

Theological  
Review

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# THE ABANDONMENT OF ATONEMENT

COLIN GRANT

A pall of consensus seems to have settled over the elusive, but pivotal, Christian doctrine of atonement. There is widespread agreement that there never has been, and never will be, one orthodox doctrine of atonement. While the issue of the person of Christ provoked the intense debates and debacles which resulted in the two-natures christology of Chalcedon, the work of Christ never elicited such focused attention, and consequently never received a corresponding authoritative formulation. Some would suggest that this is so much the better because the work of Christ must necessarily shatter any concepts which would seek to contain it; though why this is not equally true of the person of Christ is passed over in discreet silence. The consensus rather goes on to enumerate a list of generally accepted theories of atonement, among which pride of place (although in view of the inevitable inadequacy of theoretical constructs in this area, it is a dubious distinction) is awarded to St. Anselm, whose *Cur Deus Homo* is reckoned as the first sustained statement of an atonement theory. Amid the concern of the feudal age with integrity and honour, Anselm concluded that sin was such an affront to God's honour that it could only be dealt with if in some way that affront could be recompensed. Since only man should, but only God could, accomplish this, that constituted the explanation for the God-man. Thus the first explicit theory of atonement suggested that God facilitated forgiveness with integrity through the sacrifice of the God-man.

From the vantage point of this explanation, it is possible to identify other prominent theories of atonement, pre- as well as post-Anselm. In what has probably been the single most influential book on the subject in this century, Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*, the suggestion is made that there is a general understanding of atonement in the early centuries which is quite distinct from Anselm's theory. This Aulén calls the classical or dramatic view of atonement, according to which the accomplishment of Christ was seen as the classic victory of God over Satan in the great cosmic drama of the clash between the forces of good and evil. On this side of Anselm, a very different understanding of atonement has emerged from the consideration that the problem which prompts the need for atonement is not God's but ours. It is we who are estranged; it is we who are sinners. Consequently what is required is not a change in God, but in us. And this is what God offers in Christ. In revealing His love in the cross, God elicits our responding love so that reconciliation is effected. This moral influence approach, broached by Abelard shortly after Anselm's theory was formulated, has tended to dominate modern thinking on the subject.

These three main conceptions of atonement may be supplemented by recognition of the juristic perspective of the reformers, which, Aulén's impartial Lutheranism notwithstanding, draws on Anselm as well as on the early Fathers. Two other underlying motifs which have exercised varying degrees of influence on atonement articulations are the Greek concept of divinization, according to which the incarnation itself constitutes a kind of atonement, hints of which may be detected in someone like McLeod Campbell,

and the cultic approach of sacrifice, which is presupposed in varying degrees by the more explicit theories.

This consensus about main types of atonement theories is seen to entail the corollary that this plurality of theories precludes any one theory gaining ascendancy to the exclusion of the others. At certain times it seemed inevitable to understand atonement in terms of one particular dominant motif. However, the advantage of hindsight shows that that understanding was at best partial. Anything approaching an adequate understanding of atonement must allow for the variety of expressions to which this diffuse reality has given rise. The various theories all have their contribution to make to a comprehensive appreciation of the meaning of atonement.

The obviousness of this conclusion, and the ease with which it is reached, is only exceeded by its uselessness as a contemporary perspective on atonement. The theoretical advocacy of a sophisticated openness which is appreciative of various approaches translates into the concrete practice of the total avoidance of the whole issue. Thus the persistent recommendation of such pluralism amounts to little more than lip-service paid by theologians to a doctrine whose abandonment is too unthinkable to be acknowledged explicitly. The shallowness and absurdity of this solution is particularly glaring at that point where it derives its initial credibility, in its proposal for combining objective and subjective approaches to atonement. The superficial plausibility of this proposal is dissipated as soon as it is recognized that far from representing different emphases on a continuum, the objective and subjective approaches reflect the diverse world views of different historic epochs. At the very least, anyone who advocates their harmonization is undertaking to combine the ancient and modern worlds.

In this paper we shall consider the concerns and difficulties of the modern subjective and traditional objective approaches respectively, and attempt an assessment of the prospects for an appreciation of atonement today in light of the gulf between these perspectives.

## I

Any attempt to combine elements of objective and subjective views of atonement runs into an immediate obstacle in that, from the point of view of the objective approach, subjective views are not views of atonement at all.<sup>1</sup> The final contention of subjective views is that atonement is not necessary because God is love, and forgives freely. However, rather than putting it so bluntly, advocates of the subjective approach continue to refer to this free forgiveness as atonement. We could find no clearer example of this stance than the following statement by one of the most influential exponents of the subjective view, Hastings Rashdall: "The atonement is the very central doctrine of Christianity in so far as it proclaims, and brings home to the heart of man, the supreme Christian truth that God is love, and that love is the most precious thing in human life".<sup>2</sup> Not all advocates of the subjective approach are so casual. Its leading American exponent, Horace Bushnell, was more aware of the cost of forgiveness to God,<sup>3</sup> and the alleged originator of this view, Abelard, may well be misrepresented in being identified with the view as it came to be articulated by later enthusiasts.<sup>4</sup> However,

there can be no doubt about the triumph of this approach in modern theology.

The father of modern theology, Schleiermacher, entitled the 100th section of his major doctrinal work: "The Redeemer assumes believers into the power of His God-consciousness, and this is His redemptive activity".<sup>5</sup> Earlier he had diagnosed the problem which makes redemption necessary as "God-forgetfulness"<sup>6</sup> which he warns must not be taken to mean "a state in which it is quite impossible for the God-consciousness to be kindled".<sup>7</sup> The possibility of its being rekindled is ever present. What it requires to actualize it is the ignition of someone who has that consciousness, and this is what is effected in Jesus. Thus for Schleiermacher, atonement refers to a reorientation in human consciousness whereby the awareness of God is recovered, at-one-ment is effected, apparently with little or no difficulty for God.

The grace and love of God are reduced to sentimentality if the tension between judgment and grace, righteousness and love is not properly maintained. In Schleiermacher's theology this tension is presented only in weakened form . . . The omnipotence and authority of God's sanctifying and transforming love are so strongly sounded that sin seen from God's side dissolves into nothing.<sup>8</sup>

This direction is further refined by Albrecht Ritschl by his expansion of the God-consciousness motif on both ends, in reference to Jesus and to ourselves. In Jesus, the God-consciousness takes the specific form of a consciousness of vocation.<sup>9</sup> "Jesus' vocation to found the kingdom of God is for Ritschl the key to every phase and detail of his life and ministry."<sup>10</sup> This object of Jesus' vocation, the kingdom of God, constitutes the significance of Jesus for us in the form of its ethical challenge, and provides the direction for reconciliation in that it opens the way through the ethical to the religious because it is also God's "eternal self-end".<sup>11</sup> The prospect of growing reconciliation in the advancing kingdom which has come to light in Jesus thus supplants the historic concern with justification in a further unfolding of the abandonment of atonement.

Perhaps the most concise certification of the new view is to be found in the statement of Harnack which came to be regarded as a central slogan of liberal theology: "The gospel, as Jesus proclaimed it, has to do with the father only and not with the son".<sup>12</sup> The "essence of Christianity", to follow Harnack's original German title, centres in the revelation that God is father and not the stern judge who demands the sacrifice of the son. The sacrifice of Jesus is essentially a human event. For "it was by the cross of Jesus Christ that mankind gained such an experience of the power of purity and love true to death that they can never forget, and that it signifies a new epoch in their history".<sup>13</sup>

The reaction against this direction represented by neo-orthodoxy, and by Barth in particular, can be seen as a recovery of an appreciation of the need for and reality of atonement. In Christ God pronounces his judgmental "No!" as well as his accepting "Yes!". Yet even here the direction away from the centrality of atonement is implicit in the continuing predominance of the consciousness motif in the form of the centrality of revelation.<sup>14</sup> Thus even with Barth it can be charged that atonement is finally a matter of the revelation of the grace of God in Christ, rather than something actually effected in the concrete reality of

Christ.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, in so far as a restoration of concern with atonement was involved in neo-orthodoxy, it was short lived. For virtually all major movements in theology since the middle of this century have found it possible to accord the issue scant attention at best.

Neglect is difficult to document. Perhaps the best that can be done is to point to the absence of concern with atonement at those places where it might be most expected to emerge, and to elicit some confirmatory endorsements of this impression. One such place where it might be expected to have some prominence is in the recent controversy over christology.<sup>16</sup> However, apart from passing references as in testimonials to the importance of atonement from Frances Young and to his aversion to the traditional accounts from Michael Goulder in the original volume, the only direct treatment of the subject is a scant 25 pages in the third volume of the controversy.<sup>17</sup> The fundamental focus is provided by modern academic interest in questions of history, myth and metaphysics, and in contrast to the classical christological controversy where the ancient counterparts of these issues were under debate, the atmosphere this time does not suggest an underlying assumption of soteriological significance.

The direction which seems to be the single most dominant one in contemporary theology manages to avoid atonement by focusing on the promotion of liberation. It emulates liberal theology in turning from the cross toward the whole life of Jesus and especially his message of the kingdom, but where liberals found in this a confirmation of the inherent value of the individual, liberation theology sees it as the evidence of God's siding with the poor and oppressed. Consequently any questioning of this theology invariably invites the accusation of siding with the privileged and oppressors. Yet this accusation must be risked, as it is by Schubert Ogden when he asks how liberation can be motivated and sustained apart from redemption.<sup>18</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, the personal approach of the theology of story has equally little difficulty bypassing atonement.<sup>19</sup> Even the theologians who most directly inherit the mantle of the neo-orthodox revival of interest in classical themes, such as Moltmann and Pannenberg, present "remarkably little of salvific value, of the reconciling love of God acting in atonement in Jesus",<sup>20</sup> and this in spite of the fact that Moltmann has produced a book on *The Crucified God*.

In so far as the atonement issue is even approached in contemporary theology, it tends to be assumed that it involves the recognition of the free and automatic acceptance of God. Perhaps the only atypical element in the following articulation of this stance is the fact that it is stated so explicitly.

The revelation of God in Jesus is the developmental unmasking not of a terrible God, but of a God who would 'wipe away every human tear', of a God who is radically personal and communal in knowledge, love and free creation. God would have us 'fear not'.<sup>21</sup>

From the traditional point of view, this represents the elimination, rather than an articulation, of atonement.

Yet it must be recognized that this approach to atonement is not without its merits. For one thing, it reflects the literal meaning of the term. The word "atonement" is unique in being the only major theological term of English origin. Its original meaning is precisely what its component elements suggest: at-one-ment. It refers to the achieving of at-one-ment between estranged parties. Thus its primary reference is to reconciliation, and any suggestion that such reconciliation is achieved by making amends for the offences which caused the estrangement in the first place, is a secondary development.<sup>22</sup> The strength of the liberal approach is that it reflects this priority. "The significance of the 19th century in the history of atonement doctrine is the new prominence given to such relations as that between father and son or between mother and child, to such concepts as personal sympathy and personal identification with others."<sup>23</sup>

Even more significant than this reflection of the root meaning of the term is the fact that the modern understanding of atonement is motivated by distinctly theological concerns. Aulén suggests that the subjective view represents a reaction against what he calls the Latin theory, originated by St. Anselm.<sup>24</sup> It takes issue with this theory's apparent assumption that atonement consists in appeasing God so that the divine attitude toward us is changed from wrath to grace. Against such a perspective, it insists that, far from being a trophy marking our successful propitiation of God, atonement is rather a gift of God's grace. Thus one of the earliest proponents of this argument, Faustus Socinus, insisted toward the end of the 16th century that forgiveness is not achieved by satisfaction being provided to God, but rather issues from God himself of his own volition. "For God can, especially since he is Lord of all, abandon as much of his rights as he pleases."<sup>25</sup> Socinus suggests that if God cannot forgive without satisfaction, he has less power than humans.<sup>26</sup> Forgiveness must be of God, and not a response to which God is cajoled by the sacrifice of Christ.

In fairness to the traditional accounts of atonement, it must be noted that no serious exponent of them ever meant to suggest that this was how atonement was effected. In this regard, Aulén's reading of Anselm is highly misleading. The latter's explanation of atonement in terms of the satisfaction of God's honour which allows God to forgive with integrity presupposes that God is the source as well as the object of this satisfaction. This is the whole point of his treatise, *Cur Deus Homo*, as suggested most succinctly in the heading of Chapter Six of Book Two: "That the satisfaction whereby man can be saved can be effected only by one who is God and man".<sup>27</sup> Only the God-man can provide satisfaction because as God he can effect it and as man he represents the side from which it is due. In the dialectic of the incarnation, God satisfies his own honour from within estranged humanity. We shall see that this model of atonement is not without its own problems, but anthropocentrism is not one of them. Contrary to Aulén, Anselm does not see man propitiating God, but rather this office is, and can only be, executed by the God-man.

Still, the question that troubles modern sensibility is why there is need for satisfaction. In the tradition of Socinus, we wonder about the power and supremacy of God if there is some constraint to which God is subject. If God is God, then requirements of honour must surely be negotiable for God. If God is bound by these requirements, then such requirements are superior, and God is not really

God. The point is nowhere expressed more clearly than by a theologian whose fame and influence have least to do with his pronouncements on atonement, St. Thomas Aquinas, in his explanation of how God could have forgiven without satisfaction and not thereby impugned the cause of justice.

. . . if God had wanted to free man from sin without any satisfaction at all, he would not have been acting against justice. Justice cannot be safeguarded by the judge whose duty it is to punish crimes committed against others, e.g. against a fellow man, or the government, or the head of the government, should he dismiss a crime without punishment. But God has no one above him, for he is himself the supreme and common good of the entire universe. If then he forgives sin, which is a crime in that it is committed against him, he violates no one's rights. The man who waives satisfaction and forgives an offence done to himself acts mercifully, not unjustly.<sup>28</sup>

Because God is Lord of all, there is an inherent guarantee of the maintenance of justice in divine forgiveness. But this seems to assume that justice is a concomitant of authority and power. It is because of God's sheer supremacy that forgiveness should be possible without questions of compensation or satisfaction. But is justice guaranteed by authority and power? Is it not rather assured by impartiality and consistency? But in that case, forgiveness as a concession of supreme authority appears arbitrary and problematic. If God can forgive because of sheer supremacy, how does this differ from a capricious despot who might display indulgence one moment and vengeance the next? It seems that forgiveness itself, if it is to be genuine and worthwhile, must entail the affirmation of the truth or right offended.

The affirmation of truth and right was one of the main concerns behind the traditional models of atonement. It has been suggested that the strength of that version which is prime candidate for the epitome of satisfaction models, the penal theory of atonement, lies in its concern for the sanctity of the moral law.<sup>29</sup> As is often the case in this area, sources of strength very easily revolve into points of weakness. Concern for the moral law can very easily result in its elevation over the personal reality of divine forgiveness. The concern for atonement, which validates the moral dimension, can displace the quest of at-one-ment, which is the goal of the whole process. Along with this, there is also the implication that somehow the moral law is superior to God. Its requirements have to be satisfied before God can forgive. Yet, recognizing these dangers in satisfaction perspectives, there is something in this outlook which will not be denied.

The consciousness of guilt cannot be overcome by the simple assertion that man is forgiven. Man can believe in forgiveness only if justice is maintained and guilt is confirmed. God must remain Lord and Judge in spite of the reuniting power of his love.<sup>30</sup>

There can be no real at-one-ment without atonement. This is not due to the inviolability of some abstract reality such as the moral law, but rather has to do with the very nature of God.

The moral influence approach, as it is generally understood, sees atonement as the at-one-ment which can be realized through the recognition of God's graciousness which freely forgives us and accepts us as we are. As far as it

goes, it is difficult to fault such an interpretation as an accurate portrayal of the fundamental thrust of the gospel. But to stop there, as much contemporary Christian rhetoric does, is to settle for a half-truth which can only serve to undermine that very gospel. For as characterized by sheer forgiving acceptance, God cannot fail to appear as an arbitrary power representing indiscriminate indulgence for whatever transpires. Such a sentimentalization and trivialization of the gospel of divine love can be avoided only by acknowledging another side in the divine character, that side which traditionally has been designated as holiness.

Love is not love of God if it is not holy. At the same time, holiness is not really holy if it is not love. Holiness is the presupposition of love, while love is the fulfilment of holiness.<sup>31</sup>

Because of this, the original meaning of at-one-ment expanded to include reference to the atonement which made at-one-ment possible. Consequently a full appreciation of atonement must encompass this sense of making amends which gives substance to the accepting love. The sentimentalization of accepting love on its own is dissipated through the recognition that it is holy love that thus accepts. This has at least two crucial implications. On the one hand, it dispenses with the suggestion of compromise which is implicit in the isolation of love as the sole ingredient in forgiveness.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, it provides an assurance that the acceptance of divine love is genuine and will be sustained.<sup>33</sup>

Thus in spite of a fundamental concern to identify God as the source of forgiveness, the moral influence approach so portrays this as straightforward acceptance that it tends to eliminate the fundamental tension between acceptance and rejection, grace and wrath, love and holiness to which the traditional atonement models pointed.

The 'love of God' in liberal theology since Schleiermacher is nothing but the 'soprano' of these happy people. They did not have the ears to hear the bass which is the pain of God sounding out of the depths.<sup>34</sup>

The easy acceptance of God coincides with an essentially easy understanding of life, which, in the words of D. M. MacKinnon "ignores altogether the dimension of the irrevocable; in the end, it comes perilously near taking refuge in a false optimism, which supposes all for the best, in the best of all possible worlds".<sup>35</sup> MacKinnon concludes that, whatever their inadequacies, the traditional treatments of atonement insisted that the work of Christ concerned the deepest contradictions of human life. These contradictions are the human experiences which constitute glimpses of the conflict theology points to in terms of the dialectic of the holiness and love of God. It is out of that conflict that atonement emerges. When the dialectic is short-circuited, as it is in much contemporary religious and theological affirmation of the love of God, in complete disregard of God's holiness, atonement is replaced by an at-one-ment which is as inconsequential as the arbitrary God who sponsors it.

## II

If the moral influence approach proves forbidding because it loses the depth of the gospel with which traditional atonement models were concerned, those

models themselves fall far short of providing an acceptable alternative. "Their transactional character, whether expressed in terms of propitiation, substitution or payment of a debt, make them an easy butt for criticism."<sup>36</sup> In fact, the criticism is so easy that it readily degenerates into caricature, as in the following dismissal of traditional models of atonement by Michael Goulder.

Alas for those whose task is the defence of the traditional doctrines of atonement! Better Skid Row than the endless round of empty speculations that run from the implausible to the irreligious: the theories that point to demons more powerful than God (unless he can cheat them), and those that posit a faceless justice more powerful than God; those that make Christ a whipping boy, and those that make him an international banker in merit, with resources enough to pay off the world's balance of payments deficit. Many such expositors end their labours with the complacent reflection, 'all these pictures are inadequate: we need them all to do justice to the greatness of the facts': but rubbish added to rubbish makes rubbish.<sup>37</sup>

The complacency implicit in the blanket endorsement of all accounts of atonement because none is adequate to the reality itself is precisely the issue behind this paper, as suggested in the introduction. In fact, in the light of Goulder's proposal to avoid the difficulties in the concept of incarnation by regarding Jesus as "The Man of *Universal Destiny*" (italics added), it may be that he knows what he is talking about when he speaks of rubbish. However, without accepting his blanket dismissal of traditional accounts of atonement as being any more adequate than their blanket endorsement, we can agree that even on the most sympathetic reading, these accounts do have an unfortunate tendency to trivialize the reality they attempt to represent. Paul van Buren's assessment of Anselm's position, that it portrays the cross "as a great transaction carried out over our heads",<sup>38</sup> might be applied to any of the objective views of atonement.

It is not just the foreignness of talk of transactions between God and Satan, or between the Father and the Son, which makes these accounts problematic, but the very suggestion of an "objective" transaction which is somehow supposed to have an inherent significance for us. We could translate the ancient mythology of deals with Satan into the contemporary idiom of psychological conflict within God. Aulén asserts of the classical view of atonement: "God is at once the author and the object of reconciliation; He is reconciled in the act of reconciling the world to himself".<sup>39</sup> And we have seen that, contrary to Aulén's own interpretation, Anselm maintains this dialectic, and, indeed, facilitates a theopsychological type of interpretation even more directly by eliminating the external reference to Satan, and concentrating the transaction internally in the Godhead between the Father and the Son. From a perspective as indebted to Luther as Aulén's, Kazoh Kitamori effects the transition to contemporary psychological terms by describing atonement in terms of a struggle within the divine psyche which he characterizes as the pain of God resulting from the conflict in which the divine love conquers the divine wrath so that sinners might be acceptable in spite of their sin.<sup>40</sup> This psychological account is less jarring to modern ears than talk of treacherous deals with Satan, but the familiarity of the idiom does not dispense with the sense of an alien transaction to which we are not party.

The legacy of this theopsychic approach to atonement surfaces in the concern, particularly prominent in neo-orthodox theology, to isolate the significance of Christ, especially of his death, from the rest of life. "Theologians have commonly imagined that they are under obligation to make a complete isolation of the sacrifice of Christ from the heroic self-offering of other noble souls; and this has vitiated most of the classical attempts to produce a doctrine of atonement."<sup>41</sup> The concern that it is really God with whom we have to do in Christ easily slips over into the insistence that we have to do with God only in Christ. Thus Brunner emphasized the once-for-allness (*Einmaligkeit*) of the event of Christ, contending not simply for its uniqueness but its absolute uniqueness.<sup>42</sup> Such insistence on the completeness of the work of Christ serves to confirm the sense of an alien transaction which places such an encumbrance on any attempt at an appreciation of atonement that it is not likely to be surmounted.

Beyond the abstraction of essentially objective theories of atonement which gives the impression of reporting a celestial transaction which has little or nothing to do with us, an impression re-enforced by the isolation of the work of Christ from the rest of our experience of life, the fundamental difficulty with objective theories is located in the same place as that of the subjective moral influence approach, in the understanding of God. Where the moral influence view sentimentalizes the love of God through a failure to appreciate and affirm divine holiness, the objective satisfaction theories fail to do justice to the love of God because of a one-sided obsession with divine holiness. Even if we were not put off by the transactional atmosphere of the traditional accounts of atonement, we would find ourselves brought up short by the understanding of God implied in them. Not only does God come off as something of a wheeler-dealer, but as a wheeler-dealer of questionable credentials. Beyond the deceitful treatment of Satan in the classical theory, which might suggest that it was really Satan who prevailed through the endorsement of his methods, the satisfaction theory, especially in its stronger penal-substitutionary form, raises basic questions about the sheer morality of the whole operation. The central assumption of the traditional accounts was that atonement was the method by which God was able to forgive with integrity. But the penal-substitution explanation suggests that this was made possible by allowing, if not causing, the innocent to suffer for the guilty. How is integrity maintained by such a reversal of just deserts? There would seem to be some point to Bushnell's conclusion: "The justice satisfied is satisfied with injustice!"<sup>43</sup> At the very least, it is ironic that the approach to atonement which puts the premium on moral integrity should be accused of portraying the atonement in immoral terms.

An immediate answer to this charge of immorality against the penal theory is to point out that God does not require Jesus to become the substitute for the guilty, but rather that it is God the Son who takes this judgement upon himself in the mystery of the incarnation. Thus Moltmann contends that it is the cross that evokes the doctrine of the Trinity as its only adequate interpretation, according to which the Father sacrifices the Son through the Spirit.<sup>44</sup> However, far from exonerating God, such a perspective could in fact be seen to confirm the suspicions of those who challenge the God who requires satisfaction. Thus Dorothee Soelle contends that Moltmann's position is an example of that understanding of God which actually glorifies suffering

and really amounts to a theological sadism which ends up "worshipping the executioner".<sup>45</sup> Christians manage to live with this astounding concept of God because it is tempered with the conviction that God is loving as well as just, thus adding the note of masochism.<sup>46</sup>

But the cross is neither a symbol expressing the relation between God the Father and the Son, nor a symbol of masochism which needs suffering in order to convince itself of love. It is above all a symbol of reality. Love does not 'require' the cross, but *de facto* it ends up on the cross.<sup>47</sup>

Or, as Soelle puts it more crisply elsewhere: "Christ came to the cross because he went too far in loving people, not because a heavenly father elected him as the special victim to be punished".<sup>48</sup>

Thus Soelle raises questions about the understanding of God implicit in traditional satisfaction theories of atonement which are just as debilitating as the innocuous picture of God which results from the modern moral influence tendency to lose sight of holiness through the sentimentalization of divine love. The connotation of sadism and the legitimation of suffering are issues which must be faced by any account of atonement which would expect to be taken seriously today. On the other hand, Soelle's own position does not provide much help toward a positive understanding of atonement for today. Her concentration on the problem of suffering prescribes a different orientation.

In the face of suffering you are either with the victim or the executioner – there is no other option. Therefore that explanation of suffering that looks away from the victim and identifies itself with a righteousness that is supposed to stand behind the suffering has already taken a step in the direction of theological sadism, which wants to understand God as the torturer.<sup>49</sup>

Blessed are those who can distinguish so clearly between victims and executioners. Doubly blessed are those who can be sure that they are on the side of the victims. Those of us who find life more ambiguous many continue to draw consolation from the traditional conviction, however inadequately expressed, that God is to be found in the midst of that ambiguity as certified by the cross. This does not provide any excuse for not siding with the victims in so far as they can be identified, but it does submit our failures in identification and in recognition, as well as our complicity in the role of executioner, to the healing power of divine holiness and love.

### III

The off-setting deficiencies of the subjective and objective approaches to atonement make the tendency to propose an amalgamation readily understandable. Since the subjective focus on experience compensates for the abstraction of the objective theories, and the divine sponsorship of atonement in the objective theories supplies the substantive gap in the subjective approach, it seems obvious that the solution to the atonement issue lies in some combination of the two approaches. The traditional concern with the holiness of God and its satisfaction constitutes a corrective to the sentimentalization of love in the modern approach, while the emphasis on the love of God in this approach recovers the essential thrust of the gospel

threatened by the narrowly fastidious preoccupation with divine integrity in the traditional approaches. Similarly, modern sensitivity to the realities of suffering expose the suggestion of sadism in a view of atonement which sees God regarding suffering as acceptable and even compensatory, while traditional theories maintain an appreciation of the complexity and depth of suffering threatened by the modern assumption that it should be susceptible to the remedial action of social engineering.

However, in spite of the obviousness of this direction, and the frequency with which it is promoted, serious attempts to effect such a harmonization have not been particularly successful. The Erlangen school in Germany did not really manage to integrate the classical concern with redemption into the modern emphasis on reconciliation;<sup>30</sup> and Moberly's *Atonement and Personality* fails in its attempt to combine subjective and objective concerns, according to critics from both sides of the spectrum.<sup>31</sup>

It is not surprising that advocates of objective or subjective views of atonement should find that comprehensive approaches which attempt to combine elements from both sides do not do justice to the distinctive concerns of their own position. From their respective points of view, their own positions are themselves comprehensive. The subjective approach cannot accept that it is lacking in its appreciation of a fundamental dimension of the divine reality which traditional approaches called the holiness of God. On its own terms, its understanding of God is complete. It simply has a more mature understanding than the traditional outlook was able to manage. In order to see these respective approaches as partial, and thus amenable to harmonization, we have to be standing on a more abstract level of theological reflection. Thus it is not surprising that such attempts at amalgamation have not been successful. If objective theories of atonement strike an inevitable note of abstraction in their depiction of some kind of remote divine transaction, proposals for combining objective and subjective approaches only aggravate the problem by intensifying the degree of abstraction. Their product is a theological construction rather than a reflection of living reality.

What makes combination proposals abstract is their neglect of the rootedness of appreciations of atonement. They proceed as though the subject simply involved theoretical differences which should be subject to mutual adjustment. However, far from representing extremes on a continuum which might lend themselves to harmonization, the objective and subjective approaches to atonement reflect basically different world views. They carry conviction not simply because they present atonement in a certain way, but because they reflect a certain mentality. It is not accidental that the objective theories emerged in pre-modern eras, while the subjective approach has gained prominence in the modern period. "The major shift in the symbolism of salvation took place in the age of the Enlightenment as a shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric focus."<sup>32</sup> This is what separates objective and subjective approaches to atonement. In the language of the philosophy of science, the gap between them is not merely that of a variation between different models depicting a common reality, but rather constitutes what Thomas Kuhn has designated a paradigm shift.<sup>33</sup> The difference between these approaches is akin to the difference between the approaches of Newtonian and Einsteinian physics to the natural world. Just as the

awareness of relativity raises questions and opens perspectives never dreamed of from the Newtonian vantage point, so too the self-consciousness of the modern outlook results in an entirely different perspective from the immediacy of the ancient and medieval worlds. It is this self-consciousness which is reflected in the emergence of the subjective approach and in the decline in interest in objective views of atonement.

This revolution in perspective from theocentric to anthropocentric focus not only explains the emergence of the subjective approach, but also goes a long way towards accounting for the dissolution of the atonement issue through this approach. Because the orientation is from the human rather than from the divine, concern with the requirements of divinity very easily recedes, to be replaced by an essential confidence in humanity which not only makes appreciation of any need for human justification difficult, but also encourages the assumption that the problem is rather one of divine justification. "The enlightenment, therefore, began a process in which humanity no longer felt the need to justify itself before God; it was God who had to justify the divine existence to humanity."<sup>34</sup> This is the gap which proposals for amalgamating objective and subjective views of atonement would have to bridge.

What is at stake in the issue of atonement today is not a question of the compatibility of different versions of a theological doctrine, but rather the question of the viability of theology as such. What is required is nothing less than an understanding of atonement which reaches to the fundamental questioning of God characteristic of the contemporary outlook. An imaginative proposal in this direction is presented by Robert S. Paul in a book which, contrary to the more specific suggestion of its title, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, also provides one of the most illuminating historical surveys of the doctrine.

The older ransom theories thought of atonement in terms of the debt for sin being paid to the devil; the satisfaction theories explained it as penal suffering inflicted to satisfy God's justice. But to give a content to the atonement that every generation can understand (and to get nearer to the passion narratives), we should perhaps think of it as a penalty or debt demanded by and paid to man. That measures the enormity of the deed that was perpetrated by our Lord's accusers, but it is also the measure of the goodness that was prepared to pay the price. The miracle of miracles is that in Christ God meets the charge that man makes against him and proves its falsity in the very act of taking the judgment for human sin upon himself. Here we are in the realm of pure grace.<sup>35</sup>

This interpretation cleverly combines the traditional concern with satisfaction with the modern questioning of the goodness of God. God satisfies this questioning by falsifying the judgement implicit in it through the very acceptance of that judgement in the cross. The answer to the theodicy question is "Yes" – God is responsible for evil. God accepts that responsibility in Christ, in submitting to the judgement of humanity. Yet by that very submission, the injustice of that judgement is exposed and the graciousness of God in submitting to that false judgement is exhibited, and in its light the real cause for atonement in human sinfulness is disclosed.

Yet in the light of what we have seen about the abstractness of comprehensive treatments of atonement, the very cleverness of Paul's proposal should raise a note of caution. Even more alarming is his stated aim – "to give a content to the atonement that every generation can understand". The price of such a universal perspective would seem to be an inevitable abstractness. However, that need not detain us, because it is equally evident that that aim is not realized. Far from "giving a content to the atonement that every generation can understand", it is highly unlikely that this interpretation would be understood by advocates of the traditional objective theories of atonement. They were not particularly troubled by the theodicy question. On the contrary, their concern was how they could be acceptable to God, rather than the modern question of whether God can be acceptable to us. In so far as they would find it intelligible, they would undoubtedly find it lacking in that the penalty or debt referred to is prescribed by humanity, and indeed sinful humanity, the very antithesis of the traditional assumption of a prescription sponsored by the holiness of God.

Not only does this explanation fall short of meeting traditional concerns, but it is doubtful whether it really speaks to modern sensibility either. For in spite of failing to do justice to the concern for the holiness of God in traditional versions of atonement, it nevertheless retains the form of that concern. Talk of debt and penalty is precisely what modern sensibility finds unintelligible. Thus instead of achieving a comprehensive interpretation "that every generation can understand", what we seem to have is a theological hybrid – impressive in the theological greenhouse, but doomed to be scorched under the searching rays of the traditional concern with the holiness of God, or washed away completely in the showers of blessing from the modern God who, if credible at all, can only be entirely on our side.

Yet the failure of Paul's interpretation is as instructive as the interpretation itself is imaginative. His recognition of the extent of the gulf which an understanding of atonement must bridge makes the failure of his attempt to bridge it particularly poignant. It shows that the precariousness of atonement extends to theodicy as well. Paul's confidence that atonement can be approached through theodicy reflects his own prior appreciation of atonement. P. T. Forsyth may be taken as an illustration of this direction. He contends: "Christ is the theodicy of God and the justification of God and the ungodly".<sup>56</sup> The basis for this contention is his confidence that "the supreme theodicy is atonement".<sup>57</sup> This is not a conclusion to puzzlement over theodicy, but rather an application of an appreciation of atonement.

We are bidden to recognize that God's demand on man takes the lead over man's demand on God. And both are over-ruled by God's demand on God, God meeting his own demand. And we learn unwillingly that only God's justification of man gives the secret of man's justification of God.<sup>58</sup>

From within an appreciation of atonement, atonement can be seen to address the theodicy problem. But it is another matter to assume that theodicy will open the way to atonement, as Paul implies. The likelihood is that the scales will tip in the other direction, toward the abandonment even of the question of God. For that is the direction which modern culture has taken in its march from theocentrism to

anthropocentrism. And this is what is at stake in the atonement issue.

Far from being a domestic dispute among theologians, subject to resolution through academic compromise, atonement is rather a question of the basis and substance of theology. Its progressive erosion in the modern period corresponds to a decline in the significance of theology. But what is at stake is not simply the fortunes of theology, but the issue of our fundamental understanding of life, the adequacy of the anthropocentric perspective. This is not to imply that a return to traditional theocentrism is either desirable or possible. We have learned too much about the humanness of all our understanding to return to the immediacy of previous ages. What might be realistically expected would be an appreciation of the claims of divinity from within our humanity. In this sense, the question of atonement would provide the avenue for what have otherwise been abstract preoccupations with questions about the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of God or the divinity of Christ. One bright spot on the horizon is the recent concern to appreciate the claim that, contrary to the classical portrayal, God really suffers with and for humanity, as in the work of Moltmann and process theologians following the lead of Charles Hartshorne. This might be seen as a culmination of the concern evidenced in liberal theology to pursue the logic of the claim that God is characterized by unconditional love. However, if this approach is not to degenerate into sentimentality, it must recover something of the traditional appreciation of the holiness of God, which alone can give substance and depth to the concept of divine suffering. This could pave the way for a more vital appreciation of atonement than traditional theories could manage because of their reticence about ascribing suffering to God. It would also reflect the original concern of moral influence approaches to bring home to us the cost of atonement to God and thus elicit our repentance and response. There would even be some vindication of advocates of combining elements of subjective and objective views of atonement. However, the combination would not be effected as a theological exercise, but only through struggling with the realities of life as we find it and see reflected in it the holy suffering of a loving God.

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# MARTIN LUTHER AND HIS INFLUENCE ON ENGLAND

GORDON HUELIN

The literature on Martin Luther, the 500th anniversary of whose birth we commemorated in November 1983, is immense. Yet, apart from the work of an American scholar, H. E. Jacobs, *The Lutheran Movement in England*, which is now nearly a century old and extremely hard to come by, as well as being somewhat out of date, plus an unpublished thesis in the University Library, Cambridge, by Dr. Susan Brigden, entitled *The Early Reformation in London 1520-47: The Conflict in the Parishes*, comparatively little has been written on Luther's links with England and his influence on the religious thought of not a few of its inhabitants. This paper is therefore intended to fill something of a gap.

It was in the year 1520 that Luther published his three great Reformation treatises, the second of which, *De Captivitate Babylonica Ecclesiae (Concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church)* appeared in the month of October. Unlike the first and the third it was written in Latin, since it was a theological treatise intended primarily for the clergy. In it, Luther turned his attention to the sacraments, and particularly to that of the Lord's Supper. The first captivity as far as this was concerned lay, he said, in *the withholding of the cup or chalice from the laity*. The second captivity lay in the Roman doctrine of *transubstantiation*. And the third captivity, which Luther declared the most wicked abuse of all, since it brought in its train a host of other abuses, lay in *the teaching that the Mass was a sacrifice*.

Now it was this second of Luther's Reformation treatises which not only more than any other marked his breach with Rome, but which also roused the wrath of the English King Henry VIII. That is of considerable importance to us, since thereafter Henry became a determined enemy of Luther, with the result that Lutheranism never had the opportunity of making the impact on England which Calvinism made at a later date. We cannot be certain as to why Henry VIII felt moved to write a refutation of Luther's second Reformation treatise, although Erwin Doernberg, in his book *Henry VIII and Luther: an Account of their Personal Relations*, published in 1961, suggests three possibilities:

- i) Henry may have been genuinely disturbed by Luther's reformation activities – after all, he was deeply interested in theology;
- ii) He may have seen that Luther was an embarrassment to the Pope and realized that here was the chance of obtaining a papal title from Leo X that he had long coveted;
- iii) He may have had mixed motives – partly arising out of a genuine concern for the threat to orthodoxy, partly from a consideration of the political effects if he were to rise to the Papacy's defence.

Whatever his reasons, Henry wrote the *Assertion of the Seven Sacraments*, a book of 78 quarto pages which appeared in 1521 and was dedicated to Pope Leo X. (Doernberg believes that the King did "a good deal of the writing himself" but that the "final version of the book was the work of a schooled cleric" (pp. 22, 23).) The Pope having

received a beautifully produced copy from the English Ambassador in Rome, was so delighted that he granted an indulgence of 10 years to anyone who should read it, and promptly bestowed on Henry and his successors the title of "Defensor Fidei", i.e. "Defender of the Faith", a title still borne by our present Queen.

Not only did Henry rise to the defence of Catholicism and its sacramental teaching, but at the same time he let it be known in no uncertain language what he thought of Martin Luther, that "vile heretic whose false and frivolous teaching was the fruit of a mind utterly divorced from God". He would not, Henry declared, attempt to bring about a recantation from Luther by means of this book, since the case seemed hopeless. "Alas! The most greedy wolf of hell has surprised him, devoured and swallowed him down into the lowest part of his belly where he lies half alive and half in death." Incredible as it seems to us in the 1980s, a Roman Catholic priest issued a reprint of Henry VIII's book against Luther during the first decade of the present century, in the hope, he declared, that by means of it Anglican readers might be brought back to the true fold!

As for Luther, he penned a reply in which he expressed in plain terms his opinion of the King of England, calling Henry "a pig, an ass, a dunghill, spawn of an adder, a basilisk, a lying buffoon dressed in King's robes, a mad fool with a frothy mouth and whorish face". Erwin Doernberg points out in the volume already mentioned that "whatever can and must be said about the unnecessarily objectionable language in which Luther addressed Henry VIII, this must be judged in the proper perspective, for there has hardly ever been a time in which slogans and abusive verbosity, often childish primitive, was so widespread and in such common use as in the 16th century". No doubt devout Protestant ladies in 19th century Victorian England, who were shocked at such outbursts on dear Dr. Luther's part, might have been comforted to learn from Johann Mathesius that Luther never indulged in indecent conversation. But in fact, as Heinrich Boehmer said in his book *Luther and the Reformation in the Light of Modern Research*, it is Mathesius' statement which is surprising, for if we go back to Luther's day we soon realise that the tone prevailing at his table and in his writings was not in the least contrary to the tone of good society in Germany, nor yet in France or England. Boehmer writes: "The familiar phrase, 'What is natural is nothing to be ashamed of' has hardly ever been followed so literally, even by the highest persons, as in those outspoken times. Things which everybody knew of, it was held, could be discussed out loud with anyone, even in the presence of modest womanhood. For the modest womanhood of that time possessed the delicacy of feeling of a (more) modern Hamburg fish-wife . . . The pious and delicately sensitive Queen Margaret of Navarre wrote tales which today no decent woman can read without blushing; while Elizabeth of England, the Virgin Queen, would sit through such a coarse comedy as 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' with hearty enjoyment; indeed she expressed no disapproval when her suitors greeted her with the appellation, not perhaps entirely false, but certainly impolite: 'Good morning, old whore!'" The point to bear in mind, emphasizes Boehmer, is that it was "from this coarse and primitively gross generation that Martin Luther sprang, to this coarse generation he spoke, and with this coarse generation he had to measure himself in his struggles".

At the same time as the King of England was pouring forth his invective against Luther and gaining papal approval for so doing, some of Henry's subjects were studying Luther's writings and were making them more widely known – until the year 1521 there was no reason for their not doing this, for only then were they hindered by the authorities. The circulation of Luther's works in England can be traced to various sources:

- 1) First, there were the *Universities* – with Cambridge well to the fore. The reasons for Cambridge's addiction to Luther were its proximity to the East Anglian ports through which the Reformers' writings infiltrated; the fact that many of the Cambridge students were drawn from East Anglia and were ready to absorb the new teaching; and finally, the existence within the University of that group of gifted young scholars already mentioned which included men such as Cranmer, Latimer and Coverdale. These were accustomed to meet at the "White Horse" Inn which stood on a site between the buildings of King's College and St. Catherine's but has long since disappeared, and which, because of the nature of the discussions that took place there, became known to contemporaries as "Little Germany". Yet, if the University of Cambridge was in the lead, that of Oxford also had its supporters of Luther: e.g. the bookseller John Dorne sold a dozen or more copies of his books in 1520, and in the following year Cardinal Wolsey received the news from Oxford that banned books were circulating there; indeed, it was said that the "University was infected with Lutheranism".
- 2) Secondly, there was a rather mysterious group known as the "Society of Christian Brethren" which organized secret meetings to study and spread Luther's teaching – Gordon Rupp calls it a kind of "Forbidden Book of the Month Club". London seems to have been its main centre. We hear of secret meetings, particularly in the neighbourhood around Cheapside: there was a "night school" in Friday Street; there was a meeting in a warehouse in Bow Lane; and there were those who gathered together in the Rectory of the pre-Fire church of All Hallows Honey Lane, of which, during the late 1530s, Thomas Garrett, who was martyred at Smithfield in July 1540, had charge. One would like to know much more about that Rectory, but at any rate it seems clear that in the late 1520s it was dangerous for anyone to be seen approaching it, since by this time the living of All Hallows was held by Dr. Robert Forman (incidentally Thomas Garrett was his curate), and in 1528 Forman was examined and in due course suspended by Tunstall the Bishop of London for having copies of Luther's books in his possession. The "Society of Christian Brethren" was supported by City merchants, men such as Humphrey Monmouth, a wealthy cloth merchant of the parish of All Hallows Barking, who after hearing William Tyndale preach at St. Dunstan-in-the-West became his patron and benefactor. Other supporters of the "Christian brethren" were members of City livery companies: and from evidence given by Thomas Keyle, a mercer of London, it seems that there existed well-organized funds to which the "Christian Brethren" could have recourse when they needed money to distribute the proscribed literature.
- 3) Thirdly, there were those who had daily contact with the Continent by reason of their trade, and who managed to import Lutheran ideas and books. One thinks of the East Anglian ports to which I have already

referred, and there were others like Bristol and Hull. Nor must we forget the German merchants of the Hanseatic League who had their headquarters at the Steelyard in the City of London. As has been said, "Not only were these merchants interested in the Lutheran movement, but they knew more about it than English students and bishops, and desired a similar Reformation in England". It was towards the end of the 13th century that some German merchants mainly from Cologne (though they were soon joined by others known collectively as the "Hansa" or "Hanseatic League") were granted a plot of land on the bank of the River Thames as their headquarters, close to where today stands Cannon Street Station. It was known as the "Stahlhof", or in English as the "Steelyard", a word derived from "stahl", meaning simply a place where goods are offered for sale. The Steelyard was square in shape and was surrounded by a wall. Apparently it did not have its own place of worship and the merchants used the nearby church of All Hallows-the-Great. When, in 1526, the Hanseatic merchants were suspected of Lutheranism it was Cardinal Wolsey, who as papal legate had jurisdiction over them, who began proceedings against them. So Hans Ellendorp said that he had found a treatise of Luther in the room of someone who had died, and had read scarcely a page of it. He excused himself for not having immediately burnt it on the grounds that it was not his own. Another merchant, Herbert Bellendorp, said that about a year before, he had had some Lutheran books in German, including the *Concerning the Babylonian Captivity* of which he had read a few pages and then burnt it. Returning from Germany at Whitsuntide, he had brought with him some more of Luther's works, but had not realized that those possessing them were automatically excommunicated. He was, he said, "willing to be reformed". Yet another, Hans Reussel, had some of Luther's books in translation, not realizing that a translation of Luther's books was prohibited. Henry Pryknes said that around the previous Michaelmas the purser of a ship left in his room a little book in German which he recognized as Luther's, in which he read a treatise on the Lord's Prayer. He submitted himself to correction. It certainly does not seem that the merchants of the Steelyard had any intention of becoming martyrs for Luther's sake!

However, the motives of some of the merchants and tradesmen were not entirely disinterested – there was certainly money to be made out of smuggling Luther's works into this country, and it seems to have been worth the risk involved. Clearly, we should not minimize the importance of this agency for the transmission of Lutheran material. As Professor Carl Meyer has said in an article entitled "Henry VIII burns Luther's books, 12 May 1521", which appeared in the *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (1958): "Peddlers gossip and merchants swap yarns as well as goods".

- 4) Fourthly, there were those who were called the "Known men", the survivors of the earlier Lollard movement, who had in the previous century been forced underground but now threw in their lot with the Reformation, and took on a fresh lease of life. We should not forget that it was their founder, John Wycliffe, whose name is associated with an English translation of the Scriptures, and the new interest shown in the Bible by Lutherans would specially appeal to

them. Dr. J. E. Oxley in a study on *The Reformation in Essex* shows how Essex and Suffolk had been Lollard strongholds, and hence would be very receptive to the teaching of Luther. The real difficulty facing anyone doing serious research into the religious history of the 1520s and '30s is that it is by no means always easy to distinguish between Lollards and Lutherans.

- 5) Fifthly, we must not overlook the English religious houses – the monasteries and friaries. Martin Luther himself was a monk. The news of his revolt would therefore be of special interest to members of the religious orders, for many of whom by the 1520s the life of the cloister had ceased to have any meaning or appeal. Luther belonged to an order which followed the Rule of St. Augustine, and it was to the order of the Austin friars in Cambridge that Robert Barnes, who became the most devoted of all Luther's champions in England, belonged. Another friar of the same order attracted to Lutheranism was Miles Coverdale, subsequently responsible for an English translation of the Bible. Another Cambridge friar, though of a different order, the Carmelites, was a Suffolk man, John Bale. All three of them used to attend the meetings at the White Horse Inn. We know that the monks of Bury St. Edmunds helped to circulate the proscribed Lutheran books. Yet another follower of Luther's opinions was William Roy, who was for a while a member of the Franciscan Order at Greenwich. Roy left for Germany, where he assisted William Tyndale in translating the New Testament, though apparently not with great success; for Tyndale later wrote concerning Roy, "I bade him farewell for our two lives and (as men say) a day longer".

So we can say that during the 1520s and 1530s Luther's teachings and writings were spread around in England by various agents, despite the prohibition laid down by the authorities.

And what of those authorities? They certainly did not turn a blind eye to what was happening; on the contrary, they did their best to stop it. C. H. Cooper in his *Annals of Cambridge* claims that Luther's books were burned there as early as 1520 (though perhaps it should be 1521), and as proof he cites the following extract from the proctor's accounts of that year: "To Dr. Nychols, deputy Vice-Chancellor, for drink and other expenses about the burning of the books of Martin Luther 2/-". In London the great holocaust took place on 12th May, 1521 at Paul's Cross in the presence of Cardinal Wolsey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the other bishops, as well as a vast crowd of allegedly 30,000 Londoners who had turned up for what the Venetian ambassador called "Luther's festival". Bishop John Fisher of Rochester preached a sermon lasting two hours, and as he did so, a large number of Luther's books were burned in the churchyard. This was followed by a speech from Wolsey excommunicating and cursing Luther, after which he gave the crowd his blessing!

Furthermore, the authorities made great efforts to catch the culprits. John Longland, who became Bishop of Lincoln in 1521, was violently anti-Lutheran and hurled abuse across the North Sea at the German Reformer – a manuscript in the Bodleian Library gives us a sample: "You, Luther, already turn everything upside down and confound everything, preaching (as you do) neglect of everything in place of charity, for cleanliness filth, for celibacy and

chastity the company of women, for obedience contempt and sedition, for a Christian life the lax and uncontrolled life of the sons of Belial. Thus you despise the Church, you despise its authority, the honour of the Eucharist, all sacrifice, the priesthood, vows, religion, virginity and chastity." But Bishop Longland, whose diocese included Oxford and the University, also kept the authorities there on their toes, so that they were ready when the curate of Dr. Forman in London, Thomas Garrett, paid a visit to the city in 1528 in order to distribute Lutheran books, which according to Bishop Longland he had obtained from a bookseller in Fleet Street named John Gough. Longland informed Wolsey of this, and Wolsey in turn ordered Bishop Tunstal of London to examine Gough. Tunstal reported to Wolsey in 1528 that he had done so, but that Gough when examined said he did not know Garrett, that he had never dealt in forbidden books, and that he thought he had been mistaken for another man. Nevertheless, Tunstal had committed Gough to the Fleet prison as "all my other prisons are full of persons from the farthest parts of the diocese". One wonders how many of these were there on charges of Lutheranism. Meanwhile in Oxford the proctors seized Garrett and handed him over to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Cottisford, who was Rector of Lincoln College, for safe-keeping. Dr. Cottisford placed Garrett in custody in his room and then went off to chapel for evensong. One can imagine his consternation when he returned to find that the bird had flown. Garrett was presently found perched at Bristol. Along with others, he was subsequently released on Wolsey's orders. However, this leniency proved to be no deterrent, and the authorities then resorted to the extreme penalty. Garrett, who by this time had become Rector of All Hallows Honey Lane – and Luther's debt to him as a propagandist on his behalf was probably immense – went, as we have seen, in July 1540 to the stake in Smithfield; and of the two others who perished with him one was Robert Barnes, sometime member of the Austin Friars in Cambridge, in whose honour Luther himself penned a fulsome obituary notice entitled "Saint Robert".

Despite all such efforts, the influence of Luther on English life and thought was too strong to be suppressed. We may consider it particularly in the matter of worship where it can be said to have been threefold:

- 1) First, as regards the translation of the Bible. Hitherto in public worship, the readings from holy Scripture had been in a language unintelligible to the ordinary layman. One may imagine then the thrill when for the first time people in Germany were able to hear the gospel in Luther's German New Testament, which was published in 1522: a folio volume with numerous initial-letter woodcuts from the workshop of the painter-cum-publisher Lukas Cranach, plus 21 full pages to accompany the last book of the New Testament, Revelation. Some of the woodcuts illustrating Revelation left no doubt as to how Luther applied its vivid imagery to contemporary Rome – the Great Dragon of Rev. 12-13 being shown as wearing the papal tiara. This was too much for the moderate Reformer and protector of Luther, Frederick the Wise, and in the next edition of the German New Testament the dragon appeared minus the top two sections of the tiara, so that it looked like any ordinary crown. In England too, the ordinary people were to hear the Bible in the vernacular through the translation made by their fellow-countryman William Tyndale – though Tyndale

had to flee to Germany in order to carry out the task, and it ultimately cost him his life. Tyndale, who seems to have become acquainted with Luther's works in 1522, felt the call to do for Englishmen what Luther had done for Germans: as he wrote to a "learned man" in Gloucestershire: "Ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost". It may be that Tyndale managed to secure a copy of Luther's recently-published German translation through the merchants of the Steelyard in London – we do not know. What we do know is that Tyndale depended very considerably on Luther's work. It was only towards the end of the last century that the full extent of his debt to the German Reformer was realized, when Bishop Westcott in his *General View of the History of the English Bible* drew attention to the fact that much of Tyndale's work consisted of either direct translations or else paraphrases of Luther. Thus, Tyndale's "Prologue" to his quarto Testament includes a large section from Luther's Preface to the German New Testament, while his *Prologue to Romans*, published in 1529, was largely a translation of Luther's *Preface* to that Epistle. Moreover, Tyndale kept Luther's order of the books of the New Testament, with Hebrews, James, Jude and Revelation at the end. At the same time a more recent "Reappraisal of William Tyndale's Debt to Martin Luther" (L. J. Trinterreed, in *Church History*, Vol. 31, 1962) has shown that while Tyndale followed Luther closely in the matter of Biblical translation, he was not of the same mind when it came to theology, and tended to look more towards Erasmus and to the Reformers in Basle and Zurich.

2) Secondly, we note the Lutheran influences as regards the first English Prayer Book, which came into use in June 1549. In compiling this book, Thomas Cranmer drew from various sources old and new; and for the new material, he leaned to some extent on Luther and Luther's followers. One should not forget that in 1532, shortly before his appointment to the Primacy, Cranmer served as Henry VIII's ambassador abroad, and his journeys took him to Nuremberg. There, for the first time, he made the acquaintance of some of the Lutheran divines, including Andreas Osiander, who was pastor of the church of St. Laurence. Furthermore, Cranmer fell in love with Margaret Osiander, the pastor's niece, and married her, and her influence as much as that of her Lutheran uncle no doubt showed itself in her husband's liturgical projects. Certainly, Cranmer's desire, first to have the service in English, the language of the people, rather than in Latin, and secondly to ensure that at the Eucharist *all* the people should communicate, and in both kinds – two desires which he was unable to achieve as long as Henry VIII lived – may have been nurtured by what he saw in the churches of Germany. It was in 1526 that Luther produced his *Deutsche Messe*, or German Mass, which was a communion service from which all reference to sacrifice had been carefully removed. At the same time, Luther did not display the iconoclasm which was to be seen in the efforts of other 16th century Reformers such as Zwingli in Zurich and Calvin in Geneva. The wearing of the old Eucharistic vestments was left optional, candles and altars were still allowed, and, as someone has rather nicely put it, "Neither the heads of

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the images nor of their venerators were broken". In these and other respects the 1549 English Prayer Book was much closer to Lutheranism both in its content and in its teaching than its successor, the Second Prayer Book of 1552. As in the case of the Lutheran liturgies, all the services, Mattins and Evensong, Holy Communion and the rest, were in the vernacular tongue. During the 1540s, Archbishop Hermann of Cologne, who had become a disciple of Luther, drew up *A Simple and Religious Consultation* – for which he was deposed by the Pope – a book whose influence is clearly visible in the First Prayer Book. For example, the Comfortable Words in the service of Holy Communion were drawn from Hermann, while the title, "The Supper of the Lord", one of those found in the 1549 book, was Hermann's name for the service, and paragraphs and phrases in the services of Baptism and Confirmation clearly reflect Lutheran influences.

- 3) Thirdly, we cannot overlook Luther's contribution with regard to hymns. Suffice it to say that visiting a German Lutheran church in London a couple of years ago, my wife and I were invited after the service to join the small congregation for tea, and as we sat round the table and tea was ended, there came the inevitable singing of

German hymns. I asked if we might have, "Ein' feste Burg", generally known to us as "A safe stronghold". I shall never forget the enthusiasm with which that group of people joined in the German words, or how their faces lit up. It was still the confessional hymn of the Reformation and the challenge of their own countryman as he faced and resisted the opposing forces.

It breathes too the spirit of that Londoner of the year 1527, John Parkyns, who, having heard read in his own tongue the Gospel, longed to possess a copy for himself, and firmly resolved that should he be fortunate enough to do so, neither the threats of the authorities nor the dire penalties which he faced if he was caught, would make him give it up. According to a manuscript preserved in the Greater London Record Office, John Parkyns remarked "If I have 20 books of the true holy scripture translated into English, I would bring none of them in for my Lord of London, curse he or bless he; for he doth it because *we* should have no knowledge, but keeps it all secret to himself".

Whether he realized it or not, Parkyns was echoing the very sentiments of one whose influence in England was more considerable than he, or possibly we ourselves, may have appreciated.

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# THE TRACTARIAN CHALLENGE TO CONSENSUS AND THE IDENTITY OF ANGLICANISM

PAUL AVIS

## I

"The Church of England above all others," writes John McManners in his contribution to the Doctrine Commission's report *Believing in the Church*, "lives by consensus." But, he convincingly suggests, it is not a consensus that consists in the unanimity of all church members or one that can be identified by reference to the pronouncements of authority, duly embraced by the faithful. It is not specifiable. You cannot take its temperature. It is a consensus that exists in the tacit dimension, an unwritten understanding between members of a common fellowship.<sup>1</sup>

The hidden agenda here is of course the transposition of the notion of consensus from the explicit to the tacit, from theory to praxis, from doctrine to living. In effecting this transposition Professor McManners and the members of the Doctrine Commission are making a virtue of necessity. The notion of a tacit consensus is a *post factum* accommodation to the demise of doctrinal accord within the Church of England. To say that is not by any means to criticise the concept of a tacit consensus subsisting in the realm of praxis – I have sponsored this view myself in a recent publication<sup>2</sup> – it is simply to make it unambiguously clear that what we are dealing with is not the timeless essence or ethos of Anglicanism but a pragmatic adjustment to the facts of history.

But a one-sided emphasis on praxis is dangerous. It is undialectical in that it destroys the tension of theory-praxis that alone gives meaning to the concept of praxis. It compels praxis to carry a burden that it cannot sustain<sup>3</sup> Consensus needs to be explicit as well as tacit if it is to contribute to the identity of a Christian church.

Such an explicit consensus existed in the Church of England prior to the Oxford Movement and consisted in adherence to the central principles of Reformation theology. The Tractarian challenge to this consensus contributed significantly to the state of affairs to which the Doctrine Commission makes a noble attempt to give an acceptable face.

## II

The avowed intent of the more extreme Tractarians to *unprotestantise* the Church of England appears in retrospect as the culmination – though not the inevitable conclusion – of a process that had been at work for nearly 200 years. The 17th and 18th centuries saw a deepening sense of reserve and distrust among Anglican churchmen towards the Continental churches of the Reformation, affecting first the Calvinists, in the 17th century, then the Lutherans in the 18th. As Owen Chadwick has pointed out, three out of six Archbishops of Canterbury from Parker to Laud (Grindal, Whitgift and Abbott) "would not have disdained the theology of Switzerland", but as a result of the Civil War and Commonwealth, Calvinism came to be identified with disloyalty to the Church of England. By the end of the 18th century Anglicanism had come to be conceived as a

tradition that did not include Calvinism.<sup>4</sup> Instead there had developed a discriminating attitude to the Reformation, which favoured the Lutherans as members of a sister church, at the expense of the Reformed.

In the early 18th century high churchmen were said to esteem the Lutherans as "the best part of the reform'd religion" and as closest to the Church of England in doctrine, discipline and worship. One decided high churchman advanced that "as they retain a considerable share in the divinely appointed form, without any schismatical opposition to it, so we may reasonably hope that a proportionable share of the divine blessings attends and vertuates their sacred ministrations". The same writer added: "Of these Protestants we cannot advisedly say that their sacraments are no sacraments, that their ministers are mere laymen, that their churches are no churches, but rather that they may be churches, tho' not so perfectly formed". This, we are reliably informed, was "the traditional high church view".<sup>5</sup> But as rationalising tendencies began to prevail in Lutheranism during the *Aufklärung*, English high churchmen looked on with dismay and a sense of increasing alienation. However, this did not affect their assessment of the Reformation itself or of the reformed character of the Church of England.

Within the Oxford Movement, three strands emerged: firstly the old high church tradition represented by Hugh James Rose and William Palmer of Worcester College; secondly, the high church tradition radicalised by a rejection of the Reformation and of the Protestant character of the Church of England, seen in Keble, Pusey, and the Anglican Newman, following the lead of Hurrell Froude; thirdly, the extreme left wing, Frederick Oakeley and W. G. Ward who, also provoked by Froude, set the pace for radical measures and preceded Newman into the Roman fold.

Of these three groups, the first, the faithful high churchmen like Rose and Palmer, respected the reformed nature of the English church and disassociated themselves from the Tractarian platform of *unprotestantising* the Church of England. Keble (a hereditary high-churchman) and Pusey (a convert) set out from the same position but moved steadily towards a negative attitude to the Reformation and a determination to change the face of the church. Together with the extremists, the avowed Romanisers, they presented a deliberate challenge to a consensus within Anglicanism.

Such a consensus clearly existed prior to the Oxford Movement. In general terms, it comprised an acceptance of the Protestant character of the Church of England in its articles, liturgy and polity. Specifically, it meant the central Reformation principles of justification by faith, the supreme authority of scripture and the role of the sovereign – a lay person – in the government of the church. It was a consensus of all living traditions in the church, evangelicals, high churchmen and latitudinarians.

The evangelicals saw themselves as custodians of the reformed character of Anglicanism. Tractarianism provoked a vigorous reaffirmation of Protestant principles by the evangelicals. They responded to Tractarian editions of the Fathers and the Caroline divines with new editions of the English Reformers. The Parker Society published 53 volumes for 7,000 subscribers between 1841 and 1853. Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* appeared in a new edition in 1837

and the Calvin Translation Society commenced publication in 1843. Notable evangelical divines like William Goode and E. A. Litton adorned Anglican theology and were a match for the heavy guns of the Tractarians like Pusey. Litton's major treatise *The Church of Christ* (1851) took up its ground on the principles of "evangelical Protestantism, the Protestantism of Luther, Calvin and our own Reformers". But at that time, the evangelicals also had fraternal links with both the high church and the latitudinarian traditions.<sup>6</sup>

Through such allies as C. P. Golightly, prime instigator of the Oxford Martyrs' Memorial (1839-40), the evangelicals joined forces with the high-churchmen – a tradition within Anglicanism that like the evangelicals, though perhaps less fervently, accepted the heritage of the Reformation.

### III

The developed Tractarian position, however, had no hesitation in claiming that Protestant sacraments were no sacraments, their ministers mere laymen and their churches no churches. This was not – as might be supposed – a mere republication of a temporarily obscured high church tradition, claiming unbroken continuity with Laud, but a harking back to the unrepresentative Non-jurors and the method adopted by Bishop Bull (d. 1710) of playing off the Reformers (particularly their doctrine of justification) against the Fathers. To Hurrell Froude, authentic Anglicanism meant "Charles the First and the Non-jurors".<sup>7</sup>

In response to Tractarianism, the term "evangelical high-churchman" was coined, both to distinguish traditional high churchmen from Tractarians and to emphasise their commitment to the Reformation principles of the supreme authority of scripture and justification by faith. Golightly himself, a staunch Hookerian, is difficult to place, being a high-churchman in all his instincts yet implacably hostile to Tractarianism and its most indefatigable Oxford opponent. As Peter Toon has commented: "To distinguish an evangelical high-churchman from an evangelical with a high doctrine of the visible, episcopally governed, national church is not easy and between about 1838 and 1848 perhaps impossible in some cases".<sup>1</sup>

It was the Gorham case (1847 onwards) that drove a wedge between the evangelicals and the high-churchmen who had been united in their opposition to the Romanising tendencies of the Tractarians. While the evangelicals took refuge in the secular courts, thus bringing the old charge against the Reformers – Erastianism – out into the open again, the high-churchmen lined up behind Henry Phillpotts, bishop of Exeter, on sacramental doctrine. Phillpotts, though never anything but his own man, was regarded by the Tractarians as being on the side of the angels: in *Tract 81*, 10 years before Gorham, Pusey cites him as his last witness in a *catena* of fathers of the English church who held to a sound doctrine of the eucharistic sacrifice.

Evangelicals in this period were firm in their confidence that they had the Reformers on their side. They were their true heirs and authorised interpreters. On the questions of justification and the authority of scripture their confidence was well founded. But on the priesthood of all believers and the right of private judgement – as well as in the problematical area of sacramental theology where the Reformers themselves were not agreed – evangelicalism

had diverged from Reformation theology. As Peter Toon has pointed out, even the scholarly William Goode, "was so influenced by what we now know to be latitudinarian interpretations of the Reformation that he believed that the doctrine of private judgement was an essential principle of the Reformers, and this claim became a standard evangelical presupposition".<sup>9</sup>

As this point reminds us, there was another influential tradition of interpreting the Reformation, the latitudinarian or broad church one, which constitutes a challenge to the assumption of the evangelicals then (and now) that they are the only true voice of the Reformers. Just as the high church tradition should not be identified exclusively with the Non-jurors, so too the liberal Anglicans should not be placed with the shallow rationalism of Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761). Coleridge, Arnold, Maurice, Hare and the others have their antecedents in the Tew Circle of James I's reign which interpenetrated with high church circles.<sup>10</sup> They perpetuate the authentic Anglican ethos of cultured liberality, balance and breadth of view that we find in the moderate latitudinarian position from the Tew Circle and the Cambridge Platonists in the 17th century to Mandell Creighton and William Temple in modern times. It was a liberality and sense of proportion conspicuously lacking in extremes of churchmanship, whether high or low. That is not to say, however, that it lacked passionate conviction where questions of principle were concerned.

### IV

In Anglicanism before the Oxford Movement there was no sense of exclusive adherence to, say, Catholicity at the expense of the Reformation, or Protestant principles to the exclusion of a high view of the church's tradition and sacraments. Coleridge, a close student of the 17th-century divines as well as a passionate advocate of Luther, symbolises this integrated position. In this Coleridge was doing no more than Hooker or Laud.

Elements within evangelicalism could make common cause with broad church liberals in defence of Reformation principles and in opposition to Romanist tendencies. On the question of justification they could stand together against notions of salvation by infused sacramental grace (though the latitudinarians would tend to favour a more moralistic position than the evangelicals for whom moral striving was confined to the sphere of sanctification). On authority they could unite in defence of scripture against tradition (though latitudinarians would give a larger role to reason). On private judgement they were at one in taking the Reformation to be an assertion of the principle of conscience and the first dawn of religious toleration. The evangelical predilection for a simple gospel, comprising those doctrines on the surface of Pauline Christianity, linked up with the undogmatic, minimising approach of the liberals for whom faith was expressed in the practice of the Christian life.

The liberal Anglicans or broad-churchmen are to be clearly distinguished from the low-churchmen who were, as Peter Toon points out, none other than right-wing evangelical churchmen who worked with dissenters and who set little store by the historic episcopate.<sup>11</sup>

The limited and pragmatic partnership between evangelicals and liberals came to an end in mid-century as

the debate between religion and science began to claim more of the limelight from the Protestant-versus-Catholic controversy. The parting of the ways was the question of the inspiration of the Bible and matters came to a head with the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860.

## V

However, on the eve of the Oxford Movement, the party-structure of the Church of England could be likened to a series of mutually overlapping circles: high church, broad church and evangelical. What united them was an unquestioned, tacit consensus with regard to the Protestant character of the Anglican church – a character that was evinced above all in the doctrines of justification by faith and the paramount authority of scripture, in a fraternal regard for the Continental churches of the Reformation, in esteem of the Reformers both English and foreign, and in loyalty to the standards of the Church of England (the Thirty-nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer, as well as unofficial secondary standards among which Richard Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity* stands pre-eminent).

The Tractarians set out to challenge the consensus on each of these points, though they did so as men largely ignorant of the thought of the Reformers. In opposition stood faithful high-churchmen, led by William Palmer of Worcester College who had felt betrayed by the trend of the movement, bowed out and turned against his former colleagues; evangelicals, with William Goode spearheading their counterattack; and liberal Anglicans, including professed Coleridgeans, who reinterpreted Reformation principles and held up the Reformers as men to affectionate admiration. But together they did not succeed in preventing the break up of the Anglican consensus or the partial unprotestantising of the Church of England.

By this time, however, those who had done most to bring this about had passed over to the Church of Rome. Their successors in the Anglo-Catholic movement for the most part saw no need to take that final step. They remained in communion with a church now split into two opposed camps, evangelical and Anglo-Catholic – together with a sizeable rump of middle opinion, effectively permeated by liberal assumptions, sitting lightly to dogma, made uneasy by party tub-thumping and gradually adopting many originally Catholic practices in worship.

The liberal tradition of adventurous thinking, represented at the beginning of this period by Coleridge and Arnold, is scarcely discernible in contemporary Anglicanism, apart from those who have become self-consciously radical with a strong negative charge and have virtually passed off the ecclesiastical map.

The Oxford Movement was the Church of England's deferred Counter Reformation, an upsurge of consecrated energy through the channels of Catholicism. In the realms of worship, discipline, the sacramental life and the cure of souls the Tractarians had a prophetic message for the church. Through their sheer sense of God they may have saved the Church of England. It is unhistorical to be partisan about the Oxford Movement: we are all children of the Tractarians now. But with regard to the Reformation, there is no doubt that a powerful momentum of wilful misrepresentation, culpable ignorance and downright prejudice was generated by the Oxford Movement. No one

can read Tractarian polemic against personalities, whether dead like Luther or living like Arnold, without being disturbed by its incongruity with the obtrusive aspirations to truth and holiness with which it is not infrequently juxtaposed.

While successful, to a large extent, in their aim of unprotestantising the church, what the Tractarians did not do was to *catholicise* the Church of England. Does not Catholicism involve a sense of how the church has lived through history, some appreciation of the diversities of the Christian tradition and a willingness to learn from traditions other than our own?<sup>12</sup> It is doubtful whether the defensive narrowing of historical vision, such as the Tractarians evinced with regard to the Reformation, can be the fruit of a truly Catholic spirit. And without Catholicity there can be no valid consensus.

## VI

A good deal of ecclesiological and ecumenical work now focuses on the notion of consensus. The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) envisages "the mind of the church" (*consensus fidelium*) counterbalancing the authority of the magisterium centralised in the papacy. Elsewhere I have questioned whether this ideal can ever be translated from theory into actuality.<sup>13</sup> ARCIC has in mind an explicit consensus that can articulate views on specific issues. Newman, whose *On Consulting the Faithful* is the proximate source of this idea, was much more cautious, seeing the *sensus fidei* as an instinct for truth working in the unarticulated depths of the church's life.<sup>14</sup>

The report *Believing in the Church* understands consensus as an unspoken understanding expressed in a sense of belonging to one body and it is my belief that this insight is capable of being developed into a notion of unity in the tacit dimension that could break the ecumenical stalemate.<sup>15</sup> But just as in the realm of constructive thought (following Polanyi) the explicit is merely the tip of the iceberg, resting on unplumbed depths of the creative process below the threshold of consciousness, so too the implicit, the creative, the source of new possibilities, cannot realise itself except by becoming explicit, by being articulated. A consensus that never becomes explicit is a broken reed. What is needed now is an attempt first to differentiate and then to correlate the explicit and the tacit, theory and praxis, the propositional and the personal, doctrine and living, in the concept of consensus.

One approach to this would be along the lines of Stephen Sykes' *The Identity of Christianity*,<sup>16</sup> that is to say a broadening of the "essence of Christianity" project into the sphere of praxis and in the light of the structures of human relating and belonging revealed by the social sciences. Another approach, complementary to this, would be to look for a fundamental grammar of faith, a pattern of the truth, a distinctive logic of Christian existence underlying not only doctrine but believing, praying and suffering. To tackle that question would be to leapfrog over the problem of the identity of Anglicanism and make a contribution intended to be relevant to the whole church.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

1. *Believing in the Church* (London, 1981), pp. 223ff.
2. Paul Avis, *Ecumenical Theology and Elusiveness of Doctrine* (London, SPCK, 1985).
3. Cf. Paul Avis, "In the Shadow of the Frankfurt School: From 'Critical Theory' to 'Critical Theology'," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 35 (1982), pp. 529-540.
4. W. O. Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1960), pp. 19ff.
5. George Every, *The High Church Party 1688-1718* (London 1956), p. 145.
6. Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833-1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (London, 1979), pp. 39f, 60f, 174. Cf. W. J. Conybeare, "Church Parties" (1853), *Essays Ecclesiastical and Social* (London, 1855).
7. H. R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism* (London, 1965), pp. 397ff; R. H. Froude, *Remains* (London, 1838), I, p. 308.
8. Toon, op. cit., p. 5.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 204f.
10. Cf. McAdoo, op. cit.; Brian Wormald, *Clarendon* (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 240-276.
11. Toon, op. cit., pp. 208f.
12. Cf. Owen Chadwick, "Catholicism," *Theology*, 76 (1973), pp. 171-180.
13. ARCIC, *The Final Report* (London, 1982). My criticisms are in *Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine* and, briefly, "The Church's Journey into Truth: A Preface to Further Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue," *Theology*, 86 (1983), pp. 403-411.
14. Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*, ed. J. Coulson (London, 1961).
15. See the section "Unity in the Tacit Dimension" in my *Ecumenical Theology: The Horizons of Method*.
16. Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity* (London, 1984).
17. Cf. Paul Avis, "The Church's One Foundation", *Theology*, 89 (July 1986). I hope to publish documentation of the thesis advanced in the present article in a study of the Tractarian and Liberal Anglican philosophies of history in general and interpretations of the Reformation in particular.

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**BERNARD LE BOVIER DE FONTENELLE**  
(1657-1757):

## **ON THE ORIGIN OF MYTHS**

**TRANSLATED BY JULIAN BALDICK**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Fontenelle's *On the Origin of Myths* (*De l'Origine des Fables*) is undoubtedly one of the finest and most influential essays ever written. It is well ahead of its time in its approaches and insights, and of the greatest importance for the study of history, anthropology, and religion in general.

Fontenelle was a philosopher, a man of letters, a populariser of scientific theories and much more besides. One might call him a father of the 18th-century Enlightenment, but his living to be almost 100 makes a word like "ancestor" more appropriate. He himself was a myth in his own lifetime, the legend of a man who had become reason itself, in the glacial calm of his unruffled judgment: the ultimate example of Gallic logic pursued to its implacable conclusions.

The specialists have spilt a vast amount of ink over the question of when Fontenelle composed *On the Origin of Myths*. This is connected with the false problem of identifying the first founder of "comparative religion", a problem which seems to stem from excessive British and French patriotism. Fontenelle wrote a first draft under the title *On History* (*Sur l'histoire*). Maria Teresa Marcialis (*Fontenelle: un filosofo mondano*, Sassari 1978, p. 145, n. 84) considers that any dating of this first draft is hypothetical, but suggests 1688-90. She dates *On the Origin of Myths* to the years following 1702 (*ibid.*, p. 186, n. 160). The treatise was published in 1724.

This delay in publication has been explained as due to the irreligiously subversive character of the work, and the author's unwillingness to go too far and too fast in upsetting the French authorities, who were quick to stamp on any overt impiety. An explanation of the origins of religion which ended with the verdict that all peoples were extremely stupid was clearly an indirect attack on the Judaeo-Christian tradition. To make up for this Fontenelle makes ritual genuflections to this tradition in his essay, but they are executed in so sardonic a style as to leave little doubt concerning his own feelings.

It has often been noted that subsequent 18th- and 19th-century theories of the first sources of myths and religious feeling did no more than repeat what Fontenelle had said. Indeed, well into the 20th century the theoretical study of myths was really proceeding no further. The discipline of comparative mythology had discredited itself so badly as almost to die of shame. When it was revived, in the last half-century, by the studies of Georges Dumézil (bitterly attacked by specialists who are often now badly discredited themselves), there was in a way a return to the insights of Fontenelle. For the 19th-century scholars had become bogged down by their preoccupation with etymologies, and had neglected the social background, on which Fontenelle had insisted, and to which Dumézil now reverted.

In recent times Claude Lévi-Strauss has, like Fontenelle, turned to detecting logical thinking in myths. But, as Marcialis has observed (*ibid.*, p. 191), it is wrong to take the comparison further: for Fontenelle the logic to be found among "primitive" peoples is merely a poor and undeveloped form of our scientific thought, and not, as for Lévi-Strauss, thinking of a different and impressive kind.

More recently still, the leading French classicist Marcel Detienne has taken Fontenelle's essay as a starting-point for a persuasive study entitled *L'invention de la mythologie* (Paris 1981). He argues that both the ancient Greeks and modern European writers like Fontenelle invented the idea of the myth, which has no discernible existence as an independent literary form and cannot, as Dumézil confesses, be distinguished from the tale. Thus, we might put it, the concept of the myth is itself a myth.

The translation and notes which follow are based on the edition by J.-R. Carré (Paris 1932). The reader is asked to bear in mind that the French word *histoire* sometimes has to be translated as "history", and sometimes as "story". I have used an occasional phrase from the analysis of the work given by Andrew Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, London 1887, volume 2, pp. 321ff.

### **TRANSLATION**

(1) We become so strongly accustomed to Greek myths during our childhood that when we are in a position to exercise our minds it no longer occurs to us to find them so surprising as they are. But, if one manages to view them through eyes other than those of habit, one cannot avoid being horrified to see that the whole of a people's early history is nothing but a heap of fantasies, dreams and absurdities. Could it be possible that we should have been given all that as being true? For what reason could we have been given it as being false? What could have been this passion of men for blatant and ridiculous falsehoods, and why should this passion no longer last? For the Greek myths were not like our novels, which are given to us for what they are, and not as history; myths are the only early history to be found. Let us try, if it is possible, to shed some light on this subject: let us study the human mind in one of its strangest products. It is in such products, quite often, that this mind best allows itself to be understood.

(2) During the first ages of the world, and among the nations who had not heard speak of the traditions of Seth's family, or who did not preserve them, ignorance and savagery must have been at a level so extreme that it can now hardly be imagined. Let us consider the Kaffirs, the Lapps and the Iroquois; but even then let us take care to remember that these peoples, being no longer new, must have reached some degree of knowledge and culture which the earliest men lacked.

(3) The more ignorant one is, and the less experience one has, the more prodigies one sees. The earliest men saw many, and, since fathers naturally relate to their children what they have seen and what they have done, only prodigies were to be found in the narratives of those times.

(4) When we recount something surprising, our imagination is inflamed with regard to its object, and of its own accord impels itself to magnify it, adding to it what it may lack to make it completely supernatural, as if regretting

to leave a beautiful thing in a state of imperfection. Moreover, we are flattered by the feelings of surprise and admiration which we arouse in our listeners, and we are only too glad to excite these feelings further, because this seems somehow to add to our vanity. These two reasons, put together, explain why a man who has no intention of lying when he begins a slightly unusual story can nevertheless catch himself telling a lie if he pays good attention. From this it follows that one needs a sort of effort and special care in order to tell nothing but the exact truth. What, after that, will be the case of those who are naturally inclined to invent things and deceive others?

(5) Thus since the narratives told by the earliest men to their children were often false in themselves, because they were told by people subject to see many things that were not there, and since, on top of that, they were often exaggerated, either in good faith, in the way which we have just explained, or in bad faith, it is clearly evident that they were already badly spoilt from their very beginning. But this will certainly be much worse still, when they pass from mouth to mouth: everyone will deprive them of some little touch of truth, putting in some touch of falsehood, and mainly that supernatural falsehood which pleases most. Perhaps, after a century or two, not only will there remain nothing of the little truth which was there to start, but also there will hardly remain anything of the first falsehood.

(6) Will what I am going to say be believed? There was even some philosophy in those uncultivated times, and it greatly helped in the birth of myths. Those men who have a little more inspiration than others are naturally led to look for the cause of what they see. "From where can this river come, which keeps on flowing?", some reflective man of those days must have asked. A strange sort of philosopher, but one who would perhaps have been a Descartes in these days. After a long period of meditation he made the very happy discovery that there was someone who took care to keep pouring this water out of a jug. But who kept providing him with this water? Our thinker did not proceed so far.

(7) It must be observed that these ideas, which can be called the systems of those times, were always copied from the things that were best known. People had often seen water being poured out of a jug: it was thus very easily imagined how a god poured out the water of a river, and, thanks to the very ease with which it was imagined, one was entirely led to believe it. Accordingly, in order to explain thunder and lightning, one had no hesitation in visualising a god in human form, hurling bolts of fire at us: ideas obviously borrowed from very familiar objects.

(8) This philosophy of the earliest ages depended on a principle so natural that today our own philosophy still has no other: that is to say that we explain the unknown things of nature by recourse to those that we have in front of our eyes, and transfer to the science of physics the ideas with which experience provides us. We have discovered through practice, and not through guesswork, the power of weights, springs and levers: it is only through weights, springs and levers that we make nature work. Those poor savages who were the first to inhabit the earth either were completely unacquainted with these things, or had paid no attention to them. Therefore it was only through the crudest and most palpable things known to them that they explained the effects of nature. What have we done, in the one case and in

the other? We have always visualised the unknown in the form of what was known to us; but, fortunately, there is every reason in the world to believe that the unknown cannot avoid resembling what we know at the present time.

(9) From this crude philosophy, which, of necessity, prevailed in the earliest ages, the gods and goddesses were born. It is quite curious to see how human imagination has engendered false deities. Men saw lots of things which they would have been unable to do: thunderbolts were hurled, winds were stirred up, and waves were made to rise and fall. All that was far beyond their powers. They conceived of beings more powerful than themselves, capable of producing these huge effects. It was clearly necessary that those beings should be constituted like men. What other form could they have had? As soon as they have a human form, imagination naturally gives them all that is human: thus they appear as men in every way, with the sole difference that they are always a bit more powerful.

(10) From this comes something which has perhaps not yet been the subject of reflection: namely, that in all the deities conceived by the pagans, they have made the idea of power predominate, and have paid almost no attention to wisdom, or justice, or all the other attributes which accompany divinity. This is the strongest proof that these deities are very early, and the best indication of the path followed by the imagination in forming them. The earliest men knew no quality finer than that of brute strength: wisdom and justice did not even have a name in the ancient languages, as they still lack one today among the American savages. Moreover, men acquired their first idea of a higher being from unusual events, and in no way from the regular order of the universe, which they were incapable of recognising or admiring. Thus they conceived of the gods in a time when they themselves had nothing finer to give them than power, and conceived of them according to what bore the insignia of power, not according to what bore the insignia of wisdom. It is not surprising, then, that they conceived of several gods, often mutually antagonistic, cruel, strange, unjust and ignorant. All that is not directly opposed to the idea of strength and power, which is the only one that they would have formed. Those gods were certainly bound to be affected both by the period in which they had been made and by the occasions which had caused them to be made. Even then, what wretched sort of power were they given? Mars, the god of war, is wounded fighting a mortal: that is a great blow to his dignity, but, as he retreats, he produces a shout of which 10,000 men together would have been incapable. It is by virtue of this vigorous shout that Mars gains the upper hand over Diomedes; and that will be enough, in Homer's sound judgment, to serve the honour of a god.<sup>1</sup> Given the fashion in which the imagination is composed, it is content with a little, and it will always recognise as a deity anyone who has a little more power than a man.

(11) Cicero has said somewhere that he would have preferred Homer to have transferred the qualities of the gods to men, rather than to have transferred – as he has – the qualities of men to the gods.<sup>2</sup> But Cicero was asking too much of him: the qualities which, in his own day, he attributed to the gods were totally unknown in the time of Homer. Pagans have always copied their deities from themselves: thus, the closer that men have come to perfection, the closer the gods have come as well. The earliest men are very brutal, and sacrifice everything to

strength: the gods will be almost just as brutal, only a bit more powerful. Thus are made the gods of Homer's time. Men then begin to have ideas of wisdom and justice: the gods gain thereby, begin to be wise and just, and are so increasingly, in proportion to the development of these ideas among men. Thus are made the gods of Cicero's time, and they were far superior in value to those of Homer's, because far superior philosophers had put their hands to it.

(12) Up to this point the earliest men have given birth to myths without, so to speak, its being their fault. Men are ignorant, and consequently see many prodigies. Surprising things are naturally exaggerated as they are told, and are moreover laden with various falsehoods as they pass from mouth to mouth. The crudest and most absurd kinds of philosophical systems are established, but no others can be. Now we shall see how, with these foundations, men have, in a certain fashion, delighted to deceive themselves.

(13) What we have called the philosophy of the earliest ages proved to be entirely suitable for combination with factual history. A young man falls in a river, and his body cannot be found. What has happened to him? The philosophy of the time informs men that this river contains girls who rule over it: the girls have kidnapped the young man, and quite naturally so. No evidence is needed to believe this. A man of unknown parentage possesses some remarkable talent. There are gods who are formed approximately like men: no further attention is paid to his family – he is a son of one of those gods. The majority of myths, considered attentively, will be found to be no more than a mixture of facts and the philosophy of the time, which explained their miraculous aspect most conveniently, and attached itself to them in a very natural fashion. It was just a case of gods and goddesses, who resembled us entirely, and who were very well cast to act opposite men on the stage.

(14) As stories of real facts, mixed with these false products of the imagination, were very current, people began to invent stories without any foundation, or, at the very least, facts in which there was something remarkable were recounted only with the embellishment of trappings recognised as likely to give pleasure. These trappings were false, and perhaps sometimes they were even presented as such. However, the stories were not considered mythical. This will be understood if we compare our modern history with that of old.

(15) In a period distinguished by the highest degree of wit, such as the age of Augustus and our own, there has been a desire to argue about men's actions, look into their motives and come to know their characters. The historians of such times have adapted themselves to this taste, and have taken great care not to transcribe facts in their nakedness and dryness: they have attached motives to them, along with portraits of the actors. Do we think that these portraits and motives are the exact truth, believing in them as we do in the facts? No; we know perfectly well that the historians have guessed them as best they could, and that it is almost impossible that they should have guessed correctly. However, we do not find fault with the historians for having looked for this embellishment, which does not go beyond the bounds of probability; and it is because of this probability that this mixture of falsehood, which we accept as being possible in our histories, does not make us consider them as myths.

(16) In the same way, after the earliest peoples had, in the ways previously described, acquired the taste for these histories, into which there came gods, goddesses and the supernatural in general, histories were no longer produced without ornamentation. It was known that that could be untrue; but in those days it was probable, and that was enough to maintain these myths in the position of histories.

(17) Nowadays the Arabs still fill their histories with prodigies and miracles, which are most ridiculous and grotesque. Doubtless they consider that as mere ornamentation, by which they are not afraid to be deceived, because among them this is a kind of literary convention. But when histories of this kind fall into the hands of other peoples, whose taste demands that facts be transcribed exactly as they happened, then either these histories are believed as the literal truth, or at any rate people persuade themselves that they have been believed by those who have published them, and by those who have accepted them without contradiction. In any case there is a considerable misunderstanding. When I said that the falsehood in these histories was recognised for what it was, I meant by those who were slightly enlightened; for as regards the common people, it is destined to be taken in by everything.

(18) In earliest times, not only was the surprising side of factual history explained by a fanciful kind of philosophy, but also the subject-matter of philosophy was explained by factual narratives conceived just as one desired. People saw two constellations near the North Pole, called the two Bears, which would always appear, and never set like the others. They did not think that this was because these constellations were close to a pole that was raised in relation to the observer – that much was not known. It was imagined that of these two Bears one had been the mistress, and the other the son of Jupiter, and that, when these two people had been changed into constellations, Juno in her jealousy had asked Oceanus not to let them come down to him and go to rest there like the others.<sup>3</sup> All the metamorphoses are the science of physics of those earliest times. Mulberries are red, because they are stained with the blood of a pair of lovers;<sup>4</sup> the partridge always flies very low, because Daedalus, who was changed into a partridge, remembered the misfortune of his son, who had flown too high, and so on.<sup>5</sup> I have never forgotten being told in my childhood that the elder had once borne grapes as good as those of the vine, but after the treacherous Judas had hanged himself from this tree its fruit had become as bad as it is now. This myth cannot have been born before Christianity, and it is of precisely the same kind as those ancient metamorphoses collected by Ovid, showing that men have always had a liking for stories of this sort. They give pleasure in two ways: they strike the mind with some element of the supernatural, and they satisfy one's curiosity with the explanation that they appear to give for some natural and well-known fact.

(19) Beyond all these specific factors in the birth of myths, there were two others, more general, and of the very greatest assistance to them. The first is one's right to invent things similar to those already accepted, or to extend them by means of results that they entail. Some strange occurrence will give rise to the belief that a god has been in love with a woman – at once all stories will be packed with nothing but gods in love. You believe in the one all right: why not believe in the other? If gods have children, then they love them and use all their powers on their behalf when

occasion demands: and there you have an inexhaustible source of prodigies which cannot be dismissed as absurd.

(20) The second, which greatly assists us in our errors, is blind respect for antiquity. Our fathers believed in it: should we claim to be wiser than they? These two factors, put together, work wonders. The first, given the slightest foundation laid by the weakness of human nature, extends a folly to infinite proportions; the second, provided only this folly has gained a footing, preserves it for ever. The first, because we are already in error, obliges us to proceed further and further into error, and the second forbids us to extract ourselves, because we have been in error for some time.

(21) Thus we see, as far as seems likely, the reasons which have impelled myths to the heights of absurdity that they have reached, and the reasons which have kept them there; for nature's own part therein was neither entirely so ridiculous nor so great in quantity; nor are men so mad that they could have dreamt such fantasies up all at once, believed in them, and taken a very long time to rid themselves of them, had it not been for the interference of the two things just mentioned.

(22) If we examine the errors of recent times, we shall find that they have been established, extended and preserved by the same elements. Admittedly, we have not reached a degree of absurdity such as that of the ancient Greek myths, but that is because we did not set off from so absurd a starting-point in the first place. We are just as good as they were at extending and preserving our errors, but fortunately they are not so great, because we are illuminated by the lights of the true religion, and, in my opinion, by some rays of the true philosophy.

(23) The origin of myths is generally ascribed to the lively imagination of the Eastern peoples: personally, I ascribe it to the ignorance of the earliest men. Install a young people at the North Pole: its first histories will be myths – indeed, are not the earliest records of the Arctic entirely full of them? They are packed with nothing but giants and magicians. I do not deny that a strong, blazing sun can provide men's minds with a final cooking, and thus bring to perfection the inclination to gorge themselves on myths that they already have; for this, however, all men are gifted independently of the sun. Moreover, in everything that I have just said, I have credited men only with what is common to them all, and what must be as effective in the polar regions as at the Equator.

(24) If it were necessary, I could perhaps show clearly an astonishing resemblance between the myths of the American Indians and those of the Greeks. The former used to send the souls of the wicked to muddy and disagreeable lakes, as the Greeks used to send them to the banks of the Styx and the Acheron. The Indians believed that rain came from a girl in the clouds, playing with her little brother, who used to break her water-jug: is that not very like those water-nymphs, pouring water out of urns? According to Peruvian tradition, the Inca Manco Guyna Capac, whose father was the Sun, was able, thanks to his eloquence, to persuade the inhabitants of the country, who used to live like wild beasts in the middle of the jungle, to come out and conduct their lives according to rational laws. Orpheus did the same for the Greeks, and he too had the Sun for his father: this shows that for a time the Greeks were savages just

as much as the Indians, that they were extracted from barbarism by the same means, and that the collective imaginations of these two peoples, so far removed from one another, have joined in believing the possessors of remarkable gifts to be children of the Sun. Since the Greeks, when they were still a young people, did not, for all their wit, reason more intelligently than the barbarians of America, who, as far as can be seen, were a fairly young people when discovered by the Spaniards, there is cause to believe that the American Indians would eventually have come round to reasoning as intelligently as the Greeks, had they been given enough time.

(25) The ancient Chinese also used the ancient Greek method of inventing stories to explain natural phenomena. What causes the ebb and flow of the tide? You can readily perceive that they are not going to think of the pressure of the Moon on our vortex.<sup>6</sup> It is because a princess had 100 children, of whom 50 inhabited the coast, and the other 50 the mountains. They produced two great peoples, who often make war on each other. When the inhabitants of the coast are beating those of the mountains and driving them back, we have the flow; when they are driven back by them and flee from the mountains to the coast, we have the ebb. This way of philosophizing is rather like that of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, so true is it that the same ignorance has produced approximately the same effects among all peoples.

(26) It is for this reason that there is no people whose history does not begin with myths, except the Chosen People, among whom Providence, by a special dispensation, has preserved the truth. How remarkably slow men are to reach a rational conclusion, however simple it is! To preserve the memory of facts just as they happened is not something particularly marvellous; but many centuries will pass before people are able to do that, and until then the facts which are remembered will be just fantasies and dreams. It would be a great mistake, therefore, to be surprised that philosophy and rational thought should have been very crude and imperfect for many centuries, and that even today their progress should be so slow.

(27) Among most peoples, myths turned into religion; but among the Greeks they also turned, so to speak, into adornment. As the ideas that they provided did no more than correspond to the most common conformation of the human imagination, poetry and painting assimilated them perfectly well, and the love of the Greeks for those arts is well known. Deities of all kinds, disseminated everywhere, giving life and animation to everything, lacking interest in nothing, and, most important of all, often acting in a surprising fashion, cannot fail to produce a pleasing effect, whether in poems or in paintings, where it is merely a question of charming the imagination by presenting objects that it grasps easily and finds striking at the same time. How should myths not suit the imagination, which has itself given birth to them? When poetry or painting brings them into play to exhibit to our imagination they do no more than return its own handiwork to it.

(28) Errors, once established among men, have the habit of enrooting themselves very deeply, and attaching themselves to various means of support. Religion and common sense have freed us from belief in the Greek myths, but they still manage to survive among us through poetry and painting, and seem to have found the secret of

being necessary to them. Although we are infinitely more enlightened than those whose crude minds and simple faith invented the myths, we have little difficulty in recapturing the turn of mind that made them like the myths so much. They devoured the myths because they believed in them, and we devour them with as much pleasure, but without believing in them. There could be no better proof that imagination and reason have hardly anything to do with one another, and that things by which reason is no longer in the least deceived lose nothing of their charm with regard to the imagination.

(29) Up to now we have included in this history of the origin of myths only what is taken from the very heart of human nature, and indeed it is this which has prevailed there; but to this some external factors have been added, mention of which must not be omitted. For example, since the Phoenicians and Egyptians were older peoples than the Greeks, their myths were passed on to them, and were expanded in this process, while even their most truthful stories turned into myths. Phoenician (and perhaps Egyptian also) was full of words of double meaning, and in any case the Greeks hardly understood either tongue. Here was a wonderful source of misunderstandings. Two Egyptian women, whose surname means "dove", come to live in the forest of Dodona as fortune-tellers: the Greeks think that there are two real doves, perched in the trees and engaged in prophesying, and then before long it is the trees who are prophesying themselves. The word for a ship's rudder in Phoenician also means "speaking": the Greeks, in the story of the Argonauts, imagine that their ship had a rudder which actually spoke.<sup>7</sup> Modern scholars have found a thousand other examples, in which it is obvious that the origin of many myths is to be found in what are commonly called "false friends", which the Greeks were very prone to find in Phoenician or Egyptian. Personally, I feel that the Greeks, in spite of having so much wit and curiosity, showed a considerable lack of either the one or the other in not thinking of acquiring a perfect knowledge of those languages, or in neglecting them. Were they not well aware that almost all their cities were Egyptian or Phoenician colonies, and that most of their old stories came from those colonies? Were not the beginnings of their language and the antiquities of their country dependent upon these two languages? But these were barbarous languages, harsh and disagreeable. A charming delicacy of feeling!

(30) When the art of writing was invented, it helped greatly to spread myths and give one people the riches of all the follies of another, but on the other hand there were some positive advantages: to a small degree, the uncertainty of tradition was established, and the corpus of myths no longer expanded at the same rate, while remaining approximately in the same condition as at the time when writing was invented.

(31) Gradually, ignorance receded, and as a result less prodigies were seen, fewer false systems of philosophy were constructed, and stories became less mythical – for all of this follows from one thing to another. Up to this point the memory of things past had been handed down only through pure curiosity, but now it was realised that this could be useful, whether to preserve those things on which nations prided themselves, or to decide the disputes which could arise between different peoples, or to provide moral examples (and I think that this purpose was the last to enter men's heads, although people make the most noise about it).

All this required that history should be true – by "true" I mean true as opposed to the stories of the past, which were full of nothing but absurdities. Thus, among some nations, history began to be written in a way that was more rational, and usually had the air of plausibility.

(32) From this point no new myths appear: people are satisfied with the preservation of old ones. But as for those minds that are madly in love with antiquity, is there anything of which they are incapable? It is fondly imagined that in these myths the secrets of physics and ethics lie concealed.

(33) Could it have been possible, that the Ancients should have dreamt such things up, without having some subtle purpose? The prestige of the Ancients always inspires respect; but those who invented the myths were undoubtedly not the sort of people who would know about ethics or physics, or find sufficient skill to disguise these sciences beneath an artificial imagery.

(34) Let us not look, therefore, for anything in myths except the history of the errors of the human mind. This mind is less capable of committing errors as soon as it knows just how capable of committing them it is. To have filled one's head with all the extravagances of the Phoenicians and Greeks does not constitute a science. But it is a science, to know what brought the Phoenicians and Greeks to these extravagances. All men are so much alike that there is no people whose follies should not make us tremble.

#### NOTES

1. Homer, *Iliad*, V, 835-863.
2. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, I, XXVI 65.
3. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 401-531.
4. *Ibid.*, IV, 51-166.
5. Fontenelle's memory betrays him: Ovid (*ibid.*, VIII, 236-259) says that the nephew of Daedalus was turned into a partridge during a terrifying fall, and that consequently the partridge is afraid of heights.
6. Allusion to Descartes' theory of "vortices" as explaining tides, a theory espoused by Fontenelle, but conclusively demolished by Newton. Cf. Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes/Digression sur les anciens et les modernes*, ed. Robert Shackleton, Oxford 1955, editor's Introduction, pp. 4-5 and 22-7.
7. Here Fontenelle gives a confused version of the story about the oracle of Dodona, to be found in Herodotus (II, 55-7), before passing on to the legend of the prophesying beam cut from an oak of Dodona and placed in the stem of the *Argo* (cf. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, I, 524-8 and IV, 580-592).

# THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS

GRACE JANTZEN

During the past weeks of Christmas and the New Year we have all been rather bombarded with profundity, from the dignified words of lessons and carols to the sublimity of midnight mass and sober reflection about the year that is past and the year to come. But I hope it has not all been ponderous for you; that for you, as for me, there has been fun and light-heartedness. My thoughts this morning begin from nothing more solemn than finishing the last of a Christmas bird and pulling the wishbone. What did I wish? Ah, now, that would be telling; the magic only works if you keep it a secret. What would you have wished?

The idea of the wish, the secret wish above all other wishes, has long captivated human imagination, and finds its place in the fantasy and legend of the race as an archetypal image. Often the wish has a condition or a cost. The young man wishes to marry the princess but will only be permitted to do so if he slays the dragon. Cinderella wishes to be beautiful and attend the ball, and her wish is granted – but only until midnight. The cost can be staggering: Mephistopheles will give Faust whatever he desires, for the price of his soul. Sometimes the story of the wish is a story about the character of the person who makes it, as in the case of Solomon who chooses wisdom rather than long life or honours or prosperity, and because of the excellence of his choice he is given all the rest as well.

What would you or I wish for if we had the choice? Silly question, we may feel: these are fairy tales and fantasies and legends, not the real world in which one does well in a philosophy essay by working at it, not by vaguely wishing to get by. True enough; and your teachers would much prefer performance to pleasant fantasy. Yet even in the fairy tales the hero often had to work to make his wish come true; but it was the wish, the longing of the heart, that gave the wish its focus. Identifying what our real wishes and longings are is the first step to obtaining them and giving our work a direction and purpose beyond filling up the time and indulging our fluctuating whims and the expectations of other people.

The Psalmist in our reading today has worked out both what his real longing is and that he is going to have to go after it. “One thing have I desired of the Lord,” he says, “that will I seek after.” He knows he will have to seek; it will not come automatically or by magic, but he has identified his own real desire. And what is it? It is not, as with Solomon, wisdom to rule; it is not social justice or compassion or seeking first the kingdom of God. The thing the Psalmist wants most is “that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple”.

When we have finished piously nodding our heads we might do worse than to ask, “What kind of a wish is that?”. Why should anyone want to spend their whole life beholding the beauty of the Lord – and, indeed, what could possibly be meant by it?

Epiphany, the season of the Church year into which we have just entered, is the season in which we think especially

about the beauty of God. The story of the Magi is a story of the manifestation of the glory of God to the world. The Scriptures and Christian tradition make a great deal of the beauty and glory of God. In spite of this, I have seldom heard sermons about it, and, with the notable exception of the great work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, find not much attention paid to it in theological writing. What is the glory of God? When the Psalmist wants to spend his whole life gazing upon the beauty of the Lord, what does that amount to? God is good, yes, and powerful and wise and just and compassionate – but *beautiful*? We solemnly say or sing “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be” – and if we have a certain sort of churchmanship we bow as we sing it. But what on earth do we mean? “I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another,” we find in our lesson from Isaiah. What does God do with all that glory?

The philosophers of ancient Greece thought a great deal about beauty as a characteristic of ultimate reality. For Plato, ultimate Reality can be characterized equally as the Form of the Good and the Form of the Beautiful: appreciation of beauty is not an optional extra but is fundamental to a true understanding of how things are. Different though Aristotle is in many respects, in this he is in agreement with Plato. God, the Unmoved Mover, does not move the worlds and all things in them by pushing them around, but rather by attracting them with his deep desirability, as a magnet attracts filings. We and all beings, when true to ourselves, long for God because of this glory: he is the supreme object of delight and desire. The Bible, too, makes much of the light and life and loveliness of God, revealed in Creation and in his tender care for all his fragile creatures. It is the vision of this glory which is represented as the ultimate happiness of humankind, the goal and fulfilment of our existence.

This is a way of thinking which we tend to find difficult to enter into. If we were asked to consider how our lives could find complete fulfilment, most of us would be unlikely to reply by saying that our deepest wish and longing is simply to see the loveliness of God. And if we were trying to identify what it is that we most hope for if there is life after death, we might think in terms of reunion with loved ones, or of peace and happiness, but few of us could honestly say that what we hope for above all is to gaze endlessly at the glory of God for all eternity. We just don't think in those terms.

Why not? I suggest that there are at least three reasons. In the first place, there is ignorance. We can hardly long for that which we know nothing about, except in an inarticulate and unfocussed sense. And we have not thought much about the glory of God, or know what we mean by it. So it is not obvious to us to long for it.

Secondly, our whole post-Enlightenment culture in the western world, the Christian church not excepted, has reinforced this ignorance by focussing far more on what we do and what we produce than on glory or beauty. Work is for productivity; art and beauty are for leisure. It is nice and pleasant, but inessential. This is also the pattern of much Christian thinking, where great emphasis is placed on social justice and doctrinal truth, and much less on the sheer wonder and delight of God. Most Christians would find it commendable if you were to give your life as Albert

Schweitzer did to medical care for the Third World, or, like Mother Teresa of Calcutta you were to work for the poor or the ignorant or the underprivileged in the name of Christ – and these things *are* commendable, of course. But just imagine how you would have to justify yourself and meet all sorts of criticisms, even from Christians, if you decided to become a contemplative monk or nun: to desire above all to behold the beauty of the Lord, the glory of Epiphany, all the days of your life. It wouldn't even cross the minds of most of us to do that with our lives; we find the thought utterly foreign, alien to the presuppositions of the value system implicit in our society. I am not, of course, suggesting that we should all abandon our studies and rush off to convents and monasteries; I am only illustrating how much more congenial we find action than contemplation, busyness than stillness, and how our whole society is geared to value performance and achievement more than appreciation and receptivity.

There is a third reason, related to these, but more rooted in ourselves as individuals than in society as a whole. Beauty, glory, gives itself to us; there is nothing we can do to earn it or achieve it. All we can do is to open our eyes and our hearts and receive the love and loveliness of God. And this we find very hard to do. We are regularly exhorted to love: to be unselfish and generous and compassionate in our care for one another. Difficult as this may sometimes be in practice, it is at least something we can set about doing, something where we can take ourselves in hand and behave in accordance with the welfare of the other person. I would suggest, however, that receiving love is very much more difficult than giving it. To receive love, we have to open ourselves, lay down the barriers and defences that we have erected to protect our hurts and insecurities. Real love accepts us as we are; therefore to receive it we must also accept ourselves as we are. Love is the hardest of all gifts to receive. It asks of us that we abandon our control and our doing and striving, and open ourselves to the lover in trust. Indeed, in a sense we cannot even set about receiving love, generating trust. Only through the steady, persevering love of God can we learn gradually to allow the barriers to fall away, and the hurts to which we cling to be healed, and be gently loved into receiving love. And only as we do so is the love which we ourselves give a genuine love for God and our neighbour, and not a mere projection of our own insistent needs.

Now, just the same is true of the glory and beauty of God. The light and loveliness of himself is not something which we can control or generate, but which we are invited simply to receive. There is a passivity necessary for receiving his beauty, an abandoning of ourselves and our projects and activities and becoming still. Yet the passivity is not just inertia, but is an alert, attentive stillness, the attitude of contemplation. We can do nothing whatever to bring about the glory of God; it can only be received as a free gift. But we can prepare ourselves – or allow ourselves to be prepared, for in the end even this is a gift – to receive him with thankfulness and delight.

This, indeed, is the centre of the Gospel and the meaning of Epiphany – God manifesting his glory to the world, inviting all to receive it freely. “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” The glory and loveliness of God is not a mere prettiness, a superficial sentimentality or a

decorative touch. The glory of God is best known in the face of Christ, in his compassion and joyful self-giving freedom. Ultimately the glory of God and the love of God are the same, and are manifested in Jesus Christ. This means that the glory of God is far more than an uncosting decoration; it is the love which expends itself for us in gladness and in suffering.

It follows from this that receiving the love of God, gazing upon his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, transforms our own lives and activities. It is as we are open to the compassion of that glory that our own compassion becomes beautiful rather than patronizing, and our service becomes free and joyful rather than a drudgery to ourselves and an insult to those who receive it. Holiness is insufferable unless it is beautiful; and it can only be beautiful if it proceeds from the authenticity and liberation of the glory of God rather than from our own compulsions to be good or religiously impressive. It is in the context of contemplation of the truth of God in Jesus Christ that our studies become an aspect of our worship and growth rather than selfish or sterile. This is not automatic; it requires the discipline of stillness and attention gently fostered over a long period of time until the love of God permeates us and all that we think and do.

C. S. Lewis once said that for most of us, the joys of heaven would be an acquired taste. The same is true of the glory and love of God in this life. We have to *learn* to receive it and allow ourselves to let go of our defences so that we can delight in and radiate its loveliness. Even a few minutes of daily contemplation and waiting upon God will draw us more and more deeply into his love and loveliness, and purify our intentions in the ground of our beseeching, so that we are increasingly able to receive and reflect him.

It is these who are purified in heart who shall see God, those whose longings and desires have crystallized so that they have come to terms with their longings and know that the one thing they wish for above all else, and seek after in singleness of mind, is to behold the beauty of the Lord in the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

To whom be all glory and majesty, wonder and worship, now and always.

#### NOTE

1. A sermon given at the Opening of Term Service, Wednesday, 8th January, 1986, at King's College, London (KQC).

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament

Edited by Bernhard Lang. *Issues in Religion and Theology* 8. S.P.C.K./Fortress Press, 1985. Pp. xii + 175. £3.50.

One of the characteristics of contemporary Old Testament scholarship is an increasing awareness of the potential insight to be gained from other scholarly disciplines: literary criticism and sociology would be two characteristic examples. Another such partner is anthropology, and so it is valuable to have this collection of 10 essays, all published since 1954, which can help to explore this relation.

The introductory essay by the editor, Bernhard Lang, does in fact show that the relation between biblical and anthropological study is of much longer standing, with Robertson Smith an honoured name. But the prolific work of Sir James Frazer, though a remarkable achievement, is much more obviously dated, and has indeed tended to bring any kind of comparative method into disrepute. After this historical sketch Lang outlines some current concerns of anthropologists that bear on biblical study, in a way that justifies the title of his own piece, "Anthropology as a new Model for Biblical Studies".

But anthropology is itself a very diverse discipline, and this is well illustrated by the essays that follow. First comes a brief note by F. Steiner suggesting that the rites in Gen. 47-48 might be explained in terms of Joseph's enslavement in Egypt bearing the implication that he was no longer to be regarded as Jacob's son – a point apparently not taken up by any of the standard commentaries on Genesis. I. Schapera acknowledges his debt to Frazer in a comparative study of "The Sin of Cain". J. W. Rogerson writes on "Corporate Personality": the ideas put forward by H. W. Robinson have been very influential, but must be seen to rest on a suspect anthropological basis. T. W. Overholt makes some interesting comparisons between the roles of Jeremiah and the American Indian religious figure, Handsome Lake: a fascinating study, though doubts remain about the extent of our knowledge of Jeremiah as an individual. The first half of the book is completed by the editor's recent essay "The Social Organisation of Peasant Poverty in Biblical Israel". Here the system of rent capitalism is outlined for the light it can shed on the world of the eight century prophets and the reasons for their denunciations of contemporary society.

More controversial and potentially even more rewarding are the essays in the second half of the book. This begins with the famous section on "The Abominations of Leviticus" from Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger*, with its argument that anomaly as threat to holiness is the key to understanding. This point is then taken further by Michael Carroll, who proposes a Levi-Straussian nature/culture distinction as providing a more refined way of understanding Leviticus. The next essay is also by Carroll, and is an attempt to provide a structural analysis of several episodes in Genesis. Here the influence of Sir Edmund Leach is very apparent, and so it is appropriate that there should then be an essay by Leach himself: "The Logic of Sacrifice" from his *Culture and Communication*. Here structural analysis is applied to the requirements for sacrifice laid down in Exod. 25-Lev. 16. Whether or not the

precise pattern detected by Leach is accepted as persuasive, we should at least be warned of the inadequacy of conventional modern western logic when applied to this particular biblical material. These chapters also provide the starting-point for the final essay, by Douglas Davies, "An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus," which again uses structuralist methods to show how sacrificial rituals can only properly be understood in the appropriate social (rather than individual) context. The book is completed with a useful bibliography and the usual indexes.

Taken overall this is a very worthwhile addition to what is already proving to be a most useful series. No doubt it is true that there is a natural human tendency for scholars in any discipline to be wary of what is going on beyond their usual frontiers, and this tendency is strengthened when one of the disciplines involves religion: a residual suspicion of the God-squad is still found, with the apparently incompatible demands that theology should stop pretending to be objective and limit itself to piety, and that it should stop pretending to have all the answers because it introduces God into every argument. A collection of this kind can do a great deal to show how much biblical scholars and anthropologists have in common; and where there is difference (as inevitably there must be) the nature of and genuine grounds for such difference.

R. J. Coggins

### Women in the Ministry of Jesus

Ben Witherington III. C.U.P., SNTS Monograph Series 51, 1984. Pp. xi + 221. £17.50.

If there are still people around who think that Jesus was a misogynist, reading this revised Durham Ph.D. thesis on "Jesus' attitude to women and their roles as reflected in His earthly life", would be a suitable penance. A short and superficial chapter on "women and their roles in Palestine" is followed by an exegesis of passages considered relevant to the theme, but with minimal attention to their context in Jesus' ministry and teaching as a whole. The historical authenticity is first defended, quite reasonably in the case of the synoptic sayings and parables, much less so in the miracle stories and lengthy Johannine material. Inferences are then drawn from each about "Jesus' attitude to women". These are usually banal, never new and illustrated rather than demonstrated by the circumstantial evidence adduced. The author's exegesis is competent, but his historical judgment is defective, and despite talk of roles and status he shows no signs of the sociological awareness which should surely inform this kind of study. The question is framed with deliberate vagueness: Jesus' attitude. It invites a rather brief response: positive. Hard questions about Jesus' call to discipleship and its possibly disruptive implications for family life are avoided. Matt. 10.37, Luke 14.26 are not discussed, and Theissen's account of "Wanderradikalismus" is neither mentioned in the bibliographies nor discussed in the text. Witherington III is anxious to assert that Jesus is in favour of the family and "was attempting to reform, not reject, the patriarchal framework of His culture" (p. 129). "Male headship" is not threatened by Jesus' "attempt to liberate women from a social stereotype" (p. 20).

The level of historical argument is low: "If children are received openly by Jesus and if they have a place in the Kingdom, this may imply that giving birth to children and being a parent are seen as good things" (p. 16). Since Jesus speaks of women and "women's work" in his parables he evidently presupposes the worth of both (pp. 39f.), and women grinding at the mill "may tell us that Jesus thought some division of labour between male and female was natural and acceptable both in His own day and in the future" (p. 46). The claims made are cautious to the point of triviality. In a typical formulation, Mk. 12.40 and 41-44 "*may reveal something about Jesus' attitude towards widows*" (my italics). Clearly he did not rob them. But is that news? The author thinks the gospels, especially the Fourth, provide a generally reliable account of "Jesus' attitude" to widows etc., and he may be right. But he will not persuade anyone who is not already convinced. The value of this book lies not in its contribution to historical research on Jesus, which is negligible. It is very rare nowadays for any book to make a genuine contribution to that quest (a thought when selecting thesis topics). Its value as a modest addition to Christian reflection on the gospel material (which today includes raising questions about the historicity of the traditions) lies in the bits of information culled from other scholars. These can add interest to one's telling and retelling the gospel story in preaching and teaching. Read as conscientious reflection on the gospel *tradition* it escapes the censure due if judged as a piece of historical research. But this defence of such studies can only increase dissatisfaction over their theological value. Biblical study which merely casts scholarly dress over what we already know is no substitute for enlarging our understanding of Jesus, the gospel or the gospels.

Robert Morgan

## What Crucified Jesus?

Ellis Rivkin. S.C.M. Press, 1986. Pp. xii + 79. £3.95.

People have been attempting to write "scientific" history about the life of Jesus for a long time now and one would suppose there was little room left for improvement. But every now and then some new evidence enters and reshapes the discussion, or else the focus on the available material is clarified afresh. Clarification of focus, provided with admirable economy, is the first contribution made by Rivkin's book.

It has other major virtues. A welcome feature of some recent scholarship, especially in America, has been a convergence of Jewish treatments of Jesus, such as Rivkin's, and those by Christian scholars. The whole subject, but especially the crucifixion and resurrection, has long been bedevilled by *parti pris*. The Jews killed the incarnate Son of God, said (or thought) the Christians; Jesus (who was probably a sort of Zealot) was put to death by the Romans and then the myth of his resurrection sent Christianity off down its false, dogmatic road, said the Jews. Now, most Christian scholars see no reason to underplay the Jewishness of Jesus, and Jewish scholars are found welcoming the remarkable and special charisma of Jesus. More ironically, we even have the spectacle of Jews countenancing the truth of the resurrection of Jesus, even if denying its doctrinal consequences (see the work of P. Lapide), at a time when Christian leaders express grave doubts about its facticity or

its importance. It is interesting that Rivkin, while prudently denying a historian's competence to pronounce on the matter, understands perfectly well that belief in the resurrection of such a one as Jesus should have arisen in the Jewish, and especially the Pharisaic, context of the time; and he sees belief in it as beyond question the mark of the Christian position.

Again, lovers of irony will note both greater readiness to accept as historical aspects of the Gospels (the Synoptics at least) about which Christian scholars are often sceptical, and a religious warmth about Jesus which Christian scholars often eschew, doubtless out of the austere pursuit of objectivity. Rivkin can teach such persons how unhistorical it can be to keep the religious dimension at arm's length in making even an "objective" assessment of Jesus in his historical setting.

Rivkin's aim, however, is historical: can we identify with precision how, in the context of Roman Palestine, Jesus came to die? His method is to go straight for the leading features of the socio-political situation. Roman government worked through a wholly subservient high-priesthood, filled by a succession of its appointees. By a series of provocative acts, affronting Jewish susceptibilities, the government had created a situation of extreme tension and suspicion. Judaism, on the other hand, had developed its own ways of responding to the situation. There were two fundamental principles, by adherence to which relative safety might be sought: first, clear separation between the two realms of civil government and religious life. Thus, tribute could be paid and the everyday presence of the Romans could be borne, so long as Jewish observance, the life of God's Israel, was inviolate. Second, the leading groups in Jewish life, Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes, had settled for a policy of "live and let live" in relation to one another: not mutual approval (for they each engaged in polemics against the others' doctrines), but mutual forbearance.

This position had been seriously disturbed, and the security of the nation threatened, when, from AD 6, certain Jews refused any longer to accept the *modus vivendi* with the Roman government, claiming God alone as lord of Israel, and so forbidding the payment of tribute to the alien power. In this new situation, not only revolutionaries of this breed but also what we should see as purely religious charismatics were highly suspect to the authorities. To preach divine action to bring in God's kingdom was scarcely less worrying than to engage in guerilla activity, for both could easily stir up the people in such volatile times.

This state of affairs is, of course, described by Josephus. Suppose then, Rivkin bids us, that in the world of which Josephus tells, there had arisen "a charismatic of charismatics", a greater even than John the Baptist. What characteristics would he have displayed and what would have been the probable course of his career? The profile that emerges is almost indistinguishable from the career of Jesus, a man of such remarkable charisma that his "death would have ended in Life".

The death of such a one was not brought about by his religious views for religious reasons: he would meet the disapproval of groups like the Pharisees but would easily benefit from the policy of ultimate mutual forbearance. He was, like many others, a victim – the supreme victim – of

“the system”, that is, of the Roman government of Palestine, as it strove to maintain itself through the agency of Caiaphas in the midst of great precariousness and tension. Questions of religious or theological propriety did not come into the matter; questions of political risk alone counted. To such a picture, the Synoptic Gospels broadly conform, though they write from the standpoint of religious adherence to Jesus.

Inevitably, there are loose ends – and one or two more ironies. Ignoring a whole scholarly industry, Rivkin is content to see Jesus’ self-designation, “son of man”, as coming from his adoption of Ezekiel’s visionary prophetic role as part of his persona: the simplicity has a certain appeal. Josephus’ virtual ignoring of Jesus remains a puzzle. And finally, the story of Jesus did not yield only the resurrection, towards which Rivkin is so positive, but also the early church in Palestine. It is in some ways less easy to fit into the picture painted by Rivkin some of the developments of its early years than the career of Jesus himself.

J. L. Houlden

## The Interpretation of Mark

Edited by W. R. Telford. Issue in Religion and Theology 7. S.P.C.K., 1985. Pp. xi + 180. £3.50.

This collection of essays follows the pattern already established by the earlier volumes in the series: there is an introduction by the editor, then eight essays, a select bibliography, and indexes. A feature of this volume is that the span of time covered by the essays is shorter than in some of the previous collections; the earliest is 1964, and the latest is 1977. The authors are: E. Schweizer, T. J. Weeden, K. Kertelge, N. Perrin, J. Dewey, E. Best, R. C. Tannehill and S. Schulz; two of the contributions have been translated into English by R. Morgan.

The interpretation of no New Testament book has undergone a more radical change in the last 30 years than Mark. Dr. Telford traces the history of this change, starting at the beginning of the century with W. Wrede and the messianic secret, and going through to the present day and the prospect for the future. He thus provides the background for the essays he has chosen. It is a masterly piece of work; he says that he “was faced with the formidable task of assessing over 250 essays, articles and books on the Gospel, 90% of which were written after 1960”. If it were appropriate to make a very minor criticism at this point, it would be that Dr. Telford passes over the immense contribution to Marcan interpretation made in England, before it became popular elsewhere, by R. H. Lightfoot. His three books are indeed included in the bibliography, but there is no mention of him in the introduction. A. M. Farrer, who developed many of Lightfoot’s ideas, is mentioned in the introduction, and two of his books are listed in the bibliography, but not the eighth of his Bampton Lectures (*The Glass of Vision*, 1948) in which he discussed the end of Mark’s gospel, anticipating later studies. It is also surprising that there is no reference to the important essay by G. D. Kilpatrick on Mark 13 verses 9-11 in *Studies in the Gospels* (Ed. D. E. Nineham, 1957).

The series is intended for the use of “students, teachers, clergy, and general readers”. It would, as everybody agrees, be disastrous if knowledge of writers on Mark became a substitute for understanding the book. Our best guides will be those who illuminate the text: our worst will be those who come between us and the page. On this criterion, the most useful essays here are those by T. J. Weeden (“The Heresy that Necessitated Mark’s Gospel”), J. Dewey (“The Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1-3:6”) and R. C. Tannehill (“The Disciples in Mark: the Function of a Narrative Role”).

J. C. Fenton

## Jesus and Community

G. Lohfink. E.T. by J. P. Galvin, S.P.C.K., 1985. Pp. xii + 211. £4.95.

Did Jesus found a church? The heat with which that question was once debated has now dissipated. It is not so much that a universally agreed answer has been found as that the question has been seen to be the wrong one, adopting an anachronistic starting-point and taking Jesus’ ministry out of its proper context. Yet the past decade or more has seen a new emphasis on the social dimension of both Old and New Testaments, while in Biblical study, as also in wider theological debate, the talk is now of “community”. The absence of the article before that term in Lohfink’s title signals the book’s place in the 1980’s; it may also obscure the fact that this is not one of a number of possible partners for the formula “Jesus and ———”. Eschatology and community are inseparable; Jesus’s ministry can only be understood against the background of Israel’s eschatological hope of the gathering of the people of God. When Israel as a whole rejected the call to be gathered, Jesus turned to his disciples not as a new Israel nor as a remnant but as the prefiguration of the eschatological Israel. Yet as the eschatological gathered people of God they must manifest the rule of God – *in community*. Jesus’s ethical teaching is not idealism, nor does it speak of some future state; its purpose is not to lead to despair and dependence on grace alone, neither is it for an *élite* or for the inner heart. It describes the life of the renewed people of God within whose social relationships is manifested God’s reign; social relationships that are marked by the renunciation of violence, of retribution and of structures of domination; social relationships that stand in contrast to those of the rest of society – in short – another key-term for Lohfink – a *contrast society*.

Lohfink’s use of the Gospel material is essentially conservative; he rarely discusses critical questions of authenticity and when he does he usually argues in favour of the material’s historical reliability for Jesus’s words or intentions. Yet his audience will not thereby be a narrow one any more than is his own background reading. It is no surprise to find the name of G. Theissen in the bibliography, for he has undoubtedly been influenced by the latter’s description of the “First Followers of Jesus”, while maintaining a more radical sense of the calling of the settled communities than does Theissen. The ability to take the fruits of such recent New Testament scholarship and to make them widely available is an enviable achievement; this is even more so when it is done without being patronising and without over-simplification – the discussion of the texts

is careful, reference is often made (in transliteration) to Greek terms and there is a recognition of those parts of the New Testament which fail to capture this ideal of community.

Yet as the book progresses its underlying concern becomes increasingly apparent. The second part asks whether this ideal of community was recognised in the life of the New Testament communities and in the early church. That it was both confirms in retrospect the reading of Jesus's intentions, and also gives to them and to the expectation that they are to be worked out in social reality a firmer authority. Authority for whom? It is contemporary parish life particularly within his own church which is Lohfink's focus of concern; he must establish his cause not only against those who dismiss Jesus's ethic of a contrast society as idealism or internalise it into individualism, but also against those who restrict it to a minority or who see the egalitarianism of the early church as an aberration, a period of experimentation before the development of structures within the mature church of the Fathers. Hence it is crucial that it is not until the age of Augustine that there is lost that awareness of the church – inevitably the term creeps in and assumes an increasingly important profile – as the gathered people of God living as a contrast society here in the midst of the wider society.

To maintain such a picture of the church during the early Patristic period Lohfink has to rely on the claims of Christian Apologists, refuting the charge of their bias by arguing that any Apology which was palpably false would be an exercise in futility. Inevitably, the argument becomes increasingly triumphalist, paying no attention to any evidence which might suggest that the church frequently reflected the values and conflicts of society at large, sometimes consciously conforming to it. His dilemma is that of anyone who seeks to recover an ideal period in the church's life and to give to it special authority, whether that period be within or beyond the time of the New Testament. Yet if the last section of the book disappoints, it is not because he fails to convince us that he has portrayed the real life of the early church; rather a recognition of the dilemmas the church faced as it sought to effect its calling and its frequent failure to do so, would have opened up new questions. While the book closes with a firm appeal to the grace of God and to his act of new creation which enables the church to be such a contrast society, it does not explore what that should mean in our context, in terms either of inner church structures or of its manner of life in the midst of society. These are urgent questions with no easy answers; it is because of the urgency and integrity with which they are at least provoked that the book deserves a hearing by any with a concern for the life in community of those called to be the people of God.

J.M. Lieu

## **Alternative Approaches to New Testament Study**

Edited by A. E. Harvey. S.P.C.K., 1985. Pp. x + 144. £4.95.

This book presents good evidence that the British N.T. scene, perhaps despite appearances to the contrary, has not been entirely unaffected by the new trends affecting the discipline. However, in the best British pragmatic tradition

we are not, in the main, presented with methodological essays, but with worked examples of the "alternative approaches" on offer.

Michael Goulder opens the volume with a passionate critique of orthodox Gospel criticism – a once impregnable edifice now under attack from several sides. Isolating eight hypotheses which made up the traditional paradigm he shows how the positing of five hypothetical lost bodies of tradition (Q, M, L, the Luke-John tradition and Jesus material) has put scholarship in a position where no theory can ever be falsified. Contrary evidence is massaged to support the ever more subtle reconstructions of succeeding generations of scholars. In place of critical orthodoxy a new paradigm is outlined (with new criteria for identifying traditions) in which the star role is played by Matthew, who, as a competent scribe, a fine parabolist, and an inspired poet, created, apparently *ex nihilo*, all the material which has been seen as Q and M. He is followed by Luke whose strong suite was parables and who likewise scarcely made use of an L source. For the traditionalist it is comforting to find that Goulder continues to believe in Jesus material and the priority of Mark.

John Drury applies a structuralist approach to Mk. 1:1-15 – and does his cause a great service by not despising history. The Gospels are attempts to commandeer the sacred past (the O.T.) and thus a structuralist approach still gives the historian a margin within which to work. In particular Drury finds that in the story of John the Baptist, Mark runs the nation's history backwards: the city and the land empty as the nation goes back to the threshold of its inheritance, the Jordan.

John Riches and Alan Millar plead against the tendency to think that a traditional concept (e.g., the Kingdom of God) must carry its traditional connotations (here, the "vivid apocalyptic conceptions") with it. Rather "a writer or speaker can employ familiar linguistic forms in new ways to express new thoughts while retaining the 'core' of their customary content". While this argument is to be welcomed for its clarity (and is given some support from considerations from the philosophy of language), this is scarcely an alternative to traditional history-of-traditions work.

With regard to approach, even less new ground is broken by J. Duncan M. Derrett in his discussion of "taking the cross and turning the cheek". These sayings are read in the context of the Jewish use of the crucifixion motif (understood to include a wide range of types of execution) and of a vengeance tradition respectively. A vast amount of historical and bibliographical material is offered to the well-informed reader but others may be baffled.

The editor's own contribution seeks to set Paul's acceptance of punishment from Jewish synagogues in its social context. While Jewish Christians wished to remain within Judaism their variant beliefs would be tolerated, but they would constantly run the risk of punishment on account of their behaviour, particularly with regard to the laws concerning food and ritual purity. Paul tells us that he received the "40 strokes save one" five times and Harvey suggests that the acceptance of such punishment might have confirmed to the Christian that he "was not acting *for the sake* of abiding by the Law". Further, such a dangerous course was pursued for theological and practical reasons:

God had not finally cast off the Jews, and many churches were founded precisely from groups of Jews within existing synagogues. This lucid essay would serve as a good introduction to the recent resurgence of N.T. studies informed by insights drawn from the study of the social context of religion.

F. Gerald Downing takes up the cause of what will undoubtedly come to be known as audience criticism. The early Christian texts are currently being read as enclosed narrative worlds with no attention being paid to the conventions of their audiences. The latter would, however, have heard the texts from within their section of Graeco-Roman culture. It is therefore the interpreter's task to engage in the "quest of the historical audience". Further, the audience's contribution to the creation of the texts has to be assessed. This is most likely to lie in the area of selection, the author responding to the expectation for particular features. Thus Luke-Acts is to be read in the context of narrative and historiographical conventions as evidenced by Josephus, Jesus' message would have sounded like the preaching of the Cynics, Mark is to be heard with Roman ears and, rather curiously and only as a negative argument, Paul ought not to be heard from a later Gnostic position.

Finally, and in an unsympathetic climate, Leslie Houlden bravely addresses the question of a theological approach to the New Testament. After an account of why this type of approach has fallen on hard times he goes over to the offensive and suggests that systematic theology should put its own house in order. The theologians should recognise what has been learnt by N.T. historians: doctrine is autonomous of the formulations of the past, and has to be created in the present, certainly with reference to, but not tied by, tradition, in the light of present experience. The N.T. scholar can contribute an analysis of the procedure by which the earliest Christian faith arose and constantly call attention to the story of Jesus.

D. V. Way

### The Saga of God Incarnate

Robert Crawford. University of South Africa/T. & T. Clark, 1985. Pp. xii + 106. £7.95.

Robert Crawford's contribution to the debate on christology is more a report on the issues than a sustained original contribution to theology, though some constructive suggestions are made. The book contains five chapters and two appendices. The first chapter is a valuable summary of the views and presuppositions of what appears to be the reigning view in British christology, and concludes by saying that "current theology advocates an 'action' rather than a 'substance' one" (p. 7). This is the cue for some criticisms of fashions and assumptions. Modern "mythologizing" interpretations face logical and theological problems, as well as questions about their outmoded view of modern scientific approaches to the world. Similarly, in the last chapter, current shibboleths about "pluralism" and "secularization" are outlined and criticised.

The heart of the book's positive proposal is to be found in chapter four, where an attempt is made to give an account of what it might mean to say that Jesus is both God and man. This is, however, less successful than the critical work,

because it fails to engage with the essential matter of the nature of God and his relation to the world. In commenting on p. 25 that "the new model of the cosmos is more like an organism than a machine", Dr. Crawford points to the real problem, and this is that neither of them is satisfactory. To begin to develop an adequate christology we must move beyond both "models" to a concept of God in personal relationship with a world which as creation bears his stamp and so is a fit place for his presence in flesh.

The two appendices provide some useful historical background, the first revealing the deist and unitarian background of the "mythographers", the second a review of christological developments over the last few centuries in the light of patristic theological debate.

Colin Gunton

### The Probability of God

Hugh Montefiore. S.C.M. Press, 1985. Pp. 195. £6.95.

The Bishop of Birmingham took a three months' sabbatical in California to write this book. He clearly used the time to the full, amassing a vast amount of scientific knowledge, apparently digesting it without too much difficulty, and presenting it here in a fascinating and readable form. The general aim is to rehabilitate the design argument, to argue that it is much more probable than not that the universe is intentionally willed by a wise and powerful God. This enterprise has been undertaken before, notably by F. R. Tennant and Charles Raven. But science moves on by leaps and bounds, and Montefiore is able to call up vast new resources from more recent scientific work. The book is a worthy successor to those distinguished Anglican works of the earlier 20th century.

Montefiore covers a remarkably wide field with apparent mastery of his material – from the cosmology of the Big Bang to the ecosystem of the atmosphere and the oceans; from the theory of neo-Darwinism to the genesis of the brain in the human species. On all these matters he presents a balanced and very helpful selection of quotations and sources. He often wrote to experts in the field, and received courteous replies, which he quotes. His data have been carefully checked, and his presentation of his evidence is exemplary.

One of the most interesting features that emerge is the open-mindedness of scientists to the possibility of non-mechanistic explanations, and their frequent confessions about the huge extent of our ignorance of how the world works. There is clearly a new climate of opinion abroad, which is rarely avowedly materialistic, but which is able to confess both an appreciation of the mystery of nature and a desire to find some complete explanation of its ways, which may transcend science as we know it. It is no longer thought that science has explained everything, and that only a few minor details remain to be cleared up. Rather, everything is in the melting-pot; and we can hardly foresee what is to come.

In this context, Montefiore does not press his case beyond its strength. He sets out the way in which present knowledge of the universe discloses a whole series of

extraordinary coincidences, correlations and finely balanced relationships without which human life, or indeed any form of personal life, could not have existed. He accepts that there is no way of disproving that these could all have come about by chance. But his argument is that it seems very improbable that they did so. They suggest, he argues, that there is in matter an inner tendency to produce conscious life, a *nisus* towards the personal, which gives evidence of purpose in creation. The simplest, most economical and satisfactory explanation of these things, he says, is that God willed them so to be. Indeed, once one sees the possibility of such an explanation, the chance-hypothesis comes to seem "wildly improbable".

There is no doubt that this is a very good book – informed, reliable and judicious. But does it make its case? The central concept is that of probability; and it is just here that the main difficulties lie. If you say that something is probable, you usually mean that, relative to some sequences of regularities which you have established in the past, it is likely to ensue. Probability is relative to knowledge; and it only functions against a background of established regularity. I can say it is improbable I will change into an elephant, because people have never been known to do that sort of thing; it would conflict with well-established regularities in nature. But if I say that the universe is improbable, what have I got to measure it against? And what regularities can be in question? I do not say that such a use of concept of probability is impossible. But it would need to be carefully explained and defended.

Montefiore gives some idea of what he has in mind when he says that God "is the simple and adequate explanation of all the puzzling matters of which we have spoken" (152). Can we say that it is more probable that there is such an explanation than not? We might say that everything seems to have had an explanation so far; so it is probable that the universe will have an explanation. But, as Hume pointed out, the larger the leap, the weaker the induction; and such an argument does not have a high probability (i.e. it is not very reliable). Perhaps we could say, "If there is a simple, adequate explanation, then God is the best one". And there is a use of "improbable" where it means "inexplicable, on any known principles". I think this is what Montefiore wants; because he says, "I believe very strongly in the Principle of Sufficient Reason" (8). Of course, if that is an axiom, then it is not just improbable, it is impossible, for anything to lack an explanation. The only question then is, what sort of explanation?

The axis of Montefiore's argument is the listing of a long series of events, all improbable in themselves, which give rise to an increasingly ordered and complex state, ending (so far) with human beings. Thus the present state of the universe depends upon a long series of very precise antecedent states, a slight difference in which would have prevented the existence of the present state. That, of course, would be true of any present state whatsoever. To make the argument significant, we have to add that the present state is highly desirable or valuable; and that the series is progressively more highly ordered – which, if random shuffling procedures are used, is increasingly improbable as time goes on (improbable, that is, relative to the set of possible outcomes which random shuffling permits). Then we can say, as Montefiore does, that the simplest explanation is "that matter orders itself in a way that is optimal for life" (171) – i.e. laws of nature are not like

random shuffles of a finite deck of cards; but more like tendencies to unfold potentialities present from the first in the structure of matter.

The appeal of this explanatory notion of "unfolding tendency" is increased when we consider the amazing speed, fecundity and complexity of the emergence of animal species and of humans. It seems at least as if natural selection and random genetic mutation alone do not provide the sole explanation of evolution. "The scientific method does point to some kind of purpose in creation," he says; although "if there is an overall plan, then it is by no means clear. There are so many *culs-de-sac*, dead ends, false starts" (96).

The evidence he gets from biologists is certainly impressive; but at this point mysteries accumulate around what is meant by the inner tendency of matter to produce ordered forms. Montefiore wishes to explain this by the working of the Holy Spirit. Yet he says, "At no time would there have been any interference with the natural functions of its component parts in any creature" (139). He does not like the idea of God "intervening" in the natural order. Things happen we would not expect by chance; but "this is not because of external pressure, but because of the bias implanted in matter" (161). So the view seems to be deistic; we are told that God is immanent everywhere, but that he does nothing in particular. In the end, the proffered explanation is that God wills the universe to be what it is; and he makes it so that it has an inner tendency to greater complexity and order. I am not denying that this could be explanatory; but it remains unclear just what sort of explanation it is. For it is admitted that "we are ignorant about the options open to the creator"; so does it really explain anything to say that a creator chose it to be thus? And it is unclear what sort of thing an "inner bias" or "tendency" might be. Is Montefiore proposing the necessity of a Final Cause as part of a complete scientific explanation, a sort of Aristotelian lure for the material world? Or does he want a more active principle, as is suggested by talk of "the Spirit *working*" in creation? Or is he saying that God, like an almighty Programmer, set up the universe so that it would achieve a goal in due course?

In these comments, I am not at all meaning to dismiss the book. On the contrary, it provides a rich source of material for rethinking the nature of scientific investigation and the relation of God and the world. I mean only to suggest that there remain puzzles and obscurities which need to be further explored. I am inclined to think that the case the book does make is that the notion of "chance" is unhelpful in understanding nature, at least as any sort of basic inexplicable surd; and that some form of purposive explanation is not ruled out by modern scientific knowledge, but is even positively suggested by it. In some sense of probable, perhaps this does make the existence of God more probable than it might be on some other views of the nature of the universe.

There is a *non sequitur* on p. 131, which is probably just a slip. From the fact that I can apparently conceive a contradiction it does not follow that no being is demonstrable unless its contrary implies a contradiction. What follows is that from the fact that I can apparently conceive of God's non-existence, it does not follow that it is possible, even logically, for God not to exist. The complexity of the requisite sentence makes the *non sequitur* understandable.

## Enlightenment and Alienation: An Essay towards a Trinitarian Theology

Colin E. Gunton. Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1985. Pp. 165. £5.95.

The Enlightenment has in recent years been subject to a somewhat ambivalent assessment. On the one hand are the self-appointed heirs and successors of the Enlightenment's programme of man's release from heteronomously-imposed authority, who want to carry the task of autonomous liberation in the name of enlightened rationality still further. On the other hand are those who see in the Enlightenment nothing but man's estrangement from the true sources of human life and who escape from the burden of rationality into all kinds of fashionable mythologies. Professor Gunton's new book does not fall into either of these categories. While arguing eloquently and passionately against the alienating consequences of the Enlightenment, which he sees as disastrous for the undertaking of modern theology, he is nevertheless careful not to condemn uncritically the whole of the Enlightenment's heritage. Indeed, the main contention of his book, that a trinitarian theology provides the possibility of overcoming some of the most desperate alienations of human beings from the world and from each other, depends both on taking leave of some of the Enlightenment's most cherished dogmas and on retaining some of its seminal insights.

In the first part of the book ("Seeing and Believing", 11-54) Colin Gunton offers an analysis of the main trends of the Enlightenment's theory of perception (Descartes, Locke, Hume, Kant) which in his view lead by their emphasis on the passivity of the senses and the ordering activity of the mind to an ever widening gulf between the human mind and reality. It was Kant who recognized the threat to the validity of all our experience implied in the Humean account of perception, and who tried to overcome the resulting scepticism by postulating a universal mental framework as the structuring power of the diversity presented to us by our senses. Gunton contrasts this solution with the "dissenting voices" of Berkeley, Coleridge and Polanyi. According to Gunton, Berkeley is not to be interpreted as an idealist, but as a critical realist: the aim of his argument that the passivity and rationality of perception could have no other explanation than the constantly creating and preserving agency of God would seem to be to safeguard the correspondence of our ideas with the reality of the world. Coleridge's rehabilitation of the imagination as the active process in which a person transcends the "despotism of the eye" and gets in touch with reality is further developed in Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge, which is interpreted as a conscious departure from the Enlightenment's dichotomy of knowledge and belief and its accompanying division of passive perception and active conceptual construction. If the paradigm of knowledge is not an ideal of omniscience but the process of learning, then in perception the human person can be regarded as actively indwelling the material world by means of his or her senses, not in order to bring it under the control of the mind, but in order to receive passively the structure of the real world. Taking up "hints and pointers" from these counter-currents of the Enlightenment, Gunton argues that a trinitarian understanding of God makes it possible to understand perception and knowledge as always fallible and as only eschatologically complete participation in the inherent rationality of God's creation. Under this

theological presupposition can the alienation of the person from reality be overcome.

Part II of the book ("Thinking and Acting", 55-107) starts with a justification of the Enlightenment's demand for autonomy, which Gunton sees as directed against a conception of God as necessary power that denies human freedom. But Gunton is even more critical of the Enlightenment's proposed alternative of authentic humanity. The ideal of the autonomy of the individual will seem dangerously near to a human imitation of the picture of God from which the Enlightenment wanted to liberate humanity. Gunton shows that this conception of autonomy implies dangerous breaks between the moral agent and reality and an alienation of the individual from other persons. The trinitarian conception of God, for the interpretation of which again appeal to Coleridge is made, has in Gunton's view as its correlative an understanding of reality which implies the reciprocity of subject and object. This means that one does not have to choose between a mechanistic explanation of human freedom and the alienating autonomy of the individual will. In this part the emphasis is on the work of the Son who, as the revelation of authentic humanity, enables us to see God as related to human beings and the world in such a way that human freedom is made possible without alienation from other persons and from the world.

The third and last part of the book ("Reading and Understanding", 111-153) concentrates on the problems of the interpretation of Scripture. Gunton here identifies the heritage of the Enlightenment as the problem of the gap between what the texts say and what they mean, a gap which can be bridged only by the activity of the interpreter who has to impose an order on the complex diversity of historical events to which the texts are taken to refer. This diagnosis (which takes up the central thesis of Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*) does not lead Gunton to prescribe a return to a pre-critical or an advance towards a post-critical interpretation of Scripture as adequate treatments for the ills of biblical interpretation. Rather, he argues for a critical use of the methods of historical criticism which (following suggestions by B. S. Childs) takes the canonical form in which the texts have reached us as the starting-point of theological interpretation.

If it is the function of the canon "to lay down a unifying pattern of insights to show that it is the same God that is being described and referred to here" (R. E. Clements, quoted on p. 137f.), then – Gunton argues – the task of unification might be made easier, if God were understood in trinitarian terms. This is also seen as the basis for a reshaping of the understanding of "inspired meaning", which for Gunton is not a "wholly other" kind of meaning discernible only by believers, but "simply a successful version of meaning in general" (p. 145). Both aspects of this view of the interpretation of Scripture, i.e. the canonical approach and the reformulated doctrine of inspiration, define an attitude towards Scripture which is not primarily that of a judge handing down a decision, but rather that of a pupil exercising judgement in participating in the eschatological gift of the Spirit.

This original and brilliantly written essay is one of the most important contributions towards a theological assessment of the cultural situation in which we live. As such, it deserves to be widely read, not only by theologians, but also

by those enlightened critics of Christian theology who are still interested in dialogue with Christian theologians. Even one in agreement with the general thrust of the argument, however, might question some of Gunton's historical and systematic judgements, because different assessments might broaden the basis on which one could build in the task of theological reconstruction. For instance, is Schleiermacher to be seen only as a theologian who asserted the wrong kind of dependence on God, or is he not rather one of those thinkers who (very much like Coleridge) early diagnosed the alienating effects of the Enlightenment and devised philosophical and theological means to overcome them? Would not Paul Tillich (no less than Karl Barth and Eberhard Jüngel) be an ally in the search for a theological understanding of authentic humanity, since he does not seem to take "a middle way between autonomy and heteronomy" (p. 96), but tried to show that only on the basis of autonomy can a non-heteronomous understanding of theonomy be reached? These questions are of minor importance compared to the one question that Colin Gunton firmly puts on the theological agenda: what exactly is the form and the status of a doctrine of the Trinity that seems implied by this trinitarian theology?

The importance of this book should not be seen exclusively in the theological proposals it makes and in the questions it provokes, but also in the method employed. Colin Gunton does not argue for the *necessity* of a trinitarian understanding of God and the world; rather, he wants to establish *possibilities* "in such a way that there is mutual illumination from God to the world and, in direct correspondence from the world to God" (p. 52). This "sceptical", yet optimistic, attitude shows that he is not only a passionate critic of the Enlightenment's alienation, but also an heir to its liberation.

Christoph Schwöbel

## Freedom and Alienation

Hywel D. Lewis. Scottish Academic Press, 1985. Pages x + 159. £10.50 (paperback), £6.75 (paperback).

Professor Lewis, in his preface to this third volume based on his Gifford Lectures in 1966-68, says that what he is to show is that "Science does not explain everything". Without denying anything it does explain, he wants to prove that our thoughts and intentions make the kind of difference to what we do which cannot be reduced to mere physical causation. He predicts - perhaps a little too pessimistically - that his line of argument will find no favour with fashionable philosophical opinion at the present time but nevertheless regards it as the only plausible way of accounting for that "conviction of freedom" which ordinary people have.

His arguments revolve around the following question: Is there not something about the "I", or self, as subject, which cannot be netted entirely in mere accounts of the nature of that subject's experiences and the way in which they are inter-related, much less in mere accounts of their physical concomitants or preconditions? When, for example, I have a pain, it will not do to say simply that an experience of pain is occurring at such and such a time and place; what I am inescapably aware of is that it is *my* pain and not anybody else's. If I am asked for evidence that this awareness is

veridical, I can point to nothing beyond the awareness itself. For want of any better way of putting it, I have an intuition of selfhood.

Lewis sets himself to show that this intuition is embedded inextricably in our ordinary ways of thinking and talking. For example, apart from it our moral notions of obligation and responsibility would be incoherent. When used in their specifically moral senses, words such as "right" and "wrong" etc. are not merely verbal devices for encouraging or discouraging certain forms of behaviour which the speaker happens to think desirable or undesirable; the whole moral way in which we use these expressions makes it clear that what we are purporting to praise or blame thereby is the free agency, in the last analysis, of independently existing selves.

This thesis is defended at length in chapters which show the author's comprehensive acquaintance with arguments to the contrary. Lewis takes on all comers, from philosophers who have understood the intricacies of our concept of the freedom of the will as subtly as P. H. Nowell-Smith to sociologists who have attempted to dispose of it as ham-handedly as Barbara Wootton. There follow chapters on the darker side of the "conviction of freedom"; namely, on the alienation which guilt may generate and the loneliness in which our intuition of selfhood may land us. The latter is illustrated from contemporary literature.

Coming specifically to religion, Lewis sees an insurmountable divide between, on the one hand, all forms of monism according to which apparently independent existents including persons are really modes of one ultimate divine being and, on the other hand, all forms of pluralism according to which such existents are genuinely real and distinct from the one transcendent source of their being. Dependence is one thing but identity, another. Our "conviction of freedom" is the ultimate guarantee that we are not identical with God; but it is also the final ground for belief in our dependence upon Him. That hunger for fellowship with God - and incidentally with others in Him - to which religion bears witness would be inconceivable apart from our intuition of freedom; for it is only beings who are in some sense independent of other beings, whether divine or human, who can be conceived to long for fellowship with these others.

I think Lewis is entitled to claim, as he does, that his conception of an independently existing self, distinct from brain or body and irreducible to a series of physical or mental events, fits in with our ordinary ways of thinking and talking. But the other side of the coin is, of course, the reductionist conception of the self, classically propounded by David Hume. Before leaping to the conclusion that Lewis's arguments are self-evidently triumphant, those who come new to the subject or have not thought about it recently, would be well advised to consider some competent contemporary representation of the reductionist case (as, for example, that to be found in Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, 1984). There they will find it argued that personal identity can be adequately accounted for in terms of physical or psychological continuity. It is said to suffice that experiences can be linked with one another - our experiences of remembering for example with those of what is remembered, or of intending with those of what was intended. Parfit contends that, once we think of ourselves in these reductionist terms, our fear of death will be less

daunting and our sense of fellowship with others more rewarding; an opinion, which certainly raises the question whether the concepts of fellowship with God and other persons, which are so central to the Christian religion, really are as closely linked to our intuition of selfhood as Lewis seems to think.

But whatever we may feel about all that, one cannot but admire the elegance and clarity which characterise this latest of Professor Lewis's writings as they do all his previous ones, the scholarship and fair-mindedness with which he always attempts to state the counter-arguments he has to answer in defending his own, and the consistency and skill with which through a long and distinguished career he has ploughed his own philosophical furrow in the interest of truths of which, it has seemed to him, others were losing sight.

W. D. Hudson

### **Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine**

Paul Avis. S.P.C.K., 1986. Pp. xv + 142. £5.95.

Dr. Avis tells us that his book was provoked by the Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission's *Final Report* in 1982. His criticisms are not directed against the assumption that *doctrinal* agreement between the two churches is a possibility – this he accepts. The really intractable differences are “differences of ‘horizon’, of ultimate assumptions regarding the approach to truth and the methods, norms and sources of theology” (xii). Most of the book is therefore concerned not with detailed examination of the ARCIC texts, but with a discussion of the different presuppositions which govern Anglican and official Roman Catholic theology (the word “official” is important, since the views of Catholic theologians such as Rahner and Küng are constantly contrasted with the pronouncements issuing forth from the Vatican).

An important difference between Anglican and official Roman Catholic approaches is seen by Avis to lie in their attitudes towards pluralism – the fact that in both society and church there are different and to some extent contradictory points of view which must somehow co-exist. Rome has not yet adjusted to this feature of modern life:

Its recognition of pluralism has been muted and half-hearted. Recent disciplinary episodes reveal that there is at present no intention of embracing the implications of the modern pluralistic situation in a liberal culture. To this extent, the official Roman Catholic attitude can be accused of cultivating an ostrich-like air of unreality.

The Anglican attitude is thus preferable:

The acceptance of pluralism as we find it in the Anglican Church denotes the eminent realism of Anglicanism. There is no need to apologize too much for the alleged defects of Anglicanism – its lack of discipline, its reticence where dogmatic definitions are concerned, its breadth of permitted opinion. Its pragmatism is not always born of a weary cynicism: at its best it is the product of sagacity, a sense of realism about the world as it is in the providence of God, a willingness to look the facts in the face and to make the best of them. (116)

We have here the familiar liberal Protestant contrast between a rigid orthodoxy and tolerance of different theological standpoints within a single church. In good Protestant fashion (and not without reason), the Pope's authority to issue binding decisions is declared to be incompatible with “the liberty of conscience” which is “intrinsic to Anglicanism” (80). But Avis is aware that Anglicanism's easygoing tolerance has recently been attacked from within by Stephen Sykes as lacking integrity, and he therefore argues that Anglican “comprehensiveness” should issue not merely in the juxtaposition of mutually opposing views within a single communion, but in the quest for a *synthesis* of the positive points contributed by different traditions within Anglicanism. Coleridge and F. D. Maurice point towards such an approach; Maurice's dictum, that the Church of England is to be “most Catholic when she is most Protestant”, is quoted approvingly (124).

This step from “pluralism” to “synthesis” seems to me to be problematic. Despite Sykes, it is possible to defend a pluralism which consists merely of the juxtaposition of different points of view (which is the reality of contemporary Anglicanism); it is at least better than the obvious alternative, sectarianism. But the notion of “synthesis” is one which – despite its laudable intentions – seems very difficult to apply in practice. It would be hard enough to explain how one could be most Catholic when one is most Protestant, but next to impossible to explain how one could be most liberal when one is most fundamentalist, or vice versa. Some theological differences are simply irreducible, and that is not always a bad thing. Tolerating views with which one disagrees is not necessarily symptomatic of a lazy complacency, in the church any more than in society.

Underlying the contrast between Anglican and Roman Catholic attitudes towards pluralism are two different views of the nature of revelation, according to Avis. He argues that the transcendent God is ultimately a mystery which cannot be adequately represented by any dogmatic definition. Alongside affirmative theology, the *via negativa* has stressed the utter inadequacy of our speech about God, and our knowledge of him is thus at best “a form of learned ignorance” (3). This leads to the central contention of the book, that the official Roman Catholic view of revelation in terms of “revealed truths” is erroneous, and that ARCIC has distorted the genuine Anglican position by acceding to that notion. Avis feels that this “propositional” view has now been rendered impossible by the emphasis in the philosophy of science on the provisional and tentative nature of our knowledge, and by the relativism resulting from historical study. There are thus no dogmatic decisions, however venerable, which can be authoritatively declared to be “free from error” and so binding on all Christians. Our apprehension of truth is a matter of personal encounter rather than intellectual assent:

Reality remains a mystery that does not lend itself to clear and distinct description. The closest we can come to capturing reality in words remains at the level of the tacit rather than the explicit. Our most refined and exact concepts are but blunt instruments for the delicate task of interpreting a world of meaning that in its heights and depths surpasses the furthest reach of human imagination. Myth, poetry, symbol, metaphor and analogy come closest and point us forward, but ultimately they themselves fail. (9)

Avis therefore criticizes ARCIC's claim that a formal definition by the magisterium may "enrich" our "grasp of the truth" – enrichment comes not from infallible dogmas but rather from "mutual fellowship in joy or sorrow, from the resources of the liturgy, from music and literature" (65). The "principle of reverent agnosticism" is authentically Anglican, whereas official Roman Catholic theology is implacably opposed to the suggestion that "doctrine attempts merely a vague approximation to the truth" (46).

There is much here with which one may well sympathize; and yet one wonders whether this almost exclusive emphasis on the *via negativa* and the inadequacy of language is really satisfactory. To reject the possibility of ecclesiastical decisions miraculously preserved from error is something with which most non-Catholics (and some Catholics) would immediately agree. But it does not follow from this that the most one can expect from theology is "vague approximations", and that "clarity, precision, distinctness, objectivity are spurious when applied to statements of doctrine" (40). The statements of theology are of course provisional and inadequate, since the God revealed in Jesus Christ remains mysterious. But it is also true that the mysterious God actually *has* revealed himself in Jesus Christ, and this creates the possibility not just of an indefinable encounter with an ultimate reality but of *logos* about *theos* – rational discourse about God. Such at least seems to be the implication of the New Testament, with its strong emphasis on the preached word and on Jesus himself as the Word.

Francis Watson

### **From Controversy to Co-existence. Evangelicals in the Church of England 1914-1980**

Randle Manwaring. C.U.P., 1985. Pp. xi + 227. £19.50.

It is remarkable that Cambridge University Press should have accepted this book for publication, for it is written from an openly partisan point of view and belongs more to the genre of propaganda than to that of history or of theology. What it says is what, it seems, evangelicals like to hear: their myths are set down here as if they were solid fact. Naturally, every book has a certain amount of tendency, a certain ideological preference, but few are so unashamedly partisan as this work, and the writer lacks both the theological insight and the historical ability to understand the issues involved in what he is describing. Rather than attempt any fairness in his historical sketch, the author simply perpetuates the aspects that conservative evangelicals have found congenial. For example, he (rightly) stresses the centrality of Billy Graham in the whole rise of mid-century evangelicalism, and on other pages he praises Karl Barth as a prophet of protest against liberalism and humanism. He does not mention, probably does not know, that Barth, when he heard Graham's preaching, was horrified by it, considering that it put a law in the place of the Gospel. Similarly, he thinks of Nazism as an outstanding representative of humanism and the like, but he does not think how many of those who in the early years supported Hitler were those who held the same values which animate this book, those of tenacity to traditional Protestantism and longing for a return to strict morality.

In pattern the book is an informal history, or rather anecdote, and its theme is the move of Anglican evangelicals from a largely negative position of opposition through growing success in the post-war years and into an increasing posture of co-existence in more recent times. The centrality of the great personalities of the evangelical firmament, in recent years John Stott and Jim Packer, is made clearly evident. The author writes as an insider and much of the inner self-consciousness of evangelicalism is well conveyed by his writing. The influence of organisations such as the Crusaders, the Children's Special Service Mission, and the Christian Unions in colleges and universities is made very clear.

Central to the argument, in a certain way, is chapter 9, "The Fundamentalist Issue," where Manwaring wants, quite reasonably, to defend evangelicals against the supposition that they are all fundamentalists. Of course they are not and, in spite of what he says about my own writings on the subject, I never supposed that they were. But, if they are not, then a new problem at once arises, which pierces to the heart of our author's assurance of the rightness of evangelicalism. As soon as fundamentalism is gone, then evangelicalism – at least as it is here expressed – loses all basis for its incessant claims that it is more biblical than any other form of Christianity. It is not. The Bible, taken as authoritative, points in other Christian directions than the evangelical. The continual self-assurance of Mr. Manwaring that he and his friends have absolute biblical authority on their side is a relic of fundamentalism; without it, they have no basis for their claims. Once the more moderate positions about scripture, mentioned here and there in this book, are accepted, then evangelicals will have to accept that, in degree of obedience to biblical authority, they are no better than the rest of us. But few signs of comprehension of this lesson can be seen in this book.

The same applies to the continual reference back to the Reformation, the Reformed Faith and the like, which the writer insists to be the sole true heritage of the Church of England. There is not much doubt that evangelicals *aspire to* continuity with the Reformed tradition. This aspiration is repeated in this book as if it was a factual reality. But are Anglican evangelicals, as a matter of fact, anywhere near the Reformed tradition? One who comes from that tradition may be permitted to doubt it. To people who belong to the actual tradition of the Reformation, Anglican evangelicals give little impression of knowing what a Reformed church is like at all. They seem more like people who draw their resources from a more modern well of piety and sentiment, often sectarian in character, as is well illustrated by the importance of closed evangelical societies, so rightly stressed in this book. But, even more so, part of the heritage of the Reformed churches is a stress on *loyalty* to the church. If this book is a right account of Anglican evangelicals, one cannot see much sign of *loyalty* to the Church of England. That just is not a factor. The loyalty of evangelicals is to evangelicalism. They know that evangelicalism is right. The church is the field in which they work, and they want to have a bigger say in it than they have had; but the motive of *loyalty* to the church, as a Christian and equal in status with *loyalty* to evangelical convictions, is scarcely contemplated here.

Thus one is left wondering how far Anglican evangelicalism depends on truly Anglican roots at all. The underlying theology of this book, in so far as it could be said

to have one, seems to derive from the thought of "pure" or sectarian evangelical groupings rather than from historic Anglicanism. Thus the position of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who demanded secession from the existing churches in order to form a new evangelical church, is given respectful attention (p. 201). Of course few followed this suggestion, but that it should even be discussed seems to place us quite outside the Anglican tradition.

Nor can the author cope with the intellectual matters that he has to face from time to time. His treatment of the *Honest to God* discussion is unthinkingly prejudiced. The primitivity of his conceptions is displayed when he asks us to suspect that there was a connection between the Bishop of Woolwich's book and the wild doings of John Profumo in the same year. And, after all, did not John Robinson speak for a good number of evangelicals, as well as other Anglican believers? Do evangelicals really affirm the "three-tier universe", and do they insist that God is literally "up there"?

But nowhere is the writer's inability to cope with the questions he himself is handling more evident than in the matter of Hermeneutics. This, he tells us, was the "shock" theme of the Nottingham Congress (p. 200). But he does not explain why. Yet the question is there in a form that threatens the whole evangelical self-consciousness: one sees the biblical text through the spectacles of one's own tradition. "A Christian Union Bible Study Group will hear the text only in a 'Christian Union' kind of way" (quoted from Thiselton). But this, if right, means that for evangelicals the real authority is not the Bible, but their own evangelicalism through whose spectacles they read it. Not surprisingly, a shock; but the author, having mentioned the subject, just passes it by.

As has been said, Mr. Manwaring presents the evangelical point of view throughout and has little time or understanding for any other. He does indeed see that there have been faults and excesses at times and that there has been some reason for the unpopularity that evangelicals have sometimes suffered. But on the whole all these things have been getting better and better. Evangelicals are becoming more committed to the Church of England, he says: but how can they really do so, when, on his own showing, their very evangelicalism prevents them from anything more than the most grudging recognition that anything deemed by them to be unevangelical belongs to genuine Christianity? In spite of ups and downs, evangelicalism has always been right and is now right.

In criticising this book I am far from saying that the actual situation in evangelicalism is worse than the depiction of it that Mr. Manwaring gives us. On the contrary, by his own enthusiastic and partisan depiction he casts a worse light on the evangelical mind than it as a whole and in actuality is likely to deserve, a worse light than a critical or impartial discussion would have cast. For his own depiction, if it is valid, gives above all the impression that evangelicalism is a fundamentally selfish movement, self-seeking and self-centred, seeking its own advancement and glorying in it, mean-spirited and advantage-seeking in debate. Thus Mr. Manwaring's advocacy does discredit to much that is fair and humble in the evangelical character. And this brings us back to the central problem. Those of us who have personal experience of evangelicalism remember two dark sides of it: its complete destruction of all fairness in

religious argument, and the rubbishy character of the ideas it so commonly disseminated as interpretations of the Bible. These two problems still lie at the centre, if Manwaring's depiction is a true representation.

James Barr

### **Westminster, Whitehall and the Vatican: The Role of Cardinal Hinsley, 1935-43**

Thomas Moloney. Burns and Oates, 1985. Pp. 263. £9.95.

In June 1939 bombs exploded in the Strand, Piccadilly and Park Lane as part of the IRA's campaign to make the British withdraw from Ireland. Arthur Hinsley, Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, condemned the violence and threatened its perpetrators with excommunication. From Dublin, the IRA warned Hinsley that he should not use the Catholic Church to defend British aggression in Ireland; from Armagh, the Primate of All Ireland, Cardinal MacRory, informed him that he agreed the violence was indefensible, but pointedly drew his attention to the IRA's belief that it was acting out of patriotic motives and in response to past and continuing English injustices in Ireland. In England, anxious members of the Catholic laity told Hinsley that the IRA was generating anti-Catholic feeling; for their part, the Catholic bishops in England (some of whom were Irish), rejected Hinsley's view that IRA prisoners on hunger strike in English jails should be told that they would be refused the sacraments and Christian burial if their suicide resulted.

The Irish question, with its sadly familiar characteristics, provides a striking illustration of the pressures and constraints which Hinsley laboured under as Archbishop of Westminster between 1935 and 1943. The priority he gave to the interests of English and Welsh Catholics frequently created tension between himself and leaders of Catholics elsewhere. At home, his sympathy for lay demands for a more active role in church life, which he believed would lead to deeper commitment and church growth, brought him into conflict with his own bishops and clergy, defending their prerogatives of leadership. There was little that Hinsley could do about this; the Archbishop of Westminster was no more than the permanent president of the Bishop's Conference of England and Wales, and was bound to follow the wishes of the majority.

If this lack of primatial authority stopped Hinsley imposing change on his bishops, it also required of him great tact when dealing with Whitehall, which had little understanding of his constitutional position. Ministers and officials often approached him, expecting results, whenever they wanted Catholic support for Government policy. Whitehall was, for example, anxious that British Catholics should not look favourably on the seemingly Catholic inspired régime at Vichy, nor that hostility to atheistic Communism – the *bête noire* of the Catholic Church since 1917 – should create opposition to Anglo-Soviet co-operation after the German invasion of Russia in 1941. An astute diplomatist himself, and with a conception of the national interest often similar to that of British officials, Hinsley was usually willing and able to do what the Foreign Office asked of him.

Although Hinsley spent 10 years in Rome as Rector of the English College and seven as the Holy See's Apostolic Delegate to British Africa, his relations with the Vatican throughout his time at Westminster were less close than might have been expected. The Abyssinian crisis, which burst soon after Hinsley arrived in England early in 1935, showed him the unwisdom of too intimate a connection with the Vatican, whose policymakers were predominantly Italian and sympathetic to Mussolini. The Vatican's appointment of an Apostolic Delegate to London in 1938 upset Hinsley because it was made without his knowledge, but at least the Vatican was prudent enough to appoint an Englishman rather than an Italian.

For all the meticulous care with which Dr. Moloney examines his activities, no clear picture of Hinsley himself ever emerges. The archives of the Archbishop of Westminster and of the Foreign Office, the main sources, reveal a true statesman of the church, wise, resourceful, sensitive and humble in public and ecclesiastical affairs; but they say almost nothing of what Hinsley was like as a man, of how he was regarded by those who worked with him, or of what was his vision, if any, of the task entrusted to him. The nearest we come to this is in what the author views as Hinsley's dearest project, conceived in the dark days of 1940, the "Sword of the Spirit". This was "a campaign of prayer, study and action" whose object was "the restoration in Europe of a Christian basis for both public and private life". Hinsley secured at its inception a high degree of lay involvement and hoped for its advance along interdenominational lines. But the hostility of the Catholic bishops and the lukewarmness of the Anglican establishment – George Bell was a notable exception – had effectively killed it by 1942. The comment on this episode, that "if the diocesan bishops of the day tended to act over-protectively, there were sound historical reasons for this which Hinsley both understood and respected" (p. 204) seems generous to a fault. Hinsley's failure to do more to ensure the success of a scheme that engaged him so deeply requires a fuller explanation than the one provided. If somewhat uncritical, Dr. Moloney's book is often absorbing for the light it casts on the activities of Catholic clergy and laity in the 1930s; it should prove of value to students of ecclesiastical and international history alike.

Paul Stafford

### **The Sinews of the Spirit: the Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought**

Norman Vance. C.U.P., 1985. Pp. x + 244. £22.50.

This aptly titled book, which centres on the writings of Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, puts in its proper Victorian context the style of English religion popularly known as "muscular Christianity". Dr. Vance, in a detailed and careful study, demonstrates that this was but one aspect of a concern with the ideal of manliness which ranged much wider. "Physical vigour and prowess," "patriotic and military qualities," "the traditions of chivalry" and the exaltation of particular moral standards are all aspects of this ideal of manliness. It might be preached as an exemplar of Christian virtue, or it might slip free from any but the most tenuous Christian moorings to become in the later part of the century a cult of athleticism or imperial exploit.

In endeavouring to proclaim a gospel of Christian manliness, Kingsley in particular attacked what he saw as a distorted, other-worldly and ascetic Christianity. In his celebrated clash with Newman in the 1860s the battle, as Dr. Vance rightly points out, was not so much about mendacity as about "Manichaeism", "a battle between different religious temperaments and different views of religious character". In an age in which Millais' portrayal of *Christ in the House of His Parents* had been labelled "a pictorial blasphemy", because it associated Christ with the details of everyday life, there was a need to affirm the human reality of the Incarnation. It was part of what would appear to be a continuing tension in the religious life of England between those who define Christianity as "spiritual" (and understand that to mean "concerned with the salvation of the soul and a future life"), and those who proclaim that the very salvation Christianity proclaims is a redemption of the world created by God in all its aspects.

Against world-denying Evangelicalism and what were frequently considered the un-English (if not unnatural) refinements of Tractarian piety, Kingsley proclaimed the worth of physical strength, courage and health, the importance of the family and married love, and a call to service as patriot or social reformer. A "crusader" (in the modern sense) was a title which embodied much of this manly ideal. Yet this cult of manliness was only one-sidedly Christian. It promoted vigorous Christian action, it knew little of Christian contemplation. Asceticism was narrowing and negative, the thin-bloodedness of the pale Galilean. There was no sense that it might be the demanding discipline of true attentiveness to God. Over-simplified contrasts were drawn, as between the "manly Goth and the effeminate Roman". Esau was vindicated at the expense of Jacob. In his novel, *Hypatia*, set in those early centuries of the church beloved by the Tractarians, it is not the Tractarian ideal which Kingsley exalts. He writes approvingly of the ostrich-hunting bishop, Synesius, as an endorsement of the sporting clerics of the 19th century.

Dr. Vance shows clearly the different ways in which Coleridge, Thomas Arnold and Carlyle all influenced this tradition. He exonerates Dr. Arnold from responsibility for the public school games and sports tradition so often laid at his door. Above all the pervasive influence of F. D. Maurice upon not only Kingsley and Hughes, but on this whole tradition is underlined – an influence which may even have been enhanced by his expulsion from his chair at what Dr. Vance describes as "that conservative reservoir of Anglican orthodoxy", King's College, London. Thomas Hughes' novels, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and the lesser-known *Tom Brown at Oxford* are analysed carefully by Dr. Vance as exemplars of the ideal of manliness, which is summarised more succinctly in Hughes' hymn, "O God of truth, whose living word upholds whate'er hath breath". Later decades were to see both the flourishing of alternative ideals, such as "aesthetic Hellenism" and the absorption of the ideal of Christian manliness into traditions to which Kingsley was inimical, Evangelicalism and the successors of the Tractarians. In different ways the *Boy's Own Paper* and the Boys' Brigade continued the tradition.

In this detailed survey Dr. Vance has not only given us a fine study of Kingsley, but reminded us of the importance of a style of religion which still has its adherents in English Christianity. One may cavil over small points (Pusey's tract on fasting as an example of Tractarian dubious argument (p.

35), or Bishop Selwyn being characterised as “warlike” (p. 86)), but this is a book which by careful criticism and detailed exploration of a major 19th century theme both illuminates a much wider area of Victorian literature and religion and poses implicitly the question of how the Christian understanding of human nature may be persuasively and imaginatively portrayed. The 19th century did this in part by the production of Lives of Jesus (which somewhat disappointingly Dr. Vance does not discuss). New Testament criticism means this way is no longer open to us. No more in the light of feminist concern is manliness in the 19th-century sense. Perhaps it will be left to a scholar of the next century to write a companion study of the ideal of Christian feminism in late 20th-century literature and religious thought under a different title – *The Sinews of the Spirit* would hardly do for that!

Geoffrey Rowell  
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### What’s Right With Feminism

Elaine Storkey. Third Way Books, S.P.C.K., 1985. Pp. 186. £3.95.

As the title suggests, Elaine Storkey has directed her arguments at those Christians (especially of evangelical leanings) who have already assumed, without investigation, that feminism is “all wrong”, a dangerous secular ideology which should be resisted by the faithful. Her book proceeds with admirable clarity to set out the feminist case with regard to women’s unequal situation: at work, at home, in education, in law, and in the church itself. She indicates a variety of feminist analyses, offering definitions of the liberal, Marxist and radical feminist positions. Her third, and shortest, section scans Christian responses, both negative and positive, and finally she makes the case for a “biblical feminism”: in her terms, a Christian feminism that is consistent with an evangelical understanding of biblical authority.

It would obviously be unfair to demand extensive and original argument in a book which is intended as an introductory work, but I sensed that the author was severely constrained by her envisaged readership. I was continually frustrated by the brevity of each chapter, and wanted much more analysis of the situation outlined. Although the style is readable, statistics are accessibly presented, and there are some trenchant quotations to enliven the text, anyone who has followed the feminist debate with even minimal attention over the last few years will find the treatment rather preliminary. On the other hand, the book may be too serious and moderate to attract readers ignorant of the debate whose previous diet has been only the ill-considered anti-feminist tract. (The author unveils some unsuspected horrors currently lurking on popular church bookstalls.)

One of the most interesting philosophical questions the author touches on is whether or not contemporary feminism is purely a child of the Enlightenment, and therefore whether a specifically *Christian* feminism can offer a perspective much more deeply critical of modern post-Enlightenment culture. However, Storkey shows no knowledge of other Christian feminists (e.g. Angela West) who have explored this issue. Indeed, throughout the book, her references are scanty to what is now a considerable body

of theological work that is both Christian and feminist. “Broadly-Christian feminism,” which Storkey distinguishes from her own “biblical feminism”, is barely mentioned. Apart from sowing the unfair implication that only evangelical Christianity can be regarded as properly “biblical”, Storkey distorts the picture by concentrating, among individual writers, only on Mary Daly. Daly’s explicitly post-Christian position may offer a neat counterbalance to the virulently anti-feminist camp, but it is hardly representative of mainstream Christian feminism. The otherwise uninformed reader would suppose that the author was virtually alone in treading some kind of middle ground. Even such major writers as Reuther, Fiorenza, Russell and Tribble are not discussed, where they are mentioned at all.

There were further disappointments for me in the author’s habit of introducing important issues in a clear and sensitive way, only to resolve these rapidly into “sound” evangelical conclusions without having satisfactorily argued the case. For instance, she outlines the difficulty of reconciling the twin Enlightenment themes of “freedom” and “nature” – and the subsequent opposition (crucial for some feminist argument) between individual autonomy and either biological or sociological determinism. But then she collapses the dilemma into the banal statement:

“Freedom comes from following the Maker’s instructions”

(a tired old sermon point which in fact betrays a typically Enlightenment, thoroughly mechanistic view of creation). Her ethical discussions follow a similar path. After an initially sympathetic and well-considered exploration of the rationale for political lesbianism, and an acknowledgement that

“many lesbian relationships are closer to the norms of truth, commitment, love and faithfulness than many heterosexual marriages”,

Storkey does not hesitate to assert her belief that

“practising lesbianism is not a Christian option”.

It is as if she wants her evangelical tradition to step outside its usual framework of thinking, but is ultimately unwilling to live with some of the uncertainties this entails.

So I was constantly aware of the book this might have been, but isn’t: namely, a genuinely original (and much-needed) evangelical contribution to the debate about feminism. The author recalls to evangelicals their history of fighting social oppression; throughout, her case for feminism rests on an appeal to the Christian conscience in the face of continuing injustice. But passion, whether of intellectual discovery or of political commitment, is somehow lacking. The fascinating historical section on the Bible-based feminism of the 19th-century temperance league (male alcoholism was blamed for domestic violence against women) remains only an excursus. Nor, though the author pleads convincingly for less dogmatism concerning the interpretation of “subordinationist” biblical texts, is there much theological freshness.

If Elaine Storkey had risked engaging in the potentially explosive – and personally demanding – encounter between a robust evangelical faith and a strong feminist commitment (rather than simply trying to moderate both approaches) the resulting insights could have been exciting. She is clearly a writer capable of imaginative and forceful reasoning; it is a pity that she has settled instead for a tone of sweet reasonableness which I suspect will persuade neither feminists nor evangelicals.

## Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai

Kosuke Koyama. S.C.M. Press, 1984. Pp. 273. £7.95.

## No Other Name?

Paul F. Knitter. S.C.M. Press, 1985. Pp. 288. £9.50.

Professor Koyama, who now teaches Ecumenics and World Christianity at Union Theological Seminary, New York, has, so he claims, spent his life poised between Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: which is to say, between his country, Japan's, assimilation of the religious traditions of Shintoism, Confucianism, and (most influential of all) Mahayana Buddhism; and the Judaeo-Christian traditions of Mount Sinai into which his paternal grandfather was baptised.

Koyama was himself baptised in 1942 into the religion of his country's then enemy. His book is a personal and moving account of his theological pilgrimage since then, somewhat loosely described under four biblical themes: "All its cities were laid in ruins before the Lord, before his fierce anger" (Jer. 4.26); "My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 121.2); "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex. 20.7); and "My mind is turning over in me. My emotions are agitated all together" (Hos. 11.8). Koyama claims that these themes are deeply "disturbing" to the spiritual orientation of the East, but the traumatic events of 1945 have led him to ponder them. His dialogue, as a son of Mount Fuji, with the traditions of Mount Sinai has been "a strange and moving experience".

That experience has also been a complex one. East and West have mingled uneasily in modern Japan. In particular, her defeat in war in 1945 was the result of a perverted spirituality which had exalted the Emperor as an idol. Yet that spirituality is curiously western rather than eastern.

Complex, too, is the question of truth in the dialogue between Mount Sinai and Mount Fuji. It is not a simple matter of the one being true and the second false. For example, in an excellent chapter on Ecclesiastes (19), Koyama asserts that the Buddha and Paul make more sense of how the world really is than does the Preacher's nihilism, his exhortation to eat, drink and be merry. For the Buddha, the finality of death can be challenged by eradicating self and selfishness. For Paul, nature's futility is not hopeless in the Preacher's sense of vanity: it brings the fulfilment of a promise of liberty for the whole created order. To be sure, the Buddha and Paul are far apart, but not so far as is either from the Preacher.

Koyama believes that the broken, crucified Christ is the hope of the world. From his brokenness comes the love of God, his passionate, agitated involvement with creation, a theme which eastern religion needs to hear.

His book is dedicated to the memory of Herbert Brand, "an English gentleman, through whose preaching, in broken Japanese, my grandfather was converted to Jesus Christ". Koyama's grandfather was impressed that in no way did Brand's preaching make derogatory comments about Buddhism or Japanese culture. It is not the least of the merits of Koyama's book that it breathes the spirit of Brand.

The great merit of Professor Koyama's work is not its structural coherence (indeed, he is a rather rambling writer) but the personal experience it enshrines. *No Other Name*, on the other hand, could have been written by somebody who has never met a person of another Faith, except for its assurance that the author has done so. No doubt its origins as lectures given at Xavier University, Cincinnati, where Knitter is a professor of Theology explain its donnish, textbook, impersonal "feel". Yet Knitter's is a very fine book of its kind, a far better achievement than Alan Race's recent and slightly overrated *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, to which Knitter pays generous tribute. Race's book explores something of the same ground as does Knitter, but his three categories of understanding (exclusiveness, inclusiveness and pluralism) form a much too simple and simplistic means of analysing Christian assessments of other faiths.

Knitter's is a much more subtle book. Its content is explained by its sub-title, "A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions". The introductory chapter argues that religious pluralism, though a newly experienced reality for many (western) people today, seems to be the way things really are. In Part I, three chapters describe popular attitudes toward religious pluralism: that all are relatively true; that all are essentially the same; that all have a common psychic origin. Part II records Christian attitudes toward religious pluralism: the conservative Evangelical model that there is one true religion; the mainline Protestant model that salvation is only in Christ; the Catholic model that there are many ways but only one norm; the theocentric model that there are many ways to the centre. In the two chapters which constitute Part III, Professor Knitter suggests his version of a more authentic dialogue than heretofore.

Old hands at inter-religious dialogue will be grateful for the clear presentation of material in Parts I and II, but will (or should!) be acquainted with the issues and authors mentioned and discussed. Part III will be the section to which they turn with most eagerness. The first chapter in that section explores the uniqueness of Jesus. The final chapter argues for doing before knowing in dialogue, and suggests that truth is not always *either-or* but sometimes *both-and*. This chapter also touches on the need for a global theology. Knitter draws on many others to make his points - clearly, the shadow of Cantwell Smith crosses the last chapter, but his is only one influence. To be honest, these last two chapters are not particularly new in their approach; Part III is something of a disappointment.

But the virtues of Parts I and II are considerable. Knitter is a superb marshaller of information and communicator, and his work is warmly recommendable to students and to teachers. Pastors who work among Christians in multi-Faith areas could find it to be an invaluable basis for a discussion group which deals seriously with the ways of God in the world of today.

Martin Forward

## The Cross against the Bomb

Robin Gill. Epworth. £2.50.

When the current epidemic of crypto-pacifism was at its height, particularly in church circles, *The Cross and the Bomb* offered an enema to the body politic. A group of essayists, including three from King's College, London, Ulrich Simon, Keith Ward and myself, set out to give a reasoned, moral and Christian defence of a policy of nuclear deterrence. *The Cross against the Bomb* by Robin Gill of Edinburgh University is a riposte to the earlier book, whose claims he finds "deeply disturbing".

The thought of what nuclear weapons are capable of doing to our fellow human beings is indeed disturbing. The temptation, for all of us, is to want to have nothing at all to do with them or their justification. The problem is that we live in a world in which such weapons are not the only evil. First, it is of the very nature of major states to want to expand their power and influence. Secondly, totalitarian Communism is a highly destructive system, inimical to the human spirit, and its stated aim, to be achieved by peaceful means if at all possible, is still world-wide domination. Unfortunately this book, like many others, does not convey the impression that more than one evil, that of nuclear weapons, is really taken into account. But the principle of proportion, which is fundamental to Just War theory, is a relationship between two terms. We live in a world in which the possibility of a new Hitler or Stalin arising cannot be ruled out. Each of them was responsible for the millions of dead that would be caused by a major nuclear strike. For all the apparent benignity of Reagan and Gorbachov this kind of fact must not be allowed to slip out of sight, particularly when the evil of nuclear weapons is being discussed.

Robin Gill considers a number of claims but at their heart is the assertion that not all uses of nuclear weapons would inevitably violate the principles of the Just War tradition. Everyone agrees, certainly all the contributors to *The Cross and the Bomb*, that a major nuclear exchange would be the worst conceivable evil and that nothing could justify it. The question is therefore whether a limited use would

automatically and inevitably escalate into use which would contravene the Just War principles of discrimination and proportion. Robin Gill argues that it would. This is not, however, the view of many strategists. More crucial, from a moral point of view, could it ever be right to allow the fear of escalation to inhibit all resistance to perceived aggression? This would be a disastrous and deeply immoral message to convey, for it would allow the most ruthless states to think that if only they raised the stakes high enough they could obtain what they wanted.

There could be more agreement between the contributors to *The Cross and the Bomb* and Robin Gill than the latter perhaps allows. But it would involve Robin Gill coming clean at a number of points where at the moment there is a blurring. For example, it would be highly desirable (so many of us think) to make NATO less dependent on an early use of nuclear weapons. This could be done by having a more adequate conventional capability, which, for the first time, is possible without a vast increase of manpower. Robin Gill is, however, unwilling to pay for the price of an adequate conventional force and adds "as human ingenuity devises ever more destructive conventional weapons their moral justifiability should also be questioned". The point about E.T. (Emerging Technology) however is not that it is more destructive but that it is more accurate. Small conventional warheads can home-in on individual tanks or obliterate runways at regular intervals. The new precision-guided weapons obviate the necessity of a vast explosion over a wide area.

Robin Gill is indignant at the charge that "Nuclear Pacifism", of which he is an exponent, is really just a form of pacifism. But there is a crucial similarity between the two. Nuclear pacifism entails the inevitable conclusion that beyond a certain point - the nuclear threshold - a determined enough adversary would not be resisted by weapons that matched his own. Pacifists draw the line at all weapons, nuclear pacifists at nuclear weapons, but in both cases an enemy knows, and knows in advance, that beyond that line he can make his adversary cave in and capitulate.

Richard Harries

# S I M M O N D S

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## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

*Anglican Cycle of Prayer* 1986. C.I.O. Pp. 129. £2.20.

P. Avis *Ecumenical Theology and the Elusiveness of Doctrine*. S.P.C.K. Pp. xv + 142. £5.95.

E. Barker *The Making of a Moonie. Choice or Brainwashing?* Basil Blackwell. Pp. ix + 305. £5.95 (paperback).

R. Beckwith *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*. S.P.C.K. Pp. xiii + 528. £35.00.

J. H. Charlesworth *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*. S.N.T.S. Monograph Series, C.U.P. Pp. xxiv + 213. £19.50.

B. S. Childs *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*. S.C.M. Press. Pp. xvi + 255. £10.00.

R. E. Creel *Divine Impassibility. An Essay in Philosophical Theology*. C.U.P. Pp. xi + 238. £25.00.

D. H. van Daalen *A Guide to the Revelation*. S.P.C.K. Pp. x + 205. £5.95.

M. C. Felderhof (ed.) *Religious Education in a Pluralistic Society*. Hodder and Stoughton. Pp. ix + 148. £5.95.

J. Gernet *China and the Christian Impact*. C.U.P. Pp. 310. £12.50.

R. Gill *A Textbook of Christian Ethics*. T. and T. Clark. Pp. xiii + 571.

R. Hanson *Studies in Christian Antiquity*. T. and T. Clark. Pp. ix + 344. £16.95.

J. M. Hull *What Prevents Christian Adults from Learning?* S.C.M. Pp. xii + 243. £6.95.

M. de Jonge (ed.) *Outside the Old Testament*. Cambridge Commentaries on Writings of the Jewish and Christian World 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. C.U.P. Pp. xv + 263. £11.95.

G. Karakunnel *The Christian Vision of Man*. Asian Trading Corporation, Bangalore. Pp. xviii + 285.

S. N. C. Lieu *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China. A Historical Survey*. Manchester University Press. Pp. xviii + 360. £35.00.

A. L. Loades *Kant and Job's Comforters*. Avevo. Pp. vi + 174.

J. Lochman *The Faith We Confess. An Ecumenical Dogmatics*. T. and T. Clark. Pp. xiv + 274. £14.95.

D. Lyon *The Steeple's Shadow*. S.P.C.K. Pp. x + 165. £3.95.

R. Manwaring *From Controversy to Co-Existence. Evangelicals in the Church of England 1914-1980*. C.U.P. Pp. xi + 227. £19.50.

J. Moltmann *God in Creation. An Ecological Doctrine of Creation*. S.C.M. Pp. xvi + 365. £10.00.

H. P. Nebelsick *Circles of God. Theology and Science from the Greeks to Copernicus*. Scottish Academic Press. Pp. xxviii + 284. £16.00.

R. Page *Ambiguity and the Presence of God*. S.C.M. Press. Pp. ix + 230. £10.50.

W. Pannenberg *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. T. and T. Clark. Pp. 552. £24.95.

J. Partain and R. Deutsch *A Guide to Isaiah 1-39*. S.P.C.K. Pp. x + 262. £5.95.

J. Polkinghorne *One World. The Interaction of Science and Theology*. S.P.C.K. Pp. xiii + 114. £4.50.

K. Rahner *I Remember*. S.C.M. Press. Pp. 111. £5.95.

E. Rivkin *What Crucified Jesus?* S.C.M. Press. Pp. xii + 79. £3.95.

J. Sacks *Wealth and Poverty. A Jewish Analysis*. Social Affairs Unit. Pp. 23.

N. Smart et al (ed.) *Nineteenth Century Religious Thought in the West*, Vol. III. C.U.P. Pp. ix + 342. £30.00.

E. Storkey *What's Right with Feminism*. S.P.C.K. Pp. vi + 186. £3.95.

T. F. Torrance *Reality and Scientific Theology*. Scottish Academic Press. Pp. xvi + 206. £10.00.

G. S. Wakefield *The Liturgy of St. John*. Epworth. Pp. ix + 102. £3.95.

A. Walker *Restoring the Kingdom. The Radical Christianity of the House Church Movement*. Hodder and Stoughton. Pp. 303. £5.95.

T. Walter *All You Love is Need*. S.P.C.K. Pp. xv + 173. £3.95.

J. B. Webster *Eberhard Jüngel. An Introduction to his Theology*. C.U.P. Pp. viii + 182. £20.00.

V. White *The Fall of a Sparrow. A Concept of Special Divine Action*. Paternoster. Pp. 208. £7.50.

A. Wilkinson *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945*. S.C.M. Press. Pp. xvii + 361. £10.50.

J. D. Zizioulas *Being as Communion*. D.L.T. Pp. 269. £9.95.