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# The Reconciliation of Mind

by T.F. Torrance

"It pleased the father that in him should all fullness dwell. And having made peace through the blood of his Cross by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say whether they be things on earth or things in heaven. And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now has he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in his sight." (Colossians 1:21-22)

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)

Paul states that we are alienated or estranged in our minds, and in fact are hostile in mind to God. This is a basic New Testament conception which was deeply resented by the rational culture of the ancient classical world of Greece and Rome, and which the rational culture of the Medieval world and rational, philosophical and scientific, culture of our modern world have found very difficult to accept. This applies not least to "evangelical Christianity" today which, on the whole, still seems to work with what I call an "unbaptized reason," for it has not thought through sufficiently the transformation of human reason in the light of the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. Hence the *mind* of the Church and the *mind* of society are not inwardly formed by the Gospel—they remain basically unevangelized. This is because we have not taken seriously this New Testament emphasis that the mind of man is alienated at its very root. It is in the human mind that sin is entrenched, and so it is there, the Gospel tells us, that we are required to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and to be healed and reconciled to God.

According to the teaching of the Bible, man has been created in mind as well as body out of nothing. We must not forget that a creaturely human mind has "being." This is a fact which, interestingly, our neurologists, brain scientists and psychiatrists have come to recognize. Some of them speak of the mind as constituting a "fifth dimension," and others refer to the "ontology of mind." The mind is ontologically real—it has being. What they do not often recognize, however, is that it is deep in this mental being that our humanity is twisted and distorted, and indeed, to use Old Testament language echoed here by St. Paul, is "desperately wicked." We do not find in St. Paul, any more than in the Old Testament, any body/soul or body/mind dualism, for, as James Denney used to express it, man is the body of his soul and the soul of his body, or the body of his mind and the mind of his body, a unitary whole. It is as such that man has fallen and become alienated from God, and as such that he needs to be redeemed.

The mind of a human being constitutes what the Greeks called *hegemonikon* or the governing principle, for it is the mind that governs or directs our behavior as human beings.

Thus where modern people tend to refer to the will as the determining factor in human behavior, the Greek Fathers traced everything back to the mind. It is a mistake to think that they were not interested in the will and did not therefore stress the freedom of the will as modern people do, because they laid this emphasis upon the mind as the governing element in human nature. The Greek Fathers realized, however, as perhaps few people do today, that although we may have free-will we are not at all free to escape from our self-will. That is why they put their finger upon the twisted state of affairs in the depths of the human mind. It is in the heart of our mental reality which governs and controls all our thinking and culture that we have become estranged from the truth and hostile to God. And it is right there, in the ontological depths of the human mind, that we desperately need to be saved and redeemed.

The rational culture of the ancient classical world found this very difficult to accept, so that inevitably difficult problems arose whenever the Gospel began to take root and find expression in Greek life and thought. Thus we find cropping up fairly early within the Church an insidious heresy that came to be known as "Apollinarianism." It took its name from Apollinaris, a very clever theologian, who refused to believe that in his Incarnation the Son of God took upon himself our alienated, twisted mind, because it was in that mind that sin had become rooted and entrenched. If Jesus had taken our alienated mind upon himself, so argued Apollinaris, he must have been a sinner, in fact an original sinner. And so he held that the Son of God became incarnate in our human existence in such a way that in Jesus the human mind was displaced by the divine mind. It was therefore some sort of neutral humanity that the Son of God assumed, and not the actual humanity in which we sinners all share.

However, the Fathers of the Church found this idea of the Incarnation to be evangelically and soteriologically deficient. If at that point, in the heart of our mental being, we are not redeemed and cleansed by the blood of Christ, then we are not really saved at all. If in the fundamental controlling principle of our human mind we are untouched by the Incarnation and the Atonement, then we are no better off than the pagan Greeks. And so the Christian Church insisted that we must take dead seriously the fact that in the Incarnation, the holy Son of God assumed our fallen, enslaved human nature, our twisted, distorted, bent mind, but that in assuming it right from the very beginning our Lord converted it, healed it, and sanctified it in himself. In taking from us our fallen human nature upon himself, instead of sinning in it as we all do, Jesus condemned sin in our carnal mind, and was himself wholly without sin. And so by living out a life of perfect holiness and purity in his mind, he sanctified and healed our human mind in the whole course of his incarnate and redemptive life from his birth to his crucifixion. He carried our mind into the very depths of his agonizing and atoning struggle on the Cross—he descended into the hell of the utmost wickedness and dereliction of the human mind under the judgment of God, in order to lay hold upon the very root of our sin and to redeem us from its stranglehold upon us. Yes, it was not only our actual sins, but it was original sin and original guilt that the Son of God took upon himself in Incarnation and Atonement

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in order to heal, convert, and sanctify the human mind in himself and reconcile it to God.

There is extant a fragment of a second century theologian, Irenaeus, which I like to think of in this connection. In it there seems to be a suggestion that the Incarnation may be understood in the light of the incident recorded in the Gospel when Jesus touched a leper, and when, instead of becoming leprous himself, he healed the leper. I don't know whether you have ever seen a leper. I used to pass a leper colony when I went to school every day as a boy in China. That was long ago, but I have never forgotten the horrible emaciation of face and hand and limb in leprous flesh. If I sense what Irenaeus had in mind in that tantalizing fragment, it was that Jesus had taken our leprous humanity upon himself, but that instead of becoming a leper himself he healed and transformed our leprous human nature and restored it to be like the flesh of a newborn child. But let us not forget that it was our diseased *mind* that our Lord assumed for our sakes. But in assuming

in Jesus. That is far from being easy, but it is something which fidelity to the Gospel will not allow us to avoid. It was because Karl Barth, for example, took this so seriously that he spent so much of his life thinking out what the renewal of the human mind means in the light of God's self-revelation in Christ, and what knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus implies for the transformation of reason, intelligibility and objectivity in Christian theology. Karl Barth was above all an evangelical theologian who spent his life in evangelizing the human reason, whereas the great majority of Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians still operate, I am afraid, with an ungenerated and unbaptized reason, and thus avoid the agonizing experience of working out conformity to Christ in the ontological depths of their minds.

Sometimes the inner conflict can be very sharp, as I learned as soon as I began to teach Christian theology, so I regularly made a point of alerting students about what was involved. I used to tell them about a friend of mine who went up to

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*As in the New Testament teaching and preaching were always interwoven with each other, so in the remarkable growth and expansion of the Church after New Testament times, theological and evangelizing activity always functioned inseparably together.*

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it, far from sinning himself or being estranged and alienated from the Father, even when he penetrated into the fearful depths of our alienation—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—he turned it all back again, converted it from the very bottom of our disobedient human being, from the roots of our estranged mental existence, into perfect oneness with the mind of God—"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." In Colossians, as in Ephesians, St. Paul thought of the atoning reconciliation as embracing heaven as well as earth, for all things invisible as well as visible need to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God—how much more the invisible mental life of human being!

It was in order to conserve this biblical teaching that great Patristic theologians in the early Church enunciated as a fundamental principle, "The unassumed is the unhealed" (Gregory of Nazianzus), or "What Christ has not assumed has not been saved" (Cyril of Alexandria). They reckoned that the Church would be soteriologically and evangelically deficient if it refused to take seriously that Christ took our fallen mind upon himself in order to redeem and save it. That is a truth which I first learned from my beloved Edinburgh teacher, H.R. MacKintosh, who had himself been profoundly influenced by the Christology of these Greek Fathers. But it was only when I studied Karl Barth's account of this doctrine that its truth broke in upon my mind in a quite unforgettable way. I refer to that section in the *Church Dogmatics* I.2, where Barth expounded the mystery of the Virgin Birth. Overwhelmed by the immense significance of what our Lord had done all for our sakes and in our place, I fell to the ground in my knees trembling in awe and wonder at the sheer miracle of God's grace in the birth, life and passion of Jesus—the miracle that foul, wicked, depraved humanity, twisted in upon itself, had been appropriated from us by the Son of God, and had been cleansed, changed, redeemed and sanctified in him.

Here we are dealing with the inner heart of evangelical theology—the transforming of the human mind in such a way that it is no longer conformed to the patterns of this world but brought through renewal into conformity to Christ, through the communion of our mind with the mind of God in him, and its assimilation to the holiness and truth of God incarnate

Basel to study music when I went there to study theology with Karl Barth. In those years before the war there were two of the world's greatest musicians in Basel, Adolf Busch and Rudolf Serkin—it was with the latter that my friend Edgar wanted to take piano lessons. Serkin looked at his hands and asked how old he was. When he said that he was twenty-seven, Serkin shook his head and told him that he was too old for him to take on, and declined to enroll him. But Edgar hung about and when Serkin found that he had an unusually keen "understanding for music," he sent him to a friend in Salzburg who gave him exercises for six months on end, until the very shape of his hands was transformed. I recall his talking to me afterwards about the drawn-out pain and agony of that experience. But it had been worth it, for when the muscles in his hands had been sufficiently restructured, Serkin at last took him on—and in due course Edgar became a distinguished musician, and indeed a composer, himself.

In recounting that story to my young students, I used to say to them, "Something similar may well happen to you in these classes, for as you let the truth of the Gospel have its way with you, you will find the very shape and structure of your mind beginning to change." That is indeed what the Gospel is about, a *metanoia*, a radical repentant rethinking of everything before the face of Jesus Christ. No better account of theological method has been given than that which Jesus gave to his disciples when he said: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." That is what repentant rethinking means: you cannot separate evangelical theology from that profound experience of the radical changing and transforming of your mind that comes through dying and rising with Christ.

There often came a point in my classes when I felt that the students wanted to throw their books at me, as the inner struggle between the Gospel and the frame of mind they brought to it became intense. Let us make no mistake about it: Divine Revelation conflicts sharply with the structure of our natural reason, with the secular patterns of thought that have already become established in our minds through the twist of our ingrained mental alienation from God. We cannot become true theologians without the agonizing experience of profound

change in the mental structure of our innermost being.

“Let this mind be in you (*touto phroneite*),” as St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “which was also in Christ Jesus.” The early Greek Fathers gave a great deal of thought to that injunction. They cultivated what they called “the Apostolic mind” (*phronema apostolikon*), for it was only through the mind of the Apostles embodied in the Holy Scriptures that the Church could be imbued with the mind of Christ (*phronema Christou*) himself. That is precisely what a faithful theology was about.

Thus a regular question raised by Christian theologians, concealed behind all the great debates in the early centuries, was whether they were really thinking *worthily* of God in accordance with the mind of Christ Jesus, as it has been imprinted by the Holy Spirit in the Apostolic Scriptures. All through those early centuries as the Gospel was carried from end to end of the Mediterranean world, Christian theology

as I read their essays and examinations or listened to them in the chapel. “Has this person a genuinely theological instinct or not? Is his or her thinking spontaneously and naturally governed by the mind of Christ?” That is much more important than being theologically learned, much more important than being able to offer a formal academic account of some doctrine or historic debate in the Church. What really counts in the end is whether a person’s mind is radically transformed by Christ and so spiritually attuned to the mind of Christ, that he thinks instinctively from the depths of his mental being in a way worthy of God.

As Athanasius used to insist, we must learn to think strictly “in accordance with the nature” (*kata physin*) of God the Father as he is made known to us through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, that is, in an essentially godly way (*eusebos*). To think like that from a center in God himself, in accordance with his

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*There often came a point in my classes when I felt that the students wanted to throw their books at me, as the inner struggle between the Gospel and the frame of mind they brought to it became intense.*

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played a major role in the evangelizing of nation after nation, for it was only as the mind and culture of people were brought into conformity to the mind of Christ that the Church could put down permanent roots in the soil of humanity. As in the New Testament teaching and preaching were always interwoven with each other, so in the remarkable growth and expansion of the Church after New Testament times, theological and evangelizing activity always functioned inseparably together. By its intrinsic nature, an evangelical theology is an evangelizing theology, for it is concerned with the winning and transforming of the human mind through conformity to the mind of Christ Jesus—not simply the minds of individual human beings but the mind of human society and culture in which individual human beings exist.

What does this have to say to us today about what we call “evangelical Christianity?” We have been concerned with evangelizing men, women and children as individual human beings, calling for repentance and personal decision for Christ as Lord and Savior, and rightly so. But have we been concerned with the evangelizing of the mind of the society in which these people live? If not, how can a Christian Church put down roots in an unevangelized society and remain genuinely Christian? I believe this is where evangelical Christianity today has failed terribly. By and large, as far as I can see, even the mind of the Church, let alone the mind of society, is still secular in that it shares the mind of the secular society within which it exists. We have Christian people, but do we really have a *Christian* Church? We have people who profess to believe in Christ as Lord and Savior, but do we have a Church that so imbued with the mind of Christ that its members individually and as a community think *instinctively* in a Christian way?

I have been wonderfully blessed with a mother and a wife who have a profoundly Christian, and indeed a remarkably theological, *instinct*. My mother never had any academic training in theology, but her life and her understanding were so tuned into the mind of Christ that she knew at once where the truth lay and was quick to discern any deviation from it. This is also very true of my dear wife who is imbued with an unerring *theological instinct*, evident again and again in her reaction to ideas put forward by preachers or teachers. At the end of the day that was the test I used to put to my students,

essential nature revealed in the Incarnate Son, is, he claimed, what *theologia* strictly is. If any one does not think in that way, but thinks from a center in himself, governed by the devisings of his own reason, then he is bound to think of him in an unworthy or irreligious way (*asebos*)—which Athanasius designated *mythologia*. Either you think from out of a mind centered in God through union with the mind of the Lord Jesus, or you think from out of a mind centered in yourself, alienated from God and inwardly hostile to the Truth incarnate in the Lord Jesus, that is, in a way finally governed by the unregenerate and unbaptized reason.

The transformation of the human mind and its renewal through assimilation to the mind of Christ is something that has to go on throughout the whole of our life—it is a never-ending discipleship in repentant rethinking as we take up the cross and follow Christ. That is why we cannot be theologians without incessant prayer in offering ourselves daily to God through the reconciling and atoning mediation of Christ; and that is also why we cannot be evangelists without being theologians whose minds are constantly schooled in obedience to Christ. It is, after all, with our minds that we worship God and it is only with our minds that we can preach the Gospel and evangelize the world. Is that not, in part at least, what St. Paul was concerned with in the two verses from the twelfth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans which we read? “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service (*logike latreia*—not just spiritual but *rational* worship). And be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” Notice the distinctive way in which St. Paul interrelates the renewing of the mind with the offering of the body as a living sacrifice and with rational worship. It is not with disembodied minds, but with the created unity of mind and body in which the human self is constituted. While stress may be laid upon the transformation of the mind and its assimilation to Christ, the whole human self is involved.

The transformation the Apostle calls for is so deep as to evoke out of the rational self an instinctive judgment about what is good, acceptable and perfect before God. That is to say, in the way I have been expressing it, we are called to be

transformed in such a profound way that there develops with in the depths of our rational being a *theological instinct* in virtue of which we are able to make true theological judgments. Without such a theological instinct we have little more than people with secular minds loosely clothed with a Christian profession. A genuine theological instinct of the kind St. Paul has in view cannot be gained apart from a constant self-offering in rational worship to God, for it is through that inner relation between prayer and the transforming renewal of our minds, that we may be so tuned into God that we fulfil our service in the rational way acceptable to him.

In his scientific autobiography, Werner Heisenberg tells us that again and again when the mathematics of quantum theory proved to be as difficult as they were intricate, he would go

away for three or four weeks at a time to play the piano or the violin in order, as he put it, to tune in to the "Central Order"—the name he used in that context for God. When his whole being was tuned into that Central Order, he would come back to find his mathematical equations working out more easily. It is something similar that happens in theological activity. Through study of the Holy Scriptures, meditation and prayer we tune in to the mind of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, the Source of all rationality, until our minds, healed, renewed, and sanctified in him, are instinct with his Truth—then it is that we may preach and teach the Gospel, and find it transforming the lives and minds of people and the society to which they belong.

## Romans 13 (Actually Romans 12:14-13:8) Reexamined

by Vernard Eller

We need to give more detailed attention to Romans 13—in that I have come to realize how firmly we are in the grip of the passage's traditional "legitimizing" interpretation. The support for this reading falls into a most interesting alignment. Of course, the Christian Right (along with conservative evangelicalism in general) welcomes this theological view of Romans 13 as confirmation of its own *politically* conservative predilection that is committed to political establishment of being God's chosen means for governing the world.

Yet curiously enough, the Christian Left also accepts, if not welcomes, the legitimizing interpretation—although under an entirely different rationale and for a totally different purpose. In some cases the argument runs: Mark 12 shows *Jesus* to be strongly *illegitimizing* of Caesar. Romans 13 has *Paul* coming out just the other way. In this showdown, then, *Jesus* obviously should take precedence over *Paul*. Therefore, we aren't obligated to give particular weight or attention to *Paul's* counsel about paying taxes and honoring the authorities. Alternatively, the argument runs: Yes, *Paul* does legitimize established government; yet certainly he must intend this regarding only "good" governments. Accordingly, his counsel about paying taxes must apply only to governments worthy of our tax dollars; when he says to pay taxes to those to whom they "are due," he must mean to those who, in our opinion, are morally deserving. Thus, it would follow that *Paul* had in mind paying them only to the "good" Roman Empire of his day and not the "Evil Empire" of ours (namely, the one Ronald Reagan was *representing*, not the one of which he spoke).

Now, however, as a way out of the political sophistries of both the Right and the Left, I propose an anarchical reading of Romans 13 that has *Paul illegitimizing* the political world as a whole—and thus entirely bypassing the dispute about his legitimizing *anything*, whether of the Left or of the Right, whether judged to be politically good, bad, or indifferent. If I may, I will call mine: "A Reading of Romans 13 Under the Premise that Its Author Was a Student of the Old Testament" (I disdain to argue this premise, because anyone undertaking

to challenge it is manifestly belated, bewildered, and benighted).

(1) If we respect *Paul's* context by examining the total passage of Romans 12:14-13:8, it is plain that his purpose in introducing "the governing authorities" is in no sense to argue their "legitimacy." His main topic is the Christian obligation to love *any person whatsoever* and live peaceably *with all*. Check it out; he opens this inning by placing his hit: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" (Romans 12:14). He extends that run to second base (13:1), at which point he introduces his "governing authorities" illustration. This he closes off neatly at third (13:7). He then proceeds to make his home-plate score by ending up where he started: "Owe no one anything except to love one another" (13:8). Pretty slick, I would say.

The "governing authorities," then, are brought in as *Paul's* example of those to whom it will be most difficult to make the obligation apply—but whom God nevertheless commands us to love, even when our natural propensity most strongly urges us to hate, resist, and fight them. As he elsewhere states the offense even more pointedly, "Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded?"—which, of course, is not the easiest thing in the world for human beings to do.

Thus—just as with *Jesus' praying*, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and his teaching about "turning the other cheek," "going the second mile," and the like—*Paul* is using the governing authorities as a test case of our loving the enemy—even when doing so is repugnant to our innate moral sensibilities (which sensibilities we ought never, never, never equate as being the very will of God—but which we regularly do go on to equate so anyhow). And if this "indiscriminating love" reading be correct, then verse 7 (the final word of the "governing authorities" section) ought to agree with *Paul's* overall love theme.

This it most beautifully does if "pay all of them their dues—taxes, revenue, respect, honor" advises against withholding *any* of these items from *whatever* governing authority claims them as due. If, however, the verse is taken to mean that we are to allow these things only to nice governments who are known to be deserving of them—then we have gone from "indiscriminating love" to "highly discriminating love," and *Paul* has undercut his radically Christian argument merely to

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