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# CHRISTIAN HOPE AND JESUS' DESPAIR

**Grace M. Jantzen**

> There the cross stands, thickly wreathed in roses.
> Who put the roses on the cross?
> The wreath grows bigger, so that on every side
> The harsh cross is surrounded by gentleness.[1]

One of the major preoccupations of Christianity in the two thousand years of its history has been the attempt to make the cross of Jesus respectable. We have draped it with roses, smoothed its wood, coated it with silver and gold. We have placed it between candles on an altar of white linen and surrounded it with incense and singing. We have even made the sign of the cross a blessing; it was a curse. It was a coarse wooden gibbet, where Jesus died between thieves, not candles, surrounded by executioners, not choir boys. And as he died, he had a cry of rejection and despair on his lips: "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If the cross of Jesus is the centre of Christianity, then the centre of Christianity is a place of despair, horror and absurdity, where hope is shattered and God is silent.

One of the great strengths of the theology of Jürgen Moltmann in his book *The Crucified God* is that he refuses to play down the awfulness of the cross; the only theology which he can find adequate will be "theology within earshot of the dying cry of Jesus."[2] And yet it is the very absurdity and god-forsakenness of Jesus' death which leads him to construct what he himself entitles a theology of hope.[3] I propose to examine how Jesus' cry of despair functions as a pivot point for Moltmann's understanding of Christian hope, paying special attention to Moltmann's effort to answer the "protest atheism" of Albert Camus. Camus was of course only one of many influences on Moltmann's thought; but the method with which he tried to reply to the existentialist tradition within which Camus stands[4] is instructive both for the insights into his theology which it offers and for the points at which (I shall argue) it ultimately breaks down.

For Camus, as for Nietzsche before him, atheism is not simply an intellectual rejection of God. It is not a question of examining arguments for the existence of God, finding them wanting, and, having drawn the atheistic conclusion, going on to other things. Rather, the absence of God is, paradoxically, a religious experience, an intense and life-transforming encounter with the existential aloneness and absurdity of a world on its own. Nietzsche tells the story of the madman entering the marketplace, wildly proclaiming the death of God, and the consequent lost plunging of the universe,

> Backward, sideward, forward in all directions. Is there any up or down left? Are we not straying through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? . . . Do we not smell anything yet of God's decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead . . . and we have killed him . . . Who will wipe his blood of us? . . . Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must not we ourselves become gods simply to seem worthy of it?[5]

In less dramatic terms, part of what Nietzsche is doing here is pointing out the consequences of modern secularism; and in this, Camus would agree with him. We cannot adopt a naturalistic view of the universe without adopting the radical aloneness and lack of meaning which this entails: when a space shuttle encounters problems on the launch pad, we don't call a prayer meeting, we call the computer experts; but then we have no right to comfort outselves with pious thoughts of God and immortality and providence should the experts fail and the shuttle and its occupants go up in flames. In Camus' *The Outsider*, Meursault, in prison, is awaiting execution when the chaplain comes to see him, and asks him whether he had not ever wished there were an afterlife.

> Of course I had, I told him. Everybody has that wish at times. But that had no more importance than wishing to be rich, or to swim very fast, or to have a better-shaped mouth. It was in the same order of things . . . But, apparently, he had more to say on the subject of God. I went close up to him and made a last attempt to explain that I'd very little time left, and I wasn't going to waste it on God.[6]

It is facile to make a quick identification of Camus with Meursault;[7] nevertheless to this extent at least he is expressing Camus' opinion: if God is to be left out of life, then he must also be left out of death. And if, in life and death, man is on his own, then ultimately there can be no eternal significance to human existence. Although we are free to choose our actions and thus create our characters, in the end this freedom is a condemnation, since it leaves us finally with anxiety and despair yet without the consolation of any sort of ultimate meaningfulness.

These are familiar enough existentialist themes which Camus shares with others such as Nietzsche and Sartre. But Camus is doing far more than pointing out the dishonesty of living by secular categories and dying by religious ones, trying to shield ourselves from the loneliness and discomfort of the demise of God. The fundamental problem for Camus is the question of how to live, how to respond to this God-abandoned world in

> a period which, within fifty years, uproots, enslaves, or kills seventy million human beings,[8]

and it is this effort at response to appalling suffering which justifies calling Camus' atheism a religious experience. Nietzsche said, in the passage already quoted, that men will have to become gods now that God has died; but Camus puts it quite differently. In his novel *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux and Tarrou pause for a short rest in their exhausting efforts to save life.

> "It comes to this," Tarrou said almost casually, "what interests me is learning how to become a saint."
>
> "But you don't believe in God."
>
> "Exactly. Can one be a saint without God? — that's the problem, in fact the only problem, I'm up against today."
>
> ... "Perhaps," the doctor answered. "But you know, I feel more fellowship with the defeated than with saints. Heroism and sanctity don't really appeal to me, I imagine. What interests me is — being a man."
>
> "Yes, we're both after the same thing, but I'm less ambitious."[9]

In a world of plague and suffering and terror, becoming god-like would mean becoming like a being who sits aloof from all the tragedy; it would mean becoming inhuman. As the doctor says,

> Since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him, and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes towards the heaven where he sits in silence?[10]

This is not a casual weighing up of the pros and cons of the likelihood of the existence of God. Indeed, in a sense it would be even more terrible if God **did** exist, for that would mean that God himself could look upon the suffering even of innocent children with an equanimity which would be moral enormity if found in man. The acceptance of such a God, not his rejection, would be blasphemy: in Stendahl's famous phrase, "The only excuse for God is that he does not exist."[11] Paneloux, the priest in the novel, has to come to terms with the fact that the God he serves is the God who permits the plague. At first, Paneloux preaches that this, too, is part of the plan of God, and seems to take a perverse sort of pleasure in the awfulness of it: it gives him a chance to enhance his reputation for powerful preaching. In a voice "vibrant with accusation" Paneloux says of the plague,

> It is a red spear, sternly pointing to the narrow path, the one way of salvation. And thus, my brothers, at last it has revealed to you, the divine compassion which has ordained good and evil in everything; wrath and pity; the plague and your salvation. This same pestilence which is slaying you works for your good and points your path.[12]

Camus here shows the superficiality and even the blasphemy of belief in a God who watches silently while he afflicts the town with horrible suffering. Paneloux says that "we should love what we cannot understand," but Dr. Rieux replies,

> No, Father. I've a very different idea of love. And until my dying day I shall refuse to love a scheme of things in which children are put to torture.[13]

Camus elsewhere comments on Ivan in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov,* that here is an example of a man who, because he cannot acquiese to evil, cannot acquiese to a God who allows it.

> . . . even if God existed, even if the mystery cloaked a truth . . . Ivan would not admit that truth should be paid for by evil, suffering, and the death of innocents. Ivan incarnates the refusal of salvation. Faith leads to immortal life, but faith presumes the acceptance of the mystery and of evil and resignation to injustice. The man who is prevented by the suffering of children from accepting faith will certainly not accept eternal life.[14]

Yet although Camus rejects a Christianity which can accept without demur a pestilence that afflicts even the innocent, he also is at pains to show that this is not the only form of Christianity. Paneloux, though preaching about the plague as though it "works for good", is bigger than his sermon, and struggles against the suffering alongside the others. And having watched many, including innocent children, die horribly, he preaches another sermon, of stikingly different quality. Although he still affirms that ultimately we must simply have faith in God, that faith is no longer blind to evil but rather is the basis of working against it to the utmost. He says,

> The love of God is a hard love. It demands total self-surrender, disdain of our human personality. And yet it alone can reconcile us to suffering and the deaths of children, it alone can justify them, since we cannot understand them, and we can only make God's will ours.[15]

But "making God's will ours" is now no longer simply accepting the suffering of others; it is voluntarily identifying with that suffering, taking it upon ourselves to relieve others. Tarrou summarizes Paneloux' new position:

> When an innocent youth can have his eyes destroyed, a Christian should either lose his faith or consent to having his eyes destroyed. Paneloux declines to lose his faith, and he will go through with it to the end.[16]

So Camus is willing to accept that there is a Christianity less worthy of denunciation than the sort rejected by Ivan Karamazov, a Christianity which demands indentification with suffering not to accept it but as a means of struggle against it; in this he was influenced by the thought of Simone Weil whom he greatly respected.[17] Yet he remains unconvinced. He sees that there can be a faith in God that is not blasphemy. But he makes it clear that although he is willing to work beside Christians in the common struggle against evil, and valuing the common effort,

> working side by side for something that unites us — beyond blasphemy and prayers,[18]

this mutual effort should not be seen as a too-easy reconciliation. There are still deep differences between Camus and the Christian believer, differences which he himself insisted upon in a talk he gave at a Dominican Monastery:

> The other day at the Sorbonne, speaking to a Marxist lecturer, a Catholic priest said in public that he, too, was anti-clerical. Well, I don't like priests who are anti-clerical any more than philosophies that are ashamed of themselves. Hence I shall not try to pass myself off as a Christian in your presence. I share with you the same revulsion from evil. But I do not share your hope and I continue to struggle against this universe in which children suffer and die.[19]

In *The Plague*, Paneloux eventually falls ill in his efforts to help those who are suffering, but declines medical help for himself. When he dies, the verdict on the index-card says, "Doubtful case."[20]

It is this "Doubtful case" with which Moltmann struggles, in his effort to develop a theology which will take seriously the enormity of suffering and still provide a basis for the hope which Camus does not share. And at the centre of such a theology of hope, Moltmann finds his despair of Jesus, dying abandoned by God. Only when the implications of this are understood, he believes, can we have faith which could be labelled "protest faith", an adequate response to the protest atheism of Camus.

Moltmann shares with Camus the emphasis on integrity and authenticity. In *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux and Tarrou discuss whether in the absence of God they can become saints or even fully human: the latter is seen as more difficult. But this project of humanization is one which Christianity has often renounced. "God became man that we men might participate in God," said Athanasius,[21] and Christians have often thought that to become God-like they must struggle against their humanness. The *Imitatio Christi* of Thomas a Kempis, arguably the most-read book of medieval spirituality, is full of advice on how the imitation of Christ is the renunciation of self. But Moltmann, while not denying that rightly understood this may have value, sees the incarnation from a different perspective. With Luther, Moltmann argues that God became man, not so that man might become God, but so that man might recover his lost humanity. Jesus came, not so much to reveal to us what God is like, but to show us what man can be like, to point the way out of the alienated, inauthentic and dehumanized situation into which we have strayed. Nietzsche was right: if God is dead, man must become God. But ifman becomes God, then he is no longer human; in his efforts at divinity, he becomes alienated from his humanity. Thus Moltmann argues that a proper understanding of Jesus Christ is the antidote both to an anti-human theism and to what in the name of humanity becomes a dehumanizing atheism. He agrees with Tarrou in *The Plague:* it is much more ambitious to try to become human that to try to become a saint; but it is an ambition in which Jesus is the leader. And a God who becomes incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth cannot be a God who opposes this project of the humanity of man, but a God who supports it. In Moltmann's words,

> A God who is conceived of in his omnipotence, perfection and infinity at man's expense cannot be the God who is love in the cross of Jesus, who makes a human encounter in order to restore their lost humanity to unhappy and proud divinities, who 'became poor to make many rich.' God conceived of at man's expense cannot be the Father of Jesus Christ.[22]

But if God is not God at man's expense, this will entail a profound revision in our conception of him. The struggle for authenticity and humanity is, as the existentialists have shown us, a struggle against suffering and oppression wherever it is found. This is not optional. As Dr. Rieux reminds us in his fight against the plague,

> . . . there's no question of heroism in all this. It's a matter of common decency.[23]

But if to become human *means* to become involved in the struggle against dehumanization and suffering, and if this is the purpose of the Incarnation, then God can no longer be thought of as the one who sits silently in the heavens, permitting the tragedy, utterly unmoved by it all. God himself must be involved in this suffering with man: if man is to have hope, God himself must suffer God-forsakenness. If he does not, then he has no real solidarity with man, no real love which takes the sufferings of the beloved as his own. This means that the traditional doctrine of a God who cannot suffer, a God completely self-sufficient in his eternal infinity, must be rejected. If there is to be any theology after Auschwitz, it must be a theology which sees God suffering *in* Auschwitz, not immune to its anguish. Moltmann writes,

> Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would be to condemn man to indifference.[24]

This is why Moltmann see the crucifixion as the centre of Christian theology, for here above all God takes suffering into himself. This has two aspects. In the first place, Jesus, the Son of God, suffers death and despair at the abandonment of the Father. Moltmann argues that the despair of Jesus on the cross is not simply despair at his own death, horrible though that is. Rather, his despair was a result of disillusionment in his whole concept of God. Jesus had lived by the conviction that God was for man, not against man; their ally, not theirjudge. Thus he emphasized forgiveness, love, solidarity with the outcast and oppressed. But in the end, God let him die. He did not vindicate Jesus' belief that God is a tender Father. So on the cross, Jesus is forsaken by God, and not only Jesus himself, but the whole world. Jesus' cry of despair is a cry that his life has been lived on a false premise: God is a silent God, impervious to suffering.

An yet it is this very silence of God, this very refusal to intervene in the suffering of Jesus, which makes it possible for God himself to suffer. What God the Father suffers is the god-forsaken death of his Son. This is not to say that when Jesus died, God the Father died; rather, it is a recognition of the grief of God at Jesus' death. Moltmann says,

> The suffering and dying of the Son, forsaken by the Father, is a different kind of suffering from the suffering of the Father in the death of the Son... The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son.[25]

Hence the cry of despair as Jesus dies is the basis of Christian hope, for it is in that despair that God takes suffering into himself and thus makes possible human liberation. Camus has said, in words Moltmann quotes,

> For God to be a man, he had to despair.[26]

Indeed, Moltmann goes even further than this. Not only does the God-man despair, but the Father himself suffers forsakenness in the loss of his Son. Thus Moltmann offers this answer to Camus:

> The only way past protest atheism is through a theology of the cross which understands God as the suffering God in the suffering of Christ and which cries out with the god-forsaken God, 'My God, why have you forsaken me?' For this theology, God and suffering are no longer contradictions... God himself loves and suffers the death of Christ in his love. He is no 'cold heavenly power', nor does he 'tread his way over corpses', but is known as the human God in the crucified Son of Man.[27]

Through Jesus' despair, God demonstrates his solidarity with god-forsaken, suffering humanity, and liberates man from the alienating effort at becoming self-sufficient and inauthentic demi-gods, freeing them for the human dignity of working unitedly against all that dehumanizes.

But there is more to it than this. The story of Jesus does not end with the cry of despair on the cross, but with the message of Easter. This same man, who had died abandoned by God, was raised to life. And this means that, contrary to appearances on the cross, God *did* vindicate him and his lifestyle of genuine humanity. This, according to Moltmann, was the really astonishing thing about the Easter events. Jesus, who had been put to death in the most horrible way, condemned as a blasphemer, and forsaken by God, was raised from the dead.

> The new and scandalous element in the Christian message of Easter was not that some man or other was raised before anyone else, but that the one who was raised was this condemned, executed and forsaken man.[28]

Since he was the one who was raised, he is the one with whom God identifies, and thus the one whose love for man and concern for man's future is God's love and God's concern. Thus the hope of the suffering world rests on the suffering and vindicated Son of God. Not only can Christians work side by side with Camus for the humanity of man, conscious that God himself shares in the struggle; unlike Camus, they can do so in the hope that their efforts will not be ultimately meaningless. There is a hope for the future — the future of the world, because of the future of God. Ultimately the struggle is not absurd: Jesus has been raised from the dead and thus opens the way to hope for the liberation of all men. Moltmann says,

> In view of the misery of creation, the fact that the atonement is already accomplished, although the struggle continues, is incomprehensible without the future of the redemption of the body and of the peace which brings the struggle to an end. 'For Jesus is he who is to come. Everyone who truly encounters him, encounters him from the future, as the life to come, as the Lord of the world to come.'[29]

Thus the theology of Moltmann can be profitably studied as a response to the anguish and despair of protest atheists like Camus. The most impressive feature of Moltmann's thought, in my view, is his refusal to shirk the horrendous facts of human suffering, oppression, and dehumanization, and his effort not to pander cheap hope as an antidote to it. Instead, he meets the protest atheists more that half way, accepting the legitimacy of their cry for authenticity and their struggle against suffering, and offering them the despair of Jesus as the grounds for a costly hope, a hope that finds its pattern in the one who lives authentically by abandoning identity with God and accepting his identity as the way of the cross. This is why that cross cannot be prettified: a gold-plated cross in clouds of incense has nothing to say to the stench of plague-ridden human beings. Moltmann sees this clearly. In spite of this impressive honesty, however, I find problems with Moltmann's theology: I will mention three of them. In the first place, I have some worries about Moltmann's theological adequacy. As he himself points out, a theology whose centre rests on the despair of Jesus requires a radical revision of our concept of God. He discusses that revision in terms of the traditional doctrine of divine impassivity, and argues persuasively that that doctrine cannot be so stringently interpreted that it makes God immune to suffering.

> A God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being... But in that case is he a God? Is he not rather a stone?[30]

I am ready to be persuaded by this, and to accept Moltmann's claim that the doctrine of divine impassivity is a Greek legacy of dubious value, making God a close cousin of Aristotle's Unmoved Mover but unrelated to the responsive God of Abraham, Jesus, and Paul.

But there is another aspect to this theological revision which I find more problematical but to which Moltmann pays less attention in this book, and that is the doctrine of the trinity. To be sure, he insists throughout *The Crucified God* that his theology is utterly dependent on trinitarianism, and cannot be understood otherwise — in an "unChristian monotheism"[31] for example. But if there is the sort of distinction which Moltmann draws between the Father and the Son, so that the Son suffers death but the Father suffers grief, this entails that the Father and the Son are two separate centres of consciousness, two individuals. And this has traditionally been rejected as the heresy of tritheism.[32] Perhaps this is a tradition which Moltmann thinks is misguided, though in this book he does not explicitly say so; in any case, further explanation would be in order. However, I do not want to make unduly heavy weather of this point. The doctrine of the trinity is notoriously difficult, and if Moltmann falls foul of one or other aspect of Christian tradition regarding it, perhaps that is only yet another sign that the tradition itself needs rethinking — and perhaps Moltmann has provided a basis from which to do so. This need not, therefore, be a serious objection to his theology, only a point at which further clarification would be welcome.

The second difficulty I have is much more disturbing. For Moltmann, everything depends on the resurrection, for it was this that finally vindicated Jesus and showed God to be on the side of humanity. Were it not for the resurrection, Jesus' cry of despair would be the last word: he , and the world, would be God-forsaken. But Moltmann's account of the resurrection is very unclear. He points to the contrast between the public, historical crucifixion of Jesus and the very different status of "the Easter visions and the Christian symbol" of which there was no "unpartisan knowledge established on a neutral basis," and says,

> The resurrection of Jesus from the dead by God does not speak
> the 'language of facts', but only the language of faith and hope,
> that is, the 'language of promise'.[33]

What does this mean? Does it mean that it is mistaken to talk about a factual resurrection of Jesus the way we talk about a factual crucifixion? If so, then why should it be a symbol for faith? If Jesus did not rise from the dead with the same historical reality as the historical reality of his crucifixion, then was not after all his despairing cry the truth? On the other hand, if he did literally rise out of the tomb, how exactly does this constitute a vindication: what is the difference between vindication and magic here?

If my interpretation of Moltmann is correct, then his view is that Jesus' despair is the basis for Christian hope precisely *because* in the resurrection God vindicated Jesus and showed that he shared Jesus' solidarity with humanity. But if Jesus was not actually raised, if the resurrection is merely a term used as a symbol of hope, it would seem in this context to be a grotesquely misguided symbol, for if Jesus was not raised, then he was not vindicated, and his cry of god-forsakenness must be on all our lips. All the faith in the world cannot turn an untruth into truth; and if it is not true that God has identified himself with man, then using symbolic talk of resurrection is a pitiful self-deception. Jesus' death, then, is a heroic act, the more heroic in that he knew it would be misinterpreted, but one which shows finally that God is not involved. As Camus wrote,

> He cried aloud his agony and that's why I love him . . . The
> unfortunate thing is that he left us alone, to carry on, whatever
> happens . . . knowing in turn what he knew but incapable of doing
> what he did and of dying like him.[34]

Thus if Moltmann's account is to go beyond that of Camus, if Jesus' despair really is not the final word and because of the resurrection there really can be Christian hope, Moltmann will have to offer a much more precise and convincing account of what Easter faith might be and how it is justified. Perhaps this is possible; I recognize that giving a coherent account of the doctrine of the resurrection is a different assignment. But given its decisive role in Moltmann's theology, it is a serious deficiency in his system that this point is left so vague.

Finally, it remains to ask whether Moltmann's answer to Camus is convincing, even assuming that he can provide a satisfactory response to the above difficulties. What Camus and other protest atheists find intolerable is the idea that so much suffering should be permitted by a God who is able to prevent it: this is the point of Camus' frequently misinterpreted comment that

> when man submits God to moral judgement, he kills him in his own heart . . .God is denied in the name of justice.[35]

A God who permits moral enormities is a God who, even if he exists, makes the only possible response that of Ivan Karamazov — wanting to "hand back his ticket." Now, if Moltmann is right, then what he has shown is that God does *not* sit in aloof silence from the suffering of this world. God himself becomes incarnate and suffers with us. Jesus suffers death, despair, and god-forsakenness on the cross, and the Father takes the suffering into himself in his grief and anguish at the anguish of the Son. If this is so, then Moltmann has impressively shown us God's solidarity with us in our suffering, and shown that in our struggle against it, we are not alone, without meaning and without hope. This in itself is a great deal. Yet in the end it leaves us with the main problem still unanswered: why does God permit the suffering in the first place? If he is struggling with us in it, then he is not the monstrous deity which we would have to renounce in the name of decency; but this is so only if he is doing all he can against evil. Yet evil continues. Does this mean that God himself is powerless to stop it? If so, that requires a revision of the concept of God of a magnitude which Moltmann has not anticipated, and which undermines the possibility of hope. If not, if God *could* prevent evil but does not do so, then are we not back with the protest atheists? "The only excuse" for that sort of half-heartedly struggling God would be "that he does not exist".

Moltmann does not pretend that he has solved the problem of evil; he only argues that in the evil, God is with us, not against us. Yet unless God is doing everything he can in the struggle, he is giving less of himself than decent human beings: suffering, even voluntary suffering, cannot be a *substitute* for doing all we can. But if God really *is* doing all he can, and he is omnipotent, then why does evil remain? The fundamental problem for a protest atheist is how an omnipotent God who allows such a world can be believed in; and unless Moltmann is willing to sacrifice the doctrine of omnipotence, he has not provided an answer to this problem. The best we are left with is a chastened Father Paneloux, who in his second sermon says,

> Who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's human suffering? He who asserted that would not be a true Christian, a follower of the Master who knew all the pangs of suffering in his body and his soul. No, he, Father Paneloux, would keep faith with that great symbol of all suffering, the tortured body on the Cross: he would stand fast, his back to the wall, and face honestly the terrible problem of a child's agony.[36]

This gives us, indeed, a pattern to follow, a pattern of solidarity with human suffering and with the suffering of Jesus, a pattern of life shared with the protest atheists, "working side by side . . . beyond blasphemy and prayers." But it does not give us the answer to the fundamental problem: how can God permit such evil to exist? Even if Moltmann is correct in what he says, what he leaves unsaid leaves us with this most intractible difficulty of all. And the final verdict must be the verdict on the index card of Father Paneloux: "Doubtful case".

1. Goethe *Die Geheimnisse. Ein Fragment* Quoted in Jürgen Moltmann *The Crucified God* (E.T. SCM, London, 1974) p. 35.

2. *The Crucified God* p. 201.

3. Jürgen Moltmann *Theology of Hope* (E.T. SCM, London, 1967).

4. Camus himself rejected the label "existentialist" in order to stress his differences from Sartre.

5. Friedrich Nietzsche "The Madman" *The Gay Science* (E.T. Walter Kaufmann, Random House, New York, 1974).

5. Albert Camus *The Outsider* (E.T. Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1961) p. 117.

7. As has been pointed out by Conor Cruise O'Brien *Camus* (Fontana Modern Masters, Collins, London, 1970).

8. Albert Camus *The Rebel* (E.T. Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1962) p. 11.

9. Albert Camus *The Plague* (E.T. Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1960) pp. 208-9.

10. *The Plague* pp. 107-8.

11. Quoted in *The Rebel* p. 58.

12. *The Plague* pp. 82-3.

13. *The Plague* p. 178.

14. *The Rebel* p. 51.

15. *The Plague* p. 186

16. *The Plague* p. 187.

17. I owe this point to an unpublished paper by Stewart Sutherland "Belief and Unbelief: Simone Weil and Albert Camus".
18. *The Plague* p. 178.

19. Quoted from notes translated by Justin O'Brien in a collection of pieces, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (Hamish Hamiton, 1961).

20. *The Plague* p. 191.

21. Quoted in *The Crucified God* p. 228.

22. *The Crucified God* p. 250.

23. *The Plague* p. 136.

24. *The Crucified God* p. 274.

25. *The Crucified God* p. 243.

26. From an untranslated section of *The Rebel*, quoted in *The Crucified God* p. 226.

27. *The Crucified God* p. 227.

28. *The Crucified God* p. 176.

29. *The Crucified God* p. 102. The quotation is from H.J. Iwand.

30. *The Crucified God* p. 265.

31. *The Crucified God* p. 265.

32. For a fuller discussion of individual consciousness and tritheism, see G.W.H. Lampe *God as Spirit* (OUP, Oxford, 1978) pp. 224-8.

33. *The Crucified God* pp. 172-3; cf. p. 204.

34. Albert Camus *The Fall* (E.T. Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1963) p. 84.

35. *The Rebel* p. 57.

36. *The Plague* p. 183.

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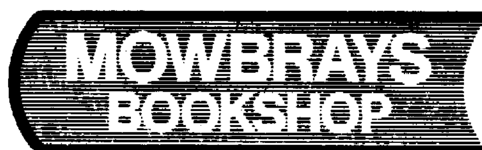


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# THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE BOOK OF ISAIAH: THREE INTERRELATED STUDIES

**Peter R. Ackroyd**

## II. THEOLOGY OF A TRADITION

At the conclusion of the first of these studies (King's Theological Review, IV/2, 53-63), we reached a point at which it could be said that the idea of a single, unified theology of the book as a whole was too simple: on any major theme which could properly be chosen as treated within the book, more than one element, more than one style of handling that theme could be detected. We also observed that, while an overall approach could be made, even at the risk of such simplification – and we saw such an example in the treatment of the Isaiah material in Ecclesiasticus – a consideration of the context in which interpretation was undertaken, before full-scale commentaries came to be written, suggested that part of the disunity of thought could be associated with the handling of this or that passage within the context of particular situations and in relation to particular needs. Such unity of treatment as could appear would derive from an overall understanding which might then influence the approach to individual sections; but the immediacy of comment, the demand for relevance to a specific situation, would be more likely to produce differences of level and of approach. Such piecemeal exegesis may be seen to continue in some measure in the practices of both synagogue and church.

One way of recognizing such a piecemeal view would be to note the degree of inconsistency in the handling of interpretative procedures generally in the Old Testament. Thus it may be observed that in the books of Samuel there has been a consistent removal of the unacceptable *ba'al* component of proper names and its replacement by the Hebrew word for 'shameful thing' *bosheth*: the name Ish-baal or Esh-baal becomes Ishbosheth. The number and occurrence of such names is not so great that this regularity appears unreasonable. But when we look a little further we observe differences of practice. Thus, in the case of the Gideon narrative of Judg. 6-8, the situation is complicated by the apparent occurrence of two traditions, one using the name Gideon and the other Jerubbaal. Whatever the relationship between these – and it need not here concern us – it is evident that the compiler has given an interpretation for the latter name which makes the divine title *ba'al* here refer to another deity – the name to mean 'Let *ba'al* plead' against Gideon – where it appears more natural to suppose that the name originally refers to Yahweh by the title *ba'al*. Elsewhere, in 1 Chronicles, the *ba'al* names are left intact, and the same applied to occasional appearances of *ba'al* names – even a name *Be'alyah*, meaning 'Yahweh is lord' – left untouched (1 Chron 12.5.). A modern editor would ask for consistency, perhaps observing that Hos. 2.16 (Hebrew 2.18) enjoins the replacement of the title *ba'al* by the acceptable alternative *'ish* with the same meaning; an ancient editor is working much more ad hoc. The same could be said for the removal of words from public reading which were felt to be blasphemous or obscene;[1] and the removal of phrases – or their modification – which were felt to be theologically dangerous, and some of these were noted by the later scribes as being the result of deliberate scribal correction (an example in 2 Sam 12.14 describes David as 'showing contempt for Yahweh', where the scribes have modified the text to read 'showing contempt for the enemies of Yahweh', which removes the objectionable sentiment but makes nonsense of the verse). However much of harmonising and smoothing of the text has gone on, many inconsistencies remain which reveal the piecemeal nature of the activity. In some respects it may be observed that the Samaritan text of the Pentateuch, clearly an alternative form to that which we know in the Hebrew, has attempted a higher degree of consistency by ironing out obvious discrepancies which might be felt to confuse the ordinary worshipper and believer.

These general reflections may serve to prepare for the recognition that when we move to a next stage of study of the book of Isaiah, we must expect to discover further indications of a rich and complex tradition, not all of one piece, and not showing straightforward and consistent signs of stages in its formation. If, indeed, we ask the question: How did the book of Isaiah come to have the shape it does? we can hardly expect to get more than very partial answers. In differing degrees but in a broadly similar way the same may be said of other prophetic books, though each book has its own particular problems of structure.

## THREE VIEWS OF THE MAKING OF THE BOOK

The point may be clarified if a brief outline is given of three types of approach to the problem of the making of the book of Isaiah. It must be stressed that these are three *types* of approach, and that none of them necessarily corresponds with the precise views of any particular scholar or groups of scholars. The fact that I find them less than satisfying is not in itself an argument against them, though it may suggest that there is in them too great a degree of rigidity, too much of an attempt to solve the problems in a unified manner, too little account taken of the resolved issues which remain.

1. **Blocks of material.**[2] The first could be described as the 'building blocks' view, though that would be less than fair to it. It works essentially on the assumption that blocks of material have been built up at different stages in the period between the lifetime of the prophet in Jerusalem in the eighth century B.C. and the postulated period of the virtual completion of the book. Thus a collection built around biographical or auto-biographical elements is seen in 6.1-9.7 (Hebrew 9.6); and this inserted into a double collection of woes and a poem with refrain found in 5.1-30 + 9.8-10.4. This double block is now to be found within the larger block of 1-12 in which the final chapter may be seen as a deliberate poetic conclusion to a particular collection. Such a sketch passes over many important details, but the outline may serve. Another block is to be found in 13-23, the collection of foreign nation oracles; itself extended and perhaps reinterpreted by the addition of another block, 24-27, often believed to be the latest collection in the book. A further block is to be found in 28-32, with supplements in 33 and perhaps 34-35. The evidently recognizable block of 36-39 is seen as an extract from 2 Kings and therefore indentifiable on that basis. It is often supposed – and in some measure such a supposition links with the third type of approach of which I shall speak – that these last chapters 36-39 were added to an already completed first book of Isaiah consisting of 1-35. Alongside this material and viewed in varying ways so far as any relationship to 1-39 is concerned, are two further blocks: 40-48 and 49-55, separable in some degree by the difference of their contents, but linked together as supposedly constituting the work of another prophet, known as the Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah, and to these was attached a final block in 56-66, variously understood as being a collection of another prophet, Third Isaiah or Trito-Isaiah, or as being the work of disciples of the Second Isaiah, and thus less unified, or as being a mixture of elements now collected

together. In such an analysis, while some attention may be given to linkages between the various blocks, greater stress inevitably rests upon the separate blocks themselves and each of them has been in varying degrees subjected to analysis with results regarded as more or less stabilised; among such results the supposition of a Second Isaiah stands out as the one most generally agreed to be sufficiently established. Indeed it often appears as if the one point on which almost all scholars agree is the self-contained and separable quality of 40-55, and the degree to which the unknown prophet of the exile, the Second Isaiah, can be described with reasonable precision as to his context and style of thought.[3]

2. **The School of Isaiah.**[4] The second approach not infrequently overlaps with this, but it argues for a greater coherence. It is a view which associates the origin of the book as we have it with what is known as the 'School of Isaiah'. It works in effect from three main ideas. The first is one general to the discussion of prophecy and the relation of prophet to prophetic book. The preservation of the words of the prophet can most naturally be associated with his followers, his disciples. The second is the more specific point that in the case of Isaiah there appears to be actual reference in 8.16 to the committal of the prophecies by the prophet to his disciples. The third is the recognition that there are so many links, verbal and of idea, between the various parts of the book – and some would say a structure which argues for coherence – that its degree of unity is sufficiently impressive to point to the existence of a school, or an 'Isaiah tradition', in which the disciples of the prophet and their disciples in their turn provide a context for the preservation and the re-use of older words, and for the addition of substantial amounts of new material, itself in part the product of an affinity with the earlier stages. Then the 'Second Isaiah' becomes not a totally independent prophet whose collected sayings have been added simply as a block to an already existing collection in 1-39, but as one who stands in the succession, so that his own collection could be seen as appropriate here and could not be envisaged as being placed at the end of some other prophetic scroll. There is no denying the degree of interlinkage between various elements in the book, but whether this particular theory does justice to these and other features must be less certain. It is true that some postulate of continuing use of prophetic words – some continuing exegetical activity – is essential for the understanding of most if not all the prophetic books. It is also true that we cannot understand the preservation of the prophetic message without some context for its use, though we may wonder whether the 'school' or 'disciple' idea is not rather rigid, and also whether there may not need to be greater place given to a context of worship and exposition there[5] – a projection back, it must be acknowledged, in some measure at least, from the evidence for later practice.

To this must be added that the text of 8.16, conventionally translated roughly as:

> Bind the testimony, seal the *torah* (instruction),
> among my disciples.

is uncertain. The Greek translators understood the final word quite differently as 'so that it be not taught' or 'studied': we wonder whether that particular interpretation owes something to later ideas of the hidden quality of the prophetic message, of the need for its secret preservation, as is indicated, for example, at the end of the book of Daniel which gives the angelic command to 'hide the words, and seal up the book until the end time' and the subsequent indication that it is the 'wise who will understand' (Dan. 12.5, 10). Quite apart from that, the grammatical construction in Isa. 8.16 is not entirely clear; the NEB renders 'with my teaching', relegating the disciples to the margin. Another proposal is to read 'in my children', as in v.18.

Was there indeed ever a 'school of Isaiah'? If so, what are we to make of affinities between Isaiah and Amos, and more particularly between Isaiah and Micah? What too is the relation between this Isaiah school and the activities of those Deuteronomic compilers responsible for the books of Kings? And how do we fit into such a picture the existence of the 'Second Isaiah'; for if we accept the postulate of such a figure, and treat, as is commonly done, the whole section 40-55 as a direct product of his activity, is there not some danger that the scheme overbalances by reason of the very evident outstanding quality of that later disciple, poet and prophet as he is often described, whose words mark for many the high water mark of Old Testament poetry and prophecy? These are not necessarily unanswerable questions, but they do present some difficulty, particularly for any too simplified view of the 'school' or the 'tradition' or the 'succession'.

3. **Editorial activity.**[6] The third approach is more strictly editorial, though this must be allowed some breadth of understanding. It overlaps in some degree with both the preceding presentations. Indeed either of them may well involve the concept of an editor or editors at work, whether bringing together the separate blocks or shaping the deposits of the ongoing tradition. It may be argued that a first collection, shaped in part by editorial process, in 1-12, is editorially joined with a second collection found in 28-33, and the foreign nation oracles of 13-23 placed deliberately between them in what is thought to be a prophetic pattern – words of judgement, oracles on the nations, words of promise – though this does not very readily fit the actual content here.[7] A late editorial insertion of 24-27 is seen as a subsequent stage; but meantime, the first book of Isaiah has taken its shape by the editorial addition of the extract from 2 Kings in 36-39. A further editorial process adds the remaining sections, though often their addition is seen as the simple placing of the material at the end of the existing collection.

But this is only one aspect of an editorial approach, and a different line is to be seen when the attempt is made at identifying moments of editorial work. In more than one recent study, particular stages have been identified. The attempt has been made to show a whole series of such stages, spread over some four centuries, and tracing the evolution of the material through these stages in what has been described as the movement from prophecy to apocalyptic.[8] Or the attempt has been made to identify a particular moment, and only subsequently to fit it into a general pattern; a very skilful exposition of this kind has identified – and this was not in itself new – the process by which oracles concerned with the interpretation of the Assyrian power as the agent of divine judgement upon Israel and Judah in the last decades of the eighth century, were transformed by the reversal of their effect so that the instrument of judgement became itself the object of judgement – so in 10.5-15. Not only this, but the context of this reversal is then sought in the changed position of Assyria in the latter half of the seventh century, when its weakening power was challenged, especially by the growing might of an independent Babylon. Thus a stratum of editorial or, perhaps better exegetical, activity could be detected, in which the changed political situation provided a stimulus for a re-application of earlier sayings, a shift in the meaning associated with them.[9]

The general principle exemplified here is entirely proper; in the century following the period of Isaiah of Jerusalem's activity which extended roughly from around 740 to just after 700 B.C., the further extension of Assyrian power during the first years was followed by decline, and eventually led to total disruption and overthrow. What had been said of Assyria in relation to the last years of the life of the northern kingdom and said again and comparably in relation to the life of Judah under Hezehiah, could no

longer be read satisfactorily in relation to the Assyria which ceased to control the Palestinian area. The upsurge of national power under king Josiah in the period around 620, contemporary with the growing might of an independent Babylon which was within two decades to extend its sway over the whole of the western area, brought about a new situation. One level of reinterpretation could be seen in the glossing of the oracles which spoke of Assyria as the instrument of divine judgement, and this in part was done by the turning of the judgement theme against Assyria itself. Such glossing of the text can be detected at various points (so most clearly in chs. 13-14 and in 23.13. See below), though it must be doubted whether it is proper to think of an edition of a collection of prophecies, worked over with a view to presenting a consistent pattern of interpretation. For alongside such reinterpretation, we may detect other partly related and partly separate levels of understanding, and this wider range of material invites a fuller discussion of the ways in which this particular 'Assyrian' theme has been handled. It is thus from this third approach, sometimes too rigidly conceived, that we may move on to our next stage.

## ASPECTS OF RE-INTERPRETATION

1. We may observe in the narrative passages which appear in 2 Kings 18-20 as also in a variant form in Isa.36-39 another aspect of such reinterpretation. In part this is linked to the interpretation of the period which is here being described, the period of the Assyrian onslaught on Judah in 701, its siege and capture of Lachish depicted so vividly on reliefs to be seen in the British Museum, its capture, according to the Assyrian account, of 46 fortified cities of Judah, its siege of Jerusalem where, again according to the Assyrian account, King Hezekiah was 'shut up like a bird in a cage' – a siege which is not directly indicated in the biblical account, though it is in fact implicit in the text (2 Kings 18.17 = Isa. 36.2). This period remains a complex one to describe and interpret, almost because we have too much and sometimes irreconcilable material;[10] more too because in the event Jerusalem was not captured, the Assyrians withdrew for some reason not entirely clear to us, though they did not thereby relinquish their claim to rule over Judah and to include that area within their imperial domain. Hezekiah and his successor Manasseh remained subject kings of Assyria, and this position was unchanged until some years into the reign of Josiah. And the Assyrian failure to capture Jerusalem – or perhaps we should simply say the fact that Jerusalem was not subjected to the prolonged siege, capture and aftermath which can be so clearly seen for Lachish, for the Assyrians certainly did not lack the technical capacity nor the military power to effect such a capture – appears to have become the subject of reinterpretation in the light of the understanding of Jerusalem and its holy place as the chosen dwelling-place of the God Yahweh.[11] Themes of a theological and indeed mythological kind could see Jerusalem as impregnable by reason of the presence of the deity. Psalms such as Pss.2 and 46 could depict the onslaught of the nations against Jerusalem, against the anointed Davidic king chosen by God, against the deity himself; and the overthrow of those enemies could become part of the deeper understanding of the power of God and of the expression of his just will against all who set themselves up in opposition to him. It was to have its echoes down the centuries, in such vivid declarations of the might of God as are found in Ezek. 38-39, in Zech. 14, and in Isa. 24. It was to become associated with the theme of the universal acceptance of Yahweh, God of Israel, as universal sovereign, so that – as in Ezek. 39 – the nations could become witnesses of his saving power for Israel, and thus themselves involved in acknowledging him, or – as in Zech. 14 – be joined together with the Jewish community in a great act of worship from which only those unwilling to go to Jerusalem are excluded and thereby bring disaster upon themselves.[12]

The account in 2 Kings 18-19, Isa. 36-37 has absorbed elements of this style of interpretation: while the narratives purport to give an account, or in all probability two interwoven accounts, of the events of 701 B.C., in reality they offer an interpretation of those events, in which the figure of Hezekiah is portrayed as the king of faith, consulting with the prophet Isaiah, laying before God the Assyrian demands, assured by the prophet of the divine answer to his prayer. The deliverance of Jerusalem is no longer simply an aspect of a complex political situation; it is part of a wider declaration of who Yahweh is. Incorporated in this material is a poetic passage (37.22-29) which offers a further element of interpretation. This is a taunt song against the Assyrian ruler who in his pride has set himself up against God. The passage uses a style reminiscent of that of royal inscriptions glorifying the activities of rulers, their military and civil achievements. It turns the proud boasts of the rulers into arrogant claims to do that which only God can do; and affirms that the whole series of events in which the alien rulers state themselves to be the initiators of action is in reality under the direct and deliberate plan of God. It reaches its climax in doom on the boastful enemy of Judah and of God.

There are two points to observe here in relation to this present discussion. One is the recognition that this reversal of the claims of the Assyrian conqueror has contacts with the same exegetical procedure which can be seen, for example, in Isa. 10. The claim is there made by the Assyrian that it is by his own power that he has brought doom upon the nations he has conquered; the claim is answered by the affirmation that he is like the implement, axe or saw or stick, which would suppose that it can wield the one who holds and uses it. The relationship shows that the development and interpretation of the Assyrian oracles is connected with a similar but not identical exegetical process by which the narratives also are being transformed. The other point is the recognition that the theme, expressed in Isa. 37.26, as

> Have you not heard from afar?
> This thing I did.
> From ancient times even I shaped it,
> Now I have brought it to pass.

is used in similar forms in chapters of the book of Isaiah recognised to belong to the exilic period in the sixth century, as in 40.21; 41.22, pointing to a further extension of the exegetical tradition here expressed. Indeed the development especially in chapters 40-45 of the claim for the absolute control and fore-knowledge of God contrasted with the total powerlessness of all idols, elaborates this particular theme, exemplifying it with the stress on God who, having already done what he had decreed, is about to bring new things to pass, new things themselves already planned by him long ago.

2. The developing interpretative tradition of the older oracles may be exemplified in yet other ways, and it is convenient to take further the Assyrian theme which is developed in other directions too. This is apparent implicitly in the chapters we have been considering, Isa. 36-37, in the light of their sequel in 38-39.[13] The overthrow of the Assyrians, depicted in vivid legend in the last verses of ch. 37, is underlined yet again in the promises to Hezekiah in ch. 38 of a new lease of life and of deliverance of king and city from Assyrian power (38.5); but the deeper significance of this is drawn out in a psalm which appears in this chapter though not in the parallel text in 2 Kings 20.1-11. The psalm expresses distress in a wide range of metaphors only partly linked with the

theme of illness and recovery which they are set to illuminate; the metaphors extend into the area of death and deliverance from death – a related theme; they extend still further into the themes of the pit, or Sheol, the realm of the dead. Metaphors of this kind find their extension in poetic descriptions of the experience of exile, as for example in Ps.107.17-22, and in the use of prison themes, in the same psalm in 107.10-16 and in passages like Isa. 61. We may observe a parallel theme in the motif of the captive king of Judah, Jehoiachin, released from prison years later (2 Kings 25.27-30), a motif which appears to form one element in the interpretation of the community's experience in exile and the prospect of a glorious release, particularly in the language of Isa. 53, where themes of distress and suffering, like those of psalms of lament, are combined with themes of prison and death, and answered in promises of coming vindication.

The sequel in the narratives is found in Isa. 39; and here the full intention becomes plain. The promise of life and of protection for Hezekiah in ch. 38 is balanced by the prophetic action of Hezekiah in relation to Babylonian envoys, explicated by Isaiah as pointing to the coming carrying away of all Judah and Babylon. This passage, as it stands in the book of Isaiah which is here our concern, fulfils two functions. First, it underlines the point that for the later generation of recipients of the prophetic message, the victory of God over Assyria is to be seen against the dark background of the conquest of Judah by Babylon; it is not now Assyria but Babylon which constitutes the threat. (It has been argued[14] – cogently but not I believe completely convincingly – that the reference here is to the situation between the first fall of the city in 597, with the emphasis on taking into exile, and the second fall in 587 when destruction of city and temple is the theme. But the stress on the totality of the loss of Judah is more like the understanding of the exile as leaving a completely empty land of Judah, almost implicit at the end of 2 Kings, but precisely stated at the end of 2 Chronicles, and belonging to a somewhat later stage of interpretation in which stress lies on the exiles in Babylon rather than on the remaining population in Judah – a theme to be found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel too, and perhaps there also pointing to aspects of the conflicts within the Judaean community in the early years of Persian rule.) Second, it provides the basis for the material of the following chapters in which the theme of Babylonian conquest lies in the past – thus showing the fulfilment of the pronouncement of Isaiah in ch. 39 – and the prospect lies beyond that in the hope of a speedy restoration. While it may properly be recognized[15] that the narratives of chs. 36-39 serve to contrast the deliverance of Jerusalem and Judah from the Assyrians with the certainty of the total conquest by Babylon, and thereby the apparently inconsistent policy of God in the two periods is faced and given a rationale, there is also implicit in the affirmation of deliverance from the Assyrians the sure prospect of eventual deliverance from the Babylonians, and the sequel explicates this.

3. This latter point is also brought out both by a series of detailed modifications of the text in the opening chapters of the book – pointers to the interpretation of earlier prophecies concerned with the Assyrian threat viewed as divine judgement in terms of a now experienced disaster at the hands of the Babylonians as the divine agent; and also by quite specific updating to be seen in the probable replacement of Assyrian references by Babylonian in Isa. 13-14 and by the precise replacement of Assyria by Babylon in Isa. 23.[16] We may note that in such instances as these, there is sometimes clear statement – and this is most evident in 23.13:

> Now see, the land of the Chaldeans (Babylonians):
> that is the people, it was not Assyria.

In Isa. 13-14 it is implicit for the most part, though explicit at some points – thus the comment on Babylon in 14.22-23 links together a preceding and a following passage, the former of which in 14.4b-21 makes no reference to any specific land, but is introduced by a reference to Babylon in 14.4a, while the latter in 14.24-27 is precisely referred to Assyria and has indeed some echoes in terms of reinterpretation of the poem against Israel which appears now apparently broken into two parts in 5.25-30 and 9.8-21 (Hebrew 7-20). We may here again observe that while some degree of consistency in reinterpretation and reapplication of earlier material may be observed – though hardly sufficient for the supposition that there is a precise 'edition' produced at a given moment – there is also observable some degree of haphazardness in the reinterpretationn; the expositors were not, it would appear, working through all the available material with a view to giving a consistent up-dating; rather is there evidence of a process of reapplication of individual passages, and this at several different stages, with emphases which are not necessarily to be fitted into a rigid pattern.

4. There is a further consideration to be taken into account by way of pointing to other possible indications of re-use. This is to be seen as partly indicated by elements added to or modifying earlier texts, elements designed to bring out a new meaning for a new situation; but also, and more elusively, in a re-reading which provides a new meaning for such texts because of the context in which they are being used. There is here an underlying point about the nature of any literary work, though clearly in some respects we cannot fully apply the principles of modern literary understanding to ancient texts about whose origin and structure we are much less informed. I noted a parallel example in a theatrical context late in 1980. We went to see the show entitled 'Tom-foolery' in London, a show based on the songs of Tom Lehrer, an American academic who made a name for himself with satirical songs in the 1960s. Among these was one which had a number of comments on political life, including some reference to well-known figures of the period who from being actors of one kind or another had become involved in politics. The song included brief reference to Ronald Reagan. We knew that song from its original context; hearing it in the autumn of 1980, at the time of the American Presidential election, the allusion came to life because of the particular status of Reagan as a Presidential candidate. Now we knew – we could check with the original recording – that the reference was in the original text; we had a strong suspicion that many of the younger members of the audience heard it as an up-dating of that text to fit the immediate situation. This was a reasonable supposition, because the songs that evening did include a number of extra stanzas or modified lines, partly to clarify allusions which might now be lost, partly to bring in similar points now applicable. But in fact this reference took on a new significance simply from its present context.

The analogy may serve as a reminder that you do not necessarily have to modify a text to make it immediately relevant to a new situation; the new reader or hearer may so understand it because of his context. A great work of literature has an impact on its contemporaries, who may perhaps be aware of the precise situation to which its author was referring; though even they, at one remove from the author, will not simply hear it as he meant it. Some years or centuries later, it may be necessary to offer a commentary to illuminate how the original text sounded to the author's contemporaries; but no such commentary will be needed for it to make some immediate impact on those who now hear it or read it.

A recent study of Isa. 21 has illuminated this with a detailed discussion of the problems of one of the most difficult passages in the book.[17] On the basis of very careful analysis, the author of the study has set out what he sees to be the different levels of the text: its

original eighth century context, as he believes he can trace it, and its new sixth century context, the former in the period of Isaiah, the latter in the period of Babylonian supremacy. In making this analysis, the author brings out two distinguishable elements: there are sections of the material where he finds it possible to separate the two levels, to assign some words and phrases to one period, and some to the other; but he also observes that once the two-level view is accepted, it becomes clear that at numerous points in the chapter the same words are capable of being read at the two levels. If we can project ourselves into the eighth century situation, we can see what kind of impact they would have; but having learnt also that the material as it now stands reflects a later situation too, we can read the words in the light of that context and detect their impact there.

## THE EVOLUTION OF THE TRADITION AND THE NATURE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

It is clear that the recognition of such levels has its consequences for the understanding of biblical interpretation. The biblical text, standing as it does in the long centuries of Jewish and Christian use, has a capacity to speak to new generations, though we must be ware of either too simple an updated reading or too naive a reading into the text of the things we wish to hear. The presuppositions of our own situation, socially and theologically, affect our understanding, and they may easily dull our hearing. For the understanding of the theology of the tradition within the book of Isaiah this recognition of the continued vitality of the text enables us to detect with greater or less precision some of the points at which earllier words were newly understood. Crucial to this, and to that extent pivotal in our understanding of the evolution of the tradition, must be the major events which we can see in the Babylonian conquest and the period known to us as the time of the exile. The impact of those experiences may be detected. But, in view of the gaps in our knowledge of the political and social situations, particularly during the years after the destruction of Jerusalem and before the advent of Persian rule, we must beware of finding ourselves writing the story of the period from the interpretation of the texts which we are reading in the light of that particular historical context. That this major moment has contributed much, we need not doubt; it is detectable in so many other Old Testament writings too. But we should be cautious of assuming that our perspective of Old Testament life and experience is entirely just to what those who lived through the events actually felt. There is always the possibility that what appears to us, on the basis of available evidence, to be of minimal importance, was of major significance to some in the community; and what is unknown to us – the gaps in our information, because neither the biblical text nor any non-biblical evidence gives us any information – was not in reality a gap, but was filled with experiences again not so necessarily insignificant as we might now be tempted to believe. But with that kind of caution, we may see that a reading of the text with the developing interpretative tradition in mind opens up a variety of thought, a variety of theological emphasis, which fits in with and further illuminates the themes which we looked at in the first of these studes.

There are further consequences in this for our understanding of the nature of biblical interpretation, further factors in the process of reinterpretation within the biblical text which point to wider principles. These can illuminate both the biblical situation itself – the nature of the theological positions held by those who reinterpreted older material – and also the perennial question of what constitutes the relationship of a later religious community to the text. Three lines of thought may be suggested as examples.

1. One of the dilemmas of prophetic experience and hence also of the handling of prophetic material is that of the equivocal relationship between what is said and what happens. We may see a number of aspects of this. The doom prophecies of Amos and Hosea directed to the northern kingdom of Israel from about the middle of the eighth centry could be seen to be validated in the disaster to that kingdom in the decades that followed, down to the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. One aspect of the preservation of such prophetic teaching may therefore be the confirmation of its truth, the underlining of its authoritative quality. Its continued use, however, depends on more than this, and here we may see the possibility that a confirmed prophetic word can be regarded as having continuing validity, seen therefore as more than a momentary utterance, understood rather as a declaration of the divine will and nature which continues to be true. But there is also bound up with this a further possibility, for even in such confirmed cases there may well be details which do not find confirmation in the events that follow; the way is then open either for these details being dropped from the tradition as of less significance or for them being held as it were in suspense. The validation of the prophetic word may be accompanied by a qualifying of it so that it not only continues to be regarded as authoritative but is also held to point to a further stage of fulfilment and of validation. There can then be an interplay between the status which a prophet acquires by reason of the validation of his words and the status which he enjoys by virtue of his official position in the religious life of the community – a subject about which there is still much debate. The matter becomes then more acute when it appears that a prophetic word is unfulfilled, and we may observe that the question of prophetic authority becomes a delicate one.[18] The relationship then – and this is a theme to which I shall return in the last of these studies – between the figure of the prophet and the tradition associated with him becomes a two-way process. The tradition has its authority because of its association with the prophet: the status and authority of the prophet is enhanced by the continuing validation of the tradition. But such a position is not easily reached, and the concern with prophetic authority which may be seen especially in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy is an indication of its problematic nature. The process of reinterpretation is itself part of a reckoning with this problem.

2. New experiences have to be assimilated by any kind of community, and not least by a religious community. This must be particularly the case where the new experiences are of a shattering kind, such as a total disruption of political life or a radical change in the social order. Such experiences introduce an element of discontinuity into the life of the community, and both in religious terms and in political terms a community needs continuity if it is to exist. The integration of moments of discontinuity into the life of the community is therefore a process by which it comes to terms with the new and the disturbing;[19] it is also, as must be clear, a process by which at one and the same time there is confirmation of the truth of the tradition, and also a modification, often imperceptible, of that tradition. No community, whether defined in political or religious terms, comes through a new experience without some degree of modification; a refusal to accept this must result in fossilisation.

3. A third aspect which joins closely with this is the process by which both older and newer material may be given a broader context in relation to already existing lines of tradition,[20] with a resulting fuller comprehension for what is now integrated, and a modification which at the same time can be seen to be in continuity with the past. A specific example may here make the point clearer. There are marked indications that that great religious tradition, to be found in so much Old Testament material, which sees the Exodus from Egypt as the central moment in the understanding of the relationship between Israel and Yahweh, occupies no place in the thought of Isaiah; the traditions which converge in him appear rather to be those of Jerusalem and of the royal house. We may, however, observe that the tradition which offers reappraisal of the earlier Isaianic material integrates that material with the Exodus line of thought; thus in Isa. 4, 11 and 12, and with some frequency in the chapters from 40 on, Exodus

themes provide a context within which the Jerusalem and Davidic themes are re-presented. A similar convergence may be seen in the Jeremiah material, and to a lesser extent in Ezekiel; it may also be seen to play its part in the Deuteronomic writings, and beyond. The result is an enrichment of understanding in that a wider range of religious traditions is drawn together so that they illuminate one another; a too simplified interpretation of divine action in relation to events is broadened by the context of continuity which the other traditions supply, and similarly a too imprecise appraisal in cultic terms is applied to the specific moments of historic experience. Each can feed the other. The result is a great richness of imagery and thought, and also a more profound understanding of the nature of the theological affirmations which are made.

The book of Isaiah offers such a rich interplay of material, and a consequent illumination of experience which continues to operate effectively. The questions already raised about prophetic authority and status point forward to a consideration of the prophet and of the ways in which he is portrayed. What kind of prophet can we perceive within and behind the book?

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The third and last of these studies: 'Theology of a Prophet' will appear in the next issue of the Review. The three studies were first given as the Annual Theological Lectures in the Queen's University of Belfast in February 1981.

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1. Cf. Ullendorff, 'The Bawdy Bible'. *BSOAS* 42 (1979), 425-56, see esp. p.426, 440ff.

2. Cf. e.g. O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: and Introduction* (London, 1965), 303-46, both for his own separate treatment of 1-39, 40-55, 56-66 and for discussion of the possible construction of 1-39 from already existing smaller collections (see pp.306-8).

3. A number of recent studies raise serious questions about this. Cf. my survey article in *ET* 93 (1981-82), 136-9, see pp.136f.

4. Cf. e.g. Eissfeldt, op.cit., p.346; J.H. Eaton, 'The Origin of the Book of Isaiah', *VT* 9 (1959), 138-57, and references there. For criticisms, cf. below and e.g. my 'Isaiah i-xii: Presentation of a Prophet', *VTS* 29 (1977), 16-48, see pp.27-9; R.E. Clements, 'The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.', *VT* 30 (1980), 421-36, see p.436.

5. Cf. H.E. van Waldow, 'The Message of Deutero-Isaiah, Interpr. 22 (1968), 259-87, see pp.268f., and also his *Anlass und Hintergrund der Ve Verkundigung des Deuterojesaja* (Diss. Bonn, 1953).

6. Cf. e.g. O. Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja, Kap. 1-12* (revised edition. ATD, 17, Gottingen, 1981): the text differs radically from that of the earlier edition translated in the SCM Press OTL Series: a revised translation is being prepared; J. Vermeylen, *Du Prophete Isaie a l'Apocalyptique. Isaie, I-XXXV, miroir d'un demi-millenaire d'experience religieuse en Israel.* 2 vols. (Paris, 1977-78); to some extent also R.E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (New Century Bible, London, 1980).

7. Cf. my article (n.4), pp.19f.

8. So Vermeylen (n.6).

9. H. Barth, *Die Jesaja-worte in der Josiazeit. Israel und Assur als Thema einer produktiven Neuinterpretation der Jesaja uberlieferung* (WMANT, 48, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1977); see also Clements (n.6) for use of this approach.

10. B.S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (SBT, II, 3, 1967).

11. A valuable discussion by R.E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem* (JSOT Sup. 13, 1980).

12. Clements' evaluation differs from this (n.11).

13. For chs. 38-39, cf. my 'An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: a Study of 2 Kings 20, Isaiah 38-39', *SJT* 27 (1974), 329-52.

14. Clements (n.11), esp. pp. 66f.

15. Clements (n.11), esp. pp.63ff.

15. Clements (n.4), see pp.428f.

16. Clements (n.4), see pp.428f.

17. A.A. Macintosh, *Isaiah xxi – A Palimpsest* (Cambridge, 1980).

18. R.P. Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed* (London, 1979).

19. Cf. my 'Continuity and Discontinuity: Rehabilitation and Authentication' in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* ed. D.A. Knight (Philadelphia, 1977), 215-34.

20. On 'lines of tradition', cf. O.H. Steck, 'Theological Streams of Tradition' in *Tradition and Theology* (see n.19), 183-214.

# RELIGION AND REASON IN THE JAPANESE EXPERIENCE

**Michael Pye**

The phrase 'religion and reason' trips off the tongue easily enough in English, and to those engaged in the history of ideas it conjures up centuries of intellectual warfare. Indeed the history of western religious thought from the time of the early Christian Apologists onwards can more or less be written in terms of endless variations on the relation between faith and reason. There is no precise analogy in East Asia to this fundamental pattern of western thought. This becomes rapidly clear when one speaks with Japanese students about elementary features of western Christian systematic theology. For example, to discuss the relationship between natural and revealed theology it is necessary first of all to explain the presupposition of two independent sources of knowledge. Needless to say, a good account of the matter might provide a highly integrated view of the relation between these, but then, that would mean moving towards a solution of a problem which, to the Japanese students, had not appeared to be one.

Does this difference of presupposition occur because the Japaneseare neither religious nor reasonable? Many would claim that Japanese society today is mainly and intrinsically non-religious, or secular. It seems to them to represent the ultimate triumph of de-religionised economic rationality. Others note a marked tendency to the sentimental, the romantic, the existentialist, or the theatrical. However both these emphases fall somehow wide. Whether or not Japan is a secularised society turns on a series of difficult definitions but the brief comment on this question must be that many millions of Japanese people engage in religious observance of various kinds, even though they may lack a strong intellectual commitment to a particular religious viewpoint. One has only to think of New Year's visits to religious places, which in various mutations take place right up to mid-February because of the persistence of the old calendar's New Year. I am thinking here mainly of visits to Shinto shrines, but larger Buddhist temples also attract a significant crowd on the **ennichi** or karma-day, and in January this is invested with a significance not much different from that of a New Year shrine visit. The great Shingon temple at Kawasaki, for example, which is half-way between Tokyo and Yokohama, attracts a massive crowd on the January day in memory of Kōbō Daishi, the founder, (the day being known in Japanese as **Hatsu Daishi,** and thus reminiscent of the shrine concept of first visit or **hatsumōde**). Or again, one person in six belongs to a religious movement of some kind which has been recently started and which thus entails a more or less distinct invidivual stance. As to the place of the apparently arbitrary dramatic gesture, of which the prominent example is **harakiri**, this takes its force through being the negation of, or the only remaining alternative to, what is required as normal activity, namely playing one's part in a rationalised political, economic or other social structure. This comment may serve as a reminder of the various levels of meaning carried by reason, rationality and related terms, for I am speaking here of an organisational rationale as in Weberian usage. At this level one might indeed say that much of Japanese experience has been based on the interaction between socio-political reason and the creative or despairing acts of individuals who have stumbled against irrational points in successive systems.

As with the question of secularisation, agonising over tortuous definitions of terms such as rationalisation will be eschewed. However, an understanding of the paradoxical Japan of today which displays a high level of economic efficiency but a low level of international rapport, does depend on recognising the role both of rationalisation in a social sense and of the project of human reason in an intellectual sense. Both of these are intimately connected with the place of religion. I hope to shed some light on these interlocking matters by referring to three main areas of Japanese experience. I also hope that they will provide sufficient explanatory context for the terminology which is used in the process. These three main areas are firstly, a form of Buddhist experience which I call Japanese Buddhist immediacy; secondly, Neo-Confucian rationalism, especially as applied to religion; and thirdly irrationalism in contemporary Japanese value systems.

The word 'immediacy' may need some introduction. When thinking about this lecture I was at first inclined to speak at this point about intuitionism, for intuition, in our language, may easily be contrasted with sustained reason. However it occurred to me that this might lead to some confusion with the so-called idea of intuitive knowledge associated with Nakae Tōju and derived from the Chinese Neo-Confucian Wang Yang-ming.[1] By 'immediacy' I mean in part, a lack of dependence on sustained reason, but also the expectation of radical religious transformation in present or shortly forthcoming experience. Japanese Buddhist immediacy has impinged particularly on the western world by way of the writings of Suzuki Daisetsu and other exponents of Zen, who have argued that Zen Buddhists are free from the distorting effects of the discriminatory intellect typical of the west and are able to discern their own Buddha-nature without dependence on discursive reason. The Zen Buddhists draw of course upon China, especially the suddenist school, and India, but they also belong to a wider family of thinkers in Japanese Buddhism, which goes back at least as far as Kūkai (or Kōbō Daishi) who lived from 774 to 835. Kūkai, the Pure Land leaders Hōnen and Shinran, the Lotus Sutra devotee Nichiren, or the Zen master Dōgen, are but the most outstanding examples of a creative Japanese Buddhist piety which has one thing in common. This is that it seeks to cut through the plodding efforts of physical and mental discipline and to lay hold of immediate spiritual transformation. They all saw the crucial events in religious consciousness as taking place, not on some distant heights yet to be scaled, but now, in this existence. Kukai's slogan was 'attaining Buddhahood in this very body' (**sokushinjōbutsu**). Hōnen and Shinran abandoned self-reliant, progressive practice and relied instead on the great compassionate vow of Amida Buddha to carry them through, in one act of deliverance, to the Pure Realm and thence to nirvana. Nichiren expectantly sought a socio-political transformation in his own real life-time, and although this did not materialise he went on the proclaim the immediately effective power of a physical manifestation of the Lotus Sutra in mandala form. Dogen declared that to practice **zazen** is to experience Buddhahood now. Of course there are many differences between all of these, but what they have in common is a radical displacement of ordinary experience, and this by a wisdom not attained through argumentative dialogues, chronicles or commentaries, which have been the three main seed-beds of rationalism in East Asia. They demanded a discontinuity with the accepted systems of moral and mental effort.

Now it is true that the world of Kūkai's Shingon Buddhism was a magical world, at least for his followers, and this magical world was left largely intact by Nichiren. The calling on Amida Buddha also was practised in a magical way, as has been well described by Hori Ichirō.[2] It was however in the context of this Buddhist immediacy that the disentangling of religion from magic began. This new phase was ushered in by the radicalisation and purification of the reliance on Amida Buddha by Hōnen and then further by Shinran. It was significantly paralleled by Dogen's rejection of practices other than **zazen** as unnecessary. With these moves

the ordinary world was demagicised and left as a more or less plain place, to be understood and in the long run manipulated. The sociological importance of this has been rightly stated by Robert Bellah in his fine work **Tokugawa Religion** (1957) where he writes as follows:

> 'Whereas traditionalistic religion may give a blanket sanction to myriads of discrete customs and thus help to slow or prevent any social change, salvation religions may, by depriving these discrete customs of any sacred character (in Weber's phrase, "freeing the world of magic")and substituting instead certain general non-situational maxims of ethical action, lead to a rationalization of behaviour which can have important effects far beyond the sphere of religion itself.'[3]

While Bellah was right to go on to point out that most forms of religion in Japan have elements of rationalization **and** of magic, nevertheless it seems clear that Pure Land Buddhism and Zen Buddhism took the lead in the process of disenchantment. They did so from within the spiritual matrix of Buddhist immediacy which emphasised the disjunction between ordinary mental work and Buddhist attainment or transformation, between scholastic Buddhist reason and vital religion.

Between mediaeval and modern Japan however there lies a second significant phase. This is marked in a broad manner by the Neo-Confucian moralism which was studied by Bellah with special reference to the Shingaku movement associated with Ishida Baigan. This socially useful moralism fitted easily with the type of Buddhist spirituality already described, and it was accepted in the long run by samurai and merchant alike. The intermediate phase is more sharply marked however by a rationalist and historicist critique of religion which was carried through in the eighteenth century, by Tominaga Nakamoto.

During the Tokugawa Period, running from 1600 to 1868, thinking was a serious pursuit in Japan. The seminal importance of this period for the later accelerated modernisation of Japan is nowadays increasingly recognised. It was a period in which civil wars were no longer the order of the day and in which the functionless samurai were increasingly challenged in social importance by the ever more successful merchant class. Increasingly people of merchant background shared in scholarly pursuits and they displayed an independence of mind not dissimilar to that of the European bourgeoisie. It is not surprising that ideas should have surfaced in that context which are analogous to those of the European Enlightenment.

Tominaga Nakamoto was the son of a prosperous soya-sauce manufacturer resident in Osaka, and seems to have been an omnivorous pupil at a private educational establishment. It is recorded that he was compelled to leave the school when he compiled an unduly critical survey of Confucianist teachings, which is now lost to us. Of his various writings there now remain two relevant to the present subject. One is a short piece entitled Writings of an Old Man **(Okina no fumi)**, of which an English translation was published by Kato Shuichi in **Monumenta Nipponica** in 1967. This contains trenchant criticisms of Bucchism, Confucianism and Shinto and argues that they should be replaced by practical morals relevant to the time. The other extant writing is a longer, densely written work which examines the problem of the origins and development of Buddhism in a spirit of historical criticism. Of this work, entitled **Shutsujōkōgo**, there is not yet any published English translation.[5]

The fundamental point about Tominga's attitude to the religions which he knew is that he was not satisfied with reforming one or other of them, or even interested in reformation, but rather sought to explain them all in terms of their historical development. In this sense Tominaga was modern. He did not write from the point of view of some one religious authority. He did try to explain why religious authorities arose. In Chapter IX of **Writings of an Old Man** he wrote:

> 'Since ancient times it has generally been the case that those who preach a moral way and establish a law of life have had somebody whom they have held up as an authoritative precursor, while at the same time they have tried to emerge above those who went before. Later generations however, being unaware of this regular practice, are quite confused by it.'[6]

Thus as far as Confucianism was concerned Tominaga was at pains to argue that Confucius was not an ultimate **fons et origo** for final truth. The trend of the time was to argue away from Neo-Confucian interpretations to the basis of Confucian tradition. Thus Itō Jinsai stressed the purity of Mencius' thought as an early exponent of Confucianism, while Ogyū Sorai criticised even Mencius in favour of Confucius himself. These arguments were essentially reformist appeals to the origins of Confucian tradition. Tominaga however pointed out the Confucius' own teaching represented a choice between kings Wen and Wu on the one hand and what he called 'the way of the five nobles' on the other hand.[7] Thus Confucius was himself a thinker among thinkers and not some absolute reference point different in kind from all the others.

As to Buddhism, Tominaga argued at length in the **Shutsujōkōgo** that the whole tissue of Mahayana doctrine was a collection of individual viewpoints, each selectively emphasising some aspect or other simply to go one better than previous schools, and then coming up with misleading attempts to maintain consistency. It was Tominaga who declared for the first time that the Buddha was not the author of the Mahayana scriptures as Chinese and Japanese Buddhists until then had piously assumed. Thus this splendidly pernicious idea was not first introduced into Japan by the pupils of the European Max Müller in the nineteenth century as is often supposed. Not only that, Tominaga argued that the Buddha himself was one teacher among others. His account opens with the remark, 'If we consider the sequence in which Buddhism arose we see that in effect it began among the heresies.'[8] It was one teaching, he argued, among about ninety-six different ones which all claimed to take one along the way to heaven. Tominaga did not disenchant by sleight of doctrine but by straightforward scornful scepticism with respect to religious authorities. He went on to argue in detail about how the Buddha's disciples built up the system in different ways, each adding his own emphasis while claiming a direct authenticity and superior insight.

Tominaga was not merely pouring scorn on the received assumptions of religious piety; he was also putting forward a general theory about how it is that religion develops and changes. This theory may be summed up in his word **kajō**, which means literally 'adding and going above', or in plain English 'superseding'. It must be clearly recognised that Tominaga's was not just a reformist rebellion against distortions of religion which have intervened between ourselves and the perfect origins of faith. Admittedly he saw the three historic 'ways' of which he was aware, as assenting to and to some degree transmitting what he called 'the way of

ways'. The famous originators such as Confucius and the Buddha however are seen by him as part and parcel of the same process of construction to which all religious leaders contribute. Such a view belongs to modern, historicist rationalism.

The existence of Tominaga's work is important in that it demonstrates that the human mind is liable, universally, to arrive at a historically orientated critique of religion which dispenses with dogmatic norms. It is commonly held in the western world that such a basis for evaluating religious traditions was an exclusively western development with its roots in the period of the Enlightenment or **Aufklärung**. This is not the case. It is also commonly held that to apply such allegedly European views about religion to the traditions of the east is thoroughly inappropriate, in that it involves the imposition of alien modes of thought upon them. Examination of Tominaga's arguments delivers the **coup de grâce** to such arguments because it shows that such modes of thought also spring from within the intellectual tradition of Japan. Paradoxically, it is precisely because Tominaga's work falls entirely within the history of Japanese thought that it has a universal significance. This point was entirely overlooked by Katō Shuichi who bewailed Tominaga's lack of contact with western thinkers as a matter of great regret.

The combined forces of political conformity and popular piety meted out a terrible pubishment on Tominaga's ideas. Of the ten works which he is thought to have written before his death through illness at the age of thirty-one, only four have survived, and two of these are innocuous. Though he certainly helped to fuel the intellectual controversies raging through the Tokugawa Period when Japan was officially closed, he eventually suffered eclipse and his work was all but forgotten in the later rush to come to terms with the west.

This brings me to the third main area which I wish to consider, albeit more briefly and here, in a sense, we go backwards again. The modern fascination of Japanese life and culture for the observer derives in large part from the wholesale persistence of irrationalism. In spite of Japan's victorious modernisation the world of religious enchantment remains, both in large areas of Buddhist observance and also in the world of Shinto ritual which affects the consciousness of most Japanese people to some extent. Between Buddhism and Shinto there is a major continuity of assumptions in two regards. Firstly, the living and the dead are felt to stand in a mutual relationship of responsibility. It hardly matters whether the dead are regarded as **hotoke** (buddhas) or **kami** (gods). Secondly religious observance is widely believed to have a direct effect on personal well-being, as can easily be perceived by visits to the larger Shinto shrines and Shingon or other Buddhist temples. Admittedly, such observance may consist of little more than writing one's heartfelt wish on a tablet, costing about a pound, and hanging it up in the shrine or temple compound. People pray for cures, they pray for success in scholarship and examinations, they pray for romantic love to be requited, they pray for prosperity in business and the well-being of their home. Here a myriad individual actions link a myriad aspirations and prayers to at least ten thousand gods.

The realm of uncriticised enchantment extends however beyond explicit religion to a much more widely based life-style ruled by consumerism and the media. Commercial and social life are dominated by the rotation of the year which, though rooted in natural phenomena, is itself reinforced by almost all the organs of image-creation . During a recent stay in Japan I recall a television announcer informing us solemnly that autumn had come followed by the camera anxiously searching the hill-sides for a tree with a few reddening leaves. At New Year I also recall seeing the sun rise early in the morning of January 1st, on a mountain top, and one of the policemen restraining the crowds from danger complaining that the sunrise was ten minutes late! This inescapable mood of calendricity calls on most of society to take part in a wide range of actions which might not otherwise have resulted from the mere rational choice of individuals. These actions include journeys of homage and report, seasonal present-giving on a massively wasteful scale, semi-ritualised parties, and a string of holidays and festivals which hover uncertainly between the civil and the religious. This inescapable pattern of annual activity is understood to belong to Japan itself, Japan in this sense being not just a geographical location but a divinely endowed world complete in itself, in spite of the post-war disestablishment of the relevant mythology. This Japan is understood, to borrow the sociological term, particularistically, in that the events which make up its continuous celebration require no external validation, no basis in universal reason, and no critical attention. The same may be said for each and every Shinto festival, or in Japanese, **matsuri**. The **matsuri** provides a compelling fusion of the enchanted world and social reality which allows of no intellectual questioning. The **matsuri** is also a microcosmic integration of the whole of Japanese society, as is evident from the close interwovenness of local and national symbols.

What does this state of affairs mean for our overall understanding of religion and reason in the Japanese experience? The picture which I have tried to sketch out shows a remarkable diversity of intellectual styles. It includes a Buddhist call to immediacy of religious transformation, which implies a rejection of sustained ethical or rational effort. In some cases this led to the recognition of a post-salvation world of order and harmony open to reasoned attention and sincerely organised work, a world free from the claims of polytheist animism. To this was added the dry moralism of Neo-Confucian self-discipline, and a sustained effort of reasoned enquiry in the Tokugawa Period which included a very modern-looking, historically critical theory of religious tradition. At the same time it is striking that even while scientific and other forms of reasoned enquiry have become common-place, non-rational religion persists strongly in modern Japan. It does not matter that religious thought has itself contributed to economic and political rationalisation. The use of Shinto mythology in the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth shows that religion can contribute mightily to particularist political rationalisation while being irrational in itself. It seems that the highly rationalised industrial sector of today's Japan, which is based on science, technology and work-study of the highest standard, continues to be in principle subordinated to the politically and religiously defined social being of Japan. If so, this would mean that Japan's apparently highly rationalised economic strategies in the world at large might under pressure give way to non-rational political action reinforced by the value-assumptions of the ever-enchanted masses. On the other hand, it is less widely recognised, but we may hope in the long run more important, that in the eighteenth century historicist critique of religion there peaked a much needed opening, from within the Japanese mind, to the universal experience of reason.

1. For essential information on these and other thinkers mentioned below see R. Tsunoda (ed.) *Sources of Japanese Tradition* New York and London, 1958.

2. I. Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan*, Chicago and London 1968, especially Chapter III.

3. R. Bellah, *Tokugawa Religion*, New York and London 1957, p.8.

4. S. Katō, 'The life and thought of Tominaga Nakamoto, 1715-46, a Tokugawa iconoclast' in *Monumenta Nipponica* XII, 1-2 Jan. 1967 pp. 1-35.

5. Critical edition edited by H. Nakamura, in *Gendai Bukkyō Meicho Zenshu I Bukkyō No Shomondai*, Tokyo 1971. An English translation of Tominaga's work by the present writer is currently in progress.

6. Japanese text in Y. Nakamura (ed.) *Nihon No Shiso* 18, Tokyo 1971, p. 160.

7. Section XI, *Ibid.* p. 165.

8. H. Nakamura, *op.cit.* p. 4, cf. p. 76.

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# SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES IN THE THEOLOGY OF KARL BARTH

**Alan Argent**

Karl Barth's contribution to theology was so enormous that much of his work is still insufficiently known. He wrote much, apart from *Church Dogmatics* and *The Epistle to the Romans*, that is still worthy of consideration. Such is his treatment of church and state.

He pursued a variety of interests, and his influence extended beyond theology. When Hitler came to power in 1933, Karl Barth was among the foremost of those Christians who resisted the attempt to subjugate the Evangelical Church to the state. Barth was one of the leading figures behind the stand taken by the German Confessing Church in its protest against Nazism, and was the principal draftsman of the Barmen Declaration of 1934.

Clearly these momentous events were not indifferent to the framing of Barth's theology. Barth retained a political influence at least until 1945, with his controversial ideas about the correct attitudes to adopt towards defeated Germany and towards the threat of Communism in post-war Europe. Yet Barth had never felt that his theology should be separate from his politics. In March 1939 he spoke in a series of Dutch cities and was requested not to talk about political issues, but countered by stating categorically that, "Wherever there is theological talk, it is always implicitly or explicitly political talk also."[1]

While in his pastorate at Safenwil (1911-1921) Barth's thought became influenced by local industrial conditions. "Class warfare, which was going on in my parish, introduced me almost for the first time to the real problems of real life."[2] In a provocative lecture on "Jesus Christ and the Social Movement", Barth contrasted the Church's failure to deal with the social needs, with Jesus Christ as the partisan of the poor, and according to whom one "has to be a comrade to be a man at all." 'Comrade Pastor' Barth was led therefore, early in his career, to reflect on the Church's involvement in society.

Barth's growing disillusionment with the theological liberalism he had formerly espoused helped to develop a fresh theological stance. Barth began to stress the "transcendence of the world of the Bible, of God's world over the world of man". Under the terrible impression made by the First World War, Barth felt bound to break with the liberal theology of his day. The resultant second edition of *Romans* has been described as "the most powerful piece of theological writing of the twentieth century".[3] In Barth's theology of crisis the Church is humanity's great achievement. It is "Israel", "religion", "law", "justification by works" par excellence. The Church is for Barth contrasted with the Gospel. Barth's doctrine of the Church, in *Romans*, is another way of presenting his main theme — the distinction and the relation of man through God's activity alone. Barth's involvement in and discussion with modern culture necessitated his consideration of contemporary social and political movements. Towards the end of the 1920s Barth criticised the attitude of the German Evangelical Church. "For the first time it had found its own feet in independence from the state, it developed a remarkably pompous self-importance which did not seem to be matched by the content and profundity of its preaching."[4] The relationship of Church and State was forcing itself to the fore in contemporary issues. Barth's concern to direct the challenge of the Gospel to the roots of man's social and political structures confronted the cultural developments of the 1930s, especially the National Socialist movement and Marxist socialism. He regarded Fascism as a religion from which "Christianity could expect only opposition", which presented an even greater temptation, "namely to conform to it."[5]

Whilst at Basle Barth came to the view that the Confessing Church had shown no awareness that to affirm the first commandment "under National Socialism was not just a 'religious' but also a political decision. It is a decision against a totalitarian state which as such cannot recognize any task, proclamation or other other than its own, nor acknowledge any other God than itself." He maintained that individual Christians must offer direct, political resistance to the Nazi state. In 1936 Barth, in Hungary as a guest of the Reformed Church there, lectured on church and state under the title, "People's Church, Free Church, Confessing Church". He argued that the state's authority derived from the reconciliation of Christ. The state has a clear function whether it fulfils this willingly, or not. In June 1938 Barth lectured in Brugg and Liestal offering a reconsideration of the theology of church and state. "Rechtfertigung und Recht", (Justification and Justice) is one of the two short works he wrote specifically on this subject. In English this work was published as "Church and State" while the second work is "The Christian Community and the Civil Community". The former was intended to give the Swiss people such clear information that they would not acquiesce in Germany's annexation of Austria.

"Church and State" in its English translation was published in May 1939, not a year after its first airing. With an introduction there are four separate sections entitled "The Church and State as they confront one another", "The Essence of the State", "The Significance of the State for the Church", and "The Service which the Church owes the State".

Barth introduced his subject by stating that 'Justification and Justice' indicated the question which he hoped to answer. "Is there a connection between the justification of the sinner through faith alone, completed once and for all by God through Jesus Christ, and the problem of justice, the problem of human law?"[6]

Thus Karl Barth (whose own life witnessed the conflicts which may easily exist between divine justification and civil justice) sought not to separate these two but make clear their connections. The reformers had demonstrated that both realities exist and that both are not in conflict. Yet for Barth the Reformers' consideration of this subject was incomplete. Neither Luther in "Of Wordly Authority", nor Calvin, in the final chapters of the "Institutes", showed how the two connect. Certainly the Reformers showed that authority and law rest on a particular 'ordination' of divine providence which is itself necessary because of unconquered sin but this does not satisfactorily meet the need. For Barth the basis and foundation of human law was crucial but was it justice or justification? "Or were they not secretly building on another foundation and in so doing... were they not actually either ignoring or misconstruing the fundamental truth of the Bible?"[7]

Barth considered what might have happened if no connection at all had been made between justice and justification. On the one hand, a highly spiritual church might be built, exclusively stressing the Kingdom of God, but refusing to enter into the sphere of human justice. On the other hand it might be possible to emphasise the problem of human law (retaining some general divine providence but free from the Reformers' linking of justice and justification) and to construct a secular church in which any 'God' would bear little relation to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in which the human justice proclaimed bore little resemblance to God's justice. Barth felt it was clear that since the Reformation both these possibilities ("Pietistic Sterility" and the "sterility of the Enlightenment") had been realized and some responsibility for this lay at the Reformers' door. To avoid "sterile and dangerous separations" between the "two realms" Barth went to the scriptures "in the intensity of our present situation." The basic teaching of the Church (i.e. the Reformed Church) on her relation to the State is reflected in Christ's execution by the State and its officials. The State, he described, was "one of those angelic powers of this age... always threatend by 'demonization', that is by the temptation of making itself an absolute".[8]

The Church Barth saw as the "actual community of the New Heaven and the New Earth,... and therefore in the realm of the State a foreign community." Yet even so "the solidarity of distress and death unites Christians with all men, and so also with those who wield political power." Though the Church may suffer persecution rather than participate in the deification of Caesar, yet it recognizes its responsibility for the State and Caesar, and so it prays for the State and its officials in all circumstances. Whereas others may point to the conflict between Church and State, Barth felt the "positive connection" between the two should be determined.

In his section on "The Church and the State as they Confront one another" Barth discussed Jesus' confrontation with Pilate. The Reformers understood this by reference to John 18:36, "My kingdom is not of this world". Yet for Barth this was unsatisfactory. From the encounter between Jesus and Pilate two outstanding points emerge — the State expressed itself in 'demonic' form as 'the power of the present age' and also the homelessness of the Church in this age was revealed. Had the world's rulers recognized God's wisdom then they would not have crucified Jesus (I Cor. 2:6f). In John 19:11 Jesus confirmed Pilate's claim to have 'power' over Him, and this power is neither "accidental" nor "presumptuous" but given "from above". If Pilate had released Jesus it would not necessarily have meant that he, and the State, had recognized Jesus' claim to be King. Indeed, the State is neutral as regards truth. However the release of Jesus "would have meant the legal granting of the right to preach justification". Pilate's use of power allowed "injustice to run its course". John sought to show that what occured was "the only possible occurrence". Pilate always therefore was the "human created instrument of that justification of sinful man" completed for all through the crucifixion. Pilate's role was crucial. When Pilate took Jesus he declared the "solidarity of paganism with the sin of Israel, but in so doing also enters into the inheritance of the promise made to Israel".

A second truth to emerge from the Jesus/Pilate encounter is that, although the 'demonic' State may will evil, yet it may be constrained to do good. The State cannot refuse to render the service it is intended to render. Therefore it should always receive its due respect, and the New Testament requires its representatives should be treated honourably (Rom.13:1-8, 1 Peter 2:17).[9]

One further point should not be overlooked. Jesus was not condemned as an enemy of the State. Indeed the gospels agree that Pilate declared him innocent (Matt.27:19-24, Mk.15:14, Lk.23:14-15, 22, John 18:38, 19:4-6). His duty lay in acquitting Christ. The implication therefore is that the evangelists regard Pilate's refusal to grant such protection as a deviation from duty. Pilate crucified Jesus because he wished to satisfy the people (Mk.15:15). Jesus died not in accordance with the law of the State nor with justice but in "flagrant defiance of justice".

Barth's judgement of the Pilate/Jesus encounter is that the 'demonic' State aserted itself too little not too much. It failed to be true to itself. Yet Pilate's misuse of power could not alter the fact that the power was really given "from above". Pilate's failure makes clear that real, human justice, exposing the true face of the State, would inevitably mean recognizing the right to proclaim divine justification.[10]

Barth's second section deals with the exegisis of Romans 13:1-7 and other Biblical passages relevent to "The Essence of the State". He remarked that (Rom.13:1) indicates a group of angelic powers, "created, but invisible, spiritual and heavenly powers, which exercise a certain independence, and have a certain superior dignity, task and function, and exert a certain real influence." Barth suggested that the early church understood the State, the emperor, king or their representatives as such angelic powers. Pilate had power (**exousia**) to crucify or release Jesus. Clearly the State moved from being the defender of that law established by God's will and became... "dominated by the Dragon, demanding the worship of Caesar, making war on the Saints, blaspheming God." When the State crucified Jesus it be came demonic. Therefore although Christ and the State may appear totally separate there is yet more to be said on "the beast of the abyss". Barth concluded that the rebellious angelic powers as Christ's resurrection and parousia makes clear will be forced into the service of Christ.[11]

Through the Church rebel angelic powers shall see the mystery of salvation which will be revealed in the future (1 Peter 1:12). Here is no question of justification of the 'demons' or 'demonic forces'. Christ called back the angelic powers to their original order. Further rebellion, therefore, may only occur within Christ's order, according to creation, in the form of unwilling service to Christ's Kingdom, until even that unwillingness is broken down by Christ's resurrection and parousia. Obviously therefore the 'political angelic power', the State, belongs ultimately to Jesus Christ, and should serve Christ, and seek the justification of the sinner.

The New Testament shows that the State could show its neutral attitude towards truth and give the Church its real freedom. The Church's relations with the State are not uniformly dark but show "distinctions between one State and another, between the State of yesterday and the State of today." Barth even interpreted the gift of discerning the Spirits as bestowing on the Church a "most significant political relevance in preaching, in teaching, and in pastoral work".[12]

In Barth's third section, "The Significance of the State for the Church", he pointed out that Christians have always concentrated their hopes not in the present age but in that "which is to come". That Christians have "no continuing city here" (Hebs. 13:14) does separate the Church from the State but also, according to Barth, serves to unite them. New Testament language is political — Kingdom of God, of Heaven, King of this realm, Messiah and Kyrios. In Revelation 21 it is not the real church (**ekklesia**) but the real city which constitutes the new age, and established the "real heavenly State".[13]

Thus, Barth argued, the deification of the State is impossible because the true divinity of the heavenly Jerusalem cannot be attached to the earthly State. The opposite is also true. The State cannot be made a devil! Augustine was wrong to identify the civitas terrana with the civitas Cain. Every State, even the worst, possesses its destiny in that it will one day contribute to the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem.

That the early Christians objected to the earthly State means that this State has been too little (not too much) of a State for those seeking the true heavenly State. For Barth 1 Cor.6:1-6 is incomprehensible unless these Christians had seen in divine justification the true source of all human law. Because Christians have no "abiding city" on earth the Church is neither a State within nor above the State. Indeed it is an "establishment amongst strangers" where justification is preached. Although the Church cannot itself bring about the disclosure of the eternal law of Christ in this age, it nevertheless can and should proclaim it to the world.

The New Testament epistles demand that Christians behave towards the State as honourably as they behave towards all men. "Render to all their dues... Owe no man anything but love one another" (Rom.13:7-8). (See also 1 Tim.2:1, Titus 3:2, 1 Peter 5:17). Barth interpreted such passages in the light of 1 Tim 2:1-7 by which he understood: "Since it is our duty to pray for all men, so we should pray in particular for Kings and for all in authority, because it is only on the condition that such men exist that we can 'lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty' ".[14]

The Christian community needs such a quiet life because it needs "freedom in the realm of all men in order to exercise its function towards all men." Since this freedom is guaranteed only through the State's existence then the Church should guarantee that existence through its prayers. The Church should never forget that "prayer for the bearers of State authority belongs to the very essence of its own existence" for its proclamation is for all men. If a State should be come so perverted as to honour evil and to punish good then recall is only possible through the Church. Even in such circumstances the State should fulfil its function and respect the Church's freedom. The honour the State owes the Church then would be revealed in Christian suffering so that, in one way or another, the State must serve divine justification.

Thus Barth outlined a close relationship between Church and State yet maintaining a clear dinstinction between the two. The Church gathers its members through free decisions and does not gather all men in. It leaves that to God. But the State includes all men (and may hold them by force). "The State as State knows nothing of the Spirit, nothing of love, nothing of forgiveness." The Church cannot become a State and establish law by force but rather must preach justification. The State could only be an idolatrous church; the church only a clerical state.

Some commentators regard ecclesiastical law as the great sin of the primitive church. But the idealized church of the first century, moved freely by the Spirit, without its own laws, never really existed. (1 Cor.14:33, 1 Cor.12-14) Yet ecclesiastical authority is spiritual and to Barth the legal order endorsed by the apostles has an inherent compelling quality. The New Testament sees the State as an outpost or annexe of the Christian community. It is in a sense, included within the ecclesiastical order. Just as the Church assumes a political aspect so also the State contains a certain ecclesiastical character.

The Church/State relationship is further treated in Rom.13:1 "be subject to the governing authorities". The verb, "be subject to", is a specifically Christian exhortation, according to Barth, meaning that the order in which Christians have to prove their obedience to God includes their relation (subjection) to governing secular authorities. In Rom. 13 the ruler of the State is described as "the minister of God" (13:4) and state officials as "God's ministers".(13:6) Clearly such persons stand "within the saved order".[15]

His fourth section deals with "The Service Which the Church owes to the State". Firstly intercession is the most intimate service owed by the Church. Christians are called to pray for all, especially for those in authority (1 Tim.2). Thus the Church reminds the State of its limits, and reminds itself of its own freedom. This service must be given without asking if the State will reciprocate. The "most brutally unjust State" still serves by increasing the Church's responsibility to it.[16]

Barth considered the exhortation, "be subject to" (Rom.13) in this light. True subjection is not obsequious but is such due to any official. Christians should expect the best from the State – i.e. "that it will grant legal protection to the free preaching of justification" but should be prepared, if necessary, "to carry this preaching into practice by suffering injustice instead of receiving justice". If Christians opposed State power and refused the request decreed by God, they would deserve condemnation.

Such respect from the Church must not be separated from the priestly function of the Church. It may be passive and limited yet need not imply approval of the State's undertakings. Matt.22:21 insists that Christians render Caesar those things that are Caesar's – i.e. his due, not as a good or bad Caesar, but simply as Caesar. Likewise Christians must render to God that which is God's. Subjection in a situation will consist in Christians being the victims of the State, of oppression of preaching unable to co-operate and obliged to express disapproval. "All this will be done, not **against** the State, but as the Church's service **for** the State!"[17]

Christians would become enemies of any State threatening their freedom if they did not resist. Even Jesus would have been "an enemy of the State" if He had not called King Herod a fox (Luke 13:32). Christians would become hypocrites in their intercession for the State if the acquiesced in such perversion of power.

Therefore Barth outlined a mutual guarantee between the two realms of Church and State. Outside the Church there is no basic understanding of those reasons which give the State legitimacy and make its existence necessary. Everywhere else the State may be called into question. Barth then returned to his Christological theme for in the Church's view the State's authority is included in the authority of Lord Jesus. Therefore the State is both served and preserved by the Church. Traditional Christian views on the Church/State issue teach rightly that only from the view of sinful man can respect be given to the State (its laws, taxes etc.) because this provides "the only protection against sophisms and excuses of man". The State can neither establish nor protect true human law (i.e. freedom for preaching justification) unless it receives its due from the Church.

Barth also dealt with the topical issue of swearing oaths of allegiance to the State. The Reformers found such oath-giving (based on Rom.13:7) acceptable though Barth, citing Matt. 5:33f ("you shall not swear falsely"), was dissatisfied with their conclusions. No totalitarian oath claiming divine functions could be given to the State. Barth saw Hitler's State in exactly this setting. Christians, swearing such oaths, betray both the Church and its Lord. Barth noted the Reformers had given outight approval to military service as a bounden duty. The State "bears the sword" (Rom.13) and as such participates in the "murderous nature of the present age". The Reformers were right for "human law needs the guarantee of human force". Barth even discussed possible Swiss defence sympathetically (and enlisted in the Swiss military reserve).[18]

A just State never demands love from its citizens but rather requires a "simple, resolute, and responsible attitude". When the State claims love it is becoming a Church, the Church a false god, and also an unjust State. An obvious gap in scriptural teaching is the absence of discussion of States where Christian citizens bear some responsibilities for the State. For Christians responsible involvement in political duty is essential (Rom.13, 1 Tim.2).

However can Christian service to the State end with prayer alone? Barth suggested Christians may need to reckon "with the possibility of revolution" . . . and "may have to 'overthrow with God' those rulers who do not follow the lines laid down by Christ". Indeed Barth concluded that democracy itself is a justifiable expansion of New Testament thought. By proclaiming divine justification in true scriptural preaching, teaching and sacraments the Church is, in creation, the force which founds and maintains the State.

Barth concluded that wherever freedom is recognized and where a true Church uses it correctly "we shall find a legitimate human authority and an equally legitimate human independence; tyranny on the one hand, and anarchy on the other, Fascism and Bolshevism alike, will be dethroned." This is the service the Church offers the State whereas it alone requires from the State nothing but freedom.[19]

Thus Barth's argument from exegesis saw a positive relationship between Church and State rather than one of opposites. His treatment of the subject was characteristically Christological. Barth's assertion that democracy most closely corresponded to the gospel was a judgement which later brought him into conflict with other theologians; and his criticism of Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms was also keenly felt. For Barth the Kingdom of God, founded in Jesus Christ, comprehends all creation and must include the State. Thus the link between God's kingdom and the earthly State is real and vital.

Barth was at pains to trace the essential unity of all creation in Christ. For him the State was not the result of sin but "an order of divine grace". In 1946 Barth visited Germany and lectured there on several topics including "The Christian Community and the Civil Community". This lecture aroused considerable attention and a revised and enlarged version was published in Engllish in 1954 in a collection, edited by R. Gregor Smith, *Against the Stream.*

Barth used the term, "community", to describe the "positive relationship and connexion" between both Christian and civil spheres, and to stress his concern with groups of humans. He saw the Christian community as the "commonalty of the people in one place, . . . called apart and gathered together as 'Christians' ". On the other hand the 'civil community' (the State) is the "commonalty of all the people in one place, under a constitutional system of government that is equally valid for and binding on them all, and which is defended and maintained by force".

The members of the civil community share no common awareness of their relationship to God. This community is moulded by neither faith, love nor hope. It has no creed and no gospel and needs physical force to secure its authority. The State has no safeguard against either neglecting or absolutising itself and thus destroying itself. The human community is much weaker, poorer and more exposed to danger in the State than in the Church.[20]

Thus Barth again sought to demonstrate the unity of all men under Christ and to examine the apparent opposition between Church and State. However he began not from biblical exegesis but from the Barmen Declaration of 1934 (especially the fifth thesis). There the Christian community is seen in "the still unredeemed world". From a distance it is impossible to distinguish between a Christian and a non-Christian. The Church can become sterile and its love grow cold. Therefore the Church should not regard the civil community too superciliously. Even the word **ekklesia** is borrowed from the political sphere. The Christian community always exists as a **politeia** with definite authorities, patterns of community life and divisions of labour. Even the most "spiritually" ordered Church has its parallels with the State's offices. "The Christian community knows man as a sinner capable of releasing the destructive forces of chaos and nothingness which would bring human time to an end". The civil community thus protects human society from chaos. Borrowing from O. Cullman he described the Christian community as the inner circle within the wider circle, enjoying the protection of the civil authority.[21]

Barth emphasised that the State "is not a product of sin", but "a constant of the divine Providence in its actions against human sin". According to Barmen's thesis no. 5 the State provides for the establishment of law and (relatively) for freedom, peace and humanity. The State may be perverted yet cannot escape from God. So also the Christian community cannot become indifferent to its political responsibility.

Barth maintained that the Church must remain the "inner circle of the Kingdom of Christ" and resist absorption into the civil community. Again the Christians must pray for the civil community. The civil power is binding on Christians although they are not blindly to obey. Examining Rom.13:1 and 5 he states Christians are there urged to be "subordinate" to the civil community, not "subject" as Luther (and he) had put it. Clearly Barth had had second thoughts, changing his earlier translation from "subjection" to subordination.

Quite properly he discouraged politicains from establishing "Christian" political parties. Political forms and systems "do not bear the distinctive mark of revelation". Barth suggested the appropriate subordination for the Christian community to make is made by proclaiming the Gospel and distinguishing between the just and unjust State, "between order and caprice, between the State as described in Rom. 13 and the State as described in Rev. 13".

Christian decisions in the political sphere must refer not to some so-called 'natural' law but rather to Christ. If the Christian community were to base its political responsibility on the assumption that it was interested in natural laws, it would not alter the power of God to make good out of evil, as He "always does in the political order". Although the problems in which the Church shares are 'natural', secular and profane the norm by which the Church is guided is not at all 'natural'.

The Church cannot simply take the Kingdom of God into the political arena, but rather reminds men of God's Kingdom. In this Kingdom there is no legislature, executive etc. Here is no sin to reprove nor chaos to check.[22]

Barth stated that the direction of Christian judgements in political affairs is not based on the analogical capacities of political organization. Rather the State exists as an allegory, or analogue to the Kingdom of God. As the State forms the outer circle, and the Church the inner circle, since both share a common centre, the state is capable of reflecting indirectly the truth of the Christian community. Barth's argument is questionable here. The State will far more likely make manifest 'natural' relative values and a tentative search for authority rather than reveal Christian truth. The latter is not its purpose.

The Church's political activity should always witness to Christ. The Church calls the State into co-responsibility before God. Barth reiterated his support for the "constitutional state" and "that twofold rule (no exemption from the full protection of the law)" for the Church. Barth's political opinions surfaced as he stated that the Church will choose between "the various socialistic possibilities (social-liberalism? co-operativism? syndicalism? free trade? moderate or radical Marxism?)" i.e. that movement from "which it can expect the greatest measure of social justice". Also the church will "withdraw from and oppose any out-and-out dictatorship such as the totalitarian State. The adult Christian can only wish to be an adult citizen, and he can only want his fellow citizens to live as adult human beings.[23]

The Church is opposed to conventions such as the restriction of political freedoms of certain classes and races "but supremely that of women". Since the Church is aware of the variety of spiritual gifts it will recognize the need to separate the different powers (executive, legislative and judiciary). Again this is an unusual argument and allows Barth's own politics to wear a theological dressing. He suggested the Church is the "sworn enemy of all secret policies and secret diplomacy" because Christ is the light to destroy the "works of darkness". And again Barth saw the Church opposed to regimentation, controlling and censoring of public opinion "because the human word is capable of being the mouthpiece of this free Word of God". He also generalilzed from the Church's ecumenism that it will therefore resist all parochial politics. This whole argument is flimsily based, not grounded on scripture.

Again Barth justified the use of violence, and Christian support of State violence in extreme circumstances, by referring to God's anger (unlike His eternal mercy). He was well aware that these assertions were similar to many built on natural law but saw this as revealing the correct but partial insight of the State. "The real Church must be the model and prototype of the real State".

Finally Barth reminded his readers of the Fifth Thesis of the Barmen Declaration; "The Bible tells us that, in accordance with a Divine ordinance, the State has the task of providing for law and peace in the world that still awaits redemption, in which the Church stands..." Thus for Barth the link between Church and State is Christ himself. The State may have relative independence yet is under His kingly rule.[24]

Barth in both "Church and State" and "The Christian Community and the Civil Community" carried the principle of analogy to extremes. The State is capable of reflecting an image of Christian truth, although this image is often distorted. The main difficulty most critics have found with Barth's political ethics is the apparent lack of control in his Biblical exposition and his analogies. Are the conclusions Barth draws from his analogies the only possible one? It seems doubtful.

From the Christological premise that God revealed Himself in Jesus Christ Barth drew the political conclusion that the Christian community should oppose all secret diplomacy and secret politics. Thielicke mischievously suggested that from the principle of 'Messianic secret' one might conclude that the Christian community should favour strict secrecy in politics and diplomacy.[25] Barth's use of analogy enabled him to reach the conclusions he desired but for this very reason such analogies are suspect.

Critics have pointed out the formalism and artificiality of his analogical method but suggest these are symptoms of a more profound error, i.e. the unhistorical nature of the whole of Barth's theology and his concentration almost absolutely on God and refusal to countenance an understanding of man from any position other than that of God. In his political ethics Barth thus argues from heaven to earth paying little or no attention to political complexities. Barth shows no appreciation of the attempts Christians have made both to love God and to work for a just political order. Also it seems doubtful whether Barth's theological method is consistently applicable in the political sphere to demonstrate the profound unity between Church and State which he seeks to show.

In "Church and State" Barth began with the Jesus/Pilate encounter where is contained all the insight the gospel has about the State. Therefore although Pilate reveals a "gangster State" we may discern "in this concave mirror" the God-established, righteous State which can "as little as the right Church be completely set aside because it rests upon divine institution and appointment".[26] Barth thus convincingly and consistently demonstrated that Pilate's authority, misused as it may be, comes from God. His weakness however seems plain when (especially in "The Christian Community and the Civil Community") he tried to identify the righteous State with democracy or some form of socialism. He was later severely criticised by Brunner and others for failing to condemn East European Communist regimes.

Barth's desire to show the vital and essential connection between Church and State, especially when others were cowed by domineering political forces is to his credit. He was surely right to condemn the theology of those who acquiesced in the rise of Hitler and to see in Lutheran teaching the possibility of political quietism among German Protestants. Yet his argument does not explain why Catholics in Bavaria, for instance, and in Italy also, failed to resist Fascist pretensions. Barth recognized that Luther's drawing apart of the two kingdoms had obscured their basic unity. If he failed adequately to justify his own political bias by scriptural reference and allowed his human frailty to show, at least he and some few others faced the threat to theology and the church from political totalitarianism and explored the way forward.

1. Lecture given by Barth to students in Leiden, 27th February 1939, quoted by E.Busch *Karl Barth : His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (1976) p.292.

2. E.Busch ibid. 69

3. J. Bowden *Karl Barth* (1971) p. 42.

4. E.Busch op.cit. pp. 190-1.

5. ibid. p. 218.

6. K.Barth *Church and State* (1939) p.4

7. ibid. p.6

8. ibid. p. 9.

9. ibid. p. 18.

10. ibid. p. 21.

11. ibid. p. 21.

12. ibid. p. 25.

13. ibid. p. 32.

14. ibid. pp. 48, 49.

15. ibid. pp. 55, 58, 61.

16. ibid. p. 64.

17. ibid. p. 68.

18. ibid. pp. 71, 74, 76

19. ibid. pp. 84, 86

20. K. Barth *Against the Stream* ed. R. Gregor Smith (1954) pp. 15-17

21. ibid. p. 20 O. Cullman *Konigscherrschaft Christi und Kirche im Neuen Testament* (1941)

22. ibid. pp. 22, 26, 28, 29, 31.

23. ibid. p. 37.

24. ibid. pp. 41, 42, 47.

25. H. Thielicke *Theologische Ethik* II 2, p. 452.

26. K. Barth *Dogmatics in Outline* (1966) pp. 110-13.

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# THE IMPOTENCE OF AGNOSTICISM

**Ian Walker**

Nowadays, Pascal's 'Wager' is not generally regarded as an argument of any consequence. Ever since Pascal's condemnation, by Pope Innocent X in 1653, his works have had a mixed or indifferent reception. I would like, however, to revive the argument by, as it were, turning it on its head.

The *Wager*, in brief, is this:

(1) Either God exists or he does not
(2) If God exists then the man who believes in him wins everything
(3) While, if God does not exist, the man who believes in him suffers only a finite loss.

The *Wager* is designed to show that there is advantage in belief in God that is not available in not believing in God. I will attempt to show a similar conclusion from the other end of things, i.e., there is disadvantage in not believing because of the very nature of some forms of disbelief.

First, we must be clear about one or two terms central to the debate:
(a) *Agnosticism*: (a-gnostic-ism) means literally 'not-knowing'. This, as far as I can see, may take two forms:
(1) The claim that religious belief does not make sense for one; not that it is, in principle, incomprehensible, but that it simply means nothing to one particular individual. Now this might be the result of un-interest, and here it will amount to saying, 'It just doesn't move me', or it may be the result of the fact that the enquirer simply cannot make anything of religious talk. So, to the proposition, 'God loves mankind', he might reply, 'I'm sorry, I just don't understand what that means; it means nothing whatsoever to me.'

This form of agnosticism does not suffer the difficulties of (2) below, for it entails no epistemic claims whatever and, as a consequence, cannot be accused of the kind of linguistic dupllicity I shall argue is involved in (2). The central issue here is that the agnostic does not claim to understand a notion he then rejects as untenable. He claims not to understand the notion at all. I can see nothing incoherent in this although I think it is not without its problems. As far as this paper is concerned, however, my argument is not with this kind of agnosticism.

(2) The belief that we do not have sufficient reason to know that there is, or is not, a God. It is this form of agnosticism on which I would like to concerntrate, but I shall defer the main body of my argument about this until I have noted just a little about two other terms.

(b) *Atheism*: (a-theism) means literally 'not-Godism', and it is the belief that there is no God of any kind. This may rest, as far as I can see, on either of the following:

(i) *Scepticism*. The ancestor of modern-day scepticism is, for many, David Hume. Hume employs reason to demonstrate the limitations of reason. The 'idea of a substance ... is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned to them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or to others, that collection' (*Treatise* I.i.6). Thus knowledge is limited to sense-data and perception of anything beyond, because of this limitation, is not possible. Hume's famous denial of causation led him to believe that all that we are in the habit of thinking of as cause and effect is really a matter of sequence; a habit of mind. We know nothing of the external world but impressions and copies of impressions between which we can discover only succession, but not necessary connection. Causation is thus only a subjective belief maintained by memory and expectation. Yet this, as has often been pointed out, makes for great problems. On what foundation is Hume going to insist on the distinction between truths of reason and matters of fact? It seems that the sceptic is not quite sceptical enough. Since it is assumed that there is no necessary connection between states of mind, no persistence of the self from moment to moment, it is not possible to be sure that the conclusions of an argument follow from the supposed premises. It is only by lack of courage that the sceptic saves nature and history, indeed, the world about him, from the flames to which he commits the Divinity.

(ii) *Theological doubt and anti-theism*. I group these two together because they suffer similar difficulties. Both make epistemic claims and so, in this respect, as we will see, they resemble (2) above. The theological doubter, unlike the agnostic, thinks that there are good enough reasons to incline him to disbelieve the claims of theism. These reasons might not be conclusive, but they are enough to engender doubt; but doubt about what? We shall see that this constitutes the central problem for the theological doubter and the agnostic as well.

Atheism that takes the form of anti-theism is the claim that there could not possibly be a God. Its *locus classicus* of recent years if Professor J.N. Findlay's famous, and, I believe, now recanted paper, 'Can God's Existence be Disproved?"[1] This kind of belief is that not only is there no God, but, given the concept of God as religion requires it, *there could not possibly be a God*. This , I believe, has been shown to be wrong on many occasions but the argument, quite simply, is this: Findlay's view is that God, defined as religion requires, necessarily does not exist. The reason for this is 'that Divine Existence can only be conceived, in a religiously satisfactory manner, if we also conceive it as something inescapable and necessary, whether for thought or reality. From which it follows that our modern denial of necessity or rational evidence for such an existence amounts to a demonstration that there cannot be a God' (p.48). This conclusion follows (so Findlay) because, if the concept of God requires that not only *actual* independent realities stand opposed to it but that such opposition is totally inconceivable, i.e. not only must the existence of other things be unthinkable without him but his own non-existence must be unthinkable, then if this is seen in relation to 'modern notions' of necessity it will be shown to be palpably false. Necessity in propositions merely reflects our use of words, the arbitrary conventions of language: 'on such a view the Divine Existence could only be a necessary matter if we had made up our minds to speak theistically *whatever the empirical circumstances might turn out to be*' (p.54). Thus the religious mind is in a quandary: 'it desires the Divine Existence both to have that inescapable character which can, on modern views, only be found where truth reflects an arbitrary convention, and also the character of "making a real difference" which is only possible where truth doesn't

have this merely linguistic basis' (p.55). Yet this is the kiss of death for religion, 'for if God is to satisfy religious claims and needs, he must be a being in every way inescapable. One whose existence and whose possession of certain excellences we cannot possibly conceive away. And modern views make if self-evidently absurd (if they don't make it ungrammatical) to speak of such a Being and to attribute existence to him' (p.55).

Now this argument has, I believe, been shown to be wrong[2]. I can, however, do no more at this point than say that its falsity lies in the fact that appeals to 'contemporary' or 'modern' views which 'show' that all existential propositions are necessarily contingent and all necessary propositions are necessarily non-existential does not constitute a sufficient premise to support the conclusion he draws. He simply has not argued his point. But this is not the main deficiency. All Findlay's argument amounts to is a denial of the ontological argument and, of course, the invalidity of this argument (if, indeed, it is invlaid) does not entail the flasity of its conclusion. Even still, Findlay has not shown that there can be no classes of necessary propositions, other than the ones he mentions, that *are* in fact, existential.

The point of significance here is that if it is impossible to establish that there could not possibly (in whatever sense of 'possible' you like) be a God then this form of atheism is wrong. I do not want to argue that because Findlay can't establish his conclusion that it can't be done (i.e., that because his argument is false the conclusion is also false). I think there may be other reasons why this form of atheism is, in principle, incoherent[3].

These then are the terms about which we should be clear in assessing the merits of the *Wager* and its revision which I shall now argue.

I will return to the question of the second form of agnosticism we have noted [(2) above]. This is the belief that we do not have sufficient reason to know that there is, or is not, a God. Now this form of agnosticism has several important consequences[4]. If the agnostic claims that we do not have sufficient reason to know that there is, or is not, a God, then this would seem to entail that he knows what it would be for a being to be God. If I say, 'We do not have sufficient reason to believe there are, or are not, fairies' then this means that I do not believe there is adequate evidence for the existence of beings that are, say, approximately six inches tall, are equipped with wings, and who live at the bottom of my garden. Presumably it makes no sense to affirm or deny, or to state that there are insufficient grounds to affirm or deny, the existence of something about which one knows nothing, or which one comprehends not. In other words, the agnostic is questioning the grounds to support the existence of a certain being *which has certain properties predicated of it.* Now if he claims to comprehend the *concept* of God he may find himself in some distinct difficulties. Will he side with the school of thought, of which Findlay is one, which holds that God's non-existence is logically impossible, or that the concept of God requires necessary existence? If so, he will become embroiled in the perennial debate whether a belief that God's non-existence is logically impossible is inconsistent with a belief that God might not exist. *One* way of construing this may take the form of accusing the agnostic of implicitly denying the principle of non-contradiction, i.e. (1) if God exists then his existence is necessary, (2) God might not exist. (1) is incompatible with (2) because if God's existence is necessary then it is not possible that he might not exist (not both p and not p). But this latter belief (2), that God might not exist, must surely be a minimum thesis of agnosticism.

If, on the other hand, he sides with the other camp and does not construe God's non-existence as logically impossible, it is hard to see how this belief amounts to little more than atheism. A view which asserts the contingency of God's existence is compatible with those held by, say, Sartre or Nietzsche. For Sartre, 'Dieu n'existe pas', he says, 'He (God) is dead, He spoke to us and is now silent. . .' And, in *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche (following Swinburne before him) tells the parable of the madman announcing the death of God in the market place and entering the churches of the realm to sing a *requiem aeternam deo* in recollection of the God who once was, but is now slain.

Now surely that is the whole force of saying that God's existence is contingent? It means that God might cease to exist. Yet when Sartre and Nietzsche affirm the logical consequence of the contingency concept of God's existence they are not being agnostics, but atheists. To say, 'God id dead' is the same, materially, as saying 'There is no God'. It could also be argued that it is the same, logically, as saying 'God might not exist'. It will not do to claim that the difference between the atheist and the agnostic in this respect is simply that one (the atheist) claims that God is dead while the other (the agnostic) holds a view which entails the possibility of God's death. This, after all, is an argument about the *nature* of God. It is clear that both Sartre and Nietzsche construe God's death as *the work of man.* This is an argument which can be enjoined by anyone who philosophizes; one can argue about whether God's existence is necessary or contingent without being a committed atheist, theist, or agnostic. So what makes the agnostic different from the atheist in this respect?

Agnosticism in the sense we are talking about is the belief that we do not have sufficient reason either to affirm or to deny God's existence. Presumably this sufficient reason, among other things, applies to the linguistic reasons about the nature of the concept of God. And therefore the agnostic must remain agnostic about the linguistic arguments. If this does not mean that the agnostic must be irrational over one area of linguistic debate (which I take it, it does not mean) it does mean that he might find it difficult to be committed to a view ('there is not sufficient reason to know that. . .') which requires non-commitment ('neither God is nor is not . . .') and yet to which, if he is to claim to understand the view about which he is uncommitted (there is nothing incoherent about being committed to a view which is one of non-commitment). Or is there? Compare Marcus Aurelius: 'there is only one thing of which you can be certain and that is that there is nothing of which you can be certain) then there must be, at least, some level of commitment (i.e. if God is, he is this, rather than that . . .).

(Frege[5] draws a distinction between first-level and second-level concept-expressions. Concept-expressions of the first-level are those which require completion with a name (or singular term) to yield a grammatical sentence. Those of the second-level require completion by a first-level concept-expression to yield a grammatical sentence. There is no difficulty in identifying predicates with Frege's first-level concept-expressions. 'Exists', however, has a strong claim to membership of the second-level. The ordinary predicate calculus treats '(Ex) (-x)' as a second-level expression, with the gap to be completed by a predicate. One consequence of this, which I have argued in 'The Logical Status of "God"' (op.cit.), is that once a Descriptivist Theory of Names is abandoned, it is no longer possible to treat positive and negative existentials as about concepts – as say, of a particular concept, that it is or is not uniquely instantiated. Accordingly, 'exists', can no longer be treated as a second-level predicate requiring completion by a first-level predicate; it must be seen as on a par logically with ordinary first-level predicates, requiring completion

by a singular term to form a sentence. This, besides raising difficulties such as those surrounding the possibility of a valid ontological argument for the existence of God, widens the gap between quantificational logic and the ordinary language sentences it is intended to symbolise.)

Now what does all this do for the *Wager*? We might restate it as follows:

(1) If God exists then his existence is necessary (because it it were possible that he might not exist then he would not be God).

(2) If a man believes that God's existence is necessary and yet believes that God might not exist then he is maintaining a view which is self-contradictory (both p and not p).

We have seen that one form of agnosticism at least amounts to this view. Therefore, one form or agnosticism, at least, is self-contradictory.

But suppose that I am wrong about (2) above. Suppose it is possible to maintain both:
(a) that God's non-existence is logically impossible (i.e. that his existence is necessary) and,
(b) that God might not exist.
At this point I am not really interested in *how* this might be possible but one can imagine various arguments, say, that (a) is a notion which relates to propositions only, whereas (b) is an existential proposition. Whatever the reason may be, however, suppose that it is possible to maintain both (a) and (b) without contradiction. I suggest that the agnostic, in asserting (b), is espousing a view which amounts to little less than atheism[6].

A minimum requirement of atheism is that it is possible that God might not exist, which is entailed by 'God does not exist'. Both these propositions could be regarded as, respectively, the necessary and sufficient conditions of atheism (note here that old principle of modal logic: *ab esse ad posse valet consequentia*— whatever is the case can be the case). God does not exist, therefore it is possible that God does not exist. Now this minimum requirement of atheism (it is possible that God does not exist) is a simple statement of the contingency concept of God's existence embodied in (b) which is, in turn, a sufficient condition of at least one form of agnosticism. Therefore, one form of agnosticism is equivalent to a minimal requirement of atheism.

How, some might ask, does this relate to the *Wager*? The anser, in fact, is quite simple: the argument I have put forward is largely about *what is believed*, i.e. the things believed by theists [(i) that God's existence is necessary], by agnostics [(ii) that God might not exist], and by atheists [(iii) that God does not, or could not, exist]. The *Wager*, on the other hand, is largely about the advantages or disadvantages of certain sorts of belief, i.e. if one believes (i) then one stands to gain more than if one believes (iii). At the beginning of this paper I said that I would like to revive the *Wager* by 'turning it on its head', and by this I meant that while the *Wager* was designed to show that there is advantage in belief, I have attempted to show that there is disadvantage in certain forms of disbelief. My attempt, and the *Wager*, do not amount to the same thing because even if there is disadvantage in certain forms of disbelief or unbelief this does not mean that there is therefore advantage in certain forms of belief. Such a conclusion would be a simple logical error. I have tried to show that there is a certain inconsistency in one form of agnosticism and that this same difficulty does not apply to theism.

The agnostic gains no advantage in maintaining the sort of belief we have been examining for several reasons. One is the simple reason that it is undesirable to contradict oneself. The second has to do with a general observation I would like to hazard, but one which I cannot hope to substantiate. All I can note is that it is a view I have often heard expressed. It is that agnosticism is, somehow or other, more 'intellectually respectable' than, say, atheism; that the agnostic is 'keeping his options open' in that, unlike the atheist, he is not committed to a view which may prove false. In short, agnosticism is sometimes construed to be a detached, uncommitted view. If my argument against agnosticism is correct then this general presumption is false. Not only may agnosticism be more closely allied to atheism than is sometimes assumed, it may also, at least in the form we have considered, be wrong. There can be no 'intellectual respectability' attaching to a view which is wrong.

Agnosticism, therefore, if it is construed in the way I have outlined it (which I suggest it often is), is impotent.[7]

1. *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. A.G.N. Flew and A. MacIntyre, SCM, London, 1955.

2. See *New Essays*, op. cit., G.E. Hughes, pp. 56-67, and A.C.A. Rainer, pp. 67-71.

3. I do not have space to argue this here, but it is not essential to the general thesis I will presently argue, viz, that one major form of agnosticism is impotent.

4. On the consequences of this belief see my "The Logical Status of 'God'" in *Religious Studies*, Vol. 16., No. 2, June 1980, pp. 217-228.

5. *Foundations of Arithmetic*, para. 53, 'Function and Concept', p. 38 in Geach and Black, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic*, para. 21.

6. Mr Christopher Kirwan of Exeter College Oxford suggested to me that if we take (b) as meaning 'God's existence is not necessary', someone who believes it will be committed to atheism if he also believes (1) (that if God exists then his existence is necessary). But, he argued, (b) could also be read, quite differently, as 'God's existence is not certain', which is a statement of agnosticism and which commits its proponent to no more than agnosticism even if he combines it with belief in (1). This, however, it seems to me, does not mitigate the force of my argument because 'God's existence is not certain' is elliptical for saying 'God might not exist'. Whilst the former is more a statement about an individual's beliefs and the latter *appears* to be a statement with ontological import the effects for the argument are the same. In modal terms, the two statements can still be expressed as 'It is possible that God does not exist' and this, after all, is exactly the statement I have considered throughout this latter section of the paper.

7. I have benefitted, in my consideration of this problem, from discussions with my students at Dulwich College, Adrian Crickmer and Richard Mico.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

**Early Arianism – A view of salvation.** By Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh. SCM Press. London 1981. xiii + 209 pages. £12.50.

It is time someone did something for Arius and his friends. This book promises to be the necessary attempt to understand the inward and Christian motivation of the doctrines which have been for centuries reviled and despised. In a bold thesis, the authors claim that to the early Arians the creatureliness of the Son of God was the key to man's salvation. His status as Son itself, and all his other glories, flow from his freely chosen obedience to the God who created him. His life in the flesh was one of moral advance culminating in the suffering of death, and as his reward he is crowned with adoptive sonship, which is also his by anticipation before the world existed. Christians illuminated by him travel the same road to the same sonship. It is precisely because he is **not** consubstantial with the Father that he saves us, being the created, changeable but undeviatingly virtuous Captain of our salvation. "This bold insistence upon the things 'common to us and the Son', which nettled the champions of orthodoxy from the outset of the dispute, manifests the deepest interests of the followers of Arius" (p. 68). The union between Christ and God is one of will, mutual favour and obedience. Athanasius' **Life of Antony** reveals a conscious attempt to challenge the appeal of the rugged Arian spirituality to monastic support. So in the early Arian period "ecclesiastics were confronted with the choice between an orthodoxy in which grace had come to be the entry into a stabilized order of redeemed creation and an Arianism in which grace empowered people for moral advance in a transactional universe" (p. 193).

Bold and attractive as it is, the thesis is also wrong. It depends on mistaken exegesis of crucial texts and on accepting the slanders of the Arians' enemies as representing their true position. Where the exegesis is concerned, one has only to look at the repeated use made of a couplet from the Thalia (Opitz, *Urkunde* 3, p. 242 lines 14-15). This text is interpreted "he (God) advanced him as a Son to himself by adoption" (pp. 23, 56, 73, 96). Yet the word translated "advanced" or "raised" is *enenken*, which commonly means "bore" or "produced" like babies or fruit. And "by adoption" stands for *tonde teknopoiesas*, which means "having given birth to *this* one" (*tonde* is emphatic). Rather than stating that Christ is a creature just like other men, which is what Gregg and Groh make him say, Arius is expressing in crude, almost violent, anthropomorphic terms the unique sonship of Christ. This extends to using active verb *teknopoio* which normally expresses the mother's part in procreation, the middle being used for the father's begetting. Arius said: "The Unbegun appointed the Son to be Beginning (or, Chief) of the things which he fathered *(ton gennematon)*, and produced him as a Son for himself, giving birth to this one." But however often Arius said "A creature, but **not** as one of the creatures; begotten, but **not** as one of the begotten things", Athanasius was determined to fix on him the lie that he meant "a creature **just like us**". Gregg and Groh give the slander italics and take it as Arian Gospel. By a wry irony, their first page contains both statements, "implicitly or explicitly we all play Arius' songs in an Athanasian key," and "The Alexandrian bishops had it exactly right." Gregg and Groh have fallen into Athanasius' trap. He repeatedly poses the dilemma, "**Either** the Son is consubstantial with the Father, **or** he is a creature **just like us**, adoptive son **just like us**." The Arians, when allowed to get a word in, consistently argue, "The bible calls him created, but he is not like any other creature; begotten, but uniquely begotten from the Father alone, unlike all other begettings." Why do we not take them at their word?

There are other pieces of inaccurate and perverse exegesis in the book; I have cited only the worst, which exposes the weakness of the argument at its most important point. Two other topics deserve mention. First, the chapter on Antony promises much, but achieves little. Athanasius' hero comes out of the desert and denounces Arius, but only in conventional theological terms, never in terms of the alleged soteriology. The authors show that the *Life of Antony* contains some Anthanasion soteriology, but that is not necessarily an anti-Arian soteriology. Secondly, the indexes are a disgrace to the authors and publisher. The first could be given to a novice to show how not to make an index of subjects (reams of references with no articulation). The second lists references to ancient authors without enabling you to locate the discussion of a particular passage. They are of little use to the reader.

I wish the authors well, believing that Arius is still the victim of Alexandrian episcopal misrepresentation. But they will have to start again. Surer foundations are laid in Christopher Stead's 'The Thalia of Arius' in JTS NS 29 (1978) 20-52, and the subtle study of Rudolf Lorenz, *Arius judaizans?* (Gottingen 1979). But if Gregg and Groh make us all think again about Arius, they will have done a good service.

Stuart G. Hall

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**Explorations in Theology: 9.** By Ronald H. Preston. SCM Press, 1981. x + 182 pp. £5.95.

Professor Preston is almost the last (and certainly the most youthful, despite his recent retirement) of the little group of moralists who have given shape to the moral reasoning of English Christianity in the last thirty years: among them, Canon V.A. Demant, Bishop Robert Mortimer (following upon Bishop Kenneth Kirk) and Bishop Ian Ramsey: men who **changed** that shape from the moulds in which pioneers of a generation before had pressed it, notably Canon Peter Green of Manchester and Canon Lindsay Dewar of St Albans; with Canon Herbert Waddams of Canterbury and Canon G.B. Bentley of Windsor torn several ways in between. In this group Canon Preston's work has been distinctive: first, because he read Economics under R.H. Tawney at the L.S.E. before he read Theology, and he has never unlearned that discipline, enabling him to explore economic, industrial and some social issues as none other of us has; and secondly because he is the most travelled among us, the most journeyed with the World Council of Churches. In one essay in this book he describes himself as "a white, elderly, ordained priest of the Church of England, wholly English in my antecedents and career, though laced with a lifetime's concern for, and involvement in, the ecumenical movement." This collection of some of his occasional pieces, and the appended bibliography of his published writings, is a record of his attempt to escape from what he calls these "limitations".

But how can he escape? Whither shall he go? Not wholly to the W.C.C. or any of its constituent churches. While he can claim an authority for the deliverances of the Geneva and Uppsala gatherings of 1966 and 1968 as near infallilbillity as he dare go (chapter 2, A Breakthrough in Ecumenical Social Ethics?) and though he can defend the W.C.C. against the heavy artillery of Paul Ramsey of Princeton and others, yet he can criticize also, and that discerningly. He could not live in the Two Kingdoms with the Lutherans; nor in other-wordly if wealthy piety with the Southern Baptists; nor with the selective and tendentious misuse of Scripture with the Liberationists; nor with the facile isolationism of the situationists or the futuristic optimism of the theologians of Hope: "The more one emphasizes radical newness and discontinuity, the more useless it is in providing a guide to the present." (Chapter 5, From the Bible to the Modern World). If not Geneva, what of Rome? Could he lodge there, where he has many friends, from SODEPAX, from the Human studies in Lugano, and in the Association of Teachers of Moral Theology in which he is one of the few non-Roman members, and of them the most faithful? Alas, he could not live with the magisterial **method** in moral theology (he admires *Gaudium et Spes* for its content rather than for its magisterial status and conciliar authority); he could never live at ease with that distortion of the natural law tradition which made of ***Humanae Vitae*** the stone of stumbling and rock of offence it has become in the contemporary Roman conscience.

In short, nowhere will he breathe more freely – whether he like it or not – than in the Church of England which his work has so conspicuously adorned. Witness his handling of Scripture (chapter 1, Ethical Criticisms of Jesus; and chapter 5 again); he is good on Jesus (did he not edit T.W. Manson's posthumous *Ethics and the Gospel* (1960), a work omitted from the bibliography?), though hard on St Paul, from whose treatment of things indifferent and Gentile meats I believe he draws the wrong conclusions, forsaking moral reasoning for mere moralizing. He has, for all his overt inconoclasm, a healthy respect for tradition; witness his admiration for Kenneth Kirk's *Vision of God* and understanding of conscience. He knows the key-stone place of reason, in discerning the moral claims which arise when the facts of the case, the empirical features, are set out, studied and ordered in the light of Christian theology, of God's revelation of Himself through the Greeks, the Jews, and the Incarnate Son (chapter 7, Anglican and Ecumenical Styles in Social Ethics). His is the ancestral Anglican **practical** divinity, not speculative (chapter 3, Middle Axioms; chapter 4, On the Theological Fringe; chapter 6, his Introduction to William Temple's *Christianity and Social Order*). Above all, he remains a pastor and a priest. Who would expect to find, in a paper on Transnational Social Ethics (chapter 11), written in 1979 **this** answer to the question how the churches can help business executives in their ethical research: "the first thing the church can do for them is to help them to draw more fully on God's resources by public worship, private meditation, and study"? Canon Preston can do no other than to live thankfully with these his "limitations". In only one aspiration of his do I wish him no success: it is to make the Church of England less of what it is, in order to make it more like others which it is not. In the created order genetic diversity is an essential condition of evolutionary growth; it cannot be otherwise in the order of grace. If God so clothe the grass of the field, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

G.R. Dunstan

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## Dictionary of Medical Ethics (Revised and Enlarged Edition)

Edited by A.S. Duncan, G.R. Dunstan, R.B. Welbourn

Darton Longman & Todd 1981 £12.50

The first edition of this Dictionary, a pioneer work, was extremely well received. In this new edition nearly all the articles have been revised, some of them extensively, and a significant number of new entries and cross-references have been added. In addition two essays, one on medical science and one on medical ethics, have been included. Because of its Centre of Law, Medicine and Ethics, King's College London has a particular interest both in this subject area and in this book. Professor Gordon Dunstan, a Director of the Centre, is one of the editors and jhas contributed a number of entries to the Dictionary. Ian Kennedy (the 1981 Reith Lecturer) is another Director and, drawing on his experience both in the U.S.A. and in this country, has contributed the entry on the rights of the unborn child.

I considered the Dictionary mainly from the point of view of its interest to parish priests and the general reader. Such people need clear, factual information about what is happening in various fields of medicine and an idea of what the ethical dilemmas look like from a doctor's point of view. Herein lies the great strength of this book. For example, a reader aware of the current controversy over the treatment of severely mal-formed babies can find a two page article on **spina bifida** in which a consultant paediatric surgeon shows what the present situation is and how it has arisen and gives the criteria for deciding whether or not to operate on babies suffering from a severe form of this disease. Professor John Lorber of Sheffield, whose analysis of 524 cases of babies who were not selected for operation has been influential, and who is at the centre of the particular dilemma, contributes an article on **congenital malformations**. The reader might then look of *Life, Prolongation of: Ordinary and Extraordinary Means* by Professor Dunstan.

The book is wide-ranging in its scope and contains articles on such subjects as Chinese medicine, the problem of drugs in sport, marriage counselling (by Dr. J. Dominian), homosexuality, and animal experiments. Most non-medically qualified people will find the entries in this Dictionary educative. The general public now has to think about questions of medical ethics and this book puts people in touch with the medical facts and current practice. Will the Dictionary be equally educative for medically qualified people who need help in philosophical and theological areas? If I have less confidence it is primarily because of the allocation of space. For example, the article on abortion has four pages by Dame Josephine Barnes and hardly two pages on general ethical considerations by Professor Dunstan. Partly it reflects the fact that the majority of contributors to this book are medical practitioners. I would like to have seen more articles from people with a philosophical background.

The ethical standpoint from which most articles are written is reasonably uniform and clear. It is that which has been characteristic of much Anglican ethics as practised in recent years, careful, questioning, and undogmatic. Where the issues are complex, this is recognised and false over-simplification is avoided. For example, the article on abortion suggests that there may be a 'justifiable feticide' analogous with 'justifiable homicide'. "The Western ethical tradition does not place an **absolute** value on human life – for that would imply that no life might ever be taken, and that every life must be prolonged so far as possible by every available means. It places a **very high** value on human life, with a presumptive right to protection so strong that anyone who violates that right, or fails to protect it, has to justify his action or non-action before appropriate legal tribunals." In some entries, for example that on Euthanasia, the two main viewpoints are stated but are regarded as irreconcilable.

Nearly all articles have up-to-date references to the relevant literature. The publishers are to be congratulated on bringing out a revised and enlarged edition after only four years. But it sets a precedent and I suspect that with new research and quickening public interest a new edition will be needed at least every decade.

Richard Harries

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**The Church Struggle in South Africa. John W. de Gruchy SPCK, 1979. £4.95**

The South African government claims that it is a Christian government, defending a piece of Western civilisation against a Marxist conspiracy to overthrow it. At the same time, most of the world church condemns the policies and the action of this same government. How can this be? What is the history and the position of christianity and the churches in South Africa? In this book, John de Gruchy, a South African minister in the United Congregational Church, and a lecturer in the University of Cape Town, attempts to chart the stand of the Christian Church in South Africa during the last 100 years, and particularly since the Nationalists gained power in 1948.

It would be fair to say that this book is based very firmly on documents and statements of the churches in South Africa, and of its leading theologians. It is not a study of the sociology of the churches (although he recognises the gap that so often exists between the official, synodal, statements of the church, and the faith and action of the individual members). It also barely touches the life of the African churches which are not in the main stream, i.e. the Ethiopian and independent African churches which have grown up in South Africa as in so many parts of the continent. However the author does point out that there are far more African church members of the main churches than there are European members.

The book is arranged chronologically. He firstly deals with the foundation of the church in South Africa, and particularly, in the last century. The Dutch Reformed Church was the church of the main group of early (Dutch) colonists. The Church of England (to be slowly followed by other English denominations) was the church of the imperial power which took over the Cape Colony after the Napoleonic wars. Although both groups of Europeans were clear about the subserviant position of the Africans, the position of the church was different. For example, in 1829 the synodal of the Dutch Reformed Church stated that according to the "infallible Word of God", Holy Communion was to be administered "simultaneously to all members without distinction of colour or origin". But thirty years later, the synod was suggesting that it might be permissible "as a result of the weakness of some" to meet and worship in separate buildings. One eventual result was the formation of separate African branches of the Dutch Reformed Church, which were to bring Africans to positions of prominence and leadership on their own. De Gruchy also carefully chronicles the exceedingly close cultural ties between the Dutch Reformed Church (and also the more extremist "Gereformeerde Kerk" or Reformed Church) and the Afrikaan nation. These links were born of the fight by the Afrikaaners to keep their national identity in a hostile physical environment, surrounded by an overwhelming number of alien people. This feeling was intensified by the hostile attitude of the British imperial power, which finally resulted in the "Great Trek", and later (and more bitterly), the Boer War in which 27,000 Afrikaaner women and children with many black servants died in British concentration camps.

De Gruchy deals with this history of struggle against colonial domination because it is a significant factor in the present problem. It explains why the Afrikaaners are able to say, and believe, that they are as African as the blacks. It also explains the historical roots of the identification of the DRC with Afrikaaner nation.

The book then goes straight to the victory by the Nationalists in 1968. A series of consultations and meetings took place between the churches, including the DRC, about the work of the church. In the meeting in Pretoria in 1953, the official statement included the shrewd comment that the conference was divided into three groups: "those who sincerely believed in a righteous racial separation in the church based on the Scriptures; secondly, those who made no such confession but never the less practised some form of separation because circumstances demanded it although such separation did not correspond with the ideals of the Christian Church; thirdly, those who were conviced that separation in the church was wrong and stood condemned according to Scripture". (The author comments that not a single one of the 107 delegates there was an African – today quite unthinkable). But the Cottesloe consultation, shortly after the Sharpeville massacre in 1960, was a crucial turning point. The DRC were present, and also the very conservative Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk (NHK). The final statement included a range of, for South Africa, radical statements which clearly stated the equality of all people, and did so in specific terms (e.g. by showing the disastrous effects of migratory labour on blacks). The NHK delegates rejected it, but the DRC delegation – which included a number of the top leaders and theologians of the church – accepted the statement. However the DRC as a whole was later to reject it – with the support of the Prime Minister and the more conservative elements in the church.

The author deals with the DRC with great understanding. Calvinism is not in itself the conservative force that it has often been thought to be. The idea of a church continually reforming itself is revolutionary in the extreme. But the essence of the problem, and for the African theologians and churches as well, is exemplified in the quotation from Roland Bainton. "If there is no accommodation (to culture) Christianity is unintelligible and cannot spread", but "if there is too much accommodation it will spread, but it will no longer be Christianity". Theological support by the DRC for apartheid is based on an interpretation of the

bible. Although the scriptures "teach and uphold the essential unity of mankind and the primordial relatedness and fundamental equality of mankind", ethnic diversity is also a fundamental reality in the bible. Only at the final coming of the Kingdom of God will the real unity of God's people be experienced. Apartheid is not according the DRC, a fundamental principle, but a reality which is not necessarily wrong. And, as de Gruchy points out many others (such as J.H. Oldham, one of the founders of the World Council of Churches) have said the same thing. But this "reality" has to be cricially examined – is the separation a way of sharing in a truly equal manner, or is it a way of ossifying the status quo to the advantage of one group only? Clearly it is the latter, and it is a sad fact that the DRC is not accepting it's revolutionary roots, but has become too culturally identified with one group, with one ideology.

The rejection of the Cottesloe statement by the DRC as a whole, and the resignation of that church from the World Council of Churches showed that agreement at the top was not sufficient. The Christian Institute therefore, was set up with the aim of education and fellowship at the grass roots. In some respects, it was inspired by the Confessing Church in Germany before the last war. It was an attempt to disassociate Christians from a "national" church, which had belcome the religious promoter of the official political ideology. The Institute was led by the Afrikaaner DRC leader, Beyers Naude, a delegate at the Cottesloe meeting, who was later to be expelled from the DRC, and eventually was to be a banned person. The Programme to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches (announced, the author shows, in a most unfortunately inept manner in 1970) resulted in a demand by the South African government that the other South African churches get out of the WCC. In fact, they did not, though they are forbidden to send money to it.

But, inevitably, the story and the Christian leadership begins to pass to the majority of the country, the Africans. The Soweto riots have introduced a new stage in the development of the conflict, and the rise of Black liberation theology has brought a new group of thinkers on to the Christian stage. What is more, the words of the black theologians are very direct. Speaking in 1973, Manas Buthelezi pointed out that (1) as Africans were by far the majority in the population the Gospel had to be relevant particularly to them; (2) because the society in South Africa was one that was almost exclusively designed for whites, it was no good whites being missionaries, and talking about blacks as brothers; (3) the black has to take the initiative – it was no good being passive; (4) the African had to see his blackness as a gift from God – and not as a means of white rejection; (5) the black theologian therefore had to form a theology which was independent of white institutions. Bishop Desmond Tutu, the black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches declared that "the white man will never be free until the black man is wholly free". Other black theologians have gone on to emphasise this point – that in many ways the physical imprisonment and exploitation of Africans is reflected in the spiritual and psychological imprisonment of the whites. And only Africans can make them free. But the author also warns against the danger that the black theologians will fall into the same trap that the Afrikaans theologians and churchmen ha ve. The Christian faith must be relevant to the Africans – but must not become bound to their present dilemma and fight.

This book is relevant, not just because Southern Africa is one of the trouble spots of the world – a possible spark for a third world war. Not only because of the situation – an off-shoot of our own history – is crucial in itself. But also because it is a study of the Christian Church in circumstances where the church has had to make a political stand, like it or not. Our own society is in travail. What Christian thinking at official and at other levels is going on to face up to the challenges that we face? A year after the Soweto riots, the South African Church leaders attempted to provide a "true interpretation of the riots". They stated: "We urge all our members to listen to the anguished plea of Black people which has so often gone unanswered and has now resulted in violence". Will our church leaders be considering the riots in Brixton and in Toxteth? Will the churches be able to bring a healing but a courageous and incisive word to assist our politicians? The issue in South Africa is literally black and white. But there are many similar problems in today's Britain which claim the attention of Christians and the Christian church.

Kees Maxey

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**From Hiroshima to Harrisburg: The Unholy Alliance,** Jim Garrison SCM London 1980, £5.50

Like Garrison, I oppose both military and civil nuclear power; unlike him, I consider that the two issues should be kept separate. They are morally different and to conflate them is impolitic.

Deterrence is inescapably the conditional intention to wage indiscriminate and disproportionate nuclear war. It cannot be bluff because, as all strategists agree, 'crisis management' – going to the brink of catastrophe – is an essential part of deterrence. If morality inheres in intention as well as action then deterrence is grossly immoral. All those engaged in it should desist. How we should withdraw from the current morally untenable position is a subject of legitimate and at present anguished debate. (I argue for deep unilateral cuts by the West, aimed at starting a process of disarmament independent of the paralysing numbers game of negotiation, in *Ethics and Nuclear Deterrence* ed. Geoffrey Goodwin, Croom Helm London 1982.)

Garrison does not essay moral judgement of deterrence. He discusses at length the invention of the atom bomb, its use against Japanese cities, the psychological impact of this use as analysed in Robert Lifton's excellent Penguin *Death in Life: the survivors of Hiroshima*, and some postwar nuclear weapons developments. The difficult and complicated question of how the origins of the cold war relate to the bomb is seen off with vague accusations of American failure to 'show bold initiative and trust' in 1945 (69). The complicated and vital concept of deterrence gets only 2½ pages (87-90). What we must do about deterrence, it appears, is to get rid of the nation-state which is anachronistic in 'the Age of Overkill'. 'Tragically', this cannot be done (121-8). In short, Garrison has no practical proposals on military nuclear power.

I know of no argument of **principle** against civil nuclear power; the objections are **prudential**. It seems unwise to proliferate throughout the world a power system which is one (not the only) route to nuclear weapons, a ready and charismatic target for terrorists (whom Garrison surprisingly ignores), productive of waste that remains dangerous for far longer than man can reasonably expect to recall its precise location, and (as Garrison emphasises) prone to lethal accidents. One might add that now, with the world in recession, is the time for a massive effort to have ready renewable energy sources for the time when we will again be told that there is an energy gap which only civil nuclear power can fill.

Garrison draws no distinction between principle and prudence; he seeks to tar civil nuclear power with the bomb's blackness. He favours the energy policy espoused by Amory Lovins of Friends of the Earth. How is this excellent policy to be commended to governments, electorates and industry? If Garrison has an answer to this question it is 'nonviolence' which 'I would define... here as the path each of us is challenged to take to resensitize ourselves with our emotions, our bodies, our connections with each other and the earth. Nonviolence is the reconnection each one of us feels between his or her **individual** life and the **source** of all life' (245-6, his italic).Nonviolence is not 'conducive to [sic] monolithic or centralized definition' but 'certain principles... can be suggested as guidelines'. These are: to become aware of 'the full dimensions of the nuclear weapons/reactor complex in society and the degree each of us is affected by it'; to refuse to divide the world into them and us; and to avoid cooperation with the evil of nuclear power. This avoidance may involve 'insulating one's home, installing a solar panelling system or conserving energies in existing systems;... writing to your government representative [sic] about your concerns, actively joining in protest marches and occupations of nuclear weapons/reactor sites or merely informing friends of the problem' (252-3). This *ad hoc* list, with illegal action casually included without discussion of the morality and prudence of such action, hardly amounts to a set of guidelines.

To conflate military and civil nuclear power as Garrison seeks to do is impolitic as well as a confusion of principle with prudence. Political action requires the patient building of effective consensus. Different allies may be forthcoming in respect of opposition to military and to civil nuclear power. One's scope for action is diminished if one insists on eliding the two problems.

Barrie Paskins

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**Marx Against the Marxists,** Jose P Miranda. SCM Press 1980
xiii + 316 pp, £5.50 (limp edition)

Marx continues to fascinate and horrify modern intellectuals, and political systems shaped by his thought are seen by some as man's greatest hope for freedom and by others as his greatest contemporary form of bondage. Within the thought and writings of Karl Marx – perhaps like his main philosophical influence, Hegel – there is a basic ambiguity and lack of clarity. This is one reason for the widely differing evaluations of Marx, each finds it not difficult to read into Marx their own particular interpretation.

This is manifestly what Miranda has done with this latest book. Subtitled "The Christian Humanism of Karl Marx", the book sets out to prove that "at the height of his maturity Karl Marx was a Christian and believed in God". This thesis, quoted on the cover of the book, proved impossible for this reviewer to pin down in the text, and it may be that the revision that occurred between the 1978 Spanish edition and the 1980 English translation accounts for this discrepancy. It has to be said that Miranda's book, while it has all the trappings of scholarship with extensive quotations from Marx's writings, is frustrating and misleading as either an exposition of Marx's thought or a discussion of the alleged "Christian humanism" of Marx.

Miranda writes against two groups of Marxists. He is against the revisionists (presumably the whole Social Democratic tradition, although this is not made clear), and also against the "Neo-orthodoxy of Stalin and Althusser" (29). Like many contemporary expositors of Marx (e.g. McLellan), Miranda wants to distinguish between Marx's original thought, and the later developments. With a wide series of quotations from Marx (and Engels), he seeks to show that Marx was not the crude materialist he is often portrayed as, that his economic determinism was nothing like the 'iron law' of Marxist-Leninism dogma, and that there is within his thought a genuine moral and even spiritual humanism. If this was as far as Miranda went, the book would be saying nothing very new to those who have moved beyond mere polemics in their reading of Marx. But his thesis is far wider, namely that Marx was a Christian and that the incompatibility between Christianity and Marxism professed by both sides is just not true.

This thesis can only be maintained by falsifying both the content of Christianity and Marx's thought. Marx's thought developed as part of the Young Hegelian movement, with Engels, Bruno Bauer, Strauss, and Feuerbach, and their attack is their desire to overthrow religion, Bauer and Strauss in terms of a radical criticism of its foundations, Feuerbach in terms of a "resolving the religious world into its secular basis" (Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach"), and Marx and Engels in terms of an explanation of religion as the 'false consciousness' of an alienated humanity. The writings of the early Marx, i.e. 1843-45, are crucial here, yet Miranda pays little attention to them, or to this historical situation. He recognizes in chapter 9, "Marx's Thought as a Conscious Continuation of Early Christianity", that Marx does attack Christianity (how could he do otherwise), but maintains that "the God of the Bible is incompatible with religion" (224). In other words, what Marx attacked was not authentic Christianity but a radical falsification of the faith. There is some truth in this, the religious establishment did little to alleviate the sufferings of the industrial workers, but this fault they shared with the rest of society by and large. But Miranda goes on to maintain that not only was Marx baptized but "did in fact hold the Christian faith" (226).

Miranda's thesis is unconvincing. He writes that he has proved that "Marx and Engels saw their communism as a conscious continuation of authentic Christianity" (240). Whether they did think that is a moot point, the more important point is that Miranda so reduces Christianity in its content that it is no more than a vague post-Christian humanism. Such a secularized religion may well be a legitimate interpretation of Hegel and the Young Hegelians, it has very little to do with authentic Christianity. In a sense Miranda gives the game away in the English Preface: "The Christianity of an author does not consist exclusively in his or her affirmation of the existence of God... if Marx's fundamental and thoroughgoing criticism of capitalism centers around the fact that capitalism does not respect human beings as persons, as real subjects and agents, then that analysis turns out to be eminently Christian. And that is far more substantial and important than explicit professions of faith . . . Christianity means solid, unequivocal humanism." (xi) Wading through Miranda's Hegelian and Marxist "science" (see p.293) convinced me that here is neo-Marxism written in Hegelian lack of clarity, with a very idiosyncratic Christian label on the cover.

Raymond M Vince

**Constantine Versus Christ** by Alistair Kee. SCM Press, 1982, pp. 186, £5.95.

Alistair Kee's book is written with verve. He has the zest of a propagandist and anyone inclined to sympathize with his cause will read with delight, as will anyone who likes to see a scholarly case presented with clarity and vigour.

The question concerns the nature of Constantine's religion. Opinion still divides between those who believe his Christian conversion was genuine and those who hold he was (in Burkhardt's words) 'essentially unreligious'. Dr Kee goes carefully through the evidence and finds ample support for a third view: that Constantine was religious but his religion was not Christianity. He was a monotheist of a generally Platonist colour, who found in such a faith the numinous providential backing needed for the fulfilment of his political purposes. His overriding purpose was the unity of the Empire under his own unshared rule. For its attainment, he was clear that the Church, which persecution had failed to eliminate, must be wooed and won. On the side of belief, monotheism provided a sufficient basis. On the side of practical life, the Church was only too relieved to be quit of persecution and to enjoy the novel pleasure of acceptance at court.

But could such an attenuated faith satisfy the Christian leaders? The evidence here presented points to something close to intellectual and spiritual corruption. Not only does it emerge that Constantine's own letters and speeches are virtually devoid of specifically Christian content, but Eusebius' Oration in Praise of Constantine, delivered in the Emperor's presence, and his Life of Constantine give no solid indication that the Emperor's own faith contained any place for Jesus. The Logos indeed appears, but as the heavenly archetype in imitation of whom the Emperor 'pilots affairs below with an upward gaze'. True, the Emperor is no longer counted divine, but his policies have the fullest divine support, reflected in the loyalty of the Church on earth; it comes to much the same thing. There is a biblical flavour in Eusebius' adulation, but it is all derived from Old Testament examples – heroes, like Constantine himself, who have the backing of God and who often, like him in his receiving the labarum, could point to some sign which made God's favour plain.

So much is historical investigation. But, says Dr Kee, the long arm of Constantine stretches right down to our own day. The Church has never recovered from its take-over by the religion of Constantine. For three centuries, it stood by (and bled for) the values and the faith of Jesus, who eschewed power, worldly position and wealth. Then, almost overnight, it colluded with the quite contrary values of Constantine, transforming Jesus, enthroned in the apse of his churches, into the heavenly emperor – and never, as an institution, regained its soul. For, as we can now see so clearly, what Constantine (encouraged by Eusebius and his like) was doing was to provide an ideological justification for his policies – which were those of any power-hungry monarch. Officially, 'monarchy exists in imitation of the rule of heaven . . . But this argument tells us nothing about heaven. It simply gives *carte blanche* to the Emperor to rule as he rules and call it just'.

The book ends by noting that Marxism has provided a just critique of the perverted Christianity stemming from Constantine's victory, and by showing how easily 'the thin line of protest within the Church' has found itself diverted and institutionalized.

Such a wide-ranging case raises questions of many kinds. Has the historical discussion quite taken us to the heart of the matter? Was Eusebius so much the bedazzled time-server, and was Constantine so deliberately outside specifically Christian faith? Or was it a case (there are countless parallels) of a man who meant to be on the Christian side but saw the implications only imperfectly – or who (true on any showing) was keen not to provoke new disunity in the Empire by full-blast hostility to paganism? After all, if his public pronouncements (and those of a Eusebius speaking in his presence) avoid clear Christian content, they are not inclined to popular paganism either. In other words, is the language, so clearly presented in this study, that of a non-Christian or a careful diplomat who needs to stand somewhat about the fray? These questions do not receive all the discussion they deserve.

On the wider issues, of course it is true that developments under Constantine produced a major shift in Christian status and the Church's place in society. But Dr Kee's contrast between 'before' and 'after' is too sharp, and the resulting picture of Christian identity through history has a certain naivety. To take one topic: it is claimed that after Constantine the Church came to a new concern with property and wealth, wholly alien to the preaching and life of Jesus. But the fact is that the Church began to rely on the wealthy as early as the early establishment of congregations in places like Corinth.Their stability depended on the support and hospitalilty of the richer members, who were exhorted not to self-impoverishment but to almsgiving. The *poverello* existence of the Synoptic Gospels (in John even Jesus and his disciples have a common purse) testifies to something confined to Jesus' ministry and perhaps to certain elements in the early Church, but within a very few years it was not the norm. The pastoral Epistles witness to speedy adaptation to new habits in the area of church order, as the model of the servant, claimed by Jesus as the Christian pattern of authority, gave way to that of the ruler, and Ignatius caps them by seeing the bishop as the image of God the Father, with the humble deacons left to reproduce Jesus in the congregation. The invasion by worldly values began long before Constantine.

And was this the start of perversion, or was it inevitable adaptation to circumstances? And by what criteria is the propriety of such adaptation to be assessed? This is the hard question which this book leaves untouched. The Church lives always on a knife-edge between adaptation and travesty as far as the heritage of Jesus is concerned. With persuasive force, Dr Kee reminds us how strong is the case for not letting Jesus our critic be silenced by Jesus the Church's (all too easily domesticated) lord.

The modern Anglican bishop may barely recognize himself as the heir of the shift of power and Christian sensibility produced by Constantine. But it is salutary to recall that the Church of England (to go no further afield) has lost large parts of the Constantinian heritage (in power, influence and wealth) only by the movement of 'social forces' and Act of Parliament, never at any point by voluntary acts of imaginative obedience to the spirit of Jesus. True, it has gained much control over its own resources and government, but that it is a game Constantine would have understood well, even if he would scarcely have approved.

J.L. Houlden

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**Disciples and Prophets. A Biblical Model for the Religious Life.** 1980. xiii + 225pp. £7.95

**Free to Love. Poverty – Chastity – Obedience.** 1981. xiv + 96pp. £2.95

Both books by F.J. Moloney S.D.B., published by Darton, Longman and Todd, London

*Free to love* will be found helpful by members of Anglican as well as Roman Catholic religious communities, and to some extent, as its author hopes, by others too. Its theme is simple. Far from meaning 'no money, no love, no decision-making', the three traditional vows are for all of us 'our way to authentic humanity'. For 'through such a life-style we follow the poor, chaste and obedient Jesus along a path which leads to the ultimate answer to the deepest longings of the hearts of all men and women: resurrection' (p.90). Reworking and supplementing a section of the earlier and longer book, *Disciples and Prophets*, Fr Moloney presents each of the vows as a way of living out our relationship with Jesus. Poverty is expounded, in a way which Franciscans may find a little oblique, in terms of Acts 4.32-35 taken as indicating the community aspect of life 'in Christ'. Thus understood, poverty should 'announce to the world, not the evil of possessions, but the value of a shared life inspired by radical faith' (p. 25). Chastity and obedience are interpreted a little differently. Jesus himself was celibate 'because of the overwhelming presence of the Kingdom in his life': 'he could do no other than give himself entirely to it' (p. 51). Similarly, his obedience to the Father was total. In both respects, Christians are to base their own style of life on his. Thus, 'the poor, the chaste and the obedient are freed to love and for love' (p. xiii).

Much of the book is 'devotional', and, within the inevitable limits of that *genre* fairly well done: some will find the focus somewhat less than sharp, others will nevertheless find themselves addressed on this page or that. Perhaps, in a book like this, the loyal attempt to make everything applicable both to members of religious communities and to others is bound to leave readers in the latter category dissatisfied. Do not our actual needs, in relation to family responsibilities and to work — to take the most obvious examples – demand a different starting-point than these gospel 'imperatives' (as Fr Moloney calls them, p. xiii)? What is said (or not said) about work reflects – surely – one inescapable contrast between the religious life and that of the rest of us. 'Our work points to *the reason why we exist as a consecrated Christian community*' (p. 27, the author's italics). This view of the relationship between work and membership of a Christian community is, at least, highly discussible for those not living under the vows of the religious life. And the attempt to present as 'parallel' the commitment to love on the part of the celibate and of the married (p. 53f) must inevitably leave a very great deal unsaid.

In both these books, the author writes – partly – as a New Testament scholar (his *The Johannine Son of Man*, an Oxford doctoral thesis supervised by Professor Hooker, is an important study). In at least three cases, he offers a new exegesis of texts traditionally used in the rationale of life under the religious vows. Mt 19.16-22 yields no basis, we are told, for either the 'double standard' – generally deprecated now, in any case – or for a general call to poverty. The requirement to be 'perfect' derives from Matthew's theology of discipleship and of a righteousness exceeding that demanded by the Law of Moses (*Disciples and Prophets*, pp. 10ff). Less convincingly, in the same passage, Moloney distinguishes – by implication – between an individual command to one person to give his capital away and the disciples' having left their possessions behind; surely this is, effectively, a renunciation of ownership in both cases. Earlier in Mt 19, the passage about eunuchs at v. 12 is interestingly and attractively discussed in *Free to love* (pp. 48ff). This saying was Jesus' riposte to critics of his failure to marry: he takes up the very word, 'eunuch', that they had chosen as a term of abuse. In this kind of writing, especially in the second book, Fr Moloney is at his best. Wisely, in the same work, he has omitted altogether the passages of popularizing biblical theology which occupied so much space in *Disciples and Prophets*. That work had, indeed, its own significance. The attempt to provide a largely new rationale for the religious life was a bold one (though he drew extensively on recent predecessors). Members of religious congregations are called, in Fr Moloney's view, to discipleship to Jesus as that is set out in the New Testament. Further, they have a vocation of witness and protest analogous to that of the Old Testament prophets: the quality of their corporate life should hold up before the institutional church, and before urban society, a reminder (or promise, as the case may be) of what it means to live as a community. Much of this has evidently been found valuable, or so the author tells us in *Free to love*. But some religious – especially, perhaps, Anglicans and members of the pre-reformation Orders – are likely to think that Fr Moloney has done more than propose a new biblical basis for the religious life: he is presenting a highly twentieth-century understanding of the purpose of that life, in which personal consecration in prayer is decidedly under-emphasized if not neglected. *Free to love* is not only a much cheaper book than *Disciples and Prophets* but also a more satisfactory one.

C.J.A. Hickling

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**Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity** by Karl Rahner.

Translated by William V. Dych. Darton, Longman and Todd 1978. xv + 470 pp. £14.00

Until the publication of this book Karl Rahner's work has appeared chiefly in his *Theological Investigations*, a long series of works in which his theology was set out in temporal as much as systematic order. There is a selection which attempts to present an ordered arrangement of themes, but it is here for the first time that we have a one volume systematic theology in which all the main areas of his thinking are developed. It is not exactly bedside reading, but a book that has to be worked at. The difficulty is partly due to Rahner's laboured and obscure style, partly to the fact that it is serious systematic theology, in welcome contrast to the occasional writings that often seem to pass for theology in this country. Reading is not made any easier by the tough philosophical work that the reader is expected to do, and in an idion that is not very familiar this side of the North Sea.

The base upon which Rahner builds his structure is a philosophical anthropology, which, despite its existentialist derivation, surprisingly parallels that of Schleiermacher. One difference in Rahner is that to the anthropology, in which he expresses the self-transcendence and orientation to the future of all human life, there corresponds, answering and enlarging it, a more sturdily

objective theology of a fairly traditional Roman Catholic form. This more firmly objective side is revealed particularly in Rahner's discussion of the Trinity, which is far more determinative for his theology than is Schleiermacher's.

The longest chapter, taking up a third of the book, is that on christology. Here we see the real meeting point between transcendental anthropology and orthodox christology 'from above' as it has come to be called. Transcendental anthropology is here developed into transcendental christology, by which Rahner seeks to show how a view of human self-transcendence provides the grounds upon which we come to understand how God might incarnate himself in a human being. Despite the Hegelian overtones of some of Rahner's statements here, he is very careful to show that he is not simply developing a speculative 'natural' christology. 'Transcendental christology allows one to search for, and in his search to understand, what he has already found in Jesus of Nazareth' (p.212). Despite the care, however, the overall appearance is one of ambiguity, for the two approaches will not quite tie up. It is sometimes doubtful whether self-transcendence is itself a sufficient explanation of Jesus' salvific reality, or whether (the more likely) the 'descent' of the Word is given the greater substance.

All in all, the book is a good demonstration of how a Roman Catholic theologian faces up to the challenge of modernity, drawing on modern philosophical insights and, while not conceding Roman claims to represent authentic Christianity, taking a basically irenic stance towards Protestantism, other religions and the various forms of modern culture. There is throughout the book a dialogue between the liberal and the conservative in Rahner himself, particularly perhaps in his treatment of ecclesiology. The question that arises is common with respect to all philosophical approaches of this kind to systematic theology: and that is whether the various forces at work are really compatible with one another.

Colin Gunton

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# OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Peter R. Ackroyd retires this autumn after twenty-one years' tenure of the Samuel Davidson Chair of Old Testament Studies at King's College London. An appreciation is printed in this edition of the K.T.R.

Alan Argent, a former MTh student at King's College, is a Congregational minister in south London.

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Michael Pye this autumn leaves a post in the University of Leeds to take up a chair in Marburg, West Germany.

Ian Walker is head of Religious Studies at Dulwich College. His commentary on Plato's *Euthyphro* is shortly to be published.

In the Autumn 1982 edition of the K.T.R.:

G.R. Dunstan: 'A Pit Digged for Other. Perils in Moral and Social Theology.'

Peter R. Ackroyd: 'Theological Reflections on the Book of Isaiah. III: Theology of a Prophet'

Stephen Platten: 'Meaning without Order?'

Paul D.L. Avis: 'Odd Man Out in Modern Theology: F.R. Tennant (1866-1957)'

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