, Christianity especially, plays an important role – as a human creation which legitimises the oppressive economic and social structures which keep most of the population in chains. What more could anyone want? Yet a hundred years later it was to drive millions of people around the world to long for freedom from Marxist oppression. In much of the world today, China and North Korea being notable exceptions, who wants to know about, who cares about Marxism? But perhaps it is dangerous to assume that we have grown out of this kind of disaster.

In this essay I will (a) examine the development of Marx's thought from his early life onwards, (b) consider two aspects of the Marxist critique of religion, (c) relate this criticism to the Bible, (d) outline liberation theologies which constitute the most significant recent Christian response to Marxist ideology and, lastly, (e) discuss a number of specific issues where Christianity can, or should, rise to the Marxist challenge.

The Development of Marx's Thought

Jewish family background and Christian education

Karl Marx was born in 1818 in Trier in the Rhineland, which at that time belonged to Prussia. His father was a lawyer, and so he was not born into impoverished circumstances. His father was Jewish, but became a Christian and was baptised together with the rest of his family. It was quite common for educated Jews at this period to become Christians, as part of the Enlightenment legacy, moving from a liberal Judaism to a liberal Christianity. It was no doubt also good for business, since there was anti-Semitism in Prussia in this period as at all times. But we may recall that Schleiermacher, teaching in Berlin around this period, had many Jewish friends – though equally he was criticised for this.

Marx would have had the usual Christian education of the Prussian school system. It is often noted that he wrote an essay on St John's Gospel at school. He does appear to have gone through a period of being consciously a Christian as a teenager. But as with many teenagers, this period did not last. He was to become a philosopher, but a philosopher with a difference. As he said in a famous phrase, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it' (Marx 1964b: 72). Critics might reply that change without understanding may make things much worse.

Marx studied in Bonn and Berlin, and was greatly influenced from an early period by the great Berlin philosopher Hegel (1770–1831), and in the area of religion particularly Hegel in the light of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72). It was Hegel's God especially that Marx was to find redundant. Later Christian Marxists and others were to suggest that other concepts of God might not have been so unacceptable to Marx. In 1843 he moved to Brussels, was expelled from there to Paris in 1848, was thrown out of Paris in 1849 and spent the rest of his life in London, supported financially by his friend Friedrich Engels.

Marx's views on economics and society

In London he developed his economic and social theories. Goods, he believed, were exchanged at rates decided by the amount of labour that went into them. But the labourers produced goods worth more than their wages, making profit for the capitalists. The masses should therefore take over the means of production to produce a free and just society. Much in society is decided by the mode of industrial production, which is the core of his 'historical materialism'. Revolution could give reality to justice and liberty by recognising their basis in materialism. Matter is a unique reality. Society may develop in revolutionary moves which may resolve internal conflicts and tensions. Religion, as a symptom of unjust social conditions, is doomed to disappear.

Marx's basic ideas were to be developed in different and sometimes conflicting ways by his many followers over the next century, in philosophy, politics and social structures. It was to be Marx's misfortune that the socialist experiments of the twentieth century were often to degenerate into a new totalitarianism of the left, notably under Stalin and his successors in the Soviet Union. Their collapse does not prove the moral superiority of capitalism, only the need to go on searching for small steps in the direction of greater realisation of justice and human dignity. Man is alienated, in a capitalist society, from himself, his work, his products and his fellow man. Alienation must be overcome by a process of liberation.

The following encapsulates much of Marx's view of religion:

Man makes religion, religion does not make man . . . The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the fight against the other world, of which religion is the spiritual aroma . . . Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people . . . The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the saintly form of human self-alienation has been unmasked, is to unmask self-alienation in its unholy forms. (Marx 1964a: 41-2)

It is worth setting this perspective against the broad currents of nineteenth-century Christianity in Europe. Particularly

important was liberal Protestantism, which developed in Prussia, along the lines of Hegel or Schleiermacher, and placed a strong emphasis on the autonomy of reason and experience respectively, and comparatively little emphasis on Scripture, tradition and the worship and service of the church. This was the Christianity of some of the German universities. It should not of course be forgotten that the nineteenth century also saw huge movements of traditionalism, Protestant and Catholic, culminating in Vatican I and papal infallibility. It is one of the ironies of history that in the late 1990s the influence of the Pope is arguably greater than that of Marxism, and that Protestant fundamentalism and conservative charismatic Christianity are expanding fast.

The Marxist Critique of Religion

I will examine Marx's critique of religion with respect to two issues: first, the understanding of religion as a projection of human imagination, and, secondly, the question of the relationship between religion and injustice.

Religion as a projection of human aspirations

At the heart of the Enlightenment was the belief that humanity was no longer to be situated simply in terms of ancient doctrines of creation, but was to be understood, valued and evaluated in and for itself. This meant human emancipation from the chains of ancient dogma. The new reason was to bring its own chains all too soon, as the French revolutionaries were to find to their peril. It is extremely difficult to unfreeze structures, change them and then decline to refreeze them in such a way that they are not immediately set in concrete once more. We suffer from change fatigue and we all like certainties.

Nevertheless, the legacy of the Enlightenment was strongly present in the nineteenth century, with the development of a whole series of new disciplines in the social sciences. The new human sciences were to bring immense benefits to human understanding and human life, in sociology, anthropology,

psychiatry. But there was a price to be paid – think, for example, of the thousands of victims of pseudo-psychiatry locked up unnecessarily in Europe's mental hospitals over the years. Indeed it is often said that there is a straight road from the Enlightenment and the triumph of modernity to totalitarianism and the concentration camps. But the abuse does not take away the proper use, and the real benefits of modernity should not be sacrificed for a post-Modernism which is sometimes only reaction expressed in contemporary language.

The God criticised by Marx was, by and large Hegel's God. The great philosopher had sought to purify religion into a quest for the absolute and ideal form of the good, in which lower and more anthropomorphic concepts of God were purified, in order to point to the highest spiritual ideal. Here Hegel stood in the magnificent legacy of Greek philosophy, adding sophistication to the spiritual philosophy of religion from Plato through Origen, but picking up the stress on the material from Augustine and Luther, in a brilliant dialectic in which all opposites were reconciled. Hegel thought of and included everything. Colleagues, ever ungrateful, were to complain that where everything is everything, nothing is anything.

The new philosophy, which was to stimulate the human sciences, laid stress on the cultural background of concepts in theology as elsewhere. Knowledge of God came in, with and under knowledge of humanity. The concepts did not come as a bolt from the blue by revelation, either in the infallible Scriptures or in the infallible church. Hegel's pupil Ludwig Feuerbach was to develop these thoughts further. Our concepts of God are *our* concepts. Perhaps our human concepts of God were not prompted by the sense of the presence of the divine external referent, God, as even Hegel believed. Suppose there were only our concepts, nothing but our concepts? Perhaps we have made it all up. Here we have a classic form of reductionism, whose negative aspects are that they reduce complexity to over-simplicity – nothing but. Yet reductionism can also be a powerful tool in laying bare the essential structure of things – entities are not to be

multiplied beyond necessity, as the medieval folk put it. Here as elsewhere, what matters is getting the right balance – and that will often itself be a matter of argument.

Philosophers of the Enlightenment, like Edinburgh-born David Hume (1711–76), wrote treatises on human nature. Or, like the Marquis of Condorcet (1743–94), the French political theorist and social reformer, they reflected on human rights and human dignity. They asked themselves what aims and goals man had (usually man, for feminist conscientisation still had, and has, a long way to go). In this they followed the ancient search for moral values – *de finibus*, on moral ends. They were also influenced by traditional theology. What is salvation, which is somewhere at the centre of faith? Salvation is negative, rescue, rescue from some great evil which threatens our humanity. It is also positive, God's love moving us towards a goal which God has for us. But salvation has to be appropriate to humanity. It would be surprising if it did not relate to man's aspirations and needs.

Feuerbach argued that religion is a projection of human aspirations. Therefore, it is false. Given the traditional force of religion as a divine sanction affecting every area of human life, it is not surprising that this came to Feuerbach and many others as a liberation. Against Feuerbach, it could of course be argued, for to every argument there appears to be an equal and opposite argument, that a God who created humanity would most naturally include in his creation a religion which projected and reflected human aspirations. Man is made in the image of God, according to Scripture. And a religion which did not reflect human aspirations would be of no practical use whatever.

Somewhere between these positions comes the mediating view that religion has both subjective and objective dimensions, the former naturally reflecting human aspirations and the latter reflecting the reality of God, as a challenge and corrective to undue anthropocentrism. But in any event, the influence of Feuerbach was to soften the traditional sense of the absolute divine sovereignty. Later, Karl Barth (1886–1968) was to suggest that Feuerbach had put his finger on the weakness of nineteenth-century theology, which was to

advocate a man-made religion and that the answer was to turn back before the Enlightenment to the pure word of God of the Reformers, not the word of man but the word of God. This was deeply impressive, but it could be taken up in turn by other major world religions, and might be thought to be a retreat, leaving all standard human consciousness to the realm of unbelief. Karl Rahner (1904–84), arguably the twentieth-century's greatest Roman Catholic theologian, was to retrieve the spirit of man as the instrument of the spirit of God (*Theological Investigations* 9: 28). But Marx could have known none of this. For him, as already noted, 'The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly the fight against the other world, of which religion is the spiritual aroma.' If God was no more than a symbol of our subservience to oppression, then in the new society God would be redundant.

A relationship between religion and injustice?

There was, however, another grave charge, potentially of equal significance, that religion reconciled people to injustice. Here is where the famous phrase about 'the opium of the people' finds its mark. Religion, it could be argued, tends to encourage a form of fatalism. Whatever is, is right. Bless the squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations. Did the Bible not advise us that the powers that be are ordained by God? As a matter of historical fact, is it not the case that the churches have lent a vitally important veneer of respectability to innumerable tyrannies? Increasingly at odds with the Prussian and then the French state, Marx had perhaps reason to criticise a religious establishment which seemed to gravitate naturally towards power.

Alistair Kee has summarised Marxism usefully as a doctrine, a way of life, and a historically discernible tradition of thought and action (1990). Peter Scott stresses Marx's importance for the development of a hermeneutic of suspicion by noting that a 'central Marxist point is that ideas are not innocent'. We must ensure that theories are not used to support social oppression. This can of course also become a powerful tool for criticising Marxist theories themselves. Thought must be

self-critical. He argues that 'the self-presentation of the Christian God is the denial of human attempts to be gods, and is thereby the election of human beings into their freedom to be creatures' (Scott 1994: 260).

The Bible in the Light of Marxist Critique

We may ask whether the Bible is to be regarded as a confirmation or a refutation of Marxist criticisms? It will be clear fairly soon that the answer is not straightforward, for the Bible is not a single seamless narrative with a cohesive theme, but a library of texts of very different character and genre, many of which explicitly contradict one another. Again, there appears to be no single authorised interpretation of the Bible. William Blake put the dilemma like this in *The Everlasting Gospel*:

Both read the Gospel day and night,
But thou readst black while I read night.

The Bible may be read as a record of the experience and aspiration of numerous social groups. As such it can be seen as nothing but a record of the projection of human aspirations. It can also be seen as reconciling people with injustice, and has been so used by totalitarian regimes and other ruling élites throughout history. It has been used to justify all sorts of oppression, from capital punishment to apartheid. But again, it may be argued that the abuse does not take away the proper use.

There are counter-examples. The Bible has been the engine of liberation theology, the assertion of a priority for the poor, even a Marxist reading of Scripture. The text may be interpreted differently in different contexts. Yet Christians argue that not every interpretation is as good as any other. There are limits, set by the priorities of the Gospel within the Bible itself. These too are contested, but are related to Jesus as the Christ, as the revelation of the unconditional love of God, always on the side of those who are oppressed.

Let me just glance briefly at one or two texts. First, I will cover some which might seem to confirm the view that religion

is simply a projection of human aspirations. Exodus 20 includes the Ten Commandments, a version of the religious and moral code of a community. They certainly reflect human aspirations, and local customs including the laws of property. But this need not preclude their falling within the providence of a God who acts in, with and under the tradition and culture of his creatures. What then can we say about a passage like Joshua 8, where Israel puts to death, at God's command, the entire population of the town of Ai, men, women and, presumably, children? This has been a fearsome example, repeated endlessly. It seems a little too easy to say that the bits we like are of God, and the bits we do not like are of man, fallen man. But the God of genocide is clearly not to be worshipped or in any way encouraged. Can we rescue things with a theology of paradox, as in 1 Cor. 1:18–31, where the foolishness of the cross, a divine folly, is wiser than the wisdom of men? And how do we distinguish between the mystery of faith and sheer muddle and contradiction? Not easily. Perhaps the clue is in the Gospels – Mark 10:45 ('For the Son of man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'), the Passion narratives, the values of the kingdom, the world turned upside down, and the last shall be first. Christians have seen the clue to the paradox in the character of Christ, as self-giving, creative and responsive love. The narrative may reflect the social structures of the community which created it, but it also records reaction to one who was there, like that.

What then of Marx's other main charge, that religion is reconciliation with injustice? It may be that, in fact, the priests and rulers of Israel are corrupt, hate good and love evil (Mic. 3:1–12). Yet God's vengeance on Jerusalem is promised, and indeed God will encourage the people to beat their swords into ploughshares. There are, it could be argued, both realism and hope here. God's grace is with those who suffer persecution for the cause of right (Matt. 5:1–12, the Sermon on the Mount: Love your enemies). This could be taken to suggest acceptance of domination by the wicked, where what is needed is empowerment. But it need not be so. Rather, there is a special quality of reconciliation in all Christian action. Jesus

has come to announce good news to the poor, to place the stranger, like Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4:27), at the heart of God's purpose. No wonder the people in the synagogue were annoyed. This is a commentary on the expectations of the community and their frustration. On the other hand, what about Romans 13, at least at first sight? The powers that be are ordained by God – a phrase which even in our time inhibited, perhaps fatally weakened, resolute action against Hitler by Christians? Finally it might be thought that Christian communities in New Testament times were under too much pressure to be good guides to anything. They were overwhelmed, mesmerised, paralysed by visions of The Beast. Whoever takes the sword to kill, by the sword he is bound to be killed. The material is just too contingent and too overheated to be capable of any sort of sensible rational application. But perhaps it is to be appreciated as a vision of apocalypse, rather than exegeted as a textbook for a defence strategy.

We do not need the Bible, it might be thought, which connives at victimisation, encourages mass murder, slavery, patriarchalism and discrimination against the poor. We do need the Bible which speaks of justice and mercy, which supports broken reeds, the marginalised, and discloses the wonder of self-giving, responsive love as the source and goal of the universe.

The Relation of Christianity to Marxist Ideology: the Case of Liberation Theologies

We come now to the more general question of the relation of Christianity to Marxist ideology, with particular reference to liberation theologies, for as we will see there are several. But has not Marxism practically disappeared? I want to suggest that the influence of Marxist thought on Christianity, though indirect, remains remarkably strong. It should be said at once, moreover, that there has been influence flowing in both directions, for although Marx had little use for religion, modern Marxist philosophers like Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), Theodor Adorno (1903–69) and Max Horkheimer

(1895–1973) have paid serious attention to theology. In the 1960s there was a flourishing Marxist–Christian dialogue, notably around Josef Hromadka (1889–1969) in Czechoslovakia. There has also been internal dialogue in which Christians have sought to learn from Marx, often quite critically, and to reinterpret Christian faith in the light of this experience. An excellent example of such critical appreciation is Christopher Rowland's *Radical Christianity* (1988).

Much traditional theology has been concerned with salvation from sin of the soul of the individual, and the cultivation of the spiritual life. At various times there have been attempts to articulate a social theology, on the basis of the biblical narratives, but the systematic construction of a theology of social responsibility has been a comparatively modern development. There has been discussion of the need to create a responsible society. Recognition of the failure of the churches and of governments to create just and responsible societies has led in turn to calls for a theology of revolution, clearly owing much to Marxist impulses, stressing the revolutionary and apocalyptic elements in the Bible, and the emphasis on the need to look to the future as well as the past and the present.

These accents have been further deepened in a variety of theologies of liberation in the last thirty years or so. The earliest, and still most prominent of these, was Latin American liberation theology, although there soon developed black theology, Asian theology and feminist theology. All of these theologies have in common a firm rejection of the fatalist tendency in traditional theology (that is, the encouragement to put up with the allegedly inescapable injustices of this life in the hope of enjoying something better in the world to come) which offered Marxist critics such a large target. I will now look briefly at each of them in turn, before considering some general questions posed by this type of theology.

Latin American liberation theology

In Latin America the impetus has come from the existence of small élites, often right-wing dictatorships, who maintained

social and economic systems that exploited huge non-élite populations as discussed by Philip Esler in his essay in this volume. There is also an element of protest against racism, a permanent social protest against cultural assimilation of the Spanish values of the white men who have run the continent for centuries (see Norman 1981). Liberation theology in Latin America has sometimes been Protestant, more usually Catholic. Perhaps we can detect in the Catholic forms a more optimistic view of human nature, that things can be done, and in the Protestant form a greater sense of the ambiguity of all human striving. There is sharp focus on particularity. For example in Leonardo Boff's *Christology (Jesus Christ Liberator 1981)*, we are concerned supremely not with a heavenly Christ who lives in and belongs to another realm, but with the Jesus of history who is involved in all the conflicts of history. In stressing the achievability of the Kingdom now, liberation theology, especially in South America, distinguishes itself from another form of liberation theology, black theology, in North America, which favours the different view that the Kingdom will be brought in by God in the long term future.

Gustavo Gutierrez, the leading proponent of Latin American liberation theology, has expressed its main concern in this way:

Universal love comes down from the level of abstraction and becomes concrete and effective by becoming incarnate in the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. It is a question of loving all people, not in some vague, general way, but rather in the exploited person, in the concrete person who is struggling to live humanly. (1974: 276)

This, it may be said, is nothing new. Classical theology has implicitly included all that liberation theology implies. But love always needs to be spelled out explicitly in relation to personal existence and social justice. Against too strong an emphasis on liberation it has been argued that something has gone wrong when the Gospel is too closely identified with a particular sectional interest or political party. After all, God's grace is for all humankind. Rich people may be weary and

heavy laden, crushed by personal tragedy. Poor people may engage in merciless mutual extermination.

What is needed, it would appear, is a critical, self-critical reflection on liberation, not to produce compromises but to be effective. Liberation theology must include both critical theoretical reflection and highly specific application to the detail of praxis. As Hegel knew, God alone can alter the whole: it is up to women and men to attend carefully to the details. This means that a critical liberation theology may and must do more than simply cast light on the deficiencies of the past. As it matures, liberation theology has to take on and contribute to the whole Christian tradition. Whether or not all theology should now be understood as liberation theology does not perhaps greatly matter. What is important is that all should seek to work out together the implications for all women and men of God's salvation, peace, love and justice. Within this concern, liberation theology is necessary as a constant reminder of the need for the concern of the Gospel for the poor to remain at the centre.

Black theology

The development of black theology in North America has been associated with writers such as James Cone (1938–) and Allan Boesak (1946–). The central interest of their work creatively relates the black struggle for freedom in many parts of the world to the liberating message of Jesus Christ. It sees the true humanity of black people precisely in their creation as black, and affirms the place of black churches within the universal catholic church. They challenge us to consider the impact on our traditional assumptions of specific questions. For example, Was Jesus black? We do not know his skin colour. But it was probably the pale brown colour characteristic of the Middle East. It was highly unlikely to be white, and in that sense more black than white, but perhaps more yellow than black. I think white theologians have to be sensitive about sitting in judgment on how black theologians view Jesus. They will probably decide that in some circumstances it is right to think of Jesus as black, and in others it is not. It is easy for

black theologians to be portrayed as an inflexible and extreme stereotype which is then easy to criticise. This is a common form of racial discrimination. There is no reason why people of one colour should be less reflective and intelligent than people of another colour. Jesus was Jewish. It is interesting that black theologians have themselves debated the significance of Jesus' colour. The point is not Jesus' colour as such but solidarity with all the oppressed.

Jesus is identified with the oppressed, the marginalised, the outcast. Often in history these people have been black. Sometimes they have been women, strangers, or prisoners, divorcees, single parents, gay and lesbian, mentally or physically disabled. It may be important to see Jesus as black in some circumstances. In other cases, it may be right to see Jesus as white. Jesus was male, but that does not mean that men should be privileged over women. Jesus came from the Middle East, but that does not mean that Arabs should be privileged over Africans. Ultimately, in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, black nor white, and so forth (Gal. 3:28). But it is quite natural for people to identify Jesus with their own local culture, because he belongs to them. But he also belongs to all of us. Jesus is one with God the Father and the Spirit, and God is not colour determined.

In paintings, Jesus has been depicted as of many ethnic groups, Chinese, Japanese, and so forth. Always he is the man suffering for and with others on the cross. Jesus is for all, inclusively rather than exclusively. If there were verses in the Bible which suggested that Jesus was exclusively black or white, then we would need to challenge them in the name of the heart of the Gospel, which is about God's love and God's justice. Justice equally for all humanity.

Christians and Moslems disagree on the relationship of Jesus to God the Creator. But they agree on the fact that we are all created to love God and our fellow human beings. We need to work together to maximise the consequences of our agreements and minimise the consequences of our disagreements. Where Christians have persecuted Moslems in the past, and vice versa, I have no doubt that God has always been on

the side of the persecuted, as a suffering, identifying presence, bringing new creation out of destruction.

Black theology draws much of its strength from the social teaching of the Old Testament prophets, where liberation theology stresses the New Testament. Black theology concentrates on the scandal of racism (as did theology directed against apartheid in South Africa), where liberation theology stresses economic exploitation, with closer links to Marxism. There has been a measure of cross-fertilisation, and so the critique of developmentalism and the need for conscientisation and contextualisation, have become part of the common currency from Latin America to South East Asia (Song 1979). There have also been important European influences, in the 'worker priest' movement in France, and in the work of theologians like Helmut Gollwitzer (1908–92), Johann Baptist Metz (1936–), Josef Hromadka (1889–1969) and Jürgen Moltmann (1926–). It is of course possible to have theologies which embrace the main aims of liberation theology without using the name.

Feminist theology

What can we learn from feminist theology, which we associate with writers such as Rosemary Ruether (1936–) and Daphne Hampson (1944–)? The central interest of their work is to explore symbols of the feminine in the understanding of God, to critique traditional patriarchal cultural assumptions, to explore reciprocity in human relationships and to affirm the status of women within the Christian church. As such it is, along with black theology, one of the important emerging emancipatory theologies of our time. And there is a continuing need to defend the emancipation of women, as seen in Keith Whitelam's essay in this volume. One big change in the future may be the impact of a much higher proportion of women in the decision-making processes of church and state.

The role of Mary in Christian devotion has been of great significance in relation to the position of women. 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour . . . henceforth all generations will call me blessed', says Mary

in the Magnificat (Luke 1:47), and the honouring of Mary in history is a long and complex story, a tale of human devotion, human fallibility, human imagination in most of its moods. We have had the romantic Mary, the Queen of heaven, the inaccessible Virgin, full of humanity and purity. We have had Mary the down-to-earth mother at the kitchen sink, the Oxfam Mary. We have had Mariologies designed by men for men, to put woman on a pedestal where she allegedly belongs, adored but disbarred from exerting any undue influence on church and state. Indeed, it has sometimes been noticed that branches of the church which have done most to venerate Mary have had most trouble with allowing the ordination of women.

As the distinguished American theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether has said, 'We have to look back over a broad sweep of the history of culture in which a male ruling class conquered nature and the female' (1979: 63). I am conscious that we men still think we can act as gatekeepers, graciously allowing women a little more freedom today since we are in the second half of the 1990s. Like countless women, Mary knew the cost of discipleship. It is with a sense of critical realism that many contemporary Christians have turned to a new appreciation of Mary, and to a new expression of a Christian understanding of the role of women in our world. We know that women do something like 90% of the manual work in the world and earn about 15% of the income. In the face of this sort of world there has been a reappraisal of the Magnificat, in which Mary may be understood as identified with the voice of the poor, of the oppressed, the marginalised and the sidelined in this world: 'He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree' (Luke 1:52). In the next line the whole thing is spelled out with simply blinding clarity: 'He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he has sent empty away.'

*The theological significance of liberation,
black and feminist theologies*

How can we utilise the resources of the present to move towards a more constructive future? What if anything do liberation,

black or feminist theologies teach us about the Christian doctrine of God? Not a lot, it may appear, at least from the perspective of European theology and its interest in the status of Christian truth claims. For the concern of these new theologies is not what it is for God *to be* in the strict ontological sense. Yet they help us in other ways. They fill out the human element in talk about God. Humanity is made in the divine image. God is person, God is presented in some ways like human personhood, in other ways not. God cares for us in a personal way, as we learn from the Old Testament and from Christian experience of the personal presence of God's gracious invitation. God cares, God identifies, God communicates, as a person does. Not simply as a male person does, but as a female person does also. Not just as a white European, but as a person of all races. God communicates as one who is identified with the poor, not just the rich and powerful. Wherever in history God has been portrayed as identified with the rich and the powerful in human society, a continual temptation after Constantine, God may also be seen as identified personally with the marginalised. God is not only sovereign, kingly, majestic, but his character is displayed in human self-humbling.

This is particularly significant when we come to see the incarnational dimension of God. For God, to be is to love, to act is to act in love, after the pattern of Christ. Liberation, black and feminist theologies may help us to look at our Christologies and our doctrines of God with fresh eyes. Jesus is not only the Royal man, the King, the High Priest. He hath put down the mighty from their seats and hath exalted the humble and meek, the black, women. God's priorities turn the world upside down. God himself is the one for whom to love is to be incarnate, to identify with the poor and the marginalised, to *be* poor and marginalised and outcast. There can be a false romanticism here, when God is identified with every current politically correct trend. Yet there is evidence in the Bible that God engages with the weak and powerless in this world. He is crucified as a criminal, and that is decisive. He does not however take on himself the bad side of humanity which can affect weak and powerful alike, exploiting others, being rapacious or self-pitying. Being poor does not create

salvation, any more than being rich brings salvation. Only being God makes possible reconciliation.

What do we then do with theology when liberation is achieved for all the oppressed? The Bible warns us that it is hard for human nature to avoid finding new forms of exploitation. That is why the risen Christ is still the crucified Christ, and will be till God himself brings about his eschatological peace. Humanly speaking, the task of working towards and maintaining God's goal for us of love, peace and justice will always be before us.

In the second half of the 1990s the gap between rich and poor among God's children is greater than perhaps ever before in human history, and it is accelerating at a frightening pace. Africa is sinking fast into dire economic deprivation. Hunger and disease are rampant. And we are not doing very much about it. We do not even talk about it too much in governments, because we know that we are not going to do much about it, either now or in the future.

There is no room for satisfaction about church history. Many good things have happened in the lives of millions of people through the love and care shown by Christians through the ages. But there is a dark side, known only too well to people of other faiths, to minorities of all sorts, to those who have dared to stand up and criticise the prevailing orthodoxy.

We cannot anticipate the future, in political, social and environmental developments. We can expect that much will change, and also that much will remain similar to current arrangements. That has been the pattern in human history up to the present, and it would be strange if part of this pattern did not continue. We cannot anticipate the completely unknown. But we can attempt in the present to maximise the benefits and minimise the evils in the areas with which we are familiar, and which we can expect to remain a feature of the future.

What sort of liberation theology might be appropriate in the United Kingdom in the late 1990s?

It is clear that there is much in the United Kingdom which falls far short of any sort of 'option for the poor'. From a

liberation standpoint, grave ambiguities in the industrialised society of Britain are quickly revealed. How are Christians to challenge the prevailing plausibility criteria of culture, politics and society in the name of the Gospel? Liberation theology is a theology of incarnation. It stresses that God has committed himself without reservation to his created order, to risk contingency and solidarity with humanity. Liberation theologies are not of course themselves infallible. They too can be inhibited, doctrinaire, one-sided. In particular they must always open doors to reconciliation and mutuality. Liberation theologies point to the future, and to the Kingdom of God. But only God can fully realise that Kingdom.

Meeting the Marxist Challenge: Specific Issues

Where, then, are we left as far as specific proposals for the future? Christians are called to live out the consequences of faith in the present. Not in the past, though people do well to learn from those who have gone before us, positively and negatively. Not in the future, for that is for future generations to decide for themselves, but in the present, with care for those who are to come after us. Christian existence traditionally recalls *freedom*, freedom in the spirit under the free grace of God. Christians are called to be free from infallible dogma, ritual, hierarchy, historical apostolic succession, antinomianism. But is this freedom exercised on behalf of those who are not free?

How are Christians to express the consequences of faith most tangibly in the future? What about the agenda of the Gospel, the issues which do not win votes for politicians of any party, such as conditions for prisoners on remand, education for travelling people, and the like? What about criteria for valuing people in their employment and unemployment – how do Christians devise appropriate performance indicators; would Jesus have been awarded an annual performance-related pay rise, and if so, on what basis?

The core Christian realities must be compassion, identification, understanding, solidarity. At various times, various individuals and groups in our nation and our world

desperately need such support. Often they do not get it for the very compelling reason that it is awkward, embarrassing, unpopular and downright dangerous to give it. A church that never feels awkward, embarrassed, unpopular and even vulnerable should perhaps ask itself whether it can possibly be carrying out its proper mandate. Without in any way overlooking the great happiness that there is in life, there can be no doubt that at any given time there is a great deal of exploitation taking place, and indeed that much of the exploitation is done by people especially skilled in defusing and rubbishing criticism. The Gospel is about grace, forgiveness and reconciliation. These are precisely not utopian perspectives.

I suspect there is no single pattern of relationship between the law and the Gospel, the sovereignty of God and the rights of man. For example, if Christians defy the weight of biblical opinion by giving equality to women (and I think this is absolutely right) then they can hardly claim a biblical justification for a privileged place for the church in society. And history tells us to be extremely careful about identifying the will of God with the opinion of the local church at a particular time. Christianity understands the global village as entirely created by God, in order to be fulfilled in God, in the shape of the love shown through Jesus Christ. Where that love is fostered, the church has a duty to encourage and support. Where that love is denied, the church has a duty to protest and take effective action. Grace, forgiveness and reconciliation. Marx always preferred the specific to the general. I want to look now at some of the specific issues.

Penal policy

The whole area of crime and punishment presents special problems for a society which claims itself to be informed by Christian values and to be democratic. Here human rights are of decisive significance. When we look at the most overtly Christian and democratic of modern societies, we see Americans solidly in favour of capital punishment. We are as

likely to find a majority in the USA against apple pie as we are to find a majority against capital punishment. (Let me add that I do not share any of the unthinking anti-Americanism often popular in Britain – without America Britain would probably not be in a position to talk about human rights today). When we ask about prison reform in the United Kingdom and mainland Europe at the present we find that it has been the subject of good intentions for generations. When we ask for a date for the implementation of these good intentions, we are likely to be a long way from their realisation, not least because party conferences need to have some bread and circuses to keep them happy. What is the reality of imprisonment in Britain today? Increasingly severe sentences, steadily rising prison populations in institutions with diminishing resources; or female prisoners chained during childbirth. One long-term prisoner wrote to a London newspaper: 'My feeling is that the system has become the god, its purpose forgotten. We are numbers denied humanity and justice and hope, and on this our daily life is based. And the system is not even efficient' (Letters from a Lifer, *Independent*, 27 August 1993). The gross overcrowding of the prison population brought about as a direct result of British government policy to toughen sentences in the mid-1990s has led to a significant deterioration in the conditions under which prisoners live, with far more hours being spent locked in cells and with an erosion of educational programmes and various types of specialist care.

Economic and industrial issues

I can only touch on a few issues here. First, the movement toward deregulation of industry in the United Kingdom may have an impact on human rights, for example, where legislation on pit safety may be weakened to a code of practice, for economic reasons. Secondly, the future of business ethics in the United Kingdom hangs in the balance. I shall not deal with religion and the rise of capitalism, Calvinism and Max Weber, and so on. But look at modern Japan. Here conservative government has gone hand in hand with conservative

religion, and an unrepentant attitude to past atrocities. We know better than this, we may feel. Not for us the idols and icons of market forces, crudely competitive performance indicators, cynical manipulation of people by advanced marketing techniques, support of hazardous industrial processes and social habits in impoverished developing nations. But if we do not carry forward a particular unethical proposal before us, we may fear that someone else will do it instead, so that we will lose jobs, even unto the last supergun component manufactured in Britain. This is not, I suspect, a particularly comfortable area for discussion.

The media

The Media will be a potent force in the society of the future, although the spread of the Worldwide Web, with its de-centering tendency, now represents an important counter-force. It is clearly not right in a democratic society that one group should control or even dominate the spread of information, through its presence across the various media. Different interests should be appropriately represented. It is right that the church should be concerned that Christian values should also be expressed in discussion of media interests. On a national and international level, biased propaganda has always been a favourite weapon of oppression. Where people are exploited, or misinformed, the Gospel is not served.

International issues

God has created the universe and loves all human beings equally. Wherever people suffer, God is there as a suffering, enduring, sustaining, unseen presence. Christians are concerned about their nearest neighbours, but they are also concerned about all God's people, regardless of colour, creed or race. It is right to be proud of local tradition. Yet national churches have to be especially sensitive about the dangers of nationalism, however discreetly expressed, particularly in relation to our nearest neighbours.

In an international context the matter of human rights is clearly central. It is not surprising that concern for human rights has been attacked, from Marxist, Islamic, post-modern, and numerous other perspectives. And of course Western liberals have often been selective in their views. But for the Christian churches the central principles of compassion and human commitment are not negotiable. Particularly where rights are violated by those who should know better, the churches must not be afraid to speak up. The well-known Bonhoeffer quote – ‘Only those who speak up for the Jews have a right to sing hymns in church’ – is applicable to all areas where minority groups are persecuted by intolerant majorities. Christians can hardly advocate these principles abroad if we do not practise them at home, not least in the churches.

We should, I think, always try to see the specific issues of the present in the light of an awareness that *many things in our present arrangements will change*, as they have always changed, and not always in the directions which we might predict. But though the context changes, I want to suggest too that not everything is dispensable for the Christian community. Grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, vulnerability and solidarity, justice, peace, the love of God in Jesus Christ, these are the dimensions that will remain at the centre.

The continuing heart of the Christian tradition

In the life of Jesus Christians see the character of God, in identification with the poor. Christians should never get bored with repeating this. Their option lies with the unloved, those in prison, the marginalised of every sort. It is because God has given himself away to others and yet produced effective love out of darkness that there is good news. In the future there will be opportunities to translate good news into direct action. Will Christians actually give absolute priority to genuine mutuality and equality of regard, and use their limited resources at the point of greatest deprivation? God acts in those who exist by giving themselves in the service of humanity, visiting the sick, the

hungry, the poor, the prisoners, those who are marginalised and oppressed.

Christianity has learned from Marx and his followers to look to its own roots in concern for the poor, the marginalised, the oppressed. Of course there is no need to replace one sort of dogmatism by another. No-one should imagine that God's transformation of lives will simply make everyone else like him or herself. Christians have to repent for their oppression of many people, notably the poor, in the days when they were able to exercise social control. Now Christians are suffering sometimes from the symptoms of withdrawal of power, and they do not much like it. They have to learn to respect the other as other, and they may need to defend those who are unable to speak up for themselves. Not everything is permissible. But the centre is affirmation, not judgment.

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REFORMED AND ECUMENICAL

*On Being Reformed
in Ecumenical Encounters*



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Reformed Confessionality and Ecumenical Union

George Newlands

The Ecumenical Movement: Confessionality and Ecumenicity

Ecumenical Relations

I begin from a paradox. The Church is called to be one—*Ut unum sint*. It is called neither to authoritarian conformity nor to libertarian chaos, but to a unity in diversity. Not every sort of unity in diversity will do. For the church is called to discipleship, to the pattern of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and to its manifestation in the fruits of the spirit, in love, justice and peace. Oneness is unity in the vulnerable generosity of Christ, in the fragility of goodness in a fragmented world. The church is called both out of the world and into the world. It is to be an icon of generosity, of transfiguration within the structures of human relationships, individual and social. The church is called to repentance and forgiveness, to serve the Kingdom, not least at the margins of our modern societies.

Confessionality and Ecumenicity

Within the church there are historic confessions, some of longer standing than others. These bring diverse gifts and are called to be open to receive. It is hard to learn that we can sometimes give by receiving, by respecting the strangeness of the other as well as the likeness of the familiar. Jesus Christ is at once the medium of unconditional grace and a judgement on all our vested interests. In eschatological perspective, we are already one. We are called to work with patience and wisdom, with courtesy and urgency, towards this goal. It may be that it is in corporate response to many of the great social issues of our time, our approach to poverty, to justice, to politics, to issues arising from medical and social developments, that ways forward can be found to doctrinal and ecclesial unity, beyond the impasse of traditional disputed questions. Until we can transform the traditional pattern of confessional polemic and unexamined ecclesial rivalry there will be no tangible progress. Until this happens we shall not provide a light of generosity in darkness. As church we shall have failed, in a most important area of discipleship. That is the challenge.

How are we to relate the tensions involved in the twin commitments of confessionality and ecumenicity in a constructive way? We might usefully consider the

dynamics of our own internal discussions. How do we promote constructive dialogue within our own confession?

A Concrete Example of Ecumenical Dialogue

In seeking answers to some of these intractable questions I should like to look first at a concrete example of ecumenical dialogue, the current state of ecumenical relations in Scotland. I want to do this with the aid of the *Interim Report of the Scottish Church Initiative for Unity* which was accepted for further discussion by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1998. I have shortened this greatly for the sake of clarity and economy. At the beginning it is worth saying that these conversations are likely to be assessed differently in different ecclesial cultures. The Church of Scotland has until recently been very much a majority church in the country. Churches in minority positions might well be much more distinctively 'Reformed' in outlook and perhaps much more cautious about these kinds of proposals.

The report chronicles the development of conversations since 1968. It is *not* necessary for the purpose of this essay for the reader to examine the details of the report—the aim in quoting a substantial extract is to indicate the scope and tone of the negotiations.

In Scotland in 1968, at the invitation of the Church of Scotland, there began three decades of doctrinal discussions, known as The Multilateral Church Conversation. Six churches participated: the Church of Scotland, the Churches of Christ (later to become part of the United Reformed Church), the Congregational Union of Scotland (now the Scottish Congregational Church), the Methodist Church, the Scottish Episcopal Church and the United Free Church. The Baptist Union of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland were observers.

The original goal had been to draw up a Basis and Plan of Union, but it was recognised that, before this could be done, the doctrinal ground had to be cleared. This was done in a series of reports.¹ In 1985 the Conversation published what it hoped was its final report in which it requested permission to proceed to the drawing up of a Basis and Plan of Union. This report, *Christian Unity - NOW is the Time*, recommended to the churches that there was significant agreement on all points of doctrine and that where disagreement persisted it was not sufficient to justify their continued separation.² However, the Church

¹ *Controlling Principles for a Basis and Plan of Union Among Scottish Churches* 1969; *Interim Report* 1972; *Worship and Sacraments* 1974; *The Faith of the Church* 1978; *Christian Unity - NOW is the Time* 1985; and *Who Goes Where?* 1992.

² *Christian Unity - NOW is the Time* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1985), 9-10.

of Scotland and others wanted more work done, particularly on episcopacy. This led, in 1992, to the final report *Who Goes Where?* This report recognized the changes that had taken place both within the churches and within the ecumenical movement within the past 30 years. It contained a number of important caveats, including the following:

It is clearly insupportable to have any form of reconciliation of ministries which implies that hitherto non-episcopal ministries require validation from episcopal ones, as if hitherto they lacked either effectiveness or authenticity. The introduction of episcopacy where it has not previously existed can only be in the context of a mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministry for common service together within the wider jurisdiction of a united church. (*Who Goes Where?* Section IV: 9)

It sought new directions from the participating churches, stating the task that remained:

Our task is clear. We are to discover how to bring our churches together, so that members and ministries are reconciled and mutually recognised, in order to pursue effective common witness and service within the wider jurisdiction of a united church. We believe that the present levels of shared commitment and understanding beckon us to walk further in this enterprise engaging in vulnerable, intimate and mutually trustful conversation as we go. (*Who Goes Where?* 7)

In response to *Who Goes Where?*, the Scottish Episcopal Church indicated their willingness to proceed to a Basis and Plan of Union.

Thus the new initiative began in 1994. By 1995 five of the six participating churches had accepted the invitation to draw up a Basis and Plan of Union. Only the United Free Church declined the invitation. They were invited, along with the Roman Catholic Church, to be observers of the new Initiative for Union. The talks began in January 1996.

ACTS and the Committee on Local and Regional Unity are kept informed of progress through participants who are also appointed by their churches to these parts of ACTS.

The Report sought to identify some defining principles, noted here in abbreviated form.

2.1.1 A united church will be a missionary church. The church is understood to be an agent of God's mission, serving and demonstrating the love of God in the community. The group has still to explore a more precise understanding of 'mission'.

2.1.2 A united church will be in continuity with the past while being adaptable to changing circumstances. While recognizing the apostolicity of each tradition, it is also recognized that change is part of life. Change is also part of church life. The church has been 'on the move' since it began.

2.1.3 A united church will maintain and protect the greatest possible degree of diversity at local level. It is recognized that already within each of the participating churches there is a wide variety of practice at local level. Divisions within the church today often exist across the denominations, rather than between them. Therefore, there is a call to ensure that in a united church diversity will be recognized, respected and accepted.

2.1.4 Authority. It has been recognized that the ecumenical movement has moved away from seeking authority in one place. The concern now is to find the appropriate place, closest to the people, where the Holy Spirit can enable decisions to be made.

There followed a **Common Statement**.

3.1 The participating churches receive the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments. These, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, provide the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people. It is the responsibility of the church to interpret the Scriptures afresh to every generation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

3.2 The central affirmations of the Gospel are set out in a particular way in the early credal statements, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which continue to be used in the context of the life of faith; in particular that Jesus Christ is truly divine and truly human and that God is One God in Three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In churches where the ancient creeds are not regularly used in worship, the faith to which they bear witness is confessed and lived.

3.3 Other confessional documents which themselves reflect the classic creeds, express the close link between faith and order. In these, order is always subordinate to doctrine. Formularies are culturally conditioned and vary in the extent to which they are legally binding on the denominations.

3.4 In this century churches have been increasingly aware of God's desire for the unity of the church. The participating churches in this conversation committed themselves to the Faith and Order and Life and Work Movements and were founder members of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

3.5 Unity should not be confused with uniformity. Unity and diversity are grounded in God's perfect communion in diversity. Our churches have a high degree of unity in faith and doctrine. While this does not require each tradition to accept every doctrinal formulation characteristic of the distinctive traditions, it does require them to face and overcome the remaining obstacles to closer union:

How do we find ways of looking at history that involve the reconciling of memories?

How do we give appropriate recognition to Scotland's distinctiveness?

What theological and historical issues are raised by church-state relations?

And by the relationship between majority and minority churches?

How is the ministry of the whole people of God made effective in church government?

How is this related to personal *episcopé*, particularly that exercised by a bishop?

How does ordination relate to *all* particular ministries within the life of the whole church?

There was then a section on the difficult issue of Ministry.

4 Ministry

The ordained and lay ministries of the Church are differing forms of the one ministry of Christ that is shared by the whole People of God. (*The COCU³ Consensus*, ch. VII, section 21)

4.1 Ministering Christians

4.1.1 “Before we turn to the study of *any* particular form of ministry,” says the multilateral report, *Deacons for Scotland?*, “there is a fundamental question of perspective to be settled.”

Relatively very few of the Christians are ordained, and they are ordained in order to serve, build up and equip the whole community of the baptised for its mission It is *all* followers of Christ, not just the tiny minority of them who are ordained, who are charged by Christ to be salt to the world, light to all the world, yeast to leaven the whole lump of dough. (*Deacons for Scotland?*, 36)

4.1.3 In the first place, therefore, there is the ministry of the whole church, sent both to preach the Gospel to all nations and to be, in the quality of its life, the product of the Gospel. “The Church is sent into the world as sign, instrument and first-fruits of a reality which comes from beyond history—the Kingdom or reign of God” (*God’s Reign and Our Unity*, Section 29). The priesthood of all believers is one of the biblical images depicting the corporate responsibility of the church to stand before the face of God as representative of all humanity and to speak to the human race from God.

4.1.4 In the second place, there is the ministry given to every individual member of the church, none being without gifts of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 12:7). Agreement on this was a feature of the negotiations for church union in North India and Pakistan.

³ Consultation on Church Unity: USA negotiations since the early 1960s, including African-American, Disciples, Episcopal, Methodist, Reformed and United Churches.

4.1.5 In the third place, there is a great variety of distinctive ministries not common to all members of the church but committed to some. All such ministries are gifts of the Holy Spirit, bestowed upon the church by the risen and ascended Christ, "to equip God's people for work in his service, for the building up of the body of Christ ..." (Ephesians 4:12). Throughout the history of the church, as at present, the gifts of the Spirit abound throughout the whole People of God, and the gifts are exercised, in the vast majority of cases, by Christians who are not ordained. This perspective needs to be kept in all study of the ministering done by ordained Christians.

There followed a section on Eldership, Diaconate, Ministry of Word and Sacrament and Episcopacy.

4.2 The Ministry of the Eldership

4.2.1 The eldership is to be recognized in a united church as a gift of God to the whole church. It would be recognized as part of the heritage of faith of the united church. Elders would exercise a particular ministry of leadership and service in the local church. There would be great freedom to delegate. The eldership would exist "for the sake of the Church as a whole and ... its task [would be] to release the talents and the possibilities of all God's people" (*Reports to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 196).

4.3 The Ministry of the Diaconate

4.3.1 There has been little discussion to date within the group about the Ministry of the Diaconate. All the participating churches recognize diaconal ministries, but not all have a diaconate. Of those that do, some ordain, others commission; some have a specific relationship to the liturgy, others do not. It is recognized that work needs to be done towards reconciling the ministry of the diaconate and its role and function within the wider scope of diaconal ministries.

4.4 Ministry of Word and Sacrament

4.4.2 There is widespread agreement on the nature and function of the ordained ministry as has now been reiterated in successive ecumenical documents. For example, the text of *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* states:

The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments, and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission, and its caring ministry.

4.5 The Ministry of the Bishop

4.5.1 Each church has developed its own pattern of *episcopé*, the ministry of oversight. These models vary considerably in the extent to which the emphasis is placed on the personal, the collegial or the communal aspects of ministry.

4.5.3 The ministry of the bishops can be compared with the ministry of the eldership. Just as the eldership is to be seen as a gift of God to the whole church, so the ministry of the bishops is to be seen as a gift of God to the whole church. To date, discussion in the group has concentrated on the distinctive role of the bishop. There is general agreement that there are three primary areas: pastoral care, leadership in mission and administration.

4.5.4 However, it has been agreed that further work on the role of the bishop needs to await the defining of the specific functions and responsibilities of the councils of the church.

There follows a section on Structures.

5.1 The Local Church

5.1.1 Just as consideration of the church's ministry began with the affirmation that the ministry of Christ belongs to the whole church as the body of Christ and is therefore to be located in the ministry of all Christians, so the setting out of the structure for a united church begins at the point where the church member participates in the life of the church. If it can be said that the ministry of the eldership is a gift to the whole church from the Presbyterian tradition and the ministry of bishops is a gift from the episcopal tradition, so it can be said that the local church meeting is the gift from the congregational tradition.

5.2 The Maxi-Parish

5.2.1 In exploring the need for a church equipped for mission, a Structures Working Group has been setting out a possible model which would take account of recognized communities in which there might be more than one existing worshipping community.

5.2.4 The maxi-parish would allow the continuance of different worship traditions. Small fellowships have a contribution to make, but where financial or human resources would make an ordained minister of their own inappropriate, they would contribute as part of the maxi-parish. In many cases too, this model would deal constructively with readjustment issues in a united church, since the continuance of worship traditions does not imply that a building must continue. Two traditions can flourish in one building. Local management practices and terminology may also be preserved within such a model, diversity being one of the touchstones of this initiative.

5.3.2 It is envisaged that the bishop would be located within the regional council of the united church. Parallels can be drawn between the role of the bishop in the regional council and that of Provincial Moderator in the United Reformed Church and of District Chairs in the Methodist Church. Each has particular pastoral responsibility for local churches and their ministers, exercising leadership in relation to worship and mission.

6. Challenge to the Churches

6.1 In presenting this interim report, the Scottish Church Initiative for Union group wish to challenge the churches at all levels to become involved in the process of union. It offers four particular areas of challenge.

6.1.1 Education. In preparation for union, the group believes that church people need to participate in the process. This requires both education about their own tradition and contact with people from the other traditions involved. The discussion group has already produced one leaflet on the union talks and intends to produce others. It is proposed that a second one might look at patterns of worship. These should receive the widest possible attention, preferably on an ecumenical basis. It is vitally important that voices from more than one tradition are heard, so that the issues are viewed from angles other than our own.

6.1.2 Boundaries. Co-operation at local level is hampered throughout Scotland by the fact that each church has its own set of regional boundaries. Harmonizing boundaries would go a long way to facilitating joint regional work, quite apart from being a step towards the union of these structures in a united church. We therefore challenge the churches to set up a boundary commission with a view to producing a map of harmonized boundaries.

6.1.3 Maxi-parishes. The churches are challenged to respond to the concept of the maxi-parish proposals. Where these proposals are broadly welcomed and where local conditions allow, voluntary pilot schemes could be set up to test the model.

6.1.4 The Interim Report. This report itself is offered as part of the process towards union. It is therefore important that it receives the fullest consideration in local churches and regional bodies, remembering the value in studying it ecumenically. Responses and reactions to any aspect of the report are invited by 30th June, 1999.

6.2 While the Interim Report is being discussed by the churches, the group will continue to work on three themes: the whole people of God, the checks and balances of conciliarity and the function of the bishop in relation to the people. It will also do further work on leadership in a maxi-parish, on mission and how we understand it, and it will begin work on the central administrative structure of a united church. Between 1999 and 2000 the responses from the churches will be considered. Depending on the nature of these responses, the earliest specific proposals for union could be presented to the churches would be 2001 or 2002.

A Confessional Approach

This is one approach to ecumenicity and confessionality. The emphasis here is firmly on *ecumenicity*. It seeks to build on previous discussion in Scotland and elsewhere, and to combine a necessary clarity of expression with *maximum flexi-*

bility, so that detailed arrangements could be developed in the process of working together in the future. Not everything was to be set in concrete from the beginning.

By way of comparison and contrast, I now want to draw attention to a rather different approach to ecumenical and confessional issues, with the emphasis now on *confessionality*. Again the tone and culture of the meeting is itself significant.

The *23rd General Council of WARC* met in Debrecen, Hungary from 8th-19th August 1997, under the theme of "Break the Chains of Injustice." Each day there was a period of worship, Bible Study, then plenary sessions of the council dealing with administrative matters. The reports were put together over the first week by sections and subsections of the conference meeting in committee. There were three main subjects of business. I was the Recorder for Section I, Reformed Faith and the Search for Unity. We produced a report including a series of recommendations for action, addressed to the member churches. The shape of sections 2 (Justice for all Creation) and 3 (Partnership in God's Mission) were similar. There was also a report by a Policy Committee, on a variety of issues, including the conditional re-admission to WARC of the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa (approved) and a Public Issues Committee, with recommendations on subjects from human rights in Indonesia to injustice in relation to gypsies in Hungary and Dalits in India. There was also a Message committee, which drew up a series of recommendations which we finally signed, as the *Declaration of Debrecen*—in which, among millions of other things, we pledged ourselves to a simple life-style.

The other main formal item was the election of a new World Executive Committee, which as at Seoul created lively and at times heated debate. The new Committee consists of a larger contingent from the South, reflecting a shift in the number of delegates from Northern countries. There was a reasonable but perhaps not large enough representation of women. The other main category, youth, was nominally present, but in fact no one under 21 (29 before the next council) was elected. The youth were understandably unhappy that the actual representation failed to match the ringing affirmations of youth which had preceded the elections: "We are disappointed by the hollow words of our leaders." It was promised that four youth consultants would be named.

The Council ended with approval of a vast series of recommendations, covering the entire planetary system it seemed, approved for action or study to break the chains of injustice. This has to be set against the perspective of a much reduced budget for the future. To match aspirations to resources will be a great challenge, as they say, to the new executive.

The issues debated often reflected the traditional liberal/conservative divides, the nations in the South sometimes reflecting cultural preferences originally taught by and now heavily revised by the North, notably on issues such as the ordination of women and sexual orientation. Breaking the chains of injustice

could mean different things in different cultures. All in all, the chance to listen with respect to many different voices, seeking to articulate the Gospel *within radically different cultures* was a stimulating experience. It was also a timely reminder of how easy it is to get carried away with our own rhetoric.

Here we have more emphasis on confessionality. Beyond this we have more stress on Life and Work issues than on faith and Order Issues. These are clearly always related, but *the emphasis varies in different cultures at different times*. Reflecting further on the Debrecen theme, it seems to me that one useful way of thinking about justice and injustice as a particular Reformed concern is to focus on the idea of generosity. In *Generosity and the Christian Future* I tried to suggest that Jesus Christ is the generosity of God for us. This led me to concentrate on the contribution of Christian faith to public issues, and especially to human rights. Generosity suggests going beyond the bounds of what is strictly required in giving. Generosity is what we embody towards the stranger in our midst tonight. Generosity includes acceptance, friendship, hospitality—the gifts of the spirit of Christlikeness.

The Christian Future. Think for a moment of the Christian future in the light of generosity. What could be achieved by the churches in the future here in the towns and cities of Europe? It will be necessary to persuade future Christians of the absurdity of many of their traditional conflicts. In the future it will be necessary to search for *common human values* in dialogue across cultural divides. When we consider the history of the church here in Europe, we see that here too there has sometimes been a history of victimization. We are the servant church. But our servant imagery has not prevented us from exercising absolute power in dehumanizing ways.

How can we move towards a more constructive future? We are called to live through faith in the present, not in the past. What of the role of the church in relation to society? A church that never feels embarrassed or vulnerable in society may not be able to carry out its proper task. We live in a society with huge social problems. Here is an area where human rights are of decisive significance.

Here are some *specific issues*. Race: Was Jesus black? In paintings Jesus has been depicted as of many ethnic groups. Always he suffers for and with others on the cross. Gender: What can we learn from feminist theology? We all know that women do something like 90% of the manual work in the world and earn about 15% of the income. There has recently been an ecumenical reconsideration of the place of Mary, as the voice of the poor in this world. It is much too convenient to talk about loving the poorest of the poor, and in saying it mask out the actuality. How much do we care about our actual unemployed, the really homeless, the specific and sometimes intractable problems faced by single mothers, ethnic minorities, people dying and living with AIDS in our own towns.

Generosity by example. How is faith in Jesus Christ is to be expressed in Reformed discipleship? The character of God is the character of Jesus Christ, who is with those who are in prison, who are ill, who are mentally handicapped. How is the Reformed community actively to respond to those who are in prison in Europe today? How is it to respond e.g. to the quality of health care, to matters of taxation and social structures? How are we to respond to the issue of sexual orientation, divisive at Debrecen, Lambeth and elsewhere?

Generosity takes place in community and is demonstrated in stories of community. When we look at the Bible we see stories of lack of generosity in community, in the treatment of Philistine neighbours, in the bitter tensions between Jews and Christians. There are narratives too of generosity, in communal hospitality, in the parables of Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount.

Human Rights. A generous community will always be an open community. It will be open to continuing change. It will believe that the human future is not simply the freezing of present structures as they are. It will reflect the overflow of divine generosity. For creation itself is God's first act of generosity and reconciliation is the ultimate unconditional squandering of God's love for the new creation.

One of the things that theological professionals need to be constantly reminded is that actions speak louder than words and that the Word by which we are called to live is often most effective as a silent word, a word of active hospitality, encompassing people with generous friendship. In that way welcoming and friendly congregations can make hugely more effective contributions than writers on the subject can make.

Theology and Culture

In all these issues of 'Life and Work' subjects the relation of theology to culture—local, ecclesial, political—constantly arises. If we look for a moment at a third recent ecumenical and confessional occasion, the progress of the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion in London in July 1998, we see that very similar debates to those at Debrecen took place on similar issues. Again there were divisions, often between North and South, often between more conservative and more liberal understandings of the Bible. These differences involved theology. They also involved the coming into disagreement of different cultures. Behind much of the debate lay different attitudes to the critical interpretation of the Bible.

At this point it may be useful to recall some comments made in the Gospel and Cultures Report at Debrecen. The Gospel and Cultures Subsection derived the authority for its work from the statement of the 22nd General Council, which said: "For us the gospel speaks in many tongues ... there is no 'flesh' that is not nourished by a culture. No 'word' can be heard that is not the language of a culture."

The subsection developed several issues, of which these are two:

Cultures Before Christianity: We *recommend* that the churches, both locally and regionally, incorporate the cultural values of each region. For example, such cultural values as expressed in music, dance or movement, dress, colour, language, and symbolism distinctive to each culture, are important for use in worship and other church practices. This recovery of regional culture in the life of the church should be done in light of a comprehensive, not narrow, reading of the Bible. Moreover, such recovery should be done with the understanding that not all cultural values and practices are acceptable to the spirituality and ethical values inspired by the gospel, retaining the integrity of both the culture and the gospel.

Pluralism of Cultures: We *recommend* that WARC work with the churches to help them: discern how the gospel is embedded in each culture; identify the changing influence of the gospel or culture; study how the sacraments relate to culture including the aspect of human and ecological relationships; and scrutinize cultures ethically and spiritually.

Culture and the diversity of cultures are God-given but not every part of culture is given by God. Therefore we must begin the study of culture with respect for culture and people. The gospel is embedded in each culture and also critical of that culture. There are spiritual impulses within each culture. We seek to discern those impulses, recognizing that Christianity is not solely concerned with spiritual or religious impulses. Culture is changing, which means that the interaction of gospel and culture is dynamic. For instance, the church should not exclude from the means of grace people who live in a culture of polygamy because that culture is changing is able to be influenced by the gospel. Study is needed into how the sacraments, baptism and communion, relate to culture, including the aspect of human and ecological relationships. Sometimes cultural practices or questions reveal the gospel to the church. For example, women within and outside the church have asked how church practices are true to the spirit of Christ. We must subject all culture, including western cultures, to scrutiny.

The last sentence is crucial: not all inculturation is authentically Christian. The incarnation of God in Christ sets a particular paradigm for Christians throughout time and culture, calling each of our communities to embody the Christian witness in ways which are specific to our own contexts.

Theology and Culture in Ecumenical Dialogue

Given that we have such complex interactions between gospel and culture within our own Reformed confessions, it is even more important to pay attention to the relation between theology and culture in ecumenical dialogue. Here is the possibility of further conflict, as different theological concepts are related to different cultural environments. Some of these differences go through the confessional differences, so that we may share more common cultural assumptions with people of another denomination than with our own. On other issues the confessional bond proved to be more significant than the cultural bond. It becomes all the

more important *to devise strategies for constructive conflict and common engagement with each other*. It may be necessary to create multicultural theological approaches to cultural variety, as the old cultural universalities of *ubique, semper et ab omnibus* disappear. At the same time, cultural variety must be consonant with a common human enterprise as part of our understanding of God's creation. Separatism and exclusiveness are not ultimate values in such a vision, though they may have some penultimate justification. Social and political factors are involved throughout.

This brings me back at once to my first example—the state of ecumenical dialogue in Scotland. A classic example of *conflict in ecumenical dialogue* arises on *the role of episcopacy in uniting churches*. Is episcopacy of the *esse*, the *bene esse*, or the *plene esse* of the church? There may be no preferred solution. It may be desirable to create structures in which there are episcopal and non-episcopal structures operating together within the same united church. It may also be necessary that quite different models of episcopacy or presbytery should be used in different culturally diverse areas.

Such schemes are open to attack as being based on expediency and subject to further division. Yet awareness of the postmodern pluralism of culture might make such a multifaceted approach theologically appropriate. Incarnation encourages us to face reality as it is, and not how we should like to be in some perfect shape of things. We may have to challenge that reality. There may then be the possibility of a constructive dialogue between ecumenical and confessional discussion at a world level and at a local, national level.

Ecclesial structures, like all human structures, remain open to *coercion and psychological violence*. It will be important in ecumenical instruments of the future to build in explicit safeguards, while safeguarding the freedom of action of those who are trusted with leadership in the church. In its section on Ministry the Anglican/URC dialogue document *God's Reign and our Unity* (1983) stressed the need for ministry to have personal, collegial and communal dimensions. It reflected on bishops in presbytery in URC churches and elders in Anglican congregations. It might be desirable to have bishops in *some* presbyteries and elders in *some* congregations. Such a situation was present in Scotland in the period 1610-1640. It might have worked, given the political will. There was not good will and the arrangement collapsed. No system of administration can work without the goodwill of the participants, unless there is a considerable degree of coercion.

More recently, a more flexible approach to matters of ministerial order was advocated by Archbishop Soderblom in the Life and Work Movement in the 1920s. This was lost in the merger of Life and Work with Faith and Order.

A crucial issue in the question of episcopacy is the relation of the bishop to other church bodies. There is an excellent discussion of the role of bishops in different Lutheran and Anglican provinces in *Together in Mission and Ministry*, essays issued in relation to the Porvoo Common Statement (Church House, Lon-

don 1993). It is clear that the *authority* of the bishop as an individual, and its relationship to other sources of authority varies from one area to another, both within the Scandinavian provinces and in Britain, e.g. between the Episcopal Church in Scotland and the Church of England.

This then raises the question of *power*, and of the status of statements adopted by collegial gatherings of bishops, again in relation to other church bodies. For example, the WARC General Assembly produces recommendations made by a gathering of delegates mandated by their churches. The resolutions are not binding on the churches but may be recommended for action by the churches. The Lambeth Conference produces resolutions made by a gathering solely of bishops. Its resolutions are also not binding but may have greater impact because of the understanding of the leadership role of the bishop in particular areas. Gatherings of Orthodox or Roman Catholic bishops in Council or Synod produce resolutions which may be translated by appropriate central committees into documents binding on the faithful.

Adoption of new ecclesial instruments may have a variety of perhaps unanticipated effects, which may be helpful in moving Christian community forward in the future. On the other hand, they may have the effect of *inhibiting* forward-looking development. The coming of the Orthodox Churches into the WCC was in many ways a great step forward. But in other ways it may have tended to act as a brake on progressive theology and practice. The Councils and Synods of the Catholic Church take place almost without the witness and distinctive contribution of women. It is hard to imagine enthusiasm in the Reformed tradition for such a development, and it is hard to think that decisions taken in an exclusively male environment are likely to produce ways forward into the future. Decisions based on pre-critical approaches to the interpretation of the Bible, from whatever tradition, are unlikely to commend themselves in all areas of the church.

There is a difficult but crucial dimension of ecumenical dialogue to be negotiated always between critical and pre-critical approaches to texts, traditions and institutions. We have to recognize that the critical perspectives held by one dialogue partner may be seen rather as mere cultural conditioning by another. Yet if we are not to have complete relativity, and therefore no significant communication, it is necessary to search for common ground. *Texts and traditions have power to liberate or to oppress.*

We noted pre-critical attitudes to scripture. What constitutes pre-critical attitudes to tradition? It is striking that in the details of the Porvoo arrangements, although clergy in the Lutheran Scandinavian Churches ordained by bishops are to be afforded reciprocal facilities in the Church of England, this does not apply to a small group of non-episcopally ordained clergy. All clergy are 'recognized,' but recognition does not automatically lead to interchangeability. If, as seems likely, this practice continues with the new Anglican-Methodist discussion, it is hard to see Porvoo as a breakthrough yet on the crucial episcopal/non-episcopal front. It remains significant that the Meissen agreement with the German Luther-

an churches, though agreeing on mutual recognition, did not provide for the interchange of eucharistic ministry.

In the current SCIFU talks in Scotland it is anticipated that the Scottish Episcopal Church will recognize the ministry of the non-episcopal churches as soon as agreement on union is reached, and that there will be full and immediate ministerial interchange as soon as the union is implemented. Should this happen, it will be interesting to see whether this arrangement will be acceptable to a Lambeth Conference consisting solely of bishops in historical episcopal succession and, if not, to what extent an advisory disapproval would have consequences for the uniting church.

Once more, the nature of *the relationship between international church bodies and local churches* becomes an issue. There is need for local subsidiarity, to respect local circumstances. But how far may this go? The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa was suspended from WARC for practising and supporting apartheid. This was considered a matter of *status confessionis*. But who is to decide how far *status confessionis* extends? An Orthodox or Roman Catholic synod might well, on the basis of tradition, consider a gathering which includes ordained women, lay clerical or episcopal, to be incapable of decisions binding on all Christian people. A conservative evangelical gathering, basing itself on the authority of scripture alone, might agree.

The whole question of *authority and democratization* in the church arises here. The church may not be a democracy. But is some kind of democratic ethos necessary for justice to be maintained in the church? Or is this only a Western preoccupation? Are Western notions of justice and human rights negotiable, and if not, how is dialogue to take place? There is an excellent chapter on these issues by John A. Coleman, "Not democracy but democratisation" (1992). For Coleman, the catholic church may be seen as "a hierarchical communion instituted by the will of Christ and governed by norms of collegiality, subsidiarity, and justice as participation" (226). Better vehicles must constantly be found for promoting these central values. He adds "Absent democratisation, churches suffer a crisis of legitimation."

It becomes clear that there are *no simple solutions* to issues of ecumenicity and confessionality. It is necessary to go forward slowly, and to build trust and confidence through working together. Where dialogue partners act in ways which undermine trust, there are real setbacks. The centre remains the gospel of Jesus Christ, the incarnation of the creative, responsive loving God. But the working out of incarnation into culture will be interpreted differently at different times. This is when the Pauline virtues of charity, patience, hope and long-suffering are much required. But perhaps that is how it ought to be.

The Role of the Bible

Crucial to these decisions from a Reformed perspective but also, as was seen at Lambeth, from other Christian perspectives is *the role of the Bible*. Here again

dialogue at the world level may assist dialogue at the local level, and vice versa. Another Report to last year's General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, on the *Interpretation of Scripture* ran along these lines. Scripture has always been at the centre of Christian faith, and will always be there. The authority of scripture is deeply embedded in the life of the Church of Scotland. This is extensively reflected in all its constitutional documents. Without the scriptures we should know little of the character of God as self-giving, creative, responsive love, shown in the events concerning Jesus Christ. What we have tried to do here is to reflect on the *interpretation* of scripture: how can church members be helped to reflect on this ancient and diverse collection of books, in ways that speak to their need at the end of two millennia of Christian faith?

The Bible plays a key role in the construction of Christian doctrine, and its role in helping to shape doctrinal decisions has always presented the church with the challenge of how to read it rightly. We do not expect now to produce a definitive statement for all time, but we hope that this study may help to inform debate on our other studies over the next few years and also contribute to the use of the Bible today within our church.

We note that within the Church, the Bible has been interpreted and used in many ways at different times. Distinctive groups have had particular interpretations. In the life of communities, the Bible has had consequences for the use of power, authority and influence. It is important to learn to respect difference, to listen to the stranger, not least when the stranger is God. This is vital. We want to encourage the church to be ever more sensitive to the challenges raised by diverse and sometimes unfamiliar voices.

At the same time, we take with the greatest seriousness the Bible as the word of the living God. The church believes that God uses the Bible to illuminate our life and thought in various ways at different times. Christian people in faith understand the Bible, as they understand their lives, as a gift of grace. The Bible is a constant challenge, not least to our religion. It tells us that uttering prayers over unjust practices does not make them better. It makes them infinitely worse. All our human knowledge and understanding may be of value in arriving at the best possible interpretations of this scripture. It is always appropriate for us to ask ourselves how we may make better use of the Bible in our daily lives. Some church members find that meditation on scripture becomes a familiar and a rewarding activity. Others find real difficulty in relating Biblical narrative to the world in which they live, in business and at leisure.

The church is concerned both for those inside the Christian community and for its mission to the world. Christian people are called both out of the world and into the world. In the church we struggle to express the sense that we are a community of faith, sharing the depths of a common gospel. We recognize that our diversity is a gift of God's grace. The ultimate unity of the church is the unity in Christ which is the gift of the Spirit, a plural unity which may in

some measure reflect the self-differentiated mystery of God—Father Son and Spirit.

The scriptures should be at least as accessible to people in our time as in former times. As we struggle in this century for love, justice and full humanity, we want to see the Bible as a central resource. God who has brought redemption to humanity through Jesus Christ encourages us to fight against powers of evil and domination, and to strive to participate in that liberation which is based in freedom of the children of God.

Interpreting the Bible will not in itself solve all the problems facing us in the present. We agree that we are called to lives of justice, mercy and humility. We believe that the life of Jesus Christ shows us the basic form of humanity. We believe that his death, tortured on the cross, has fundamental implications for human rights. We believe that through his resurrection there is and there will be transformation in the cosmos. But we have to be able to translate this into practice, to realize, to actualize it, to build freedom for transformation into all our structures. This is what the gospel demands of us—not in theory, not some time in the dim and distant future, but right now. Through the living Spirit, the Bible becomes transformative. God's good news is communicated throughout the world. The word of life is broken for us; here is the healing presence of the divine love.

Re-examining ecumenicity and confessionality, it seems to me that discernment and wisdom in reading the Bible may be at the centre of progress in an ecumenical development which is unequivocally based upon justice, peace and the love of God in Jesus Christ. As such it will be crucial also for the local dynamic tension between ecumenism and confessionality demonstrated in documents of the SCIFU type. It is clear that mere organizational unity is not worth the huge effort which must be spent to achieve it. Beyond this, it is increasingly true that 'Life and Work' orientated projects are of greater existential interest to many Christians today, especially the younger generation, than 'Faith and Order' issues. In Europe the youth has already in large measure voted with its feet. We cannot expect to challenge the next generation on the strength of what are perceived to be boring and disengaged doctrines. *Only a unity which strengthens justice, peace and the love of God for all humanity will deserve to catch the imagination of Christian people, and will have some chance of becoming an ecumenical reality.*

This is a slow process. But the realization of the COCU agreement in October 1998 demonstrates that with sufficient patience and faith all things become possible.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the relation of confessionality to ecumenicity will always develop in different ways in different situations. Within the confessions there remain internal differences of emphasis, and this pluralism is in many ways to be wel-

comed. The Reformed confessions, like other denominations, have sought first to be Christian and only secondly to express their Christian faith within a distinctive tradition, a tradition which remains open to learning from the whole Christian church.

The Reformed confessions have laid stress on the importance of doctrine, and on the continuity of apostolic faith. They have stressed the integrity of the action of God in creation and redemption, in the internal gift of faith and the external conservation of creation. They have stressed the importance of a public theology.

The Reformed have stressed and continue to emphasize the need for church government to be truly representative of all the people of God. Its structures have never been perfect. No structure as such can guarantee effective administration. Committees can become as arbitrary in their use of power as individuals. But there is in the Reformed understanding a concern that church government shall both give a lead to and be accountable to the whole Christian community. It may be that bishops can play a valuable role in such administration, not least by offering leadership at regional level. Yet Reformed Christians would be concerned to emphasize that the views of a college of church leaders, which could bring the benefit of proven experience to the church would remain advisory, accountable to a wider representative assembly, and that such advice would not come in time to be mandatory. Though the church may not be a democracy in the modern sense, it would be strange, for example, to British eyes if new vertical structures of authority were to be erected at a time when older vertical structures, e.g. the House of Lords, are being reformed, and when management studies move towards the stripping out of unnecessary layers of management.

At a time when church attendance is falling in all of the mainline denominations, it should be clear that a change of church government will not in itself resolve the problems. Confessions will serve the whole church only as they concentrate on continuing to work for a deeper understanding of faith and a more effective outreach in society. Here commitment to ecumenicity is a valuable part of our Christian witness to a generous gospel, which is open to dialogue, identification and reciprocity.

The Reformed tradition has traditionally laid great stress on the authority of the Bible and continues to do so. But it has also come to recognize, not least through ecumenical participation, that there is no single authorized reading of scripture and that the word of God is heard and obeyed in the interaction of text and context, of reflection and praxis. In the Bible many cultures are represented, and their witness is multifaceted. In the modern world there is an important growing recognition of the struggle of hitherto silent minorities to be heard among the more dominant groups. This call for sensitivity to otherness and to the outsider is not strange to the gospel of Jesus Christ, who identified in vulnerability with the powerless.

There has been a call in recent theology for an intercultural hermeneutics. This is clearly to be welcomed. But if it is to be effective, it will have to be accompanied by an intercultural praxis, a development of dialogue through constructive conflict between very different cultural perspectives. It will be a challenge to the continuing effectiveness of the Reformed witness to demonstrate how effective it can be in contributing to such dialogue in the future.

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GEORGE M. NEWLANDS

Rudolf Bultmann for the Twenty-First Century

Rudolf Bultmann, perhaps the greatest New Testament scholar of the twentieth century, was born in Oldenburg in Germany in 1884. He studied in Marburg and was a professor in Marburg from 1921 to 1951. A member of the Confessing Church during the Nazi period, he lectured after the war in America (Yale) and in Britain (Gifford lectures, Edinburgh).

For a period in the mid-twentieth century, Bultmann was the centre of discussion in New Testament studies. Systematic theology became for many writers largely a matter of New Testament hermeneutics, with the relation of faith to history as its focus. In philosophy, the turn to existentialism (around the work of Bultmann's friend and colleague Martin Heidegger) and issues in the philosophy of history were prominent.

In writing his Ph.D. thesis on *Faith and History in the work of Rudolf Bultmann*, Iain Nicol was researching at the heart of the contemporary problematic, in a school of theology—Glasgow—whose senior members were then at the cutting edge of Bultmann scholarship: John Macquarrie, Ian Henderson and Ronald Gregor Smith. I note with some embarrassment, however, that *Zeit und Geschichte*, the seminal Bultmann Festschrift of 1964, has been borrowed only three times in the thirty-seven years since publication—a sign of the times. Dr. Nicol took due note of the major criticisms which have been made of Bultmann. But he also found him a constructive dialogue partner for a contemporary theology.

The world of Rudolf Bultmann is fairly familiar to those of us of a certain age. Yet he has almost completely vanished from the pop charts of contemporary theology. In the brave new world of Radical Orthodoxy and the second coming of Karl Barth, it is hard to think of Bultmann without instant recollection of his faults which, it seems, are legion. Protestant fideism, Cartesian and Kantian dualism, Augustinian individualism, Eurocentric Enlightenment foundationalism, expressivist-experientialism and numerous other dragons of mod-

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ern giant killing can be slain in recalling Bultmann. The retrenchment, which characterizes much of the life of theology and the church around the world at the turn of the third millennium is hardly likely to be fruitful soil for a rekindling of interest in Bultmann. Yet, it may be well worth looking at the debris of the bombardment to see what, if anything, remains of his achievement for the theological future.

I want to recall briefly his literary and biographical profile, often overlaid with the varnish of dismissive characterization. Bultmann's first major book, on *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921), took up the work of Johannes Weiss in demonstrating that the synoptic tradition represented the thoughts and beliefs of the Christian community rather than, say, the *ipsis-sima verba* of Jesus himself.¹ At this time Bultmann was allied with Karl Barth in his attack on the prevailing Liberal Christianity, with its stress on the personality of the Jesus of history.² Bultmann always held that his attack on the liberal tradition came purely out of scholarship, rather than from the impact of the war—though a brother was killed in the conflict.

Perhaps his most famous major work was his commentary on *The Gospel of John* (1941), in which he analysed the central concepts of the gospel in relation to the current religious culture, showing similarities to Gnostic and other belief systems.³ At the same time, partly through the influence of Heidegger, with whom he conducted joint seminars in the twenties, he developed his own "existential" interpretation of Christianity, which is expressed powerfully in the Johannine commentary.

Bultmann's thoughts on the relation of Gospel to myth found formal expression in his 1943 essay *The New Testament and Mythology*.⁴ This was to create strains with former allies, notably Barth and his followers in the Confessing Church, because it appeared to undermine their view of revelation through the biblical Word. Bonhoeffer, however, welcomed the essay as liberating. Bultmann stressed the Word as much as Barth, but in a different form. Through preaching, the Word becomes a Christ-event, which calls us to faith and creates the faith to which we are invited. Throughout the war, Bultmann preached sermons which, though they could not be explicit, clearly reflected his political stance. Bultmann shared Barth's concern for a theology of the Word. But he was clear that modern people must be presented with the scandal of the gospel, and not simply a scandal of interpretation, because the gospel was obscured by the concepts of an ancient culture. Bultmann did not wish to jettison the ancient thought forms. It was necessary first to demythologize them, in order to understand their true message, then to re-mythologize them, in order to bring the biblical passages to bear on contemporary issues. Bultmann was to be much criticized. He was denounced in some church circles as a heretic and a Marcionite. His existential philosophy was attacked as inadequate. From other perspectives he was attacked as not going far enough. His approach was thought too christological and too biblical. More recently,

literary and sociological analysis has questioned most of Bultmann's specific conclusions and proposed new methods of research. But scholarship is always an ongoing process, and theology is greatly indebted to Rudolf Bultmann for giving a huge stimulus to New Testament study.

The main themes of *Jesus and the Word* might be summarized as follows.⁵ Nineteenth-century scholarship had interested itself in the self-consciousness and the personality of Jesus. About this we know next to nothing. This did not interest the gospel writers and need not interest us. What matters are Jesus' words and actions, and his purposes within the concrete situation in which he lived. Jesus' words tell us how he understood himself, and approached the world as it confronted him. But our life, too, confronts us with the question of our own self-understanding. Who are we, and what are we doing? Who we are, our very existence, depends on the decisions we make from moment to moment.

Jesus, too, lived in this kind of situation, and his words give us answers to the questions that confront us. When Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life," he shows us how he understood himself.⁶ When he commands us to forgive one another he shows us how he responded to others and demands that we should do likewise.⁷ Consequently, we have a historical encounter with Jesus when we take his words seriously, as the decisive word in our lives. Many people refuse to do this, because obedience is a costly thing. In that we decide to act according to Jesus' will, we decide for the person of Jesus.

Here critics might well ask whether we can be sure that we have any of the exact words of Jesus, since the material of the gospels was compiled twenty to fifty years after the events. Bultmann suggests that even if the earliest strand of the tradition did not stem from Jesus, this is not decisive. So long as people take the words of the gospel tradition seriously, as decisive for their own existence, that is enough for an encounter with the Jesus of history. It could also be asked whether the words, themselves, need some connection with the actual situation of the earthly Jesus to preserve their meaning. Is the situation of the apostolic community the same as that of Jesus himself? Is Bultmann suggesting that the words and thoughts of Jesus have an eternal validity quite apart from each concrete situation? Is he saying that questions of existence are the same at all times, and knowledge of one's own existence is without any reference to the situation of the individual? If so, what has become of the historical particularity of the coming of God into history? Is Bultmann's own solution just as abstract and metaphysical as the older classical Christology he rejects? Without the notion that the life and death of Jesus is of central importance for faith today, it would not be easy to show reasonable grounds for belief that the death of one man 2000 years ago should be of crucial significance.

This position presumes that within the particularity of Jesus' life there was the presence of God, who is distinguished from creation precisely in his transcendence of the bounds of creaturely finitude.⁸

Central to Bultmann's thought is the category of faith. He wrote the famous article on *pistis* in Kittel's *Wörterbuch*. Faith is a constant theme, too, in the great commentary on the Fourth Gospel.⁹ Faith is faith, without objective security. Though his famous insistence on the non-objectifiability of faith is traced by critics to Kant and critiqued as fideism, it is also firmly in the tradition of Luther and central to Christian theology. For a rounded picture of his contribution, the rather sceptical posture of some of his critical scholarship must be balanced by the deep piety of his sermons.¹⁰ Bultmann was a member of the Confessing Church circle in the Marburg area, which included Hans von Soden and other theologians. Attempts were made in the 1930s to recognize his achievements internationally and thereby support him.¹¹

For Karl Barth, Bultmann was much too concerned with human subjective experience. Barth argued that Bultmann had reduced God's saving act in Christ to a secondary position, by understanding it primarily as a reflection in the mirror of Christian existence. The cross and resurrection have an inherent meaning of their own, and are not to be understood primarily in their meaning "for us."¹² For Barth, faith as it is expressed in existentialist reinterpretation of a demythologized "kerygma" or gospel message has no anchor in actual history, but is a timeless speculation akin to Gnostic speculation. Christology is then reduced to anthropology and faith to existentialist speculation.

On the other hand, critics, such as the philosopher Karl Jaspers, attacked Bultmann's insistence that though the biblical message needed to be demythologized, it was unique in that it alone witnessed to the central saving act of God. For Jaspers, this was typical theological exclusiveness. All myths, he insisted, are potential witnesses to transcendence. This process of "de-erygmatising" was to be taken further by the Swiss theologian Fritz Buri.¹³ The centre is a mythological symbol, which assists humans to realize their own capacity for authentic existence. For Bultmann, humans have no such innate capacity, but receive it by grace. For Friedrich Gogarten, faith was concerned not so much with individual response to the gospel as with working out its implications in secular society. This was an issue also taken up by Bonhoeffer, who was much impressed by Bultmann's famous 1942 essay on demythologizing.

After 1945, Bultmann continued to publish prolifically, including: *Theology of the New Testament*, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, *Essays: Philosophical and Theological*, *History and Eschatology*, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*.¹⁴ His pupils soon came to occupy the leading chairs in New Testament Studies in Germany, and his influence spread widely, notably in the United States.

In recent decades, the prevailing trend has moved away from Bultmann's themes. However, there have been valuable attempts to reassess critically the legacy of Bultmann, noting the areas which have been found to need further development or modification, while seeing the continuing value of using Bultmann's work as a dialogue partner.

In his fascinating *Christus Praesens*, James Kay has challenged Hans Frei's critique of Bultmann's work through a reading of a "realistic narrative," which is only loosely related to the historical context of the text.¹⁵ Dorothee Sölle provides a political critique, which may underplay the continuing need for encounter with the proclamation of the Word.¹⁶ Jürgen Moltmann's eschatological critique, likewise, tends to move encounter with God in Christ entirely into the future.¹⁷ Moltmann stresses the value of Bultmann's work for the appreciation of a genuine theology of preaching. At a time when there is much uncertainty about the role (both theological and practical) of the sermon, this may be a significant reminder of the continuing importance of the dimension of worship and meditation in Christian discipleship. Bad sermons may be the bane of the Protestant world, but without regular exposition and reflection on the meaning of faith there can be little prospect of developing the Christian tradition in future generations.

David Fergusson's list of areas in need of further work in Bultmann studies is not dissimilar to Kay's.¹⁸ He identifies the following key areas: objectivity and the use of theological language; Christology and the historical Jesus; salvation and the Christ event; theology; and politics. His final judgment is instructive:

If we fail to appreciate that Christian faith and intellectual criticism were for him harmonious pursuits we shall not understand his theology. If we cannot follow many of his conclusions, we can do no better than pursue his intention of faithfully representing the word given to the Church while simultaneously relating it to the questions and insights of the world around us.¹⁹

Pursuing Bultmann's intentions, the majority of modern systematic theologians have turned away from the liberal evangelical theology represented by Bultmann, conscious of its failure to deliver. They have turned to various forms of neo-orthodoxy and radical orthodoxy as the harder and more challenging choice. Is this a braver option, or is it a failure of nerve and a sign of desperation? Things are never simple, and the task of doing theology at the millennium may require strands of diverse strategies. But we should recall that the Kingdom will not be brought in overnight by our effort. It may be that the best long-term option will be a theology of open dialogue between Gospel and culture, not as an implicit colonization, but as a genuine reciprocity.

Is there a case for seeing any value today in Bultmann beyond the pulpit? Bultmann is often seen as the quintessential theologian of that "modern" form of Protestantism which is decaying fast and which, within the cultural

dialogue to which it aspires, has long been overtaken by postmodern concerns of a radically different nature. I have much sympathy for Charles Taylor's view on this matter. He argues that the postmodern does not abolish the modern but is an extension of the modern. Postmodern developments that too quickly become paleomodern may easily lead us back to patterns of tribalistic and coercive religion. Nevertheless, any reassessment of Bultmann ought to face squarely the postmodern challenge in theology. Theological dialogue can involve partners within as well as outside the discipline itself. The postmodern turn is perhaps most sharply expressed in the writings of the so-called radical orthodox theologians. Good examples are the symposium *Radical Orthodoxy* and *Cities of God*, by Graham Ward.²⁰

What is "radical orthodoxy?" An authoritative account can be found in the introduction to *Radical Orthodoxy*.

In the face of the secular demise of truth, it seeks to reconfigure theological truth. [It is] orthodox in the most straightforward sense of commitment to credal Christianity and the exemplarity of its patristic matrix. But orthodox also in the more specific sense of re-affirming a richer and more coherent Christianity, which was gradually lost sight of after the late Middle Ages. . . . While it shares much with Barthian neo-orthodoxy, it avoids the modern duality between revelation and reasoning and is more mediating but less accommodating. . . . Where Barthianism can tend to the ploddingly exegetical, radical orthodoxy mingles exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently reflected collage.²¹

It is radical in returning to patristic, medieval and especially Augustinian roots, in its critique of modern society, and also in realising that we have to rethink the tradition.

The central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is "participation" as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity, because any alternative framework perforce reserves a territory independent of God. . . . Underpinning the present essays, therefore, is the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will determine a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing.²²

The authors go on to claim that

This perspective should in many ways be seen as undercutting some of the contrasts between theological liberals and conservatives. . . . Thus the following essays seek to re-envision particular cultural spheres from a theological perspective which they all regard as the only non-nihilistic perspective, and the openly perspective able to uphold even finite reality.²³

To test these claims, we are given the essays themselves.²⁴ John Milbank traces the development of knowledge by faith in Hamman and Jacobi. John Montag seeks to show that, for Aquinas, revelation was essentially a matter of special illumination of the intellect (more Augustinian than later Thomism would allow). Conor Cunningham focuses on Wittgenstein, arguing that his

desire to break out of both idealism and realism “might be construed as a will to restore the primacy of the theological.”²⁵ In a similar manner, Lawrence Hemming suggests that Heidegger restores a sense of “disclosure” or of revelation as germane to all thinking. For Michael Hanby, Augustine, far from being the source of Western individualism, has a vision of God as creator, sustaining all things in truth at the basis of his thought. David Moss examines the importance of friendship in Anselm as concrete bonding with the other, and as leading to friendship with God in the Trinity. Gerard Loughlin sees divinely grounded difference in self-giving to the other as an echo of God’s erotic love. Graham Ward understands all relationship as ultimately to be gathered up into the body of Christ. For William Cavanaugh, the peace of God cannot be produced by the state but only through participation in Christ. The last essays bring together theology and the aesthetic. Frederick Bauerschmit sees divine glory in fragments, reintegrating and refiguring space. Philip Blond suggests God as the depth of things, consummating what cannot be seen by modern secular art. Catherine Pickstock traces a fusion of aesthetic and cosmological concerns in music—through the dissonance of the cross the frame of cosmic music is restored to us.²⁶

Characteristic in this collection is the turn to Aquinas and the catholic tradition, coupled with a more “catholic” reading of Augustine, stress on traditional credal Christianity, the attack on Enlightenment foundationalism and the new stress on the body and embodiment. In these essays, we have essentially many of the emphases of the nineteenth-century Oxford Movement in postmodern form. We recall that the Oxford Movement, whatever may be said critically about its theology, breathed new life for a century into a Church of England that was wilting under the strains of disenchantment, state control and accelerating unbelief. May we expect similar gains from radical orthodoxy? The difference from the Oxford Movement (almost two centuries past) suggests that, at least in Europe, secularization has expanded a great deal in the last fifty years. Communities of light have huge problems in contributing to the wider human community in the encircling gloom. There is certainly an ever more urgent need for centres of worship to strengthen faith. But it would seem that these have to be radically outward-facing circles rather than inward-looking ones, spreading rather than conserving the mystery of faith.

Can Radical Orthodoxy be radical enough? The issue of the challenge of the contemporary world that Bultmann tackled in his demythologizing program is met head on in Graham Ward’s *Cities of God*. The postmodern person has become a cosmic nihilist, a jaded and tacky denizen of the virtual reality of Las Vegas, which *is* the only reality. This is a far cry from Marburg on the Lahn, then or now. Ward raises all the serious issues.

Graham Ward’s *Cities of God* is one of the most challenging studies in theology to appear in recent years. It suffers from many of the problems of radi-

cal orthodoxy, but it has the great merit of recognizing the profound changes which Western society, especially urban culture, has undergone in the last quarter of a century and of seeking intelligent solutions to new situations. The abstract of the book puts Ward's argument succinctly:

The modern sites of eternal aspiration and hope became the postmodern cities of eternal desire. The old, modern theological responses to the city became unbelievable and inadequate, necessitating a new theological approach to urban living. Such a response would have to engage with and respond to the insurgent social atomism and the celebration of virtual realities evident in late-capitalist, postmodern civic living. This book seeks to develop that approach, emphasising the analogical relations which exist between physical, ecclesial, sacramental, social and political bodies. It argues for the participation of all these bodies in the body of Christ.²⁷

This program is pursued with insight and energy. The introduction, subtitled "signs of the times," argues for a Christian theology of signification, connected with the cultural metaphors of social semiotics, in order to produce a new analogical worldview. This is a lively, but in its own way rather exclusive, paradigm for the nature of knowledge. The postmodern perspective, now established, leads to a sharp, provocative and timely analysis of the contemporary cityscape under the heading of "cultural atomism." Beginning from a critique of the *Faith in the City* document of the 1980s, Ward seeks to show how the city has changed and has become radically secular. "This city has no need of God (or religion) for its values (aesthetic, moral and spiritual) lie all at hand."²⁸ Postmodern cities are "cities of endless desire." Las Vegas and Los Angeles are the modern heteropolis, Disneyland, as reality. "The culture of seduction, simulacra and death, which we see played out in the contemporary heteropolis, is both godless and fearful, self-possessed and self-destructive, embattled and belligerent."²⁹ The Christian response can be neither to accommodate the world nor to renounce it, retreating into neo-tribalism. We need a new understanding of analogy, involving the divine participation in the particular and social, thus combating atomism.

How may we move from the corporeal to transcorporeality? The body, the mystical body and the sacramental body are all refigured by Christology. Broken, disabled and despised bodies are healed. "Through the brokenness of the transcorporeal body God's grace operates through his creation."³⁰ Through resurrection and Eucharist, we may participate in the displaced body of Jesus Christ. A new construal of incarnation becomes possible.³¹ The church as the body of Christ becomes a new community of desire.

Desire, though it often takes on sexual connotations, is ultimately desire for God. In the Enlightenment this desire was often directed to the self and the awakening of self-consciousness, and thence to postmodern virtual communities. But it is possible to construe the church as the authentic God-given erotic community.³² Participation follows fragmentation and creates community. The eucharistic presence is not so much real presence as true presence. It

is part of the erotics of redemption. This leads to reflection on sacred sex, a theology of desire and a critique of Barth's theology of sexual difference. "It is as if he returns to a natural theology his whole theological system is designed to refute"—Irigaray's "hom(m)osexuality," seen from the perspective of men.³³ Love relates to otherness and difference, whether between different or same-sex couples. "The Church must sanctify, then, genuine sexual difference through its liturgies—whether that sexual difference is evident between two women, two men or a man and a woman."³⁴

Postmodern cities are described as cities of angels. But these are virtual angels in cyberspace, of a science fiction sort, and need to be redeemed. This may happen in cities of the good, with the help of reflection on de Certeau's critique of the modern alienated city, and Augustine, for whom all earthly loves point to the eternal love of the Trinity.³⁵

Liberal Christian pluralism has had its day lost in cultural atomism. We must build new confessional Christian communities.³⁶ The theologian does not have all the answers and cannot produce solutions. "The theologian's task is to keep alive the vision of better things—of justice, salvation and the common good—and work to clarify the world-view conducive to the promotion of these things."³⁷

This is a powerful and suggestive account of the position of the theologian in the postmodern world. Its insights into the ambiguities of the contemporary city are searching and illuminating. The stress on the love of the other as basic to a Christian understanding of reality provides a persisting focus. But the preferred solution, shaped around eucharistic communities as islands of refuge in the darkness, may not be sufficient. It is, in my view, important to any strategy for the Christian future that there should be worshipping communities centred on the love of God in Jesus Christ. However, these communities tend all too often to become introverted and to view the world beyond as a threat. This world is also God's world and may be seen as an opportunity with many shades and colours. It is not, by any means, all black. The earthly city is indeed not the heavenly city but, by God's grace, the city may come to move in the direction of the heavenly city, and may begin to grow as a few seeds of mustard.

In returning to the point, we note that Las Vegas and even Los Angeles are not Toronto nor Glasgow and do not reflect the countryside in either the northern and southern hemispheres. We may note too that the portrait of the city is highly selective. The gated communities of Los Angeles are deplored by a theology largely conceived in the Oxbridge colleges—centuries old, classic, gated communities, where the townspeople may not tread the sacred turf. On the other hand, Ward is right to point to the ever-increasing private and public influences of transnational corporations, which create affluence and poverty in urban and in rural environments alike.

We may doubt whether Bultmann would have enjoyed a weekend break in the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas: the fantasyland where it is always twilight and time for food and drink, impulse buying and gaming. Even in Marburg, he was essentially a conservative scholar, both socially and academically, who found it hard to adjust to contemporary dislocations. In his diaries, the Scottish theologian John Baillie recalls a visit to Marburg in 1946, where the great scholar explained wearily that students are simply not up to standard these days, and knowledge of New Testament Greek among the new cohort of students was quite lamentable. Clearly grammar books were not assiduously read in the trenches.

There is, then, no instant reconstitution of Bultmann for the twenty-first century. Troeltsch too was a socially conservative figure in the great German academic tradition, yet his work remains important for a radical reappraisal for the development of Christianity. What of Bultmann? I want to suggest that Bultmann remains important for the future for several reasons. First, the whole question of the relation between faith and history remains a continuing central issue of Christian theology and practice. It was inevitable and indeed salutary that the debate should move on from the arguments of the 1960s to eschatology, to postmodern readings of the Bible, to post-foundational philosophy and emancipatory theology. There had to be a move from the impasses of the Barth-Bultmann era. Yet the relation of faith to history, however intractable, continues to be worked on with patience and without spectacular results. This relationship is central to the issue of divine action, where elements of mystery remain. These elements, however, do not preclude attention to the relationship of faith to history.

Faith is a central concept for Bultmann. It is clearly possible to become too obsessed with the doctrine of justification by faith. Yet the abuse does not take away the proper use, and this always remains a central strand of Christian theology, whether it is highlighted or neglected. Without faith, all notions of transcendence become academic in the most esoteric sense.

Faith can easily collapse into fideism. Genuine faith, however, retains an element of paradox. It is always related to mystery. Bultmann was always unwilling to unpack the nature of the "Christ event," which he understood to be opened to us in the act of proclamation and reception. This reticence may be seen to have a value in underlining the mystery at the heart of faith. The theology of the Word is of a word that involves both revelation and concealment. When we stress too much the revelation, we are always in danger of creating a triumphalist ideology, which almost inevitably turns out to be coercive.

Where can we look for a retrieval of the most fruitful elements of Bultmann's thought? We have already mentioned some Protestant theologians. But it is also found within the Roman Catholic tradition, very early in the study by G. Hasenhuttl, and more recently in the writings of Edward Schillebeeckx and David Tracy. In these theologians we find a remarkable develop-

ment of the twin themes of faith and mystery, which, in a sense, combine the Protestant and Catholic traditional ways. The revealed word is also the concealed word, the word of power in powerlessness—it is the word of the theology of the cross.

Power in powerlessness and dialogue pursued conscientiously may lead, in each generation, to issues that would have surprised and shocked earlier generations. Bultmann might have been surprised to read Iain Nicol's collection "Schleiermacher and Feminism: Sources, Evaluations and Responses."³⁸ The emancipatory theologies of the millennium have brought sharply into focus the sexist, racist and other discriminatory attitudes that have made our theology parochial and tribal, not least in its universal aspirations, for centuries. These were not continuing and pressing issues for Bultmann, though his strenuous opposition in the Marburg faculty to the Aryan laws of the 1930s showed how he felt about racism. If we are to be faithful to Bultmann's intention, the emancipatory dimension is likely to become increasingly urgent. Bultmann might well have been inclined to characterize a theological program such as that of James Cone as "enthusiasm." Yet faithfulness to a tradition of dialogue may be expected to change perceptions on both sides of the dialogue as it proceeds.

Bultmann's theology is a theology of redemption as much as of revelation. What are we redeemed from and for what are we redeemed? We are seeing a major shift in both Christian and non-Christian consciousness. For almost two millennia we have produced impeccable treatises on moral theology while exploitation, genocide and slavery in various guises continue unchecked. Bultmann, it might be said, would not be of much help in such matters because his was a theology for the individual. Yet individual perception has been and always will be vital in changing corporate cultures. Bultmann's intention of open dialogue remains a valuable reminder of this. Yet his world was not the world of the millennium, and the world will change again and again. To maintain the momentum of dynamic Christian discernment, we must renew theologies with a critical edge, with the courage to retain what is non-negotiable and to recognize fresh insights into the truth of God. These strategies were almost unthinkable in the circle of Alt-Marburger half a century ago.

An example of this is seen in the fact that overcoming racism may lead us into a much more serious effort at interfaith dialogue. How is genuine interfaith dialogue to be understood and facilitated? According to my colleague Perry Schmidt-Leukel, we enter dialogue with an auto-interpretation, our understanding of our own religion, and a hetero-interpretation, our understanding of the other religion (which is the result of information assessed in the light of our own auto-interpretation). "Thus if interfaith dialogue should serve a better mutual understanding, every partner in dialogue must not only strive for a good understanding of the other's auto-interpretation but of the

other's hetero-interpretation as well. In other words, the point is to understand *how* the other perceives oneself and *why*."³⁹

One must first listen to the others' hetero-interpretation of oneself, correct one's hetero-interpretation of the other, and then, perhaps, one may come to modify one's own auto-interpretation. In this dialogue there are many misconceptions to be addressed, notably on the nature of faith, of morality, of God and of Incarnation.

Encounter between Christians and Buddhists goes back at least to the seventeenth century. This history has influenced perceptions on both sides and varies from country to country, whether in India, Sri Lanka, Japan, China or Europe. It becomes possible to see, from a Buddhist perspective, that Buddhism is more than a system of "mere morality," and that a Christian understanding of Incarnation may not necessarily entail a negative judgment on other religious figures. From a Christian perspective, it is clear that Jesus' focus on openness, truthfulness and unconditional love can be shared with Buddhists in a mutually accepting commitment. It may be that reflecting together on basic human experiences, such as suffering, death and relationship in the present, we may develop communion in the act of communication, building identity in partnership.⁴⁰ This is a valuable insight into one strand of interreligious dialogue, which may have useful consequences for the conduct of other sorts of dialogue, wherever there is a need for greater understanding and more active participation in partnership.

It is clear that simply to speak about openness and love will not, in itself, bring about openness and love. There has to be a careful intellectual strategy, and an often painful exchange of memories, hopes and expectations. It cannot be assumed, either, that the experience of misunderstanding and marginalization will, in itself, lead to greater capacity for understanding, though it often does so. We may recall that in the past, for example, some of the early Puritan communities tended to repeat the patterns of coercion from which they had just escaped. In the present, Marcella Althaus Reid (in *Indecent Theology*, her striking account of liberation theology struggling against fascism in Latin America) shows how liberation theologians have often repeated and endorsed traditional patterns of patriarchy and hetero-sexism.⁴¹

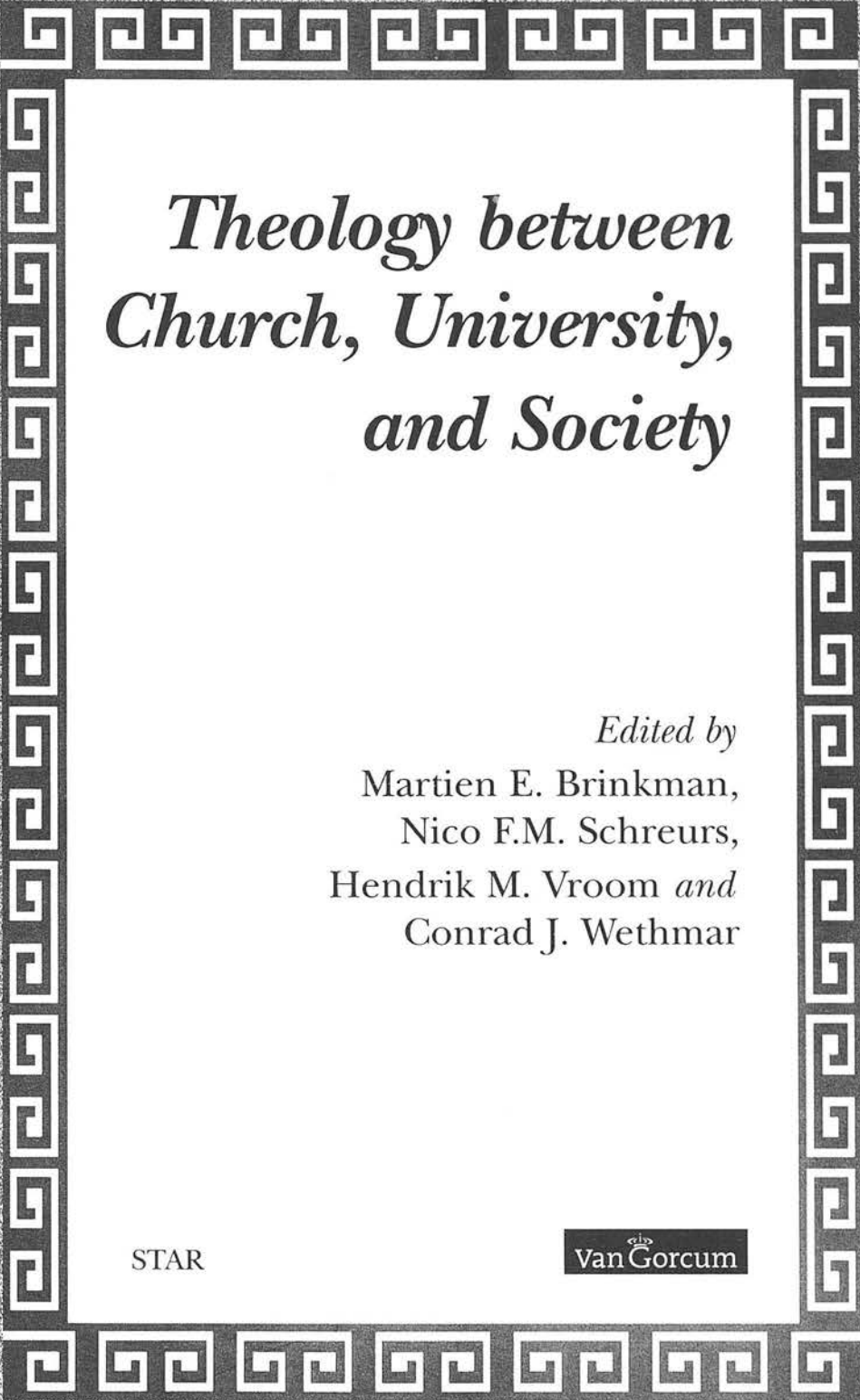
One of the most fruitful human perceptions at the millennium seems to me to be the increasing awareness of human rights. This is, of course, a complex issue, easily faulted by those who have an interest in suppressing rights. It is a concern not wholly owned by theology, whose track record has been far from distinguished. Yet it cannot be left to lawyers or even philosophers alone, since love, peace and justice are at the heart of the gospel, and central to faith's contribution to human flourishing. Because human rights are at the heart of faith's concerns, they also raise and may give clues to the perception of transcendence in a world that looks for transcendence and often fails to find it. Faith is concerned with this world, not as we might like it but as it is.

Faith is concerned with this world as God's world, in which God is present in unconditional love, despite the contrary appearance. In his focus on Christian faith for this world as it is, Bultmann remains an advocate for faith without dilution, scholarship without shortcuts and dialogue without frontiers.

Notes

- 1 Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, translated by John Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).
- 2 Rudolph Bultmann, *Jesus* (Berlin: Deutsche Bibliothek, 1929).
- 3 Rudolph Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, translated by G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971).
- 4 Rudolph Bultmann, "The New Testament and Mythology" in *Kerygma and Myth*, edited by Hans Werner Bartsch, translated by Reginald H. Fuller (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), pp. 1-44.
- 5 Rudolph Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*, translated from the second German edition by Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1935).
- 6 John 14:6.
- 7 Luke 17:3.
- 8 Bultmann's *Jesus* appeared fairly early in his career, in 1929. Later he was to develop and broaden his position in various directions—both through his work as a New Testament exegete (which we shall consider shortly) and as a systematic theologian.
- 9 Cf. his comments on John 15:1-17 in *John*, pp. 529-548.
- 10 Rudolph Bultmann, *This World and Beyond*, translated by Harold Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1960). See especially the World War sermons (e.g., December, 1939).
- 11 The University of St. Andrews, for example, awarded him an honorary D.D. in 1935.
- 12 Karl Barth, *Rudolph Bultmann: Ein Versuch, ihn zu verstehen* (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1964).
- 13 Fritz Buri, *Thinking Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968).
- 14 *Theology of the New Testament*, translated by Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1968); *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, translated by R.H. Fuller (London: Collins, 1956); *Essays: Philosophical and Theological*, translated by J.C.G. Greig (New York: Macmillan, 1955); *History and Eschatology: The Presence of Eternity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962); and *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Scribners, 1958).
- 15 James F. Kay, *Christus Praesens: A Reconsideration of Rudolph Bultmann's Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994). Cf. Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative*, edited by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 47: "... it goes almost without saying that the conceptual content of the resurrection, whether fictional or real, cannot be reduced to the faith of the disciples (the position of Rudolph Bultmann)."
- 16 Dorothee Sölle, *The Window of Vulnerability: A Political Spirituality*, translated by Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 122: "Here I want to discuss the meaning of demythologising and liberation theology's criticism of Western Philosophy. It is a kind of continuation of what Bultmann did, in light of the newer discussion of myth."
- 17 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, translated by James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 67, 68: "The theological question arises whether it is really true that in the event of revelation in proclamation and faith man already comes 'to himself' in that authenticity which at once both original and final. In that case faith would itself be the practical end of history and the believer would himself already be perfected. There would be nothing more that still awaits him, and nothing more towards which he is on his way in the world, in the body and in history."
- 18 David Fergusson, *Bultmann* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), pp. 126-147.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

- 20 John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 1999); and Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- 21 Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, *Radical Orthodoxy*, pp. 1,2.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-20.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- 27 Ward, *Cities of God*, p. i.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 152.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 202.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 227-237.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 258.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- 38 Iain G. Nicol, ed., *Schleiermacher and Feminism: Sources, Evaluations and Responses* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).
- 39 Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ed., *Buddhist Perceptions of Jesus* (St. Ottilien: Eos Verlag, 2001), p. 9. Cf. also Ninian Smart, *Concept and Empathy: Essays in the Study of Religion*, edited by Donald Wiebe (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 104-108.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 41 Marcella Althaus Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological Perversions in Sex, Gender, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2000).



*Theology between
Church, University,
and Society*

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STAR


Van Gorcum

Theology and Cultural Change: A Variety of Students

George Newlands (University of Glasgow)

In this contribution we will look at some of the consequences of the fundamental changes in Western European culture that has led to a broad variety of students at theological faculties, whose traditional task has been to train people for the ministry. At the present time, while some are engaged in preparation for the ministry, many are not. A large number of students are sympathetic to the Christian faith, but, again, there are those who are not. The student population includes not only students of average age but also a large number of middle-aged people who have found time to reflect on their faith or are searching for more religious insight and spirituality. This mixture of students from very different backgrounds poses questions for theological faculties in Britain and on the European continent, such as that of how faculties are to apply the ideas of ministerial formation and prepare students for the ministry?

Does theological education differ substantially from other kinds of professional training? Can one force students to be trained in a confessional tradition? Can one educate all these students together or do you divide them in different classes? In what follows I will give a survey of the developments in a Scottish faculty of theology.

Interim Report

Infandum, O princeps, iubes renovare dolorem
Facultatis ut opes et lamentabile regnum
Eruerint postmoderni, quaeque ipse miserrima vidi
Et quorum pars magna fui.

Actually, we cannot understand a word of this any more. Hermeneutics is dead. Postfoundationalism reigns. There are no connections. How do faculties apply the ideas of ministerial formation, and prepare students for the ministry or other professions?

I shall concentrate on what happens in Glasgow. In other universities, in private seminaries throughout the world, very different things happen. At different times, too, we have had different programs here. In 1451 we began to train priests. With the discovery of the Harvard Business Review in 1492 we started to modernize and trained Protestant ministers. Now we have a multicultural clientele of older Presbyterian ordinands, younger Muslim women, atheist philosophy students and numerous other varieties.

Ours is a state faculty of Divinity: we are civil servants. But historically, the Church of Scotland has trained all its ministers at the four ancient university faculties, and until recently practically all the academic staff were Presbyterian ministers. The one basic undergraduate course led to the B.D. degree. It included practical theology, and led to licensing by the church of candidates for ministry approved by their presbytery. (Till recent years the B.D. was a graduate course, preceded by M.A. or B.Sc.) There was no further training. We are still required to provide, and we do provide, preparation for ministry in the Church of Scotland, under the Treaty of Union of 1707. However, candidates for the ministry of the Kirk now comprise under 10% of our undergraduate student body. We are required to be financially solvent. Without the other 90% we should be closed.

Like other faculties in Britain, the Netherlands and elsewhere, we have followed the market and diversified. We teach theology, Protestant and Catholic, to ordinands of the national church, to a few ordinands from other churches, to people intending to teach in schools, and to those who simply have an interest in the subject. We now have faculty members from a variety of denominations or none. We have also expanded into religious studies—the study of religions, comparative theology, interfaith dialogue, Jewish, Islamic and Buddhist studies. We offer emancipatory theologies, feminist and gender studies. We have a center for literature, theology and the arts.

All of this has meant changes in the curriculum. We continue with the traditional BD, but it is possible to add religious studies options to the old program. We have developed a special B.D. (MIN) for church candidates, who are required by the church to include specific options in theology and ministry. It is possible to do an M.A. in religious studies. It is also possible to do a joint M.A. at honors level in Divinity and an Arts subject, e.g. French or Politics. We have also added Certificates and Diplomas in Ministry, and we are contemplating a D.Min. There is

and a range of graduate programs, taught M.Th., M.Th. in Literature, Theology and the Arts, research M.Th., M.Litt. and Ph.D. Courses are now delivered in terms and semesters, often too in discrete modules.

Tesco ergo sum. What has the Macdonaldization of Divinity achieved? On the positive side, we can now offer a wide range of options. We have a huge variety of students from very different backgrounds and perspectives. People are tempted to take courses which they would not previously have considered, and may broaden their horizons. The presence of very different opinions ought to be of educational benefit in seminars. Relationships of interaction should create new respect for different and strange perspectives. To some extent this happens.

There are also problems. As it happens, our faculty members relate well to one another and there is an excellent atmosphere of cooperation. But we cannot take this for granted, and it is not easy to sustain a genuinely interdisciplinary research culture. At undergraduate level, in the past there was a large core group of ministerial candidates who formed the basis of social life in the common room, leisure activities etc. This core has now almost disappeared, and there is much less communal life and interaction. Students come and go, as in the much larger faculties, with much less relationship to one another. (This is partly due to changing patterns of student life, various age ranges, family commitments, the need to take a job to meet costs, etc). As one might expect in a radically pluralist situation, there is an increasing tendency for more conservative candidates to concentrate on particular options (especially in New Testament studies), and to stay together as a small group. Such people may opt to spend three years at a Bible college, and then take two years with us, in order to gain the type of formation they want.

The patterns of theological education in the faculties are not immune from the effects of changes in the churches. The strong rise of the Christian Union, and the near demise of the SCM have probably affected the student culture. As universities move increasingly towards a research-led culture, the gaps between academic production and professional commitment to the churches widen. Where academics once almost all were clergy with parish experience, to which they sought to relate their teaching and research, this has practically disappeared. A culture of concentration on character formation for the ministry has given way to research in the pure atmosphere of the academic guild. These changes are unlikely to be reversed. One result may be that practical theology

as preparation for ministry takes on a new importance and continues after B.D. graduation. At the same time, practical theology for non-candidates develops in the fields of counselling and in ethics. The other traditional disciplines are likely to require both more specialization and more interdisciplinary activity—here there is a continuing and inevitable tension, which requires ongoing constructive reflection.

Does theological education differ substantially from other kinds of professional training? Yes and no. It differs as theology differs from law, dentistry or accountancy. But it is the same, as it is devoted to preparation for the distinctive skills that the particular profession requires. Theology prepares for a number of professions. Most students of dentistry will become dentists. But theology graduates will go into ministry, banking, and journalism—many fields.

Like all academic courses, it will develop transferable skills that can be used in employment. Christian churches and other religious bodies expect of their ordinands spiritual as well as academic preparation. This too has traditionally been provided in Scottish and Dutch faculties. (In England Anglican ordinands go on from faculty to theological college). It is a standard theological axiom that where God is involved, everything changes. But the formal patterns of education will be similar to those in other disciplines. Even VSNU probably cannot evaluate the presence of God . . .

There remain important issues about the scope and effectiveness of university education. In the nineteenth century it was largely assumed that an academic training would sharpen analytical skills, widen perspectives, develop character. On the basis of a sound study of Latin and Greek one might go on to administer the Indian Empire. A sound study of academic theology, provided by men of spiritual character, would likewise prepare men for ministry. This approach has been much derided. Hebrew grammar does not necessarily increase pastoral sensitivity or administrative skill. But it did have some value, no doubt because it still attracted some of the most intelligent men (not yet women) in the country.

More recently, intending civil servants had to extend their education by taking courses in business studies and skills in information technology. The humanities were not enough. Managerialism arrived. The same happened in theology and religious studies as a humanities option.

For the small minority of ministerial candidates, similar adjustments occurred. The minister as manager, with quantifiable skills, became

a popular image. The equivalent of an MBA in ministry might be considered. This had the advantage of supporting self-understanding, when notions of priesthood became uncertain. Blessed are the managers, for they shall inherit the earth. Another popular root was Therapy. The minister as therapist. This too had value. But is the Christian gospel basically an alternative to aromatherapy? Courses in counselling abounded.

Attempts are then made to redress the balance by stress on Justice, the public responsibility of theology, emancipatory theology. But are religious people better at moral issues and political judgements than non-Christians? Perhaps not, but the major world religions as a matter of fact are committed to ethical concerns.

Alternatively, the purpose of theology and of ministry, it can be argued, is to develop and encourage attention to transcendence and to a specifically religious worldview. This is the only distinctive contribution of religion to dialogue about human values. Ministry is the communicative praxis of faith experience in the liberal tradition, or of other constructions of revelation in post-liberal neo-orthodoxy or radical orthodoxy.

In a university theological faculty today there will usually be representatives of widely different perspectives, in different proportions. There will be little scope for a pure univocal vision. (This would have the advantage of intensity and the disadvantage of tribalism). My sense is that what we should hope for is a constructive tension between the various elements which may contribute to theological education and ministerial formation, not in an amorphous or harmonizing mixture but by careful attention to each of the basic traditions of understanding. This is what we are, at our best, already doing.

It may be, too, that we should not aim to have the same patterns of relationship between theology and ministerial training in all faculties. A national curriculum in these areas may not always be the best option.¹

¹ From my experience of the 1999 visitation procedure of the Dutch theological faculties, organized by the universities in the Netherlands, I should say that in Holland it is done at least as well as anywhere else. Something may be learned from experiences elsewhere. But the Netherlands is not America, or Germany, or Italy, or Britain. For this theologians in the Netherlands may give thanks!

Further Reflections

There are often of course very large differences between theory and practice, not least in ministerial practice. The most recent (April 2000) and far-reaching report of the Board of Ministry of the Church of Scotland calls for a strengthening of collaborative practice. This is a good idea, and may help to counter the eccentricities of individualistic ministry, as well as making for the more efficient deployment of resources. However, we should recognize that there are limits to what university faculties can do. It is in situations where ministers and priests formally collaborate that Christian witness is seen at its most dismal and unproductive level—in presbyteries, synods, councils and assemblies. This is a deeply intractable problem. The decisions made at these levels have a profound effect on the life of Christian communities. Promising and well-educated students may turn into ossified bureaucrats in the space of a few years. The influence of a local ecclesial culture will be significant, positively or negatively. Something may be done by education in reflective ministry. But though university faculties may support teaching and research in ecclesiology, they are not in a position to influence the organizational structures of denominations—especially in the instance where change would have to begin in Rome—and it would not be appropriate for them to do so.

How then is that portion of the theological curriculum which is more specifically dedicated to practical theology to be shaped? Not being a practical theologian I turn to some of the secondary literature.

In their 1985 *Christian Identity and Theological Education* Hough and Cobb addressed the problem of theological education.² They looked at Farley's *Theologia* (1983). Farley began from Schleiermacher, and the essence of Christianity. He identified as a problem the Clerical paradigm, within the fourfold pattern of Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Ecclesiastical History and Practical Theology. There is a problem about the nature of professional leadership required. With the decline of the Master character, images came into play of Builders: The Pastoral Director, The Manager and the Therapist.

Hough and Cobb looked in other directions, addressing "The identity of the Church" and its changing self-understanding. Guiding images are: community as human, caring, evangelistic, for the world, for the

² Joseph C. Hough, Jr. and John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christian Identity and Theological Education* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

poor, for all peoples, for women. The church should be as community of repentance, of holiness, and a worshipping community—and the study of theology has to help students prepare themselves to lead such communities. Hough and Cobb turned to “professional church leadership”: the minister as new professional and practical Christian thinker, the reflective practitioner and practical theologian. They examined the education of the Practical Theologian in the seminary. In its internal reflection Practical Theology should be critical of its own results up to now, be as inclusive as possible and critical tend towards universality. The training for the ministry must then be set in a global context, including practical Christian thinking which extends to the study of other religious traditions, sociology, the arts and mass media, spiritual disciplines, denominational studies. The focal points are parish ministry, field education, and reflective practice.

In 1989 a response to Hough and Cobb, *The Education of the Practical Theologian*, was produced by a team of which Don Browning was one of the members.³ In order to show the atmosphere and the emphases in this volume I will offer brief summaries of the chapters: Fiorenza’s treatment of Biblical Studies stresses the need for paying attention to marginal and excluded persons and groups. Ogden pleads for more attention to a hermeneutic of radical suspicion and so for more Systematic Theology. Paris focusses on the person of the student: education must help to transform character. Chopp holds that the theological curriculum should derive more from the oppressed, women and minorities in general. For Croome the central task of the minister is to translate and apply the message of the Bible. He thus pleads for more training in hermeneutical philosophy. Pawlikowski feels theological education should be geared towards overcoming anti-Semitism; Reynolds argues for more history of religions and for developing the faculty of the imagination.

As the debate moved on, the issue of ministerial training became more and more central, focussing on the question of an innovative curriculum for the study of theology and the training of ministers in contemporary society. Astley, Francis and Crowder published a collection of essays on *Christian Formation*.⁴ Again, I will sketch some central themes. “Can Church Education be Theological Education?” is Farley’s question. In

³ D. S. Browning et al., eds., *The Education of the Practical Theologian* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

⁴ J. Astley et al., eds., *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

his judgment the homiletic paradigm is no longer sufficient. Fiorenza deals with the nature of theology, identity and mission of the church and describes the distinctive nature of ministry; As elsewhere Wood accentuates the need for vision and discernment and the development of a sense of unity. Chopp does not deny the unity of the church but wants to encourage diversity and to help students develop their own potential and views. Tracy also emphasizes the development of the personality of the student, while he also argues for the need to recover the Christian soul as the subject in process of Christian identity. Welch holds that a synergism between Church and University is necessary and possible.

This discussion identifies the central theoretical issues and the best practice in recent study. I fear, however, that the recommendations could all be accepted in principle and still swallowed up in unimaginative and bureaucratically conservative ecclesial structures.

A further American study, which is distinctive in being based on two particular theological seminaries, one Evangelical and one Mainline, is *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools*.⁵ The Evangelical Seminary has a holistic approach. "The stuff that is being taught is solid Reformed doctrine."⁶ The Mainline Seminary has more diversity, stressing social issues—especially racism. But both social and doctrinal issues are of course covered in both places. There are two cultures, but there are overlaps and debates within each culture. In terms of Culture and Educational Formation, the Evangelical seminary majors on the Christian life—order, discipline, a Biblical pattern. The Mainline seminary centres on Christian life as inclusiveness and justice in church and world.

The point, which strikes me most forcibly about this study, is that both are residential, on a campus, unlike Scottish faculties today. This makes a huge difference. The influence of community is highly significant in formation. How much community is there in the various Dutch centers? How far is this possible and what difference could it make?

I come finally to a fairly recent Dutch study on the subject by J. van der Ven, *Education for Reflective Ministry*.⁷ I will summarize again the basic points he makes. First, he describes the complexity and dynamics of religion in recent years. Pastoral work is meaningful but leads to chronic

⁵ J. W. Carroll et al., *Being There: Culture and Formation in Two Theological Schools* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁶ Carroll, *Being There*, 77.

⁷ J. van der Ven, *Education for Reflective Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

stress when priests are scarce and the parish is large. Members and the priests themselves live in a secularized culture and have been partially influenced by it and in different ways. Thus the more uniform culture in the church has largely disappeared. The result is pluralization and fragmentation of the Church. To complete the picture one has to discern the different roles of religion on the levels of individual life, the Church and society at large. The phenomenon of cultural minorities has become more important. Through religious migration the landscape has become more and more pluralistic.

The cultural changes require a new view of the priesthood and a new educational perspective. The traditional model of a kerygmatic church has been superseded by the development of secularization and pluralism. The therapeutic model, which has become popular since the seventies, is too individualistic and the model of the priest and minister as manager of a parish is too narrow.

Van der Ven thus argues for a reflective ministry which is conscious of the context in which people live. He describes the religious domain and the ecclesial context and its implications for the functions of ministry with its 444 activities. The stress here is on spirit, seven functions in hermeneutic communication, leading to reflective ministry and reflective competence for ministry. Ministry is to be directed at transformation. A truly reflective ministry requires the training of the reflective competence of students and the development of their spirituality so that they are able to direct themselves in the midst of their culture and the many challenges they face. They can therefore help people to develop themselves.

The curriculum of the faculties has to fulfill the educational conditions for such a reflective ministry. Knowledge is needed but so are personal insight, skills and a proper attitude. The faculties have to provide courses and seminars with supervision and theological reflection. Students should also be trained to do research. The training of religious attitudes and the development of spirituality is very important in the study of theology.

This is a very short and very inadequate summary of what is a masterly exposition of preparation for reflective ministry. Van der Ven is familiar with the North American discussion, the European situation and the challenge from the so-called Third World. It is hard to see how his work can be improved upon. And in the universities we must concentrate on what we can actually achieve.

Yet I am left with the sense that this is still a very clerical paradigm, suitable for educating a fairly traditional Catholic priesthood. That is

inevitable in the nature of the case. It may have only limited success—like putting BMW engines into Rover designs. We could conceivably have superb ministerial formation and still have unexciting churches. The churches themselves have to change and adapt to new circumstances. It is, among other things, through wider dialogue between academic research and religious organizations that constructive change in Christian and other religious communities can occur. Even in our ecclesiologies we may have to listen to Foucault and Rawls as well as to Calvin and Aquinas. We need to consider issues of power and democratic structures. Beyond this, in the Europe of the future we may expect Christian theology to flourish, not as the queen of the sciences but as a team player, a contributor to an open and inclusive society.

Returning to my own local context, it becomes clear to us in Glasgow that as a faculty in a multicultural context we cannot take on all the responsibilities of a seminary. But along with our other research centres in theology and religious studies, we can develop a new centre in ministerial studies, which will specialize in education for a diverse ministry both of ordinands and of lay people. Such courses will relate to increasing demand for life-long learning, and take on an ecumenical and a pluralist character. Much of the interaction will be extramural, within church and society at local level. Research seminars will function to keep a firm focus on the academic as well as the professional dimensions of reflection on ministry. In this way we can be confident of fresh development in the way universities have always moved forward—by constantly reinventing themselves.

Finally, in developing strategies for theological education university faculties will no doubt attempt to relate to ever changing requirements in the churches. As church membership in Europe continues to decline, it seems likely that churches will increasingly wish to concentrate their students in a smaller group of centers. Faculties will develop different approaches, depending on whether they are likely to be part of the new groupings. It may be too that in the future some churches may wish to revert to the traditional church seminary approach, provided that they can maintain sufficient funds, rather than risk the dilution, as they may see it, of a traditional theological education in the syllabus of a large department of religious studies.

At the same time, it cannot be assumed that members of academic faculties, including deans and heads of departments, will have the traditional theological education and church background which until

fairly recently provided a degree of cultural commonality. Indeed, many members may be quite unfamiliar with the traditions of the major denominations, and may personally relate to various faiths or none. It would seem that the time of a comparatively uniform pattern of theological education in the European universities is definitely passing.

PUBLIC THEOLOGY

FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Chapter 8

Human Rights, Divine Transcendence

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Try to think ahead for a moment to fifty years from now. By then the churches will have consolidated around their core membership and clarified their theology. The Anglican Communion will have its headquarters in Singapore, in Iain Duncan Smith House. The PCUSA will have relocated to Waco, Texas. And the Church of Scotland will be living contentedly in retirement together in a rather smart bungalow on the Isle of Skye. Where there was discord, there will be peace. Outside the sacred groves, the market will prowl abroad like a raging lion. Inverness, under its megadome, will look like the Aladdin Hotel in Las Vegas. But the market will still provide discounted opportunities for ecumenical travel and Festschrift colloquia. There is a God after all.

The churches will not need society and society will not need the churches. What I am suggesting in my chapter is that, whether or not there is a perceived need, whether we approve or disapprove, Christian faith believes that a God is indeed there, and that we shall have to find new ways of relating to God, to ourselves and to society to meet changed circumstances. Christendom is dying. Triumphalism is on notice. It is, however, the experience of human community that there is transcendence, and of Christian community that there is a Christ-shaped transcendence and that this transcendence has infinite value for human flourishing, corporate and individual. But how are we to articulate the impact of this transcendence in a strange land?

Here is where I think the concept of human rights can be of continuing value. Of course, like all basic concepts it has been thoroughly discredited. All the big words are discredited regularly – love, liberty, faith. Which of us would admit to being an agapeomonist, a libertarian or a fideist? But I still

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think the human rights cluster may be one of the best means available to articulate a Christian contribution to human welfare. Hence this chapter.

What legacy from public theology in the twentieth century should be carried over into the new millennium; and what issues and theological approaches will be important in the twenty-first century?

There is no automatic benefit in carrying over theology. Christianity has often been used in support of radically selfish policies. But this need not be the case. Christian faith which most Christians would recognize as authentic is other-related, promoting the selfless rather than the selfish. God is characterized as self-giving, self-affirming love, instantiated in the incarnation in Jesus Christ, in solidarity with the oppressed to the point of death. Faith is always eschatologically open, open to correction. We do not yet have the final understanding of God and the world, and must be open to learning from other human beings in mutuality and reciprocity. *Faith does not affirm complete relativism*. It affirms the values of the Kingdom of God, as indicated for example in the Sermon on the Mount. These values are non-negotiable. At the same time, it distinguishes between faith and knowledge. There remains an important dimension of epistemological humility, which should lead to a humility of praxis.

Of course this openness has been capable of endless distortion. Indeed, the hypostatization of cultural accidents into eternal verities remains a dangerous temptation. But to capitulate to failure would be a tribute to oppression and injustice. The struggle for the fruits of faith in love, peace and justice remains an ongoing and vital task.

Theology must always engage with culture and with society in their overlappings and their diversities, their continuities and disjunctions. It must engage with intellectual constructs like civil society. But it must not forget *the nuts and bolts of actual human interchange*, biological, economic and environmental realities. Because grace is its *raison d'être*, it will be free to engage in constructive tension and dialogue with different and contrasting conceptual frameworks. But because its central categories are themselves given with particular cultural constructions, it will not be able to presume a hegemony over other contributions to the human dialogue. It will be a partner with a vital and distinctive contribution, but still a contribution which works within mutuality and reciprocity.

There are considerable similarities between theological exploration of the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Christian message and discussion in political theory about the limits of liberalism – how far there are core values and to what extent can relativism be taken to embrace respect for uncongenial

positions. There may be attitudes which can be tolerated but which cannot be respected. There are actions which so curtail the freedom of others – violence and oppression – that the freedom to perform them has to be denied. To use Isaiah Berlin's language, we must have the negative freedom to be free from oppression. We may wish to advocate positive freedoms which we see as social goods – full employment, comprehensive health care. But we have to take care that these do not in turn become coercive.

Human Rights and Christian Tradition

Human rights has been one of the most powerful concepts in socio-political thinking in the last fifty years. Yet like other powerful concepts – freedom, God, justice – it has been and remains *much contested*. Lack of an agreed definition, or even agreement on the existence of human rights, has been a cause of much frustration among writers on the subject. Different writers have emphasized civil and political, economic and social, individual and collective rights. Some have started from philosophical ideas of individual freedom, others from legal debates about state sovereignty. Alan Gewirth has sought to ground human rights in the necessary conditions of human action. John Rawls imagines a system of basic liberties which are necessary in a just society, and these include individual rights. There are problems about cultures which claim exemption from critical scrutiny from outside. Peter Jones asks pertinently why some systems of value should be open to critical examination yet others not. The intensity of debate is itself a token of the importance of the issues involved. And, as Jones has written, 'Outside the cocooned world of the academy, people are still victims of torture, still subjected to genocide, still deprived of basic freedoms and still dying through starvation. We should remember these people before we decide to forget about rights.'¹

What does *the Christian tradition* in the past and in the present have to contribute to human rights? Judging by a plethora of recent interest, the churches might claim that the Christian tradition has always been an advocate of human rights. There has always been recognition of the creation of man as a creature in the image of God, with his own dignity before God. There have been pleas for religious tolerance in the early Church (Lactantius) and the role of freedom of conscience (Augustine). Aquinas, following Aristotle, was much concerned for justice as central to the common good. Luther stressed justification by faith alone, and the freedom of the Christian man. Calvin followed Luther in supporting the individual judgement against the authority of church tradition.

But we have to wait for the legacy of the *Enlightenment*, in the French Revolution and the American Declaration of Independence, before we find a serious reckoning with human rights in society. Why should this be? It must be remembered that society up to 1750 was largely an autocratic and feudal society, in which claims to individual rights were commonly suppressed. After the Constantinian settlement the churches turned from pleas for tolerance to zeal for prosecuting those in error. *Error has no rights*. Only God has rights, and all men are subject to God, sinners in acute danger of eternal damnation. They are called to a life of repentance and obedience.

The churches were prepared to recognize rulers and states as the God-given arbiters of affairs. Rulers and states are autonomous, and individuals have no rights over against them. The development of states in modern Europe gave new impetus to the rights of states. Individual freedoms were the internal affair of sovereign states. The law and the Church offered mutual support to state power. It would therefore be stretching credulity to see the Christian Church as a player in the vanguard of human rights issues. The Church dealt too with its internal conflicts in a firmly authoritarian manner.

The situation is not of course entirely clear-cut. We noted that there were people of Christian convictions involved in some of the American declarations of the eighteenth century, and there were Christians prominent in the anti-slavery campaigns, and in the early work of the Red Cross. But these were largely individual actions, based on Christian convictions but carried out outside the institutional churches. As often, the values of the Kingdom were brought to the attention of the Church through agencies of the secular world.

Reflection on the Christomorphic shape of salvation suggests a further connection between the theological tradition and human rights. It is true that we have to wait for the Enlightenment for a considered focus on rights, and it is the case that human rights is a hugely powerful instrument for encouraging compassion in the politics of the contemporary world. *Human rights as a subject comes late to the theological agenda* – under Human Rights, the *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, published in 2000, refers the reader to articles on anti-Semitism, apartheid, democracy, justice and liberation theology. Yet there has always been, amid the failures of the churches, a witness to compassion and unconditional love as a thin line throughout the history of religion. For Christianity this is often focused on the notion of discipleship. This notion has its ambiguities and tendencies to triumphalism. Yet it has also inspired selfless service to our fellow human beings in unconditional acceptance and devotion. A classic but always relevant case

is *discipleship* in the life and thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his later life and work he reflected often on the shape of 'the form of Christ in the world'. And Christians have seen Bonhoeffer himself as a classic modern instance of that form. Bonhoeffer has been venerated. But it is not always noted that Bonhoeffer and his circle almost all met with violent death at the hands of Fascism. Those who held back from this level of commitment largely survived into a new era in which they continued to flourish in Church and society. The Christomorphic shape is not something to be entertained lightly. There is a usually very high probability that it will lead to disaster within the prevailing culture, not least the ecclesiastical culture.

Much rights reflection has in fact been carried on in reflection upon justice, and upon social justice in a theological context, especially in recent decades. This is a most important stream of tradition. But conscious focus on human rights concepts may provide alternative approaches to asking fundamental questions about the nature of humanity and the reconstruction of civil society, especially in the light of the all too frequent experience of seeing justice denied within a state justice system. Beyond the letter of the law and the culture of a given juristocracy there may be further issues of the nature of the shape of community to be examined.

Human rights remain central to discussion of citizenship in the contemporary world. From a Christian perspective, they are grounded in a theological understanding of humanity as made in *the image of God*, calling for respect for others as unique individual selves. As such, human beings deserve to be treated with dignity. This implies equality and specific basic rights. Christian faith understands humanity to be moving towards a fulfilment which is characterized through the love of God as shown in the events concerning Jesus Christ. Christian faith offers this understanding as a contribution to the ongoing exploration of the nature of humanity and the development of society. This is, precisely, an ongoing exploration. Theology includes a basic eschatological dimension. It regards its basic themes as both reliable and provisional, reliable in their central structures, provisional in their modes of expression and articulation.

Rights and Ambiguity

Emphasis on human rights has brought and will continue to bring great benefits to society. This is all the more remarkable when we consider how real the problems are in defining and advocating rights. It is vital to be aware of these critical issues – and perhaps equally vital to be clear that

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the abuse does not take away the proper use. Let us look at some of *the problem issues*.

From a *philosophical* perspective, there is nothing 'given' about human rights. Indeed, each decade highlights new dilemmas in the philosophical literature on the subject. The best overview is still perhaps provided by Alan Gewirth.² He examined the nature of rights as claim rights, for example, the question of whether rights are important even when they do not actually exist and the possibility and implications of absolute rights.

From a *political* viewpoint, rights can be seen as a two-edged weapon which is used and abused in international politics. David Forsythe³ has explored these issues in a series of books. Human rights was used in the Cold War as an instrument of policy by Presidents Carter and Bush, with rather different agendas. As Isaiah Berlin long ago demonstrated in his *Two Concepts of Liberty*,⁴ individual rights may conflict with social and economic rights. It is all too easy to major on the rhetoric of individual freedom and deny great sections of a population basic respect and the conditions for economic well-being.

From a *legal* perspective, there are again positive and negative aspects. Human rights legislation has brought and continues to bring benefits to individuals and groups marginalized by unfair laws. At the same time, it exposes conflicts of law, in which the interests of some groups inevitably conflict with those of others. Conor Gearty and Adam Tomkins' *Understanding Human Rights*⁵ gives an excellent survey of these issues. But legislation is intimately connected with politics, and this may have controversial consequences. Legislation based on classical liberal views of individual freedom may conflict with ideals of social democracy which stress communitarian values.

From a *theological* perspective, there are at least as many different options and ambiguities. Churches on the one hand campaign, often very effectively, for the implementation of human rights in far-off countries. At the same time, they may campaign, sometimes with more and sometimes with less justification, for *exemption* from human rights regulation in their own practices on religious grounds. Members of national churches invoke ancient legislation which concedes their autonomy under God. How far does this extend to the practices of every group, and how do we know what God intends for these churches in any case? (Presbyterians sometimes say with conviction, 'We are not a democracy.' But is this something actually to be proud of? Do we really want a juristocracy?)

From a *cultural* perspective there has to be the recognition of pluralism at many levels of social grouping. It will not do to pit Eastern values against

Western, capitalist against socialist, white against black or whatever. Martha Nussbaum wisely suggests that we must seek not the parochial or the locally dominant but the *best* solutions in the world to problems of citizenship, and that these can arise from many different ethnic traditions. A cosmopolitan perspective is much superior to relativism.

Rights and God

One of the earliest theological discussions of human rights is to be found in Alan Falconer's collection *Understanding Human Rights*.⁶ In an essay here on 'Christian Faith and Human Rights', Jürgen Moltmann sees the Reformed emphasis as being on human dignity through man's creation in the image of God, the Lutheran emphasis on a correspondence between Christian life in the sphere of faith and human rights in the sphere of the world, and the Roman Catholic emphasis on the analogy between nature and grace, in which grace illuminates the dignity of man in nature. Moltmann identifies another starting point in the experience of inhumanity, in a liberation theology context. The discussion has been taken forward by Max Stackhouse and others.

In the present, the language of human rights is frequently used in the churches, usually *on both sides of debates*, for example, on pro Choice and pro Life. As in secular politics, conservative groups have become at least as adept as liberal groups in seizing ownership of the language of human rights on behalf of their positions. Debates about love are polarized by such modifications as loving the sinner but not the sin. Debates about natural law and the common good may reach radically different conclusions from similar premises, as for instance in the debates about sexuality between Finnis and Nussbaum, both drawing on Aristotelian premises. The specific implications of human rights can be contested in numerous directions.

Arguments for the centrality of human rights would appear to be both complex and necessary, complex because of the range of different evaluations of rights, necessary because of the continued global violation of rights, especially of the most vulnerable. David Forsythe neatly sums up the history of the debate thus:

We do not lack for differing theories about human rights. For Edmund Burke, the concept of human rights was a monstrous fiction. For Jeremy Bentham, it was absurd to base human rights on natural rights, because 'Natural rights is simple nonsense . . . nonsense upon stilts'. The contemporary philosopher Alasdair

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MacIntyre tells us *there are no such things as human rights*; they are similar to witches and unicorns and other figments of the imagination.⁷

Forsythe has examined the regional and global implications of human rights standards, the role of non-governmental organizations and the often unnoticed yet increasingly huge power and financial muscle of *transnational corporations*. He notes that 'Only six states have revenues larger than the nine largest TNCs. If we were to include transnational banks in this figure, the power of private for-profit enterprises would be much larger.'⁸ So, for example, the Mitsubishi and Mitsui corporations have each twice as much revenue as the Netherlands, the world's seventh most prosperous nation state. Reflecting on the politics of liberalism in a realist world, he traces in contemporary geopolitics an oscillation between liberalism and neo-liberalism, between romanticism and realism. He concludes that human rights activity on any level does make a tangible difference to the contemporary world, but that there is a very long way to go.

'The various levels of action for human rights – whether global, regional, national or sub-national – were not likely to wither away because of lack of human rights violations with which to deal. Pursuing liberalism in a realist world is no simple task.'⁹

What has all this to do with theology? Not much, if theology is concerned only with abstract ideas and aesthetics without ethics. But since theology, and especially Christian theology, is committed to searching for truth and ultimate meaning in the universe, it cannot be done in isolation from these *geopolitical realities*. Behind the economic and political statistics lie equally important issues such as nutrition and health care. In the European Holocaust, six million were murdered, and in the famine in China in 1958–62, thirty million people perished. Aids currently devastates Africa. Where were human rights considerations there, and where was God's action in all of this? A theology which is done in isolation from world affairs may be a coherent and academically satisfying enterprise, but it can hardly be an adequate Christian theology.

The argument of this chapter will be that there is *an integral connection* between concern for human rights and concern for God. But it is not a simple or direct connection. God is not an interventionist God in the most literal sense, who may fix things in the world at will. But, equally, God is not entirely dependent on the cosmos. God remains creator and redeemer of the world, and may act in ways complex beyond our full understanding to encourage fulfilment in the universe along particular lines – lines consonant with God's

own being and purpose as eternal compassionate love. This action may link with human action in more and in less direct ways.

The Enlightenment search for the common good, often without reference to God, may be understood by Christians as itself prompted by the divine love. This is not to suggest that agnostic thinkers were somehow anonymous Christians, but rather from a Christian perspective that all good action is a response to *the source of goodness who is God*. Enlightenment thinkers were correct in thinking that it is possible to seek for and to achieve a measure of the common good without appeal to God. But the quest need not exclude the question of God.

Nussbaum

In the search for a differentiated rationality in relation to rights we may find in the writings of Martha Nussbaum much to encourage us. In *Cultivating Humanity*,¹⁰ Martha Nussbaum provides an exemplary retrieval of aspects of classical culture as a contribution to tackling pressing problems in the contemporary world – notably the understanding of citizenship. She identifies the dangers inherent both in modernist universalism and in postmodern particularity, and she invokes a Socratic model of rationality to steer an intelligent course between extremes. The argument is a development of her earlier *The Therapy of Desire*,¹¹ an examination of the theory and practice of Hellenistic ethics. In that volume, discussion of the debates between Aristotelian and Stoic ethicists led her to stress the continuing value of reason, in correction of Foucault's conclusion, based on his study of classical ethics, that reason is always the instrument of power and so is of very limited effectiveness.

Cultivating Humanity is in some ways an exegesis of Seneca's advice to cultivate humanitas. This is, as the preface indicates, a discussion of the nature of citizenship. But it is very much more than that. It is an exploration of a critical reflection on the best approaches to a multicultural society, in which there is mutual respect for all citizens. The juxtaposition of debates from ancient Greece and contemporary America provides a thread of philosophical continuity which ensures that intellectual rigour is never sacrificed to social engineering. She argues that three capacities are essential to cultivating humanity – critical self-examination, awareness that common needs and aims are realized differently in different circumstances and narrative imagination, the capacity to see the world from the standpoint of the other. It also requires 'scientific understanding'. To be a citizen of the world is to be aware of cultural difference.

How is Socratic self-examination possible? Argument, especially about matters of justice, may strengthen democracy. Progress can be made through a reflection that seeks the common good.¹² The Stoics argued that critical argument should lead to intellectual strength and freedom.¹³ (We might think that philosophy departments are scarcely always paradigms of citizenship!) Socratic education is for all, must be suitable to the pupil's context, concerned for a variety of norms, and requires books that do not become authorities. The realities of power and politics do not make reason redundant; they make critical reflection even more imperative.

In a chapter on narrative imagination she underscores the value of literature as a vehicle of the compassionate imagination. After charting the role of tragedy in encouraging us to identify with suffering, she notes the coincidence of the rise of the modern novel with the rise of modern democracy. 'In reading a realist novel with active participation, readers do all that tragic spectators do, and something more. They embrace the ordinary.'¹⁴ She recalls again the tradition of the Stoics. 'Marcus Aurelius made a further claim on behalf of the narrative imagination: he argued that it contributes to undoing retributive anger.'¹⁵ She identifies the danger of some forms of multiculturalism. 'The goal of producing world citizens is profoundly opposed to the spirit of identity politics, which holds that one's primary affiliation is with one's own local group, whether religious or ethnic or based on sexuality or gender.'¹⁶ A section on the study of non-Western cultures leads to reflection on the aims and limits of cross-cultural teaching. Students should become aware of their own ignorance, of other world cultures and to a great extent of their own.

Nussbaum turns to African-American studies. Particularly effective is her account of her own lack of meaningful contact with black people through her life and teaching career. 'I see few black faces. I find things out mostly by teaching and imagining.' This is a severe challenge in 'an America nominally integrated but still consumed by bigotry'.¹⁷ The citizenship theme is in turn developed into the realm of women's studies. This was to be taken up soon in a further book.¹⁸ Feminist thought leads on logically to other areas in the study of human sexuality. Nussbaum highlights academic suspicion of the subject from her own experience. A delicate and difficult task, it should nevertheless be a central part of the curriculum. What of the role of religion in the search for citizenship? She maintains that love of the neighbour is a central value in all major American religions. 'These religions call us to a critical examination of our own selfishness and narrowness, urging more inclusive sympathy.'¹⁹ The 'new' liberal education will not be for an elite but for all humanity.

The passion for justice has been eloquently expressed by Duncan Forrester in many of his own writings, notably *Christian Justice* and *On Human Worth*. One might illustrate the catalytic effect of emancipatory theology from any of its dimensions – feminist theology, black theology, Hispanic or Asian theology, or where the voice of theology is particularly not just in critique of unjust cultures, but in the theory and practice of the Christian Church itself. The Church must put her own house in order, in relation to issues of race, gender and other issues, if it is to be effective in a wide society. The Church must confront the often excruciatingly painful task of examining its own employment practices before it speaks of justice and equality for workers in other spheres.

I shall illustrate my argument from issues in which Duncan and Margaret Forrester have taken a firm stand – lesbian and gay issues, the place of women, India and race issues. The first of these is not an area in which the Church of Scotland has a good record. It is an area in which taking a firm stand for justice has led to much vilification – I think of Bishop Richard Holloway. Beginning from the concrete, I reproduce here a piece which I was asked recently to write for *Trinity College Bulletin*, in Glasgow University.

I watched the Church of Scotland Assembly 2000 debate when the BBC invited me to comment for the afternoon television programme. What was new? The tone of the debate had improved slightly since the beginning of the decade, when the mere mention of gay people in Panel on Doctrine Reports led to overtly homophobic rhetoric. Discussion of the gay issue was preferable to decades of silence. Most of the speeches were on the conservative side, especially among the younger ministers. Despite the new cordiality no openly gay person felt safe enough to utter a word. It was good that a couple of speakers mentioned the deep pain and hurt that had been caused by the issue.

My own view of this issue has long been liberal. Of course there can be solid arguments on either side of the debate, as indeed there was on slavery, women ministers and numerous other issues. Exploitation is not limited to either straight or gay people. Issues of sexuality are not that simple. But I believe that the conservative views held by a large section of Scottish Christians, for example by the Board of Social Responsibility, the Presbytery of Glasgow which voted by 300 to 22 against repeal in any circumstances, Cardinal Winning and Brian Souter were profoundly mistaken.

It is mistaken to think that the unity to which God calls human beings is a unity of sameness. There has to be scope for otherness, for diversity, as there is diversity and dynamic relationship within the Trinity. That is what it is to be made in the image of God. It is mistaken because people are constantly hurt.

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assaulted, rendered suicidal in the atmosphere of institutionalized discrimination which clearly exists in Scotland today. This debate on high principles has already produced victims, and it may well produce more.

Anti-gay sentiment appears still to be at its strongest in Europe in Scotland and in Northern Ireland, countries with strong conservative traditional cultures. At the time of the debate the prime minister was right to call the bluff of the 'Keep the Clause' campaign, when he spoke of people who hide their homophobia under the cover of child protection. Of course constructive social change cannot happen overnight, and we should not blame too quickly people who are innocently led into dubious campaigns. Perhaps there ought to be an age of consent for involvement with such bodies as the Christian Institute, and it should be set at 95. In the end, the net effect of prejudice will be to turn more people away from the church.

We can at least be glad that not all church teaching has been negative. The Scottish Episcopal Church hosted in May 2000 a valuable conference of dialogue between the churches and gay and lesbian Christians. The Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland (with which I had some connection), in its reports on the subject spoke of marriage as a foundational pattern in the Bible. This need not be a limiting or exclusive pattern. It stressed love, concern, faithfulness. Appreciation of marriage is without question important. But it should not diminish the worth of other relationships. The Church and Nation Committee constantly underlines the fundamental Christian concern for human rights, and for justice and equality in ALL areas of discrimination. It is said that only a small proportion of the population are involved here. The more marginalized they are, the more important for Christians to identify in solidarity with them. The God of Jesus Christ is always there for and with the outcast and the persecuted. There are some strange things in the Bible. But this need not lead us to encourage the somewhat irreverently termed 'stone a poof for the Jesus brigade'.

In the summer semester of 1999 I was teaching in Germany. In the middle of Frankfurt, there is a bronze statue of an angel. It is a formal and almost medieval statue. But the angel's neck is almost totally severed. It is a memorial to the gay holocaust, to hundreds of murdered people, priests and ministers and lay people. It is too easy for churches to repeat ancient anathemas while at the same time disowning responsibility for fomenting discrimination. 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.'

There is a need to be much more humble still in our approach to others outside the church. All is not doom and gloom. The churches are slowly creeping towards communication with gay and lesbian people. It is good that people with different views within the churches are learning to work together on difficult issues. On a brighter note, we may recall that already in large areas of the world this whole controversy seems about as relevant to the common good as disputes about flying the Union flag on public buildings. Even the churches may get there in time.

Here is a human rights issue, not perhaps on an enormous scale but a kind of litmus test at the heart of our own churches, at a point of painful and often apparently irreconcilable conflict. The Christian Gospel is a gospel of creation and reconciliation, of repentance and faith. When we consider the misery inflicted on the lives of countless people over the centuries through church intransigence – however culturally conditioned – it becomes clear that a huge amount of corporate repentance is in order here. We can hardly expect this in the near future, but in the long term it would seem to be inevitable.

In return we might have a threefold dividend. We might learn new things about the worship of God, the service of our neighbours and the joy of discipleship from gay people today. We might retrieve the spiritual legacy of people in the past whose lives were often complicated by confusion and denial: as one troubled soul famously put it, 'For through the law I died to the law. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' More recently, we can contemplate the cost of discipleship in the life and 1998 crucifixion of Matthew Shepard. We might also be able at last to contribute to the development of a more nuanced approach to many of the social and pastoral issues which are common to all human beings in community, when the oppressive politics of ghettoization have finally been abandoned.

It is sometimes objected that human rights issues are purely Western preoccupations, not relevant outside Europe and America. Local cultural perspectives are always to be respected. It is of course true that local perspectives are to be respected, but not at any cost – respect for a mafia culture or a gun culture will clearly be mitigated by other considerations. Martha Nussbaum has brilliantly dissected these issues.

Against the objection that a search for *humanitas* is inevitably simply an exegesis of Western values it is striking that in her *Women and Human Development*,²⁰ Nussbaum concentrates almost entirely on Indian traditions and culture, and demonstrates the continuing importance of the central values of humanity in this framework. Through the examination of legal, political and religious debates, law cases and practical outcomes, she shows that issues of rights and capabilities in India manifest in depth all the ambiguities and complexities which appear in other cultures. Much of the generalizing rhetoric surrounding the status of 'Western' and 'non-Western' perspectives will simply not stand up to close rational scrutiny.

A chapter, 'In Defense of Universal Values'²¹ makes a valuable case for a balance between respecting cultural particularity and maintaining common values. It interprets human rights through a comprehensive model of human capabilities. She argues against cultural relativism:

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It has no bite in the modern world, where the ideas of every culture turn up inside every other, through the internet and the media ... Why should we follow local ideas, rather than the best ideas that we can find? ... Finally, normative relativism is self subverting: for, in asking us to defer to local norms, it asks us to defer to norms that in most cases are strongly non-relativistic. Most local traditions take themselves to be absolutely, or relatively true. So, in asking us to follow the local, rationality asks us not to follow relativism.²²

Capabilities

Arguments from diversity and paternalism are equally weak. She lists central human functional capabilities, vital to the dignity and well-being of each person. These include: life, bodily health, bodily integrity, senses, imagination and thought, emotions, practical reason, relation to other species, play and control, political and material, over one's environment.²³ These include basic capabilities, internal capabilities and combined capabilities. 'Citizens of repressive nondemocratic regimes have the internal but not the combined capability to exercise thought and speech in accordance with their consciences.'²⁴

Capabilities have a close relationship to human rights, to political and civil liberties and to economic and social rights. Combined capabilities are rights, and do not have the 'Western' tone of talk of rights, though rights language is still useful in drawing attention to the role of justification and the importance of liberty in argument for capabilities. This theoretical framework provides a basis for renewed attention to women's preferences and options in a world which has long systematically suppressed women.

Nussbaum turns to the role of religion in these debates. Religion may be but need not be oppressive. She will argue here for frameworks of political rather than comprehensive liberalism, avoiding the tendency to exclude transcendence which is often a feature of secular liberal positions. The argument is illustrated from legal and religious argument in Indian court cases. Families are important to women, but the concept should not be allowed to become coercive. 'My approach, by contrast, begins by focusing on the capabilities and liberties of each person, and does not assume that any one affiliative group is prior or central in promoting these capabilities.'²⁵ 'The fact is that justice and friendship are good allies: women who have dignity and self-respect can help to fashion types of community that are no less loving, and often quite a lot more loving, than those they have known before.'²⁶

'Women in much of the world lose out by being women.'²⁷ The world community has been slow to address the problems of women, because it has lacked a consensus that sex-based inequality is an urgent issue of political justice. A capabilities approach 'can fairly claim to make a distinctive contribution to the practical pursuit of gender justice'.²⁸

Nussbaum's work seems to me to be an outstanding model of the way forward in untangling complex issues of the relationships of religion, culture and human rights. She demonstrates that these issues must be faced rationally at different levels, the ethical, the political, the cultural and the religious, and the connections must then be carefully drawn out. She provides, at a high level of intellectual distinction, both theoretical frameworks for understanding and practical programmes for achieving justice and human dignity. Her chosen target, the development of women, is both of major significance in itself and of great value as a paradigm case to illuminate related though different issues of culture, religion and justice – for example poverty, sexuality and race. Her work is a standing provocation to the theologian to show that theology can make an equally significant contribution to the quest for human capability.

Nussbaum's work provides an effective response to the problems of relativism and the charge that rights talk is always Western. As has been noted (Chris Brown in *Universal Human Rights?*,²⁹ 'Part of this turn involves the use of classical notions of the "virtues" to construct the kind of account of what it is to be human that would not be vulnerable to the charge of cultural imperialism. The virtues as espoused by Aristotle and other Greek thinkers are frames of mind which orient one towards characteristic human experiences.') It is clear that concepts of human rights, like all concepts, are always open to further debate and modification. But it is all too easy for autocratic rulers to attack them in order to preserve their own coercive ideologies, in any part of the world.

Theology may well wish to assert other concepts which are central to human flourishing – we have mentioned generosity. But rights may be an integral part of the realization of the purpose of a generous God for humanity. Human rights are sometimes a hard thing for Christian communities to come to terms with. We have seen the churches plead for immunity from the European Convention on Human Rights. What of the Crown Rights of the Redeemer? But that argument will work only when the churches' justice can be seen to be more just than secular justice. We must see to it that a Christian construal of human rights is more humane than other constructions. Only then will we be in a position to

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do what we are called to do, to witness to the love of God in and before the world.

God, Transcendence and Human Flourishing

Religion is not exhausted by morality. Christians are not more moral than others. If we were to reach a position in which all the goals of personal and social justice were achieved, faith would still have a central role to play in Christian life. Faith, Christian and other, is concerned with transcendence. A belief in transcendence will not in itself make for humane praxis or human flourishing. The world is full of religious bigots who have an unshakeable faith in divine transcendence, in Christian cases linked to the figure of Jesus Christ, and there are other bigots who do not believe in divine transcendence. Metaphysical and logical categories may be morally neutral. But they are essential for creating the frameworks by which we think about and act towards the world in which we live.

Taking account of transcendence is *necessary* to the Christian understanding of the world as a gift, which comes from God and which belongs to God. How in a transcultural context can we develop a critical theology of transcendence? This dilemma is fascinatingly articulated by Charles Taylor in his essay, *A Catholic Modernity*,³⁰ and in his response to comments on that paper.

The argument goes like this. Redemption happens through incarnation, the weaving of God's life into human lives, but these human lives are different. Complementarity and identity will both be part of our ultimate oneness. Our great historical temptation has been to forget the *complementarity*, to go straight for the sameness, making as many people as possible into 'good Catholics' – and in the process failing catholicity. He tries to look at the Enlightenment as Matteo Ricci looked at Chinese civilization in the sixteenth century. 'The view I'd like to defend, if I can put it in a nutshell, is that in modern, secularist culture there are mingled both authentic developments of the gospel, of an incarnational mode of life, and also a closing off to God that negates the gospel.'³¹ The problem is in the project of *Christendom*, the attempt to marry the faith with a form of culture and a mode of society.

But there are problems:

The first danger that threatens an exclusive humanism, which wipes out the transcendent beyond life, is that it provokes as reaction an immanent negation of life. The point of things isn't exhausted by life. Suffering and death help us to affirm something that matters beyond life. We may lose '*the crucial nuance*'.

The Christian conscience experiences a mixture of humility and unease: the humility in realising that the break with Christendom was necessary for this great extension of gospel-inspired actions; the unease in the sense that the denial of transcendence places this action under threat.³²

There is a revolt against the modern affirmation of life in Nietzsche. This is a turn to violence, which may perhaps only be escaped by a turn to transcendence. We make very high demands for universal solidarity today, but how do we manage it? *Self-worth has limitations*. Philanthropy may turn to coercion, unless there is unconditional love of the beneficiaries.³³ Christian spirituality points in faith to a way out 'either as a love or compassion that is unconditional – or as one based on what you are most profoundly – a being in the image of God.' 'Our being in the image of God is also our standing among others in the stream of love, which is that facet of God's life we try to grasp, very inadequately, in speaking of the Trinity.'³⁴

Taylor responds in a later chapter to reflections given upon his lecture. He speaks of the insufficiency of human flourishing as the unique focus of our lives. But he appreciates also the affirmation of ordinary life, the new forms of inwardness and the 'rights culture'.

Much modern philosophy has been 'monological'. But the goods discovered in community, 'together-goods', are important.³⁵ It is important to strive for *complementarity*, and not to be content with incommensurability, as in Foucault's 'completely solo operation'. In a rights culture, the good of solidarity may be neglected.

In a Christian contribution to understanding of transcendence, the Christological matrix of love, peace and justice, of vulnerability and generosity, leads us to construe goodness in the created order as the goodness of self-giving, self-affirming love, and evil as its negation and denial. Seeing human beings through the image of God in Jesus Christ we may see occasions for self-giving love in human relations as pointers to transcendence.

Transcendence is *not* characterized as *difference* from human love, but as its *source*, inspiration and ground. As human beings experience this sense of the givenness of what is good in their lives and in the lives of fellow human beings, they affirm the active presence of the transcendent God. They do this in correlating rationality and experience with the tradition and narratives of the Christian community. They offer this construal as a contribution to a wider, transcultural understanding of transcendence. They believe that it faithfully conveys what is at the heart of ultimate reality.

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A critical transcultural theology of transcendence will affirm the presence of the Christian God in such a way as always to acknowledge other understandings of transcendence, and to respect these as far as they share in *rejection of violence*, coercion and domination. It will insist that the transcendence of God has nothing to do with violence and coercion. It will encourage a generous and pluriform manifestation of human community, unfettered by prescribed forms of religious conformity. It will see this freedom as a gift of the free grace of God.

How are we to recognize the dimension of transcendence and respond to it appropriately? Sometimes it may be at crisis points in the lives of individuals and societies that openness to transcendence occurs. Yet there is much value in the biblical metaphor of the still small voice. We like our religious notions and practices to manifest certainty and decisiveness. Yet we know from historical appearances that such apparently unambiguous occasions and events are often deceptive. The presence of God is not in our power to command. It is always there, in the ways in which God through the various religious traditions has promised to be present, for Christians as the presence of self-giving, self-affirming love in our world. A vision which is not strident, dominating or controlling may still be an *immensely persistent*, persuasive and effective vision for the future of human flourishing. Such a vision may be an effective means of delivering basic rights, understood as the standards the God of self-giving love promises to all his creatures. For it will not be deflected by unusual events or by unexpected obstacles. It will expect just to continue to be there.

I end with a brief comment from what I regard as a classic of judicious analysis of human rights issues in a particular case, Cornel West's *Race Matters*.³⁶ It was said of America, but it applies in different tones to all our cultures. 'We simply cannot enter the twenty-first century at each other's throats, even as we acknowledge the weighty forces of racism, patriarchy, economic inequality, homophobia and ecological abuse on our necks ... None of us alone can save the nation or world. But each of us can make a positive difference if we commit ourselves to do so.'³⁷

Notes

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- 4 Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).
- 5 Conor Gearty and Adam Tomkins (eds), *Understanding Human Rights* (London: Pinter, 1999).
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- 7 Forsythe, *Human Rights in International Relations*, p. 28.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 191.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
- 10 Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
- 11 Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).
- 12 Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 25.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 110.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- 18 Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- 20 Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*.
- 21 Martha Nussbaum, 'In defense of universal values', *Women and Human Development*, Ch. 1.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 49.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 276.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 290.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 303.
- 29 Chris Brown, 'Human rights and human dignity: an analysis of human rights culture and critics', in R. Patman (ed.), *Universal Human Rights?* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).
- 30 Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- 36 Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 159.

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