Essays in
Contextual Theology

Paul White

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To Vivienne

with whom I danced before the Altar

Contents

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Preface

THE ESSAYS IN this volume (with the exception of the first which was written for my DDO Richard More as part of the ordination training selection process) are the product of the three years I spent between September 2005 and June 2008 undertaking my BA (Hons) in Contextual Theology with the North Thames Ministerial Training Course, which is now part of St. Mellitus College.

Is it not a bit odd, or even vain, to put one's undergraduate essays between covers in this way? Undoubtedly yes, but this volume is not intended as an exercise in vanity self-publishing but, rather, it is meant as a way of gathering and keeping together for my own interest pieces of work that would otherwise go astray over the coming years and of marking the fact that this degree has represented an incredibly important period of change and growth in my life.

Looking back over the essays I can see all the flaws, shortcomings and errors and I have no doubt that those shortcomings will become more apparent in the future. In my own defence they were all written to strict time limits, with strict word count limits and in the midst of a busy work and home life. However I have resisted the temptation to go back and revise them and they are reproduced here as they were submitted to the course.

Each of these essays were written in preparation for my entry into ordained Christian ministry and my prayer is that the lessons I learned from each will be carried forward into that ministry to the greater glory of God.

The nature of priesthood in the Church of England and how I might exercise such a ministry

Introduction

IT IS EASY in a project of this type to become immersed in Church history and theology to the point of distraction: How and when did the threefold ministry of deacon, presbyter and bishop arise? What is the biblical basis for ordination? Can we even use the word "priest" in a Christian context? *et cetera*. Of course these, and many others, are valid issues and I will seek to address them but I have tried not to become *distracted* by them. I have sought to use this project not simply as an academic exercise (in which it would be perfectly valid to discuss history and / or theology in a vacuum) but as part of my discernment process. This means, insofar as possible, that I have approached this essay from the perspective of looking at the ministry of ordained priesthood in the Church of England *as it is currently exercised* and considering how I may play a part in that ministry.

However, ordained ministry in the Church of England in the twenty-first century did not arrive fully formed. Therefore, whilst keeping our eyes fixed on the goal of not becoming distracted I think it is necessary to begin by at least dipping our toes into the vast pools of history and theology and hope not to be sucked beneath the surface!

The origins of ordained Christian ministry

The New Testament (NT) does not contain clear guidelines for the exercise of leadership within Christian communities. If it did then this task would be a great deal easier! In considering why this should be the case we should bear in mind that the focus of the NT is not about creating rigid structures and institutions but, rather, it is about creating a body of believers with Christ as our head, keeping watch for his return. If we maintain this eschatological focus then this puts the institutions of the Church (and the orders within them) into their proper transitory

perspective. This should not be taken to imply that they are unimportant (far from it, they are God-given) but merely that they are a means to an end (maintaining and growing the body of Christ), and not the end itself.

The first NT examples we have of people being called from the laity into a closer discipleship with Jesus are, of course, the apostles (e.g. Matt 4:18,19 & 9:9 Mark 3:14). In each case those called appear to be settled in their own lives and it is Jesus who calls them for a purpose:

> *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last.*" (John 15:16)

Even within the original twelve Jesus appears to have a select band of Peter, James and John (e.g. Mark 9:2) and from these Peter is later "ordained" to be the foundation stone of the Church (Matt 16:18).

Following the Ascension and Pentecost, the apostles continued Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing (e.g. Acts 2:14, Acts 3:6). However, as the Church grew it soon became clear that the apostles were unable to be both teachers of the word and administer to people's more earthly needs (such as the fair distribution of food between Jewish and Grecian widows) and so the first deacons (*diakonos* – servants) were ordained by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6). However these were no ordinary servants as they were required to "…*known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom*…" (Acts 6:3) and Stephen in particular was "…*a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit*…" (Acts 6:5) and "…*a man full of God's grace and power*..." (Acts 6:8). Thus the church (through the apostles) identified a need for a particular ministry of service among its members, identified the qualities of character required to carry out that service and then ordained those exhibiting those qualities into the ministry.

Later Paul / Saul (together with Barnabas) is ordained for his ministry by the laying on of hands following a call by the Holy Spirit:

> "*While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.*" (Acts 13:2,3)

And as they travel they ordain elders in the churches:

> "*Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.*" (Acts 14:23)

The moral and spiritual requirements of those seeking leadership within the Church are further set out in 1 Timothy:

> "*Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons.*" (1 Tim 3:1-10)

As indicated by the Acts 14:23 extract above as the early Church spread leadership passed from the apostles to elders (*presbyteros* or presbyters / priests) and overseers (*episkopos* or bishops) still assisted by deacons. In the earliest period of the Church this was not a clear three-fold order as the terms "elder" and "overseer" were often used interchangeably and it is quite possible that different models of leadership developed in different places, for example some Churches may have been led by a council of elders whereas others may have had a single overseer.

However, by the second or third century A.D. (and certainly before the first ecumenical council met in Nicea in 325) a clear pattern emerged of overseers / bishops being responsible for a geographic area and for the worship of individual congregations within that area to be led (in the absence of the overseer) by the elder / presbyter. Those to be ordained

had authority conferred by the laying on of hands by the bishops and the doctrine of "apostolic succession" developed to link the leadership of the Church at this point in time with the authority of the apostles. This became the orthodox model of leadership and ordination throughout Christendom and which continues in the Church of England by virtue of the Elizabethan Settlement, under which the catholic / orthodox orders were maintained, albeit within a reformed theology.

Christian "Priesthood" – An oxymoron?

As alluded to in the introduction even the terminology used in this area can be controversial. The use of the word "priest" in relation to ordained Christian ministers has been historically problematic for two main reasons:

1. It is the term used for the Jewish Priesthood in the Old Testament (e.g. Ex. 28:1); and

2. It appears to subvert the High Priesthood of Christ (Heb 14:4) and the Priesthood of all Christians (1 Peter 2).

The Levitical priesthood, as instituted at the time of Moses, was an extremely vicarial priesthood. Although the Israelites were expected to obey the Laws it was only the High Priest (Aaron and his successors) who could approach God on behalf of the people and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement (e.g. Lev. 16:34). Following the ordination of Aaron (Lev. 8) by Moses the death of Nadad and Abihu for offering "*unauthorised fire before the LORD*" (Lev. 10) was a graphic illustration that the work of the priests in attending God was dangerous work that could only be carried out by the select few and then only in the authorised way.

This made it clear that being a priest was synonymous with having privileged access to God that was specifically denied to the non-priestly. The term "priesthood" is therefore sometimes avoided (usually by those of a more "evangelical" persuasion) as implying a link to this Aaronic

priesthood which may be seen as excluding people from having the ability to enter into a direct relationship with God.

In addition, and most importantly, the ministry of God to the world through Jesus was for the purpose of establishing a new covenant of salvation, thus superseding the need for this vicarial priesthood. In Matthew's account of the passion we have the hugely symbolic verse[1]:

> "*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*" (Matt 27:51)

It was the curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the outer temple and beyond which only the High Priest could pass. This symbolically demonstrated that the death of Jesus reconciled God and man and that all are now free to approach God directly, with Jesus as our High Priest.

This is developed by the author of Hebrews – here Jesus is the new "*great high priest who has gone through the heavens*" (Heb. 4:14), the earthly priests worship at a sanctuary which is a "*copy and shadow of what is in heaven*" (Heb 8:5) whereas Jesus, as the new High Priest, "*serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the LORD, not by man.*" (Heb 8:2). The author of Hebrews makes it clear that the priesthood of Jesus does not come from the Aaronic order at all (not least because Jesus was not from the priestly tribe of Levi (Heb 7:13)) but is a priest from the more ancient and mystical order of Melchizedek[2] (e.g. Heb 7:11)[3].

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[1] See also Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45

[2] See Gen. 14:18-20.

[3] By making the connection between Jesus and Melchizedek the author of Hebrews appears to be making the following points:

- The priestly authority is not subject to the Aaronic succession (as above) but is from "God Most High"
- He confers blessings on both men and God
- He comes bearing bread and wine (wonderful Eucharistic imagery not elaborated on in Hebrews)

The other limb of the anti-"priesthood" argument is that all Christians become priests by virtue of their baptism:

> "*But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*" (1 Peter 2:9)

Thus (the argument goes) because all Christians are a "royal priesthood" it is inappropriate for particular people to be set apart to exercise a "priestly" ministry because this in some way devalues the inherently priestly nature of the laity (the *laos* or people of God). The problem with this argument, I would suggest, is that it (a) it misunderstands what "priestly" ministry actually means in a Christian context and (b) it implies that Christians cannot be marked out for different ministries following baptism. This second point is easy to refute as the bible is clear that the laity is the Church, the Church is the body of Christ and the body of Christ has many parts with different gifts and callings:

> *"Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues ? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts.*" (1 Cor 12:27-31)

We have already seen (in the preceding section) that ordination for particular ministries has deep NT roots and Paul certainly envisages the possibility of individuals within the Church (in this case himself) having a specifically priestly ministry:

- He is "king of righteousness" and "king of peace" (Heb 7:2)
- He is a priest for ever and not subject to death (7:24)
- He always lives to intercede for us (7:25)
- He does not need to offer daily sacrifice as he has offered himself as the only sacrifice necessary (7:27)

> "…*God gave me to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*" (Rom 15:15,16)

So, is Christian "priesthood" an oxymoron? In my view the answer to this must be "no" provided that the "priestly" ministry is both understood and exercised in a distinctly Christian manner. I will look at this below.

The nature of priesthood in the Church of England

The first calling of priests is their baptismal calling to be Christians. However, as noted in 1 Corinthians 12 above, following baptism into the body of Christ we can expect to have different gifts (*charisms*) to enable us to exercise different ministries. We have already considered some of the required personality characteristics of those called to be deacons, presbyters and bishops (e.g. Acts 6:3, 1 Tim 3:1-10 above) but what are the characteristics of Christian ministry itself and how should that ministry be exercised?

> *"To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."* (1 Peter 5:1-3)

This passage is a wonderful illustration of the way in which Christian ministry should be exercised – as a shepherd both serving and acting as an example to the flock, not as someone exploiting their position for love of power or money. This passage also recalls Jesus' parables of the lost sheep and the response of a loving shepherd (e.g. Matt 18:10-14). This passage also makes it clear that being "*eager to serve*" applies equally to elders and overseers, and that the ministry of service is not restricted to deacons. Of course, how could this be otherwise when the ministry of our High Priest Jesus was one of service and sacrifice:

"*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45)

There can be few better summaries of the nature of priesthood in the Church of England than that contained in the Ordinals[4]:

> "*A deacon is called to serve the Church of God, and to work with its members in caring for the poor, the needy, the sick, and all who are in trouble. He is to strengthen the faithful, search out the careless and the indifferent, and to preach the word of God in the place to which he is licensed. A deacon assists the priest under whom he serves, in leading the worship of the people, especially in the administration of the Holy Communion. He may baptize when required to do so. It is his general duty to do such pastoral work as is entrusted to him."*

> "*A priest is called by God to work with the bishop and with his fellow-priests, as servant and shepherd among the people to whom he is sent. He is to proclaim the word of the Lord, to call his hearers to repentance, and in Christ's name to absolve and to declare the forgiveness of sins. He is to baptize and prepare the baptized for Confirmation. He is to preside at the celebration of the Holy Communion. He is to lead his people in prayer and worship, to intercede for them, to bless them in the name of the Lord, and to teach and encourage by word and example. He is to minister to the sick, and prepare the dying for their death. He must set the Good Shepherd always before him as the pattern of his calling, caring for the people committed to his charge, and joining with them in a common witness to the world… You are to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; you are to teach and to admonish, to feed and to provide for the Lord's family, to search for his children in the wilderness of this world's temptations and to guide them through its confusions, so that they may be saved through Christ for ever.."*

So if the first calling of all Christians (including priests) is to love God with all our being and to love each other (Matt 22:37-39) then the additional calling of priests is to love, oversee and serve the church as the body of Christ.

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[4] All extracts from the ASB Ordinal © The Archbishops Council of the Church of England 2000 – 2004

As part of this project I have spoken with four Church of England priests who exercise ministry in quite different circumstances and come from a diverse "churchmanship" background. They range from being a female rector of a four parish benefice utilising ancient church buildings in rural Essex, a Forward in Faith chaplain in central London who has spent half of his ordained life as the priest in a convent, an evangelical minister (who does not like the word priest for some of the reasons outlined above) whose church meets in a community centre and a more "traditional" broad church parish priest who ministers in a market town.

On one level it would be easy to be misled by the obvious differences between how these priests exercise their ministry, in particular the way in which they lead worship. At the Anglo-Catholic end of the spectrum they use the Roman missals, display the sacrament in a monstrance, use considerable incense and elaborate vestments. At the evangelical end there was much less use of liturgy and considerable use of modern music and extensive teaching. The others fell somewhere between these two. An outsider could easily be forgiven for being surprised that the extremes are even part of the same church. However when speaking with these priests it soon becomes clear that what they have in common is much more important than that which seems to divide them. In each case it was clear that the priest is representing both Christ and the church in the community into which they have been called. They proclaim the gospel, administer the sacraments and make themselves available to the people.

I would like to include a few pithy quotes from each of them about their views on the priesthood and the nature of their ministry – I shall not ascribe names to quotes to spare blushes:

> "*…a minister should be an example to the congregation but without being set over and above them…it is about building up the body of Christ and releasing the ministry of Christ out into the world. It still fires me and captures me.*"
>
> "*…it is not about representing the people to God or interceding on their behalf, other than in the course of normal prayer, but all Christians should be doing this for each other. It is about representing God and the Church to the people of God and to the wider community.*"

"*It is a bit like co-ordinating a dance. However you are not just overseeing the dance you are also dancing yourself and inviting others in, all at the same time.*"

"*It is a ministry of availability. Firstly making the sacraments of the church available to the people and making yourself available. It is possible to make yourself so busy with paperwork and meetings that you stop having time for people.*"

"It is about being there with people sometimes in their deepest need. If God feels absent for that person then you are the physical representative of both God and the church."

"It is about carrying the people on your heart"

"*…the 'ministerial' role is now much more shared with the laity. In the 'priestly' role, especially in the eucharist, one acts as a focus for worship.*"

The comment made about acting as a focus for worship chimes well with the Theological Statement from the House of Bishops concerning Eucharistic presidency:

> *"the eucharistic president is to be a sign and focus of the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church, and the one who has primary responsibility for ensuring that the Church's four marks are expressed, actualised and made visible in the eucharistic celebration"* (Eucharistic Presidency: A Theological Statement by the House of Bishops of General Synod, 1997, 4.45).

Therefore part of the purpose of the ordained minister is to remind congregations by their presence that the local church in which the eucharist is being celebrated is but the expression in the here and now of much wider, catholic, church whose roots go back to the time of Jesus. The priest therefore represents the universal church to the congregation and *vice versa.*

Importantly the priest also acts as a representative or ambassador for the Church to the secular community. This is true for ministers of all denominations but is particularly so for those in the Church of England by virtue of it being the established church and, therefore, the church to which many non-churchgoing people turn both for the occasional offices and state events. This position is a great privilege, as it gives the church the opportunity to speak of God to the wider community, but it is also a great responsibility as the community will often judge the church, Christians and perhaps even God himself on the basis of the words and actions of priests. This is particularly so if there is a gap between the words and the actions. The Sunday tabloids like nothing better than a story about "naughty Vicars"!

It is apparent that the ways in which ministry in the Church of England is exercised are incredibly diverse and subject to ongoing change. The traditional pattern of one priest per parish has been on the wane for some time and many rural priests now minister to multi-parish benefices and work in teams across large areas. There has also been a rise in non-stipendiary ministers and ordained local ministers. Additionally the ministry of the laity is being increasingly recognised and there has been a considerable increase in Readers and other lay ministers who often undertake many of the tasks which would previously have been carried out by priests.

In addition not all ministry takes place within parish boundaries. Many priests work as chaplains in prisons, hospitals, universities, airports, even nightclubs. Some priests remain wholly within secular employment and may treat their workplace as their parish. Given the ongoing need to be a "Mission Shaped Church" it is likely that ministry will take place increasingly away from traditional settings and will take place where the people are. If people go to shopping centres on Sunday morning then why not take the church to them? Jesus did not wait for "sinners" to come to him – he went and found them.

Conclusion

In bringing together these threads I cannot hope to express it better than Archbishop Michael Ramsey:

> "*So today the ordained priest is called to reflect the priesthood of Christ and to serve the priesthood of the people of God.*" (The Christian Priest Today, p111.)

Ordained Christian priesthood is, therefore, a ministry of service: service to God by conforming ourselves to the example of Christ and service to our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ by helping them to realise the potential of their baptismal calling.

As mentioned in the introduction I wanted to use this project as part of my discernment process. Both the reading and the interviewing have helped to focus my thoughts on the true meaning of both ordination and priesthood within Christianity and I am clear that I am doing the right thing by exploring the call to ordination.

But how do I intend to exercise an ordained Christian ministry? On a purely abstract level the answer is that I will seek to serve the people of God through teaching, preaching, administering the sacraments and "living the life". However, on the more practical level of the way in which I envisage myself (and my family) living out a Christian ministry I have yet to form a clear view. My focus to date has been on exploring the call to ordination and given both the pace of change outlined above and the fact that I am (at least) four years away from ordination (and, hopefully, thirty years from retirement) it may be both premature and futile to plan how my ministry is going to work itself out in practice. For example I may start out as a non-stipendiary curate and in 10 or 20 years time be called to exercise full time ministry in a mission field which is barely a blip on the Church of England's radar at present. At present my task it to test whether God is calling me to be a priest within the Church of England (with all the diversity that implies) and, if he is, to trust that he will call me into the right ministry thereafter.

Am I able to exercise such a weighty and responsible ministry? In my own power and by my own strength no. But, as the ordinals remind us we do have assistance: "*I will endeavor myself, the Lord being my helper*" (BCP) and "*By the help of God, I will.*" (ASB).

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What sort of ministry will the Church of the future require?

Introduction

IF "MINISTRY" MEANS "service" and if the Church[5] is a body which consists of all its members[6] then another way of phrasing this question is to ask "How are all the members of the body of Christ to serve each other so as to enable the Church to fulfil it's calling to the world?"

If the question is phrased in this way then it quickly becomes apparent that the ministry / service of individual members is inextricably linked to the calling / mission of the whole body. So what is the calling of the whole body? The Church only exists because of God's mission to the world (the *Missio Dei*) but within the bigger picture of the *Missio Dei* the Church has been given a specific mission (or Great Commission):

> "*Then Jesus said "…go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*"[7]

The Church's mission has always been to "make disciples", as both baptism and teaching flow from discipleship. If ministry is inextricably linked to mission then the Church requires ministry which enables it to make disciples.

As Jesus Christ was incarnated in a particular place and time so too the Church does not exist as a Platonic ideal but is incarnate in the world and

[5] For the purposes of this essay "Church" means all ecclesial bodies professing an "orthodox" faith, unless the context makes it clear that I am referring to a particular Church at a particular place and time.

[6] 1 Cor. 12:27

[7] Matt. 28:18-20. All biblical quotes are from the NIV translation.

is subject to the vicissitudes of time, place and history. In other words the Church has to operate within and is always subject to the cultural context in which it finds itself. A Church within a non-Christian culture will have a different understanding of its mission from one within a professed Christian culture. The Church's mission paradigm (i.e. the way in which it goes about mission) has to fit the surrounding culture in order to work. The challenge faced by the Church today is that cultural values are shifting with such speed and in such unpredictable directions that the Church's current mission paradigm (the Christendom paradigm) is increasingly inappropriate to the culture in which it finds itself. Operating with the wrong mission paradigm means that the Church has a decreasing ability to fulfil its mission.

In order to fully answer the question about what kind of ministry will be required in the Church of the future it is necessary to consider what kind of mission paradigm will be required to fit the culture of the future. To attempt to do this will require looking at *How did we get here? What is happening now?* and *Where might we be going?*

How did we get here?

Following Christ's Ascension, and for the next three hundred years, the Church operated in an environment that was not only non-Christian but was often physically hostile to followers of the Way. When it became clear that Christianity was not simply a sub-set of Judaism[8] it ceased to enjoy the tolerance afforded to Judaism by the Roman authorities. It became a *religio illicita*, its members were subject to sporadic persecution and its meetings were, sometimes literally, forced underground[9]. This environment produced a clear distinction between those who were Christian and those who were not and there was no room for nominalism. In this setting the Church's mission was to everyone around

[8] And this was not a foregone conclusion given the dispute between the early Church leaders. Acts 15 gives a small flavour of the tensions between the Apostles in Jerusalem and Paul

[9] Of course parts of the Church in places such as China continue to operate in this environment to the present day.

them who was not already Christian. The Church's mission paradigm in this period is known as the "Apostolic" paradigm on the basis that the Church as a whole were "sent forth" (from the Greek *apostolos*) into the world to make disciples and the whole world around it was a rich, albeit sometimes dangerous, mission field.

The Church's understanding and practice of mission inevitably changed as the status of Christianity itself changed. Following the conversion of Constantine in 313 A.D. Christianity not only moved from *illicita* to *licita* but soon became "highly favoured". The Church became both wealthy and inextricably linked with the power structures of the Empire.

> " *'Make me a bishop of Rome and I will become a Christian tomorrow.' The pagan senator Praetextatus said in tribute to the wealth that now went with the office."*[10]

Although extreme this does demonstrate graphically that the attraction of Christianity changed with the arrival of legitimacy, money and power. Constantine himself never sought to take the step of enshrining Christianity as the only acceptable religion but this step was taken in 391 by the Emperor Theodosius. Across the empire pagans were put to death, their idols smashed and their temples requisitioned. In less than one hundred years Christianity had turned from a minority sect in a polytheistic world to being the official religion of the Empire and, in at least some cases, the identity of Christians themselves had shifted from being the persecuted to being the persecutors.

From this point on there has been a complex symbiotic relationship between Church and State in which each is co-identified with the other and each lends legitimacy to the other. The Church of England's role at the coronation of monarchs and having Bishops sitting in the House of Lords is one local example of this. Notwithstanding the Great Schism between East and West and the splintering of the West into national churches following the Reformation in nearly all cases the State is clearly identified as being Christian which means that to be a citizen of the State is to be a Christian and *vice versa.* This is Christendom.

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[10] Moynahan, Brian. *The Faith, A History of Christianity,* p.101

The Church's understanding of its mission during this period, the Christendom mission paradigm, is substantially different from the Apostolic mission paradigm. In Christendom it is simply not necessary to "do mission" at home because everyone is already perceived to be Christian; mission is something that is done by professional missionaries in pagan lands. Conversion to Christianity is something that happens when people are brought within the Empire or State by conquest or colonisation. In this environment the vast majority of Christians within Christendom do not give any thought to the Great Commission[11]. To put it kindly the Christendom mission paradigm is a wholesale delegation of responsibility for mission from the many to the very few. To put it less kindly it is a systemic abrogation of responsibility for making new disciples.

The problem now faced by the Church is that Christianity in no longer the dominant or even the default belief system of the vast majority of the population. The number of un-Churched people is increasing rapidly and the Church is struggling to reach them at least partly because of the general abrogation of responsibility for making disciples brought about by the Christendom mission paradigm.

What is happening now?

> "*The times they are a-changin*"[12]

In 1980 the average number of people attending Sunday services in England was 4.7 million. By 2010 this is projected to have declined to 2.9 million[13]. This is a decline of 600,000 every decade. At that rate of decline attendance will drop to zero by the year 2058. Actually the rate of decline is likely to increase as the average age of those who attend Church is higher than average age in the population as a whole. A

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[11] Matt. 28:18-20 as above.

[12] Bob Dylan

[13] UKCH Religious Trends No.5 2005/2006 page 2.21. Accessed via <http://www.christian-research.org.uk>

declining number of increasingly older people does not make a healthy Church for the future. There are examples of Churches which are growing and are bucking this trend[14] but, nevertheless, these bald statistics make for sobering reading.

As touched on in the introduction the Church does not operate in a vacuum and it is subject to cultural and social trends. A great deal has been written about the effects of Post-Modernity on the Church and the ministers of the future (and indeed the present) will have to operate in a society which has an entirely different outlook on life from that which prevailed less than a generation ago.

Post-war Britain of the late 1940's and early 1950's represented the high-point of Modernity. It was a time of ideologies, optimism for the future, rationality and a belief in the dominance of science. The past was being swept away and a Brave New World was being ushered in.

By the 1980's and 1990's modern high-rise flats had turned into slums in the sky, optimism had turned to pessimism, the big ideologies had failed, science appeared to have caused as many problems as it had solved and, according to Margaret Thatcher at least, there was no such thing as society only individuals. Global capitalism had turned everyone (who could afford it) into consumers and personal choice was all. This is the seed-bed of Post-Modernity.

Post-Modernity is not an organisation, it does not have a clear agenda and it is not capable of clear definition. It is a cultural trend which exhibits itself in myriad and sometimes contradictory ways. As such probably the best that can be done is to try and identify some of its key characteristics, which include: A rejection of belief in objective truth or ideology, an "incredulity towards meta-narratives,"[15] a rejection of logic or rationality in favour of what "feels right", a rejection of dogma in favour of karma, a decline in community based on geography and an increase in virtual or special interest communities. Given these

[14] e.g. Holy Trinity Brompton and its off-shoots

[15] Jean-Francois Lyotard. See <http://www.facingthechallenge.org/seedbed.htm>

characteristics the rejection of the meta-narratives of organised religion and an increase in consumer focused, pick and mix, spirituality seems a natural consequence.

Part of the criticism being aimed at the Church of England is not that it has been unable to adapt in the face of changing society but, on the contrary, that it embraced the Enlightenment / Modernist mind-set so thoroughly that it is now suffering even more from the effects of Post-Modernism. It could be argued that the Church of England was founded, at least in part, on the rejection of Roman practices which did not have a "rational" basis in scripture. Having rejected many such sacramental practices the Church of England could be accused of removing much of the mystery of faith and has consequentially had to engage in apologetics to justify its position. Whilst this has lead to an honourable tradition of the exposition of scripture it could also be said to make the Church look apologetic, in having to argue for a rational belief in God, and it leaves precious little room for manoeuvre in times which are less trusting of rationality. As John Drane put it:

> "*Quite simply we seem to have ended up with a secular church in a spiritual society.*"[16].

In adapting so well to secular modernity the Church of England looks ill-equipped to deal with a more spiritual post-modernity.

Where might we be going?

If we have a declining Modernist Church within a Post-Modern culture the obvious answer might be to seek to turn ourselves entirely into a Post-Modern Church. In his book *Liquid Church* Pete Ward seems to be taking this line by suggesting that in a culture which is increasingly liquid the Church must also become liquid in order to remain relevant. Whilst superficially attractive there are some significant problems with this approach, including:

[16] *The McDonaldization of the Church* page 54

- By seeking to emulate such a fast moving and ephemeral trend as post-modernism we run the risk of simply chasing chimeras which, by the time we think we understand them, have moved on and changed shape;
- If we are entirely successful in becoming as liquid as the culture around us then, in a liquid culture, what is actually distinctive about a liquid church?
- By embracing a current cultural trend in this way we run the risk of repeating the mistakes of the past (i.e. Modernism) and being wrong-footed when the next contrary trend appears.

This does not mean that we do nothing to address the situation but as Rob Warner says:

> "*We must learn to live out and express the gospel in ways that are culturally specific to our particular context….However…the church must not become subservient to it's context, watering down the essential gospel or becoming syncretistic, absorbing uncritically cultural and religious influences*"[17]

There are already many things going on within the Church which both arise from post-modern culture and which are looking to engage positively with that culture. The "grass roots up" response is to be found in the multiple expressions of "Emerging Church" and the alternative worship scene. On the whole the Emerging Church stands outside the inherited Church structures. Some espouse orthodox beliefs, albeit in non-orthodox form, whereas some are so non-dogmatic that they are open to criticism on the grounds of being barely Christian.[18] Following on from the now-seminal *Mission-Shaped Church*[19] report the Church of England has launched the Fresh Expressions initiative[20] which,

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[17] Rob Warner, *21st Century Church, Why Radical Change Cannot Wait* page 58

[18] For such a critique of Brian McLaren see http://members.tripod.com/carla_b/emergentmovement/rscottsmith.html

[19] Church House Publishing 2004

[20] See www.freshexpressions.org.uk

essentially, seeks to empower people to find new ways of expressing their Christian life and worship outside the structures of traditional Church.

It is impossible to generalise about the numerous forms that Emerging and Evolving Church is taking save to say that they are eclectic and diverse. Perhaps in a culture where personal choice is paramount such diversity of practice is essential and may represent a healthy rejection of standardised (or even McDonaldised) Church. We must be aware that infinite diversity may end up being the same thing as being liquid. However, in terms of which of these projects may end up bearing fruit I can do no better than quote (in a post-modern and eclectic way):

> "*Let a thousand flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend*"[21]

and

> *"…For if their purpose or activity is of human origin it will fail. But if it is from God you will not be able to stop these men…*"[22]

So what is an appropriate mission paradigm for a post-modern world and, therefore, what kind of ministry do we need for the Church of the future?

Although we now live in a non-Christian society, which bears some relation to the culture in which the early Christians lived, it would not be appropriate to seek a return to the Apostolic mission paradigm. This is because a post-Christian, post-modern world[23] is actually quite different from a pre-Christian and pre-modern world and we need to find new ways to act.

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[21] Mao Zedong

[22] Acts 5:38,38

[23] I am conscious that this essay contains more Posts than the trans-Australia fence.

I would like to posit the notion of a Discipleship mission paradigm. This has both an inward (existing Christian) and an outward (mission) dimension. The inward dimension goes thus: Post-Moderns are less interested in hearing what we believe (our dogma and meta-narrative) and more interested in seeing the transformative effect of our beliefs in our lives. Therefore the whole people of God (the *laos*- both ordained and non-ordained) should be prepared to shed our secular, modernist, ways and re-discover the meaning of personal discipleship, to become followers of Christ and not simply Church-goers. I believe that Church communities who are all travelling and learning together as disciples and pilgrims will be inherently attractive and provocative communities:

> "*Only as communities of love, depending on the outpouring of supernatural love by the Holy Spirit, can we begin to walk in the power of the first Christians.*"[24]

Such a genuine inward transformation will achieve a great deal of the outward mission as post-modern spiritual seekers will be attracted to authentic worshiping and spiritual communities.

The outward, mission, dimension of this paradigm is that we should not treat the un-Churched as people who need to hear all we have to say about God whether they want to our not but, rather, we should have the humility to recognise that God is already at work in their lives and then seek to journey with them as fellow-pilgrims, swapping stories of our travels and, perhaps, pointing to new horizons.

In terms of ministry for the Church of the future, operating under or working towards a Discipleship paradigm of mission, it should not be assumed that "ministry" is coterminous with the ordained ministry. To ignore the gifts and potential of 99% of the *laos* is to repeat the mistake of a Church which has been too clergy-centred in its understanding of ministry for too long. A model of mission and ministry which does not include the whole *laos* is doomed to failure as no body can function if 99% of its cells have been rendered inoperative.

However, whilst this mission paradigm calls upon the whole *laos* to minister to one another and to the world the ordained leadership of the

[24] Rob Warner, *21st Century Church*, page 86

Church of the future has a vital role to play in assisting the paradigm-shift to take place. If Christendom is the abrogation of the responsibility for mission then Discipleship should be its rediscovery and the task of the ordained ministers of the future should be to empower and assist the rest of the *laos* in that task. The Church of the future therefore requires ordained ministry that recognises that the old mission paradigms are no longer appropriate, that will enable the non-ordained to minister to each other, that recognises the need for a re-discovery of personal discipleship and is committed to assisting the *loas* in fulfilling its mission to make new disciples.

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http://opensourcetheology.net

Israel's developing counter-testimony regarding the hiddenness, inscrutability and absence of Yahweh, especially as reflected in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, offers people at the dawn of the third millennium of the Christian era a way of encountering God which is much more accessible than the way indicated by Israel's core testimony – Discuss

Introduction

IN ORDER TO properly discuss whether Israel's "counter-testimony" concerning the nature of God offers people of the third millennium a more accessible way of encountering him than the "core testimony" it will first be necessary to look at the meaning of those terms.

The conceit behind the concepts of testimony and counter-testimony concerning the nature of God is that, when studying the OT, we can only make statements about the nature of God based upon what the writers of the OT have recorded about their experiences or beliefs concerning God (i.e. what they have "testified") [25]. God did not write the text of the OT personally which means that his words, actions and even his motivations are mediated through the writers of the texts. It is clear that the writers of the various books of the OT did not all share the same experience of God and, therefore, their testimonies present somewhat different pictures of the nature of God. Although it may be a somewhat broad-brush approach these different accounts can be categorised into arguments for and against God having particular characteristics or acting in particular ways. Therefore the core testimony could be said to represent Israel's central or prime beliefs about God's characteristics or

[25] As posited by Walter Brueggemann in *Theology of the Old Testament*, Fortress Press 1997

actions and the counter-testimony is a refutation (or at least a substantial refinement) of those experiences of God.

As a counter-testimony can only be meaningful when compared with the testimony which it is seeking to refute or refine it would be useful to start with a brief examination of Israel's core testimony before looking at the counter-testimony as expressed in the books of Job, Ecclesiastes and, possibly, elsewhere.

Having looked at both strands of testimony concerning Israel's experience of the nature of God I will then be considering which is more likely to offer people at the dawn of the third millennium a more accessible way of encountering God and, accordingly, whether the Church should be promoting or teaching one testimony in preference to the other.

The core testimony of Israel concerning the nature of God

It seems clear that Israel's central understanding of itself as a nation and of the nature of God is founded upon the story of the exodus from Egypt:

> "*My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians ill-treated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labour. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me.*" [26]

In my view this passage from Deuteronomy contains all the vital ingredients of the core testimony: It makes it clear that Israel are God's

[26] Deut 26:5-10

chosen people, that God acts in a decisive manner to save his chosen people and, finally, that the proper response of the people to God's actions is obedience (in this case by worship / sacrifice). Thus the core-testimony of Israel is: (1) We are in a close and historic relationship with God, (2) our God is a God of action and, therefore, (3) our proper reaction to God should be one of obedience.

The first of these elements of the core-testimony (Israel as the "chosen people") is absolutely foundational to everything that follows. If Israel did not understand itself to be God's people then the OT would be interesting mythology, folklore or even history but it would not be theology. It is the fact that the OT records Israel's understanding of its experience and relationship to God that turns these otherwise human stories into words about God, or theology.

In relation to the second element of the core testimony Brueggemann says:

> "*Yahweh's characteristic presentation in Israel's rhetoric is that Yahweh acts powerfully, decisively and transformatively.*"[27]

The God of the OT is not simply a collection of abstract concepts or attributes but, rather, he is known through his actions in history. God creates the world, he chooses Abraham to found the nation, he saves Israel, he gives the law to Moses *et cetera.* This is important because if God is known as a God who acts on behalf of his chosen people then when he appears either not to act or his actions are contrary to the interests of the chosen people it raises exactly the type of questions we encounter in the counter-testimony.

But, finally, Israel's chosen status and God's activity is not without obligation: God requires obedience in one form or another in return. Without wishing to delve into dispensationalism there is a development in obedience that God requires from the simple command not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, the earliest dietary

[27] Brueggemann op. cit. p.137

law and prohibition of murder at the time of Noah, the covenant of circumcision with Abraham to the ten commandments and the later laws[28]. God's relationship with his chosen nation is intended to be two-way.

These elements of the core testimony are intimately related and much of the story of the OT is one of cause and effect: When Israel and key individuals, especially the Judges and Kings, "walk with God" and are obedient to his commands (in particular the commands against idolatry) then everything goes well with them and the nation. However when people "do evil in the eyes of the Lord"[29] then, as night follows day, there is chaos in the land and, ultimately, the promised land is overrun and the chosen people are carried off into captivity.

So the core testimony could be reduced to the proposition that God will act on behalf of those of his chosen people who keep the covenant to obey God's commands but he may abandon or even act against those who do not. The good will prosper and the wicked will perish. This core testimony runs like a thread throughout the thinking behind the Pentateuch, the History, the Prophets and the mainstream Wisdom writing in many of the Psalms and Proverbs.

The counter-testimony of Israel concerning the nature of God

If the core testimony of an active and relational God runs like a thread throughout the OT then it should be noted that it is intimately entwined with the thread of counter-testimony concerning a God who appears absent in times of need or whose actions appear contrary to expectations. Although this counter-testimony is most clearly identifiable in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes (as discussed further below) it is never far from the surface when things "go wrong'. Even during the exodus from Egypt when God had acted powerfully to free Israel and was leading them to the promised land his people were not slow to complain or rebel

[28] Gen 2:17, Gen 9:4-6, Gen 17:11, Ex 20:2-17, Ex 20:2-17 , Ex 21:1 – 23:19

[29] e.g. 1 Kings 16:30

as soon as they felt hungry or if left on their own for too long[30]. Similarly although many of the Psalms are full of praise for an active and bountiful God[31] there are many which lament God's apparent absence:

> "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning*?"[32]

Brueggemann labels this the "*genre of complaint"* and makes the point that such candid questioning of God is context-driven[33]. Of course, in terms of Israel's history, the ultimate context for questioning God's actions in relation to his chosen people was the Babylonian exile; if God has demonstrated his fidelity to Israel by bringing them up out of Egypt and giving them the promised land then what did it say about God's fidelity when the chosen people are carried off to captivity? One answer to this question is the core testimony answer from Deuteronomy, given above, that Israel had broken her side of the covenant with God and that the exile represented a just punishment.

However this Deuteronomistic answer does not address the reality that bad things do happen to good people nor does it prevent some tough counter-testimony statements about the exile:

> "*In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise your name for ever.*
>
> *But now you have rejected and humbled us…*
>
> *You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing for the sale…*
>
> *All this happened to us though we had not forgotten you and been false to your covenant.*

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[30] E.g. Ex. 15:24, 16:3, 17:2, 17:7, 32:1.

[31] E.g. Pss 8, 9, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 27, 30, 33, 34, 46, 47, 48, 66, 67, 68, 81, 89, 92, 95, 96, 98, 100, 101, 103, 104, 105, 106, 108, 111, 113, 115, 116, 117, 118, 124, 134, 135, 136, 138, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150.

[32] Ps 22:1 see also e.g. Pss 10, 13, 42:9, 43:2, 44, 60, 69, 74, 77:7-9, 79, 80, 83, 85, 137.

[33] Brueggemann op. cit. p.321

Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path.

But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with a deep darkness." [34]

This is a real cry from the heart and runs directly counter to the assertion that adversity must be the punishment for sin. The book of Job represents, in dramatic form, a dialogue between the clear "cause and effect" theology of the core testimony / mainstream wisdom and the context-driven counter-testimony experience of the unwarranted suffering of the innocent.

Job was clearly innocent. In fact he was "*blameless and upright: he feared God and shunned evil.*"[35] In true core testimony / mainstream wisdom style this God-fearing existence had brought Job success and "*he was the greatest man among all the peoples of the East.*"[36] Even God himself says that there was no-one on Earth like Job.[37] The prologue could not be plainer; Job was the epitome of human virtue. And yet God acceded to Satan's request to put Job's faith to the test by stripping him of everything and subjecting him to every humiliation short of death. God's motive in accepting Satan's challenge is unknown.

Job's initial reaction to losing his children and then becoming afflicted from head to foot in running sores is appropriately holy:

"*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*"[38]

And

"*Shall we accept good from God and not trouble?*"[39]

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[34] Ps 44:8, 9, 12, 17-19.

[35] Job 1:1

[36] Job 1:3

[37] Job 1:8

[38] Job 1:20

However, after a week of sitting in silent suffering with Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, Job curses the day he was born[40]. He does not curse God (as initially invited to do by his wife) but he is now considerably less sanguine about his predicament. This doubtless reflected some of the anger and confusion experienced by Israel at the time of the exile.

Job's comforters are well-versed in Wisdom and they know that God does not send undeserved suffering:

> "*Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?*"[41]

And yet both Job and the reader know that traditional Wisdom has reached its limits because this suffering really is undeserved. Beyond the boundaries of human wisdom lies God's inscrutability and sovereignty. God does not seek to answer Job's question about the cause of his suffering directly but, rather, invites him to consider the vastness and complexity of creation and to weigh up his human wisdom in comparison to the being who creates and sustains the cosmos. According to John L. McKenzie:

> "*The speech of Yahweh asks that one have faith in the demonstrated wisdom of the creator. One must believe that the power and wisdom which produced the world are able to sustain it in wisdom, even though God's wisdom is impenetrable to man* "[42]

The Book of Job does not say that the pursuit of wisdom is pointless. It does, however, make it clear that the apogee of human wisdom does not begin to scratch the surface of God's wisdom. Therefore, the lesson goes, even if our current predicament seems inexplicable we must trust

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[39] Job 2:10

[40] Job 3:1

[41] Job 4:7

[42] A Theology of the Old Testament, MacMillan 1974, p224, 225

that God knows what he is doing. God is not bound by our understanding of cause and effect.

Ecclesiastes is both more pessimistic in tone and ambiguous in the lessons to be drawn. According to the writer of Ecclesiastes (the Teacher or Koheleth) everything is ultimately meaningless, including even the pursuit of wisdom[43]. The testing of man by God serves no purpose other than to demonstrate than man is no different from animals, ultimately all will die and the dead know nothing and will have no further reward therefore we should enjoy the here and now as much as possible, but even that enjoyment has no real meaning[44]. This book is almost perfect nihilism and, in that sense, well suited to post-modernism. And yet, even here, the Teacher urges his readers to stand in awe of God, to remember their Creator while young, to fear God and keep his commandments as that is the whole duty of man[45]. Therefore, while the lessons to be drawn from Ecclesiastes are more ambiguous than Job, it does seem to be making a similar point: although we may not understand what is going on or why we are here and everything may seem (or even be) meaningless we are part of God's creation and should acknowledge and obey God as such.

So Job, Ecclesiastes and a number of the Psalms tell a very different story of the experience of God from that set out in the core testimony. In this counter-testimony the good and the holy sometimes suffer and the reasons for this or even for existence itself may never be clear to us. Nevertheless, rather than allowing this to make us "curse God and die", our proper response should be awe and humility, and even a sense of surrender, to an often hidden and inscrutable God.

[43] Ecc 1:18

[44] Ecc 3:18, Ecc 9:5, Ecc 2:24

[45] Ecc 5:7, Ecc 12:1, Ecc 12:13

Core testimony or counter-testimony for the people of the third millennium?

So which strand of Israel's story is likely to make God more accessible to people at the dawn of the third millennium; the testimony concerning a covenant God who will act either for or against his chosen people depending on whether they keep to their side of the covenant or the testimony of a more mysterious and inscrutable God whose actions or inactions seem unrelated to human perceptions of cause and effect or, even, justice?

Perhaps the Church has been guilty historically of placing too much emphasis on a wholly core testimony understanding of an active "cause and effect" God which has alienated those people whose personal experience or perception of the world and / or God is much closer to the spirit of the counter-testimony. In that case it is entirely appropriate that we should "rediscover" the fact that asking hard questions of God does not place one beyond the pale but, rather, it has always been an integral part of the journey of faith, as demonstrated by the counter-testimony material.

At this juncture it is tempting in the extreme to go further and assert that because of the apparent post-modern desire for religion-less spirituality that the Church should be actively proclaiming the inscrutable God of the counter-testimony. Many post-modern "New Agers" are comfortable with acknowledging an impersonal divine force and, to that extent, the promotion of a wholly counter-testimony experience of God may make Christianity ostensibly more accessible. A withdrawal from the "God who acts" as represented in the core testimony may also seem timely given the events of the last 90 years from the First World War to the Tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 when, for many people, God has often felt absent, hidden and inscrutable. However I will resist that temptation. Whilst promoting the worship of an inscrutable and hidden God may be superficially attractive in the modern context I believe that to do so in an unbalanced way is to sell God substantially short.

As noted above the core testimony and counter-testimony are intricately woven together throughout the story of Israel and they are both based on the lived experience of many generations. The danger in seeking to promote one strand of testimony over the other as a "way in" to experiencing God is that we unravel the whole tapestry and create a theology of God which is based on one view of God without the balancing effect of the other. For example if we promote a God who is wholly bound to act in accordance with human expectations of fairness then this is likely to have two effects: firstly it seeks to deny God his right to absolute sovereignty and, secondly, it is a picture of God that will quickly collapse in the "context-driven" reality of experience. A wholly core testimony God is therefore just too simplistic and feels too much like man making God in his own image. Conversely if we say that God is wholly mysterious and inscrutable then we are making two misleading statements: firstly that God's revelations of his character through past actions cannot be relied upon or interpreted meaningfully as it is always open to God to do as he wishes even if it contradicts his previously revealed nature and, secondly, that we should not seek to rely upon or trust him for anything as his actions or inactions will always be beyond human understanding. A wholly counter-testimony God is therefore a redundant God; it does not matter whether such a God even exists as he is so "other" and his actions so unrelated to human need as to give people absolutely no "way in".

Ultimately the best way to make an encounter with God more accessible to modern people must be to present them with the most "true" picture of God that we are able to do. To this end a more rounded picture of the nature of God is likely to emerge from a dialogue about different experiences of God rather than a monologue promoting one perspective. This dialogue is already to be found in the OT (and the NT) and to redact one aspect in favour of another is to repeat the mistake of Marcion[46]. To use some shorthand our God is both transcendent and immanent. Transcendent in his ultimate sovereignty but also immanent in his revelations, the incarnation of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is only by seeking to maintain this dynamic balance between a

[46] Founder of the Marcionites in c. 144. Excommunicated for teaching that God as revealed in Jesus was different from the creator God of the Old Testament and, therefore, that the Old Testament had no constructive role to play in a Christian understanding of God.

God that is both "out there" and "God with us" that we can hope to fully communicate our understanding of God.

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Write a page reviewing the book[47] saying what the book is about and what you thought of it.

IN *The Meaning of Jesus* the traditionalist evangelical bishop Tom Wright and the liberal academic Marcus Borg engage in a thoughtful and thought-provoking dialogue about the extent to which we can discern the person of Jesus from the evidence of the scriptures and consider the extent to which we should seek to distinguish the historic Jesus from the Christ of faith. They undertake this task by looking at various doctrines concerning Jesus ranging from the virgin birth to the resurrection via his divinity (and others) and they have written a chapter each giving their own view of the basis of each doctrine and, to a greater or lesser extent, sought to address the view of the other.

Although they approach each question from quite different perspectives it is apparent that their dialogue on these issues is grounded in deeply held Christian faith on both sides. This means that whilst their interpretation of the scriptures leads them to different conclusions about the literalism of many of the stories concerning and sayings of Jesus they seem to agree on the ultimate meaning of the scriptures. For example when discussing the resurrection Tom Wright is clear in his view that Jesus' physical body was resurrected and that the tomb was therefore empty whereas Marcus Borg states that whether or not the tomb was empty is irrelevant as, in his view, the resurrection was a spiritual rather than a physical event. However they are both agreed that, in whatever form, Jesus was "risen" and that this event created the early Church. The same is true, in general, throughout the book: Tom Wright is more wedded to the literality of the scriptures whereas Marcus Borg interprets much of scripture as the early Church "metaphorising" history based upon their experience of the post-Easter Jesus and he states that it is when we literalise the metaphors that we get "nonsense".[48] If Marcus Borg were an atheist academic intent on mere deconstruction then it would be easy for the Christian to dismiss his views and this book would be much less effective. However, the fact that he writes as a Christian compels one to acknowledge that questioning the literality of the Bible

[47] N.T. Wright & Marcus Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus*, SPCK 1999

[48] *ibid.* p.153

from an informed perspective does not, of itself, imply or cause a lack of faith. I suspect that this is liberating book for Christians who do hold deep faith but who have intellectual difficulty with some areas of doctrine.

Chose one or two sections in the book (Parts I – VIII). Discuss the different arguments presented by N.T. Wright and M. Borg, and offer your own arguments and conclusions, supporting what you say from primary and secondary sources.

I HAVE CHOSEN to look at Part V of *The Meaning of Jesus*, entitled *Was Jesus God?* As the title suggests this section is concerned with the Christian doctrine that Jesus of Nazareth was not only a man who lived in a particular time and place but that he also shared in the divine essence of God and was, in fact, the incarnation of God. The study of this subject is known as Christology.

In my view Christology is probably the most important area of Christian doctrine. Whilst St. Paul says that if the resurrection is not true then our faith is useless[49] it is also the case that if Jesus did not share in the nature of God and was therefore "only" human then the Christian worship of him as God would be wholly erroneous. Not only would this place the whole Christian community outside three of the ten commandments[50] but it would also mean that our theories of salvation through the work of Jesus (soteriology) are entirely flawed as is our understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God. In short, if Jesus were not God then either he or the early Church was seriously mistaken and Christianity is no more than pantheistic idol worship. Christology is therefore the "key-stone" of Christianity and if one removes the key-stone then the whole edifice collapses. Put in these stark terms it becomes clear why the early Church debated this issue at such length and why it is so important for us to understand the basis for, and be able to maintain, an "orthodox" Christology.

Before looking at the debate between Tom Wright and Marcus Borg on this issue I think it would be useful to very briefly outline what the

[49] 1 Corinthians 15:14

[50] Exodus 21:3-7

orthodox understanding of Christ's nature actually is in order to establish some sort of foundation to the discussion.

The Church of England is a creedal Church as its professions of faith come directly from the creeds formulated by the Ecumenical Councils of the early Church. In relation to the person of Jesus we say in the Nicene Creed:[51]

> "*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God*"

The meaning of the Nicene Creed was somewhat amplified at the later Council of Chalcedon:[52]

> "*…our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood…*"

And so the Christological position of all Churches who hold to the Chalcedonian Definition is that Jesus had two natures, one fully human and one fully divine, and that they were united in his person. Space prohibits a review of the various controversies and machinations of the early Church which resulted in this "fully human and fully divine" Christology but the view of Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzus (who helped establish this Christology against those who held that Jesus was either not divine or that he was not human) is nicely summarised in a rather more contemporary quote:

> "*If Christ was only man, then he is entirely irrelevant to any thought about God; if he is only God, then he is entirely irrelevant to any experience of human life.*"[53]

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[51] From the Council of Constantinople 381 A.D.

[52] 451 A.D.

[53] Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?* Methuen, 1947

Having, albeit briefly, established the position of the Church in this debate I shall now look at the different Christological views of Marcus Borg and Tom Wright.

As noted in the first part of this assignment Marcus Borg is both a Christian and a liberal academic. As an academic he sees a substantial discontinuity between the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ of faith as recalled / created by the early Church. Throughout *The Meaning of Jesus* Borg characterises this discontinuity as the "pre-Easter" and the "post-Easter" Jesus.

In answer to the question of whether Jesus either thought or claimed to be divine Borg says: "*if you think that you are the light of the world, you're not*"[54] This brings to mind C.S.Lewis's "trichotomy" in relation to Jesus' claims about himself:

> *"A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."*[55]

Borg's answer to this trichotomy is to posit a fourth possibility: that Jesus may have been some sort of holy man who "knew God" but that the majority of titles used in relation to Jesus (such as Son of God, Son of man, Christ, Messiah and Lord) were primarily the product of the early Church's understanding of the post-Easter Jesus and that the pre-Easter Jesus did not use these phrases or titles in relation to himself.

Dealing specifically with the title "Son of God" Borg says that this is a "relational metaphor" pointing to an intimate relationship between God and Jesus but that, ultimately, this metaphor became an "ontological claim" that Jesus is of one substance with God.[56] So, for Borg, the

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[54] *The Meaning of Jesus* p146

[55] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Macmillan 1960, pp. 55-56

[56] p. 151

doctrine that Jesus shared in the substance of God (at least during his lifetime ministry) is an over-extension or a literalisation of this relational metaphor. Jesus the Jewish mystic was metaphorically described as being the "son of God" in the same way that others who were close to God were described (for example the nation of Israel[57], leading individuals[58], angels[59] and the king[60]) but that the Christian's understanding of this term in relation to Jesus has become too literal. Borg states the danger of literalising metaphors thus:

> *"…very early on we metaphorized our history, and since then we have often historicized our metaphors. When we literalise metaphors we get nonsense."*[61]

If Borg were simply saying that it is "nonsense" to talk about Jesus being literally the Son of God on the grounds that this is simply a metaphorical description of a Jewish mystic which had got out of hand then this would be a consistent position. However, it is at this point that Borg's Christian faith appears to come into conflict with his academic views and this somewhat confuses his message. Whilst maintaining that the various Christological metaphors are "*confessions of faith*" and not "*statements of verifiable facts*" [62] Borg goes on to say that he believes they are true but true "*as metaphors*".[63] So, if it is true that Jesus is metaphorically the Son of God does this place him in an entirely different ontological category from the other metaphorical Sons of God noted earlier? If not then Jesus was a human with no divine nature who only incarnated God in the sense that he was open to the presence of a pantheistic God. If Jesus is intended to be in a different "Son of God" category then this seems only to be the case because of the events of Easter in which Jesus was raised and experienced as such by the early Church. This brings us back to Borg's discontinuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus; the pre-Easter Jesus being a spiritual person who, nevertheless, was

[57] Ex. 4:22

[58] Deut.14:1, Isaiah 1:2

[59] Gen. 6:2-4

[60] 2 Sam 7:14

[61] *The Meaning of Jesus* pp152-153

[62] ibid. p.152

[63] ibid. p 152

wholly human and did not share in the nature or substance of God and the post-Easter Jesus who was raised to be with God and can now be worshipped as divine. If this accurately summarises Borg's views then it strikes me that Borg's Christology is actually a form of Adoptionism[64], in the sense of Jesus being "adopted" into the Godhead only following his resurrection.

So how does Tom Wright deal with the question of Christology? Wright's general approach to seeking to understand the person of Jesus is to place him firmly within his historic and religious context. After all, Wright argues, we can only make informed judgements about Jesus sharing in the substance of God if we know exactly what sort of God is being spoken of. Whilst the Jewish people of the Second Temple era were fiercely monotheistic the OT demonstrates that their perception of God was by no means monochrome: YHWH was not simply a creator god who presided over his creation from a distance and nor was he simply a tribal god who travelled with the Israelites: YHWH was both "out there" as the ultimate creator and "with us" as the God of the covenant. For example in Genesis 1 God is the transcendent creator but by Genesis 2 he is already walking with his creation and this delicate balance between transcendence and immanence is broadly maintained throughout the story of the OT. Whilst the writers of the OT never sought to examine the interior life of YHWH to explain this dynamic balance they did develop metaphorical language concerning God's immanent activity and developed concepts such as the Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Presence of God, the Law of God and, of course, the Wisdom or Sophia of God. Wright states that it was in "*this rich seam of Jewish thought*" where the early Christians went quarrying for language to help them describe the phenomena that was their experience of Jesus.[65] Obviously not all of these OT metaphors came to be applied to the person of Jesus (as the Spirit is a separate person in the Trinitarian understanding of God) but, nevertheless, it is clear that to describe Jesus as the Word of God[66] or to equate him with the Wisdom of Proverbs 8 is

[64] Adoptionism has raised its head in various guises from the second century, being condemned as heresy by Pope Victor (AD 190- 198), being later revived in Spain in the 8th Century by Elipandus, by Abelard in the 12th century and in different forms by later theologians thereafter.

[65] ibid. p160

[66] e.g. John 1

to make it clear that those who encountered Jesus felt that they had experienced God at work. To them he was "Immanuel" (the Immanent God or God with us) and the various titles and metaphors applied to him reflected that experience.

In relation specifically to the title "Son of God" Wright agrees with Borg that it had a number of meanings within the OT and was used in relation to a variety of exalted yet not divine beings. However, Wright says that by Paul's day that title had:

> "*…became another way of speaking about the one God present, personal, active, saving, and rescuing, while still being able to speak of the one God sovereign, creating, sustaining, sending, remaining beyond….holding together the majesty and compassion of God, the transcendence and immanence of God, creation and covenant, sovereignty and presence.*"[67]

Wright therefore is happy to accept that the various Christological titles are both metaphorical and pre-existent in the OT. However Wright, unlike Borg, believes that these metaphorical ways of speaking about the immanent activity of God were tailor made for the God we see incarnated in Jesus.[68]

However Wright also believes that one cannot adequately "do" Christology solely by looking at the various titles. In fact he suggests that this is the "wrong" way of approaching the subject.[69] In essence Wright believes that one can only adequately assess the divinity of Jesus by looking at the whole of Jesus' "vocation" as evidenced by his ministry including his parables and his actions:

> "*…The language was deeply coded, but the symbolic action was not. He was coming to Zion, doing what YHWH had promised to do. He explained his*

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[67] The Meaning of Jesus p162

[68] On a slightly different tack Christopher Tuckett in *Christology Jesus and His Earliest Followers* notes that all language changes meaning over time and that Jesus quickly came to define the Christological titles rather than being defined by them with reference to any pre-existent meaning.

[69] *The Meaning of Jesus*.p.162

actions with riddles all pointing in the same direction…He believed himself called to do and be what in the scriptures only Israel's God did and was."[70]

It is believed that there may have been a number of individuals in that time and place who may have had a genuinely held "vocation" that they were God's anointed messiah or Christ sent to free the Israelites from the Roman yoke. However these people tended to view their messiahship in quite earthly or military forms and the movements they inspired tended to die out quickly after the "messiahs" were killed. Not only did Jesus view his vocation quite differently (he was more interested in overthrowing hypocritical worship than throwing out the Romans) but, of course, his death did not extinguish his mission. This brings us back full circle to the resurrection and, despite the comments made in the introduction, it is clear that the events of the resurrection makes all the difference to our view of Jesus' vocation. If the resurrection is true then it seems to place God's "seal of approval" on Jesus' vocation to be the messiah:

"…*Resurrection pointed to messiahship, messiahship to the task performed on the cross, and that task to God who had promised to accomplish it himself.*" [71]

For Wright, unlike Borg, there is no discontinuity between the pre-Easter and the post-Easter Jesus. The post-Easter Jesus was resurrected precisely because resurrection represented the fulfilment of the pre-Easter Jesus' vocation. Wright is clear that none of this means that Jesus necessarily thought of himself as God, or as the second person of the trinity, but when one considers Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection in a "holistic" manner (i.e. rather than looking at isolated elements such as the various "titles") it is clear why the early Church believed that this person represented an incarnation of YHWH:

"…if you start with the God of Exodus, of Isaiah, of creation and covenant, and of the psalms, and ask what that God might look like were he to become human, you will find that he might look very much like Jesus of

[70] ibid. pp165-166

[71] ibid. p164

Nazareth, and perhaps never more so than when he dies on a Roman cross."[72]

It seems, therefore, that Borg's position in relation to Christology could be characterised as discontinuity. There is discontinuity not only between the pre-Easter and post-Easter Jesus but, ultimately I would argue, between Borg's intellect and faith. Conversely Wright's approach could be characterised as one of integration – Jesus is fully integrated into his context, the vocation and status of the resurrected Jesus is integrated with that of the pre-Easter Jesus.

Whilst being deeply attracted to the more integrated approach of Wright and whilst rejecting the apparent Adoptionism of Borg, one cannot help but wonder about the interior psychological life of a person with "two natures" and, indeed, the extent to which such a person can even be said to be "fully human". However, as Gerald O'Collins says:

> "*The personal union of divinity and humanity entailed by the incarnation exceeds our conceptuality, and cannot be clarified in plain descriptive language in such a way as to be positively intelligible. If we cannot imagine and describe what it would be like to be God, we cannot imagine and describe what it would be like to be God and man.*"[73]

So the fact that we find this hypostatic union difficult to imagine, and the fact that our language can do no more than describe the relationship between God and Jesus in a variety of metaphors, need not stop us looking at what Jesus said and did, and what others said about him, and reasonably conclude that in the person and ministry of Jesus we see both the image and the incarnation of God. Scholars of *The Jesus Seminar* variety (including Marcus Borg) seem keen to remove any concept of divinity from the person of Jesus. However we need to be aware that to remove the nature of God from Jesus is ultimately to remove Christ from Christianity.

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[72] ibid. p167

[73] O'Collins, G. S.J. *Christology* OUP 1995 p 234

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How far does knowing something about the first fifteen centuries of the story of the Church help us in understanding what it means to be Christians in the twenty-first century AD? Illustrate your answer by reference to one of the Christian personalities whose lives and thought are featured in the module.

IT IS INTERESTING that this question asks one to focus specifically on the first fifteen centuries of Church history rather than simply asking how an understanding of Church history in general (i.e. all of the preceding two thousand years) helps one to understand what it means to be a Christian in the twenty-first century. The answer to this much broader question (i.e. Why do we study Church history at all?) could be summarised thus:

"*Christianity appeals to history, and to history it must go*".[74]

Christianity is not a religion of abstract ethics or teachings which arose and can be applied in an historical vacuum but, rather, it is a religion based on events (the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ) which took place at a particular point in history and these events themselves took place in the context of the historical story of Judaism. As a religion based on historical events Christianity therefore cannot help but turn to history in order to understand its origins, maintain an element of continuity of practice and belief and, therefore, be able to proclaim its message. However the question specifically asks us to consider the first fifteen centuries of Church history. Why should the question be posed in this way and what does this suggest about possible answers?

[74] Prof. George Caird as quoted by Bishop Tom Wright on <http://www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_JIG.htm>

Although all Christians are part of the "body of Christ",[75] which could be interpreted as a Platonic Church Invisible, we are also indisputably products of our own time, place, local and visible expression of Church. For the majority of students on the North Thames Ministerial Training Course this means that our understanding of what it means to be a Christian has been formed by our membership of the Church of England. Whilst the historic roots of the Church of England go deep into the Roman Catholic Church it is also the case that it was created partly out of the protestant reformation movement (and partly by the politics of the time) and has since been heavily influenced by the enlightenment and more recently by modernism and even post-modernism. This means that to be a member of the Church of England in the twenty-first century is to have a mindset that is formed by both reformation and modernity. It therefore seems that the purpose of this question is to assess the extent to which our experience of what it means to be a Christian in this reformed and modern milieu can be positively influenced by increasing our knowledge of the story of the pre-reformation and pre-modern Church.

The fact that the question has been framed in this way is perhaps demonstrative of the slightly peculiar attitude towards the historic Church that is sometimes exhibited by some from within the reformed tradition. It is often implicit within protestant circles that "real" Christianity happened in the early Church (although there is no consensus on what this means and it could vary from the first apostles and disciples perhaps up to the conversion of Constantine or even the last of the Ecumenical Councils), that the practice of Christianity "went wrong" somewhere in the middle and then only reappeared in true form at the reformation. This can result in a "time capsule" mentality in which everything that happened in between the end of the early Church and the reformation (however those terms are defined) either being largely ignored as irrelevant or being viewed with genuine unease. This deliberate breaking with the past means that protestants often stand in a slightly alienated position *vis-à-vis* much of the history of the Church. This alienation can result in a deep reluctance to draw upon that history in order to inform the present, except perhaps in a negative sense of seeking to learn from the mistakes of the past. In my view, for the reasons explored in this essay, this negative attitude towards much of

[75] 1 Cor. 12:27.

Church history means that there is a failure to value the rich seams of spirituality, learning and devotion which run throughout the story of the Church and, I would suggest, such neglect can only impoverish our understanding of what it means to be a Christian in the here and now. How so?

It will be implicit from what has been said above is that, in my view, the most important lesson to be learned from studying early and medieval Church history is that the "body of Christ" of which we are a part is more diverse, more challenging and more interesting than we often appreciate from within our Anglican enclave. We are not the first generation to undertake the Christian journey and we are certainly not the first to face challenges in doing so. The fact is that many others have sought to follow Christ before us and they have left behind a huge legacy of martyrs, saints, theologians, apologists, mystics, artists and many diverse movements. Although none of them have inhabited our particular place in the story of the Church, and we cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility of finding out for ourselves what it really means to be a Christian at this time in history, on an intellectual level we can draw huge succour from the accumulated knowledge and experience of this historic legacy and, perhaps on a more spiritual level, we can learn to allow the Christians who have gone before us to be a "*cloud of witnesses*"[76] to our own journey.

Choosing just one person from this cloud of witnesses in order to illustrate how knowledge of the early and medieval Church can enrich our understanding of what it means for us to be Christians in the here and now is, of course, a deliberately limiting exercise as there are simply so many lessons to be learnt from the past: One is tempted to choose the great theologians such as St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas as their contribution to the *corpus* of Christian theology, and hence our self-understanding, is inestimable. Similarly one is attracted to the founders of the great monastic movements such as St. Benedict, St. Francis or St. Dominic on the grounds that we could benefit from the commitment to the *opus dei* of the Benedictines, from the freedom from materialism of the Franciscans and the commitment to preaching of the Dominicans. In these "New Age" times it is also tempting to draw upon the tradition

[76] Hebrews 12:1

of Christian mysticism as exemplified by characters such as Julian of Norwich, Thomas à Kempis, St. John of the Cross or the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*[77] on the grounds that it would be a huge benefit to our modernist and rationalist Church to recapture some of their sense of the immense mystery of faith. Any of these would be perfectly valid illustrations to choose.

However, when considering what it really means to be a Christian in England in the twenty-first century we cannot ignore the fact that we are living in an increasingly post-Christendom, pluralist and even neo-pagan society. Many of the great characters touched on above come from the days of the height of Christendom. Whilst this does not make the lessons to be learnt from them irrelevant to the challenges of today (far from it) it does mean that much of their language and mindset is governed by the underlying assumptions of Christendom, not least the assumption that the default position of the structures of society and of the members of society is Christian. This means that the fundamental question that many of these characters is seeking to answer is *how best* to *be a Christian within a Christian society* rather than the question which faces us now which is: *what should be the Christian response to the huge multiplicity of faiths and non-faiths which surround us?* In order to find an historic character who addressed this very post-Christendom and neo-pagan question it is necessary to venture back to the early Church of pre-Christendom and pagan times.

To be a Christian in the Roman Empire in the three hundred or so years between the time of Christ and the conversion of the Emperor Constantine was to be faced starkly with answering the question of *what about other faiths*? In pagan Rome to be a Christian was to run the constant risk of persecution and execution and, in those circumstances, one would expect the early Christians to begin to develop a rationale for why they should hold to their faith and how their faith related to the many others around them. To a greater or lesser extent the early martyrs, apologists and proto-theologians did exactly that and I have been intrigued by the life and writings of Justin Martyr and, subject to the caution below, I am interested by the possible parallels between his situation and our own times concerning both the defence of the Christian

[77] Believed to be written by a Carthusian monk in the Fourteenth century

faith *per se* and the relationship of Christianity to the plurality of philosophies extant in our society.

However, before going any further, it should be said that there does need to be a real element of caution applied to this type of historical exercise. It would be too easy to suggest that just because Justin Martyr lived in pre-Christendom times and addressed a pagan culture that we can simply transpose his views into our post-Christendom and neo pagan culture and somehow allow Justin's thoughts to answer the challenges of our times. The temptation is obvious but dangerous; taking such a step is likely to result in both bad history and bad theology. As Rowan Williams reminds us, historical figures:

> "*…are not modern people in fancy dress; they have to be listened to as they are…*"[78]

and;

> *"The primitive Christian may be and should be a source to use in questioning later tradition; but he or she does not cease to be a stranger. They are helpful to us not because they are just like us in fancy dress, but because they are who they are in their own context."*[79]

Bearing this in mind I will resist the temptation to try and make Justin into a modern Christian or to draw any facile conclusions from his thoughts which would do injustice to him. Justin was a man of his historical, geographic and social context and cannot be removed from that context any more than we can be removed from ours.

Justin Martyr (called Justin the Philosopher in his own time) was born early in the second century (c.100) to Greek parents in Flavia Neapolis, in Hellenised Samaria. He was a young man of means with an inquisitive mind:

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[78] *Why Study the Past?* Rowan Williams p.10

[79] ibid. p.25

"He seems to have been a typical representative of the urban upper-middle class of the time – loyal, detached from ancient traditions, and cosmopolitan in outlook, intellectually active and interested, honest of mind and economically independent. Justin did not have to earn his own living; he devoted himself to his intellectual interests and became a 'philospher'."[80]

As a student of philosophy Justin started with a Stoic tutor in Ephesus and then passed onto an Aristotelian (who disillusioned Justin by raising the vulgar subject of payment for his lessons!) before studying under a Pythagorean and, finally, under a Platonist. Platonism seemed best suited to Justin's taste (containing as it does concepts of the soul and of a transcendent God) and it is notable that much Platonic thought was subsequently carried over into Christian theology, although not without some suspicion[81] as it was also used by the Gnostics to bolster their views and philosophy as a whole was generally viewed as a pagan pursuit. While he was still a student of Platonism, in c.135, Justin met an old man on a beach and they fell into conversation. The old man was a Christian and, after discussing philosophy, prophecy and the story of Jesus of Nazareth Justin was converted. However, despite the concerns that some Christians had regarding philosophy, Justin did not believe that his conversion to Christianity meant that he had to abandon or renounce his philosophical interests. Rather Justin adopted the distinctive dress of a philosopher and moved from Ephesus to Rome where he started a Christian mission, albeit a mission which took the form of a philosophical school with Justin as its teacher.

Rome at the time was the centre of a substantial empire and, as with all such cities, it contained a multiplicity of faiths and belief systems: not only were there proponents of the various Greek philosophies (as studied by Justin earlier in his life), but there were many cultic faiths indigenous to Rome and from across the Empire, Judaism would also have had a presence (given the destruction of Jerusalem the previous century and the subsequent diaspora) and it seems that Gnostic Christians (not least the descendents of Simon Magus who appeared in Acts 8) were an issue[82]. In

[80] *The Fathers of the Greek Church*, Hans Von Campenhausen. p.7

[81] For example by Hippolytus and Tertullian.

[82] Chapter XXVI – The First Apology of Justin

this mêlèe Christianity had to define itself, defend itself and work out how its claim to possess the ultimate revelation from God could be upheld in the face of so many competing claims. With his wide philosophical training and personal experience of conversion Justin was ideally placed to undertake this task. Justin's principal writings included the First Apology (addressed to the Emperor Antoninus Pius) the Second Apology (addressed to the Roman Senate) and the Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, a written account of what may have been a real dialogue with a rabbi in Ephesus. The Discourse to the Greeks is not thought to be authentic and, unfortunately, his Refutation of all Heresies, principally directed against the Gnostics, has not survived.

When faced with non-Christian faiths, or atheistic philosophies, it is often easy for an evangelist (or an apologist) to overplay the Christian hand by claiming that God has no presence in anything other than Christianity and, therefore, that anything which is non-Christian is not of God and has no value. This was not Justin's approach. Not only did it not chime with his own understanding of the Christian relationship to philosophy but it did not accord with the approach he saw taken by St. Paul when addressing a not dissimilar situation in pagan Athens a hundred years or so earlier:

> "*Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.*"[83]

In other words St. Paul took the view that non-Christians could be motivated by God towards a pursuit of the truth without them realising it and Justin developed this approach further through his doctrine of the pre-existent Christ being the logos spermatikos, or seed bearing Word, sowing seeds of truth into the hearts of men throughout time before the incarnation:

> "*For each man spoke well in proportion to the share he had of the spermatic word [logos spermatikos]….Whatever things were rightly said among all*

[83] Acts 17:22-23

> *men, are the property of us Christians.… For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them.*"[84]

This idea is explained further by Henry Chadwick:

> *"Justin argues that the light that all have is implanted by the divine Reason, the Logos of God who was incarnate in Jesus and who is universally active and present in the highest goodness and intelligence wherever they may be found. Justin strikingly interprets in this sense the parable of the Sower. The divine Sower sowed his good seed throughout his creation. Justin does not make rigid and exclusive claims for divine revelation to the Hebrews so as to invalidate the value of other sources of wisdom Abraham and Socrates are alike "Christians before Christ"* [85]

So, for Justin, those who had responded correctly to such revelation as they were given by the Word were capable of being "Christians" whether they were philosophers, Jews or pagans. However, at this point, I think it is important to restate the caution expressed earlier concerning the modern interpretation of historical figures. Justin was neither a pantheist nor a universalist and he did not believe that all religions or philosophies were equally valid paths to God. Justin believed that demonic forces were active in the world and were quite capable of distorting man's understanding of the seeds of truth that had been sown in them. [86] For Justin, whilst God was at work in the world through the divine Logos, ultimately, Christianity is the apogee of God's work: it is the fulfilment of the Judaic covenant and the prophets and it is the "true philosophy". Justin should therefore not be used as an attempt to justify a position of relativism of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions, after all Justin and six of his students were martyred (c.165) precisely because they would not compromise their position on offering sacrifices to the Roman gods[87]. Nevertheless, having made that important qualification to the interpretation of Justin's thought, when considering what it means to be a

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[84] Chapter XIII – The Second Apology of Justin.

[85] Penguin History of the Church I, the Early Church p76

[86] See e.g. Chapter LVI *The First Apology of Justin*

[87] *Acts of Justin Martyr*

Christian in the twenty-first century in a pluralistic society I find it heartening in the extreme that one of the earliest Church Fathers was quite prepared to see "God at work" in people and belief systems that are not Christian. Understanding this should temper any tendency to "evangelical arrogance" and help to open our eyes to what God may be doing in the lives of others long before they hear about Christ.

So, to conclude, how does knowing something of the first fifteen centuries of the story of the Church help us to understand what it means to be a Christian in the twenty-first century? To be a Christian in the twenty-first century means (at least in part) to have a place in the continuing story of God's relationship with his people and the more one learns of the first fifteen centuries of the story of the Church the more one realises that this story is very much part of our history. This understanding helps one to overcome the feeling of alienation from much of our Christian heritage that was touched on earlier. To be able to "come home" to that heritage, and to be able to learn from it in an informed manner, should help us to both have an appreciation of the broader context of our place in the story of the Church and gives us access to streams of theological thought and spiritual practice that would otherwise be unknown to us, as illustrated specifically by the example of Justin Martyr in relation to cultural pluralism and acknowledging that there are myriad such lessons to be learned from the early and medieval Church. This broadening of historical context and deepening of the theological and spiritual wells from which we can draw must be of enormous benefit to our understanding of what it means to be a Christian in this, or any other, century.

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Chose a figure whose life and work has figured in the final block of sessions in this module. Critically assess the contribution made and / or the challenge presented by this person to the life and thought of the Church

Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I will be looking at the contribution and challenge presented to the life and thought of the Church of England by the life and work of John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801 – 1890). I shall be arguing that Newman's greatest *contribution* and *challenge* to the Church of England are, actually, complementary to one another and arose from his search for, and ultimate rejection of, the Anglican Church's Catholic identity. As a founder and one of the leaders of the Oxford Movement[88] Newman was instrumental in bringing about a "Catholic revival" in the practices of the Church of England, the effects of which can be seen to the present day and, as a convert to Roman Catholicism, his rejection of the Anglican's claim to Catholicity, presents an on-going challenge to the ecclesiology of the Church of England. I will therefore be looking at some of the theology behind Newman's understanding of the position of the Church of England *vis à vis* Roman Catholicism and Protestantism while he was an Anglican and the development of Newman's thoughts in this area which led to his Roman Catholic conversion before concluding with a brief critique of his position.

The *Via Media* and the Oxford Movement

[88] The phrases Oxford Movement and Tractarian are used here synonymously. The phrase Anglo-Catholic is similar but is also used in relation to the inheritors of the Oxford Movement who were not members of the Oxford Movement or Tractarians in the strict sense.

Newman was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1824, at the age of 23. At that time he was a 'Low Church" Evangelical having undergone a conversion experience at the age of 15. However, whilst at Oxford, Newman came to know and respect a number of "High Churchmen" such as Edward Pusey, John Keble and Henry Edward (later Cardinal) Manning. Newman's ecclesiastical leanings became gradually higher until he broke all links with the Low Church party by withdrawing from the Bible Society in 1830. In late 1832 Newman went on a six month tour of Southern Europe with Hurrell Froude and, whilst this did not increase his sympathy towards Roman Catholicism at the time, it was his first exposure to indigenous Catholicism and he described Rome as "*the most wonderful place on Earth.*"

In Britain the Established Church felt itself to be under attack from the new Whig Parliament who were seeking to reduce the number of Bishoprics in Ireland and this came in the context of the recent repeal of the Test and Corporation Act 1828 and the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, which together removed the necessity to be a professed Anglican in order to enter into public life. The Anglican supremacy was no longer to be protected by law and much of Church life was moribund. Many within the Church, both Low and High, felt that the country was falling away from Christianity and that some form of "revival" was called for. On 14th July 1833 John Keble preached the famous sermon on "National Apostasy" and this was the event which Newman later credited as giving rise to the Oxford Movement. Within a few weeks Newman began to write, and to anonymously publish, the *Tracts for the Times*, because:

> "…*the times are very evil, yet no one speaks against them.*"[89]

The purpose of the Tracts, initially, was to stir up the clergy to take the perceived attack upon the Church of England seriously and to urge them to: "*Choose your side*"[90]! Latterly the Tracts became more theological and

[89] *Tracts for the Times* No. 1 (accessed via http://anglicanhistory.org/tracts/tract1.html)

[90] *ibid.* This was probably meant as between Church and State, but could also be interpreted to mean between Church party, i.e. High, Low or Liberal.

educational in tone and tackled the Catholic interpretation of many Anglican rites and practices. However it cannot be emphasised too strongly that the Tractarians (including Newman at this point) were not seeking to promote Church of Rome over against the Church of England, indeed Tracts 71, 72 and 79 were entitled "Against Romanism". Rather, the Tractarians were seeking to rediscover a Catholic understanding of the Church of England and to reinvigorate the clergy and parish life:

> "*Their [the Oxford Movement's] Catholic views of the Church of England were always designed to have practical consequences, nothing short of a wholesale transformation of the spiritual, liturgical and pastoral life of the Church.*"[91]

So what were the practical consequences of the Oxford Movement and how were these achieved? Over time and through a variety of means such as the distribution of the *Tracts of the Times*, the education of future clergy by members of the Oxford Movement, through preaching and, of course, by personal example the Tractarians sought to transform the Church in a number of ways such as: re-introducing the discipline of clergy saying Morning and Evening Prayer; encouraging more frequent parish communion and transforming the experience of attending services by beautifying Church buildings with interior decoration and returning to elaborate ritual including the use of candles, incense and vestments.[92] These changes to liturgical practice became increasingly widespread in the nineteenth century and caused sufficient consternation to the Church authorities that the Public Worship Regulation Act 1874 was passed at the instigation of the Archbishop of Canterbury (Archibald Campbell Tait) in order to limit the spread of Anglo-Catholic "ritualism". A number of clergy, including the Bishop of Lincoln (Edward King in 1888) were prosecuted under this Act. The hierarchy of the Church were usually Liberal (or Latitudinal) and, consequently, Anglo-Catholic clergy were often placed in working class slums, rather than the more middle

[91] *What was the Oxford Movement?* p.75

[92] It is interesting to note that the encouragement of the Daily Offices was in accordance with Cranmer's Prayer Book (albeit a practice which had long been neglected) whereas the other changes would have been rather less welcome by Cranmer.

class or rural parishes reserved for those in favour. Interestingly this led to a number of Anglo-Catholic parishes having active ministries in the most marginal parts of society which had low levels of literacy and were therefore more amenable to the "spectacle" of High worship[93]. There are still strong links between Anglo-Catholics and left leaning political groups which owe their roots to this early rejection of the Tractarians by the mainstream Church[94]. However the most significant and enduring impact of the Oxford Movement is the extent to which the Catholic rituals and accoutrements which led to riots and prosecutions of clergy at the end of the nineteenth century are now commonplace in large swathes of the Church of England. The Church of England accommodates the full spectrum of practice and belief and it is now possible to attend a High Mass one week and go to a "praise and worship" event the next and still remain within the Anglican Church. Whilst this huge diversity of practice could be said to be both a strength and a weakness of the Church of England nevertheless we have Newman and the Oxford Movement to thank for bequeathing us the Catholic end of that continuum.

This leads us back to the central theological issue behind Newman and his fellow Tractarians: '*What is the Catholic understanding of the Church of England*'? For these purposes it should be uncontroversial to assert that the Church of England has always held a somewhat ambiguous position between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. On the one hand the Church holds to the historic creeds:

"…*And I believe One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.*"[95]

And on the other the Church adheres to the Thirty-Nine Articles which seek, *inter alia*, to differentiate the Church of England from the wider Catholic Church, for example:

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[93] Perhaps in contrast to more literate, middle-class, areas which may be more receptive to ministry based on preaching, either evangelical or liberal.

[7] See for example: www.anglocatholicsocialism.org and www.sacramentalsocialists.org.uk

[95] From the Nicene Creed.

> *"As the Church of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred: so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of Ceremonies, but also in matters of Faith."*[96]

There is obviously a tension between the Creedal claim to Catholicity and the institutional Protestantism as exemplified in the Thirty-Nine Articles and in much of the practice of the Church of England at the time. So how did Newman seek to resolve this tension? The answer is to be found in the related yet distinct "branch theory" of ecclesiology and in the *Via Media*.[97]

The branch theory is the argument that the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches are but three limbs of the same historic Church which, whilst each have developed in their own ways over time, all share the same "roots", namely the Church of the Apostles as established by Christ. Newman explained the branch theory thus:

> "*These portions or branches were mainly three:- the Greek, Latin, and Anglican. Each of these inherited the early undivided Church, and in the unity of that Church it had unity with the other branches. The three branches agreed together in all but their later accidental errors. Some branches had retained in detail portions of Apostolical truth and usage, which the others had not…*"[98]

The branch theory not only justifies an exploration or even a return to the practices of the "early undivided Church", which would be attractive to those seeking to re-discover the Church of England's Catholic origins, but, in theory, it could be attractive to Protestants who also rejected the "accidental errors" of Rome and the East and who wished the practice of the Church of England to be based on scripture and the "primitive Church" of the first century. However, whilst this is theoretically the case, in reality most Protestants were not attracted to the branch theory

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[96] From Article XIX

[97] "The Middle Way"

[98] *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* p. 47

as, perhaps, they saw their role as differentiating themselves from those Churches which had "erred" rather than looking for any common cause with them. Further, it is notable that neither Rome nor Orthodoxy accepted the basic premises of the theory.[99]

Whilst the branch theory was undoubtedly part of Newman's theology he did not originate this concept[100] and his more distinctive contribution to the debate was his proposition of the *Via Media*. The Church of England, Newman maintained, lay an equal distance from Rome and Geneva in its theology. The Anglican Church was Catholic in origin, it rejected the Protestant excesses of Calvin and Luther but, at the same time, it protested against certain practices of Rome which it saw as unwarranted additions to scripture or early church practice. As Stephen Thomas puts it:

> "*In his 'Via Media', Newman posited a form of Christianity in continuity with Antiquity but distinguishable, not only from the various forms of 'Protestantism' which – as he saw it – had broken with the past altogether, but also from Rome's additions to, and corruptions of, the authentic Christian tradition.*"[101]

In order to discern which practices of Rome were "*additions to, and unwarranted corruptions of*" the authentic Christian tradition it was necessary for Newman to explore "Antiquity" through studying the writings of the early Church Fathers. Ironically it was this very exploration, in part, that led Newman to reject Anglicanism and the whole concept of the branch theory and the *Via Media*. I will be exploring this and the other reasons for Newman taking to his Anglican "*death bed*"[102] in the following section.

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[99] One example of Rome's rejection of the branch theory is the *Apostolicae Curae* of 1896 in which Pope Leo XIII declared Anglican priestly orders to be 'absolutely null and utterly void'.

[100] This is more generally attributed to William Palmer (1803 – 1885), see his *Treatise on the Church of Christ (1838).*

[101] *Newman and Heresy, the Anglican Years* p. 183

[102] *Apologia Pro Vita Sua p.99*

Newman first became aware of the "*hitch in the Anglican argument*"[103] during the long vacation in the summer of 1839 whilst studying the writings of the Church Fathers in relation to the Christological and other heresies. Both the branch theory and the *Via Media* are built on the notion that it is possible to retain an element of Catholicity whilst standing partly in opposition to the teachings of the wider Catholic Church. However, in his study of the early Church, Newman came to the view that this understanding of Catholicity was mistaken:

> "*My stronghold was Antiquity; now here, in the middle of the fifth century, I found, as it seemed to me, Christendom of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries reflected. I saw my face in that mirror and I was a Monophysite. The Church of the Via Media was in the position of the Oriental communion, Rome was where she now is and the Protestants were the Eutychians…It was difficult to make out how the Eutychians or Monophysites were heretics, unless Protestants and Anglicans were heretics also….*"[104]

Newman also felt that the *Via Media* was "*absolutely pulverised*"[105] by the words of St. Augustine: "*Securus judicat orbis terrarum*"[106] and by the related Vincentian canon: "*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus*".[107] In other words the claim to Catholicity can only be judged by the Catholic Church itself and those who hold to doctrines which have not been universally accepted and taught by the wider Catholic Church cannot share in Catholicity. On this basis there can be no "middle way" as one is either within Catholicism as accepted by the wider Church or one is outside and is a heretic. This theological discovery was the first blow the Newman's

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[103] *ibid. p.100*

[104] *ibid.* p.77

[105] *ibid.* p.79

[106] "The verdict of the world is conclusive."

[107] "That which has been believed everywhere, always and by all." Saint Vincent of Lerins

Anglicanism but did not lead to his immediate departure. The next two blows were delivered by the Church of England itself.

Despite Newman's epiphany in 1839 he continued to seek a rational basis for the Church of England's claim to Catholicity. As noted earlier the Thirty-Nine Articles were one of the causes of tension in the Catholic understanding of the Church of England. In order to sustain both the branch theory and the *Via Media* it was necessary for Newman to be able to interpret the Thirty-Nine Articles in a manner consistent with his ecclesiological views and he set out to do this in Tract 90 which was published in 1841:

> "*I had in mind to remove all such obstacles as lay in the way of holding the Apostolic and Catholic character of the Anglican teaching: to assert the right of all who chose, to say in the face of day, 'Our Church teaches the Primitive Ancient faith'. I did not conceal this: in Tract 90, it is put forward as the first principle of all, "It is a duty which we owe to the Catholic Church, and to our own, to take our reformed confessions in the most Catholic sense they will admit: we have no duties towards their framers.*"' [108]

However the Church of England felt that Newman had gone too far towards Rome with Tract 90 and the Bishop of Oxford instructed him to desist from further publication.[109] This made it clear to Newman that the Church of England had little interest in seeking to theologically justify the Church's claim to be both Catholic and Reformed or, indeed, seek to hold to any "middle way". This latter view was confirmed for him when the Church entered into discussions with the Lutheran Church of Prussia to establish a joint Bishopric in Jerusalem:

> "*This was the third blow which finally shattered my faith in the Anglican Church. That Church was not only forbidding any sympathy or concurrence*

[108] *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* p.87

[109] It is interesting that one of the Oxford tutors who was most vociferous in denouncing Newman in this venture was Archibald Campbell Tait, who later become the Archbishop of Canterbury who introduced the Public Worship Regulation Act 1874 mentioned above.

[23] *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* p. 96

with the Church of Rome, but it actually was courting an intercommunion with Protestant Prussia and the heresy of the Orientals."[110]

Given Newman's concerns about the Anglican Church's claim to Catholicity and the fact that the Church appeared either indifferent or hostile to the *Via Media* in its practice it is perhaps unsurprising that Newman felt unable to remain in the Church. Following his resignation from Anglican Holy Orders in 1843 Newman lived in quasi-monastic solitude for two years before being granted acceptance into the Roman Catholic Church in October 1845.

Newman's contribution and challenge to the life and thought of the Church of England

Clearly, Newman's *contribution* to the life of the Church of England was the important part he played in the revitalistion of various forms of personal devotion and public worship which could be said to be Catholic in nature. Whilst the division of the Church of England into Evangelical, Catholic and Liberal wings is sometimes painful, and may even be counter-productive in terms of our inability to present a "united face" to the world, it could be argued that having a diversity of practice does indicate a certain level of dynamism. Drawing an ecological analogy a culture which enjoys bio-diversity is more likely to survive in the long term than a mono-culture. The Church of England is certainly far from mono-cultural and the Newman inspired Oxford Movement played a leading part in making that the case. Of course whether or not Anglo-Catholic worship is genuinely Catholic in any meaningful sense or is simply ritualism depends, in part, on one's response to Newman's challenge to the Church of England, discussed below.

Newman's *challenge* to the Church of England is slightly more abstract than his contribution, but nonetheless important for that. For the reasons outlined earlier Newman took the view that the Church of England's Creedal claim to be part of the "*One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*" was, in fact, meaningless because, he believed, the test of Catholicity can only be made by the wider Catholic Church, which he

defined as meaning the Church of Rome. If one stands outside that Church, even if seeking to hold a "middle way" between that Church and others who hold more extreme Protestant views, then one cannot claim any part of genuine Catholicity. On this analysis to be out of communion with the Church of Rome on any issue is to be, by definition, non-Catholic and, by extension, heretical. It is obviously of importance for those within the Church of England to know whether or not one is worshipping within a heretical Church!

So was Newman right in seeking to make Catholicity coterminous with the Church of Rome and, therefore, to make that Church the final arbiter of Catholicity? Personally I believe that Newman was wrong to reach that conclusion and that his definition of Catholicity was, ultimately, too narrow. In support of that contention I am pleased to be able to cite Edward Pusey who was a close peer of Newman at Oxford, a fellow-Tractarian and Patristic Scholar, who was equally out of favour on occasion with the Church authorities[111] yet, nevertheless, he did not convert to the Church of Rome and he remained a life long Anglican and a staunch supporter of the branch theory long after the conversion of Newman:

> "*Well then may we believe that the several Churches, owning the same Lord, united to Him by the same Sacraments, confessing the same Faith, howsoever their prayers may be hindered, are still one in His sight….And so as to ourselves, our divines maintained (…), that we have done nothing to forfeit the Communion of the rest of Christendom.*"[112]

Pusey believed that the Anglican Church should re-unite with the Church of Rome, and with the Orthodox Churches, but that this would be a re-unification of the historic Catholic Church rather than a submission to Rome and would certainly not be an admission of heresy. On the contrary Pusey argued that true Catholicity came from adherence to the doctrines of the Ecumencial Councils of the undivided Church and, following the Great Schism of 1054, that the Church of Rome had

[111] For example in 1843 he was suspended from preaching for two years following his sermon *The Holy Eucharist a Comfort to the Penitent*

[112] *An Eirenicon* p.29

unilaterally introduced a number novel doctrines such as papal infallibility, purgatory, the immaculate conception and indulgences. These doctrines would fall foul the Vincentian canon as they were never agreed with the Orthodox Churches in an Ecumenical Council and are not held by them and so, using Newman's own logic, the Church of Rome stands outside of Catholicity! The point here is not to criticise Rome but, rather, to emphasise that Catholicity is wider than the Church of Rome; Catholicity does not depend on visible unity but, rather, is dependent upon adherence to Catholic doctrine.

Therefore, whilst ultimately disagreeing with Newman's conclusions about the possibility of the existence of Catholicity within the Church of England, I believe that he does present an on-going challenge to the Church to consider the extent to which it is continuing to adhere to Catholic teaching, which is the faith handed down from the early undivided Church. Newman stands as a constant reminder that simply making Creedal statements about Catholicity are not the same thing as being Catholic.

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Consider one aspect of human identity that we have explored in this block and give an account of the dialogue between theology and disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, sociology (and others you may consider appropriate) that helps our understanding of it.

How do you think such an approach is fruitful for Christian mission, apologetic and the relevance of the Gospel?

Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I will be looking at the Christian doctrine that humanity is created in the image and likeness of God (the *imago dei* or Image). I will begin with a brief survey of the biblical basis for this doctrine, followed by a consideration of the major theories of how humanity reflects the *imago dei,* before moving on to consider the implications of this theology in dialogue with some questions of scientific ethics and then concluding with some thoughts as to how the resulting understanding of our humanity impacts upon mission, apologetics and relevance of the Gospel.

The *Imago Dei* in scripture

The scriptural basis for a theology of mankind *in general* being created in the Image is limited to about half a dozen references.[113] Whether or not one accepts the stories of the creation as set out in Genesis are *literally* true it is undeniable that they convey important *theological* truths about the

[113] Gen 1:26, 27, Gen 5:1, Gen 9:6, 1 Cor 11:7, James 3:9.

relationships between God and creation, between God and mankind, between the genders and between mankind and the rest of creation. In the Genesis 1 account God creates humanity after the rest of creation has been completed and has a special task for mankind:

> *"Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the Image he created him; male and female he created them*."[114]

In the Genesis 2 account mankind is created much earlier in the story and whilst there is nothing stated about humanity being in the image of God we are given the important metaphor of man being created from a mixture of dust from the ground and the breath of God. Notwithstanding our creation in the Image humanity nevertheless fell from grace and our distance from the presence of God is illustrated by banishment from Eden and, later, the Flood. However it seems that whilst this banishment and destruction removed mankind from the direct presence of God it did not remove the Image from mankind:

> "*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man*."[115]

This restatement of humankind being in the Image suggests that there is something about the *imago dei* which is ontologically part of what it means to be human. It is however clear that not all humans equally reflect divinity in their actions so how can God's imprint be both indelible as part of human nature but so qualitatively different; how can Mother Theresa and Adolf Hitler both be made in the Image? Here I am attracted to the distinction made between image (in Hebrew *tselem*) and

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[114] Genesis 1:26, 27. This account is also reprised in a different "person" in Gen 5:1.

[115] Gen 9:6. This continued image bearing is also confirmed by the NT references in 1 Cor 11:7 and James 3:9

likeness (*demuth*) made by Iranaeus of Lyon, and still taught by the Orthodox church. The distinction is that God's *image* is fundamental part of our humanity but that the *likeness* can be either marred or perfected by our actions or by God's grace. Thus whilst Hitler and Mother Theresa both be made in the image of God it is clear that they have very different likenesses to Him. I understand that it is not possible to maintain such a clear distinction between *tselem* and *demuth* on etymological grounds, as these terms are used interchangeably in scripture, nevertheless I find the distinction to be theologically useful as it reflects the twin realities of our shared creation by God but our differing responses to the fact of that creation.

How do humans reflect the *Imago Dei*?

When tackling this question theologians have generally started by looking closely either at the characteristics of humanity and isolating those which appear to be uniquely human or by looking at the perceived qualities of God and identifying the *imago dei* as that space where God and man seem to share characteristics – the Image being the intersection of the Venn diagram between the divine and human, if you will.

The anthropocentric approach is exemplified in both the *functional* and *substantive* views[116] and, at the risk of generalising and recognising some notable exceptions[117], this method has often been the approach taken in the West. The functional view is that the *imago dei* is not rooted either ontologically in our being or in our intellectual abilities but, rather, in the task of dominion over creation given to humans in Genesis 1:28. This view has been held by a number of prominent theologians including Gerhard von Rad and Anthony Hoekema[118]. This approach could be criticised for not taking sufficiently seriously the grammatical disjunction between the act of creation which was only later followed by the giving of the task of dominion. Of course I have to be careful of such grammatical criticism given my comments about etymology above! A

[116] For example see: *What is the Image?* Michael J. Vlach Ph.D at www.theologicalstudies.org

[117] Such as Gregory of Nyassa

[118] For example See *Created in God's Image,* Anthony Hoekema p. 78

more serious criticism is that "having care of the Earth" is such a generalised quality as to be almost meaningless when applied to individuals. If someone is too old, too young or too disabled to "have dominion" over anything then to what extent are they able to manifest the Image? I believe that to reduce the Image to a general function is actually a more serious diminution of the meaning of the Image then the substantive view, which I will look at next.

The substantive view is that there is something inherent in the substance of mankind which is the mark of our creator. For example Augustine argued that the Image resides in the rational and spiritual soul[119] and Thomas Aquinas that the image consisted of memory, understanding and will.[120] The rationale for this approach is that scripture tells us that only humans were made in the Image and as these characteristics appear to be uniquely human *ergo* these must be the qualities that reflect the divine. This emphasis on reason is understandable as it is a quality which *appears* to be missing from the rest of creation[121] and it is a quality that we would assume is possessed by God. This approach has obviously appealed in the West as home to an Enlightenment which produced philosophers such as Descartes with his infamous "*I think, therefore I am."* Whilst the substantive view is undoubtedly more attractive that the functional view I believe that it is both limiting and flawed for a number of reasons. Having already raised Descarte I will allow Colin Gunton to identify the first concern:

"Moreover it is in the long lived tradition of rooting the Image in reason that we see the deficiencies endemic in the tradition, deficiencies of which Descarte's anthropology provides but an example. A stress on reason elevates one characteristic of the human above others with equal

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[119] See Bruce Demerest , *The Human Person* p.145

[120] Summa Theologica Question 93 accessed via: http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1093.htm

[121] I would note in passing that our knowledge of the genuine self-consciousness and rationality of other creatures is extremely limited. Many higher level mammals exhibit degrees of both.

claim to consideration as part of our being. *In particular it encourages the belief that we are more minds than we are bodies*…" [122] [Emphasis added]

Another serious criticism of the substantive approach is that by starting with the characteristics of humanity and ascribing the "higher" functions to God we are not discovering the *imago dei* within ourselves but, rather, we are doing no more than inventing God in the image of man: perhaps God as a cultured Englishman. This type of theism is superficially attractive as it creates of God who is simply a better version of ourselves but, I would suggest, that in the long term, does nothing to help real mission or apologetics as it fails to deal with either the genuine transcendence of God, i.e. the extent to which he is totally "other" than us rather than simply being a better version of us, nor does it grapple with the sometimes messy incarnational nature of God in the person of Jesus.

I would therefore suggest that both the functional and the substantive anthropocentric approaches to discovering the *imago dei* actually both sell the Image somewhat short and open up the possibility of failing to recognise God's imprint in the whole of human life, regardless of function or ability.

The alternative is a theocentric approach. Rather than starting with man's characteristics and projecting them onto God the theocentric approach seeks to identify the nature of God with a view to mankind seeking to emulate something of that nature in order increase our likeness to him. The problem with this approach is that whilst we know a great deal about human nature, it is by no means easy to study the nature of God and much of this theology can appear rather esoteric or abstract. If the anthropocentric approach is typical of the West then, again at the risk of generalising, I would suggest that the theocentric approach is more typical of Eastern Christianity and one of the most high profile proponents of this approach is Metropolitan John Zizioulas who largely bases his theology upon the Cappadocian Fathers and their understanding of the Trinitarian nature of God. Whilst our knowledge

[122] Gunton, C. Trinity, *Ontology and Anthropology: Towards a renewal of the Doctrine of the Imago Dei* Published within *Persons, Divine and Human* Ed. Schwöbel & Gunton. T&T Clark 1991. P.48

of the nature of God is actually very limited Christians do believe that God exists as a trinity of persons in communion. Having been speaking about "God" in the singular for so long it is sometimes easy to lose sight of this Trinitarian perspective but, certainly for Zizioulas, this is the key to understanding the *imago dei.*

In *Being as Communion*[123] and in his later writings Zizioulas considers what it means to be a 'person' in relation to the three persons of the trinity and then, by extension, to humanity. For Zizioulas true personhood exists only in inter-relatedness: A true person exists not because of their individuality or separateness from the other but because of their relationship or communion with the other. God the Father is only the Father because of the Son, God the Son is only the Son because of the Father and so on. This 'personhood as relationship' is thus the Image. It is interesting that in the Genesis 1 account of creation male and female were created together (gender perhaps being a good example of difference only finding its real purpose in relationship) and in Genesis 2, notwithstanding his relationship with God, Adam is discontent until Eve is created. It could thus be argued that Adam and Eve are in the Image not because of their reason nor because of their stewardship but because they are simultaneously in relationship with each other and with God. It was the subsequent breaking of the vertical relationship with God which marred the Image in humanity. It is the restoration of that vertical relationship, and thus the perfection of the Image in us and the recovery of our full humanity, which brings us to the Christocentric approach to the *imago dei.*

As touched on above, the Trinitarian approach can initially seem rather abstract and if we were simply left dwelling on the nature of the Trinity, or even on the story of Adam and Eve, then this would not be overly practical in terms of recovering the Image for ourselves. However the Image takes on a much more definite form in the person of Jesus Christ whom we are told is:

"…*the glory of Christ, who is the Image*"[124]

[123] DLT London 1985

[124] 2 Corinthians 4:4

I want to stress that it was not simply Jesus' teaching (his reason or intellect) nor even the atonement (his function) that makes Jesus the perfect Image but, rather, it is the whole of his incarnated being which is a hypostatic union of both God and Man. With Adam God created humans as beings of "dust and breath" and in Jesus God actually became a fully human "Son of Man." He spoke of his body as the Temple[125] and, at the resurrection, we are told that it was Jesus' physical body that was raised and transformed[126]. We should therefore resist any neo-Platonic urge to denigrate the physical and to locate our real being on another plane: as physical beings we are each created in the Image in the sense that God has blessed our physicality in the person of Adam and made it sacred in the person of Jesus and, as we progress through life and referring back to Iranaeus, we can each seek to perfect the likeness of God through our relationship with God and with our fellow humans.

The *Imago Dei* in dialogue with scientific ethics.

I would now like to place this incarnational & relational view of what it means to be created in the Image 'in dialogue' with some questions of scientific ethics. Firstly I will give a brief consideration to some mainstream ethical questions and will then look at a slightly more 'off the wall' area, which could nevertheless become more mainstream in the future.

In our society there is a significant danger that given the division between "body and soul" (and indeed a denial that we are anything more than a body) that we may lose sight of the intrinsic value of human life. Whilst laws vary across Europe abortion is almost universally available on demand for at least the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and, in some countries (such as Russia), up to the end of the second trimester without limitation.[127] Whilst there is a very good argument to say that legalised abortion is necessary to prevent all the social ills that accompany illegal

[125] John 2:21

[126] John 20:27

[127] Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abortion_law

abortions I find it interesting that the debates around abortion law reform generally focus on the number of gestational weeks as if there is a significant change in a foetus's status between, say, 12 weeks and 13 weeks. Whilst this distinction may be pragmatic it is somewhat disingenuous to maintain that life *in utero* becomes worthy of protection at an arbitrary point in time (as if *x* number of cells are more human than *y* number of cell) rather than being in God's image from the point of conception.

Even in a society where abortion is common-place most people seem to agree that there does come a point when abortion is no longer acceptable and very few people believe that killing new born infants is acceptable. However, if one takes the view that humanity only really starts either with self-consciousness or reason then there is no logical justification in drawing a distinction between abortion and infanticide:

> "…*killing a disabled infant is not morally equivalent to killing a person. Very often it is not wrong at all.*" [128]

If it is acceptable to kill disabled infants then what is the logical or moral objection to killing disabled adults with mental conditions which prevent them from demonstrating self-consciousness? Surely that it the problem with replacing absolute values with relative ones: once you get in relativism then the categories of persons whom it is acceptable to kill can often be widened as the moral basis against not killing has been removed and replaced with pragmatism, which can often justify whatever is required at the time.

As Denis Alexander puts it:

> "*If you start with a purely biological account of the individual human as the most important story that can be told about that person, then the rational maintenance of human value becomes problematic.*"[129]

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[128] Peter Singer quoted in *Rebuilding the Matrix*, Alexander, Denis Lion 2001 p.458

[129] Ante p. 463

I want to conclude this section by taking a brief look at one of the possible consequences of overvaluing the importance of reason as against human embodiedness.

In 1950 Professor Alan Turing published a paper entitled "Computing Machinery and Intelligence"[130] The purpose of that paper was to posit the notion that one day computers would be able to think for themselves and to put forward a test (the Turing Test) in order to determine when that point had been reached: The Turing Test will be passed when an human questioner, conducting a blind experiment, cannot tell whether the answers to random questions are being given by another human or by a computer; in other words whether a computer is able to intellectually imitate a human. Whilst super computers are now beating Chess Grand Masters on a regular basis I am not aware that any computer has yet passed the Turing Test. Of course this is likely to simply be a matter of time and the interesting question is what does it mean in theological terms when computers can be said to be independent thinkers? Turing believed that he foresaw the theological objection to his proposals and expressed it thus:

> "*Thinking is a function of man's immortal soul. God has given an immortal soul to every man and woman, but not to any other animal or to machines. Hence no animal or machine can think.*"[131]

Naturally Turing did not accept the basis of this (self-penned) objection, but rather than simply rejecting the notion of a soul as irrelevant to the issue he made a rather remarkable statement:

> "*In attempting to construct such machines we should not be irreverently usurping His power of creating souls, any more than we are in the procreation of children: rather we are, in either case, instruments of His will providing mansions for the souls that He creates.*"[132]

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[130] MIND A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy Vol LIX No. 236 October 1950

[131] Ante p. 443

[132] Ante p. 443

So Turing not only conflates the function of thinking with the possession of a soul (in continuation of the Augustinian tradition) but seems to suggest that a thinking machine could actually be a repository of a soul. Whilst this may seem like pure science fiction a British government think tank (Ipsos MORI) recently published a report on the rights of robots as they develop artificial intelligence[133]:

> *"A monumental shift could occur if robots continue to be developed to the point where they can at some point reproduce, improve themselves or if they gain artificial intelligence. This would open complicated issues in a range of areas... This would include debates and qualifications on consciousness, intelligence and the capacity for emotional respons*e."

But the point is, would such thinking machines, be bearers of the Image in the same way as humans? I would suggest that they would not as the most advanced robot or computer can never be a hypostatic union of "dust and breath" and I would further suggest that the most disabled infant is infinitely closer to the Image than any machine.

Conclusion

What it means to be made in the *imago dei* has been the subject of considerable theologising over the centuries. For the reasons explained above I do not believe that humans reflect the Image to the extent that they have any particular function or characteristic but, rather, I believe that we are the Image as a unique mixture of flesh and spirit and that we perfect that Image through our relationships with God and our fellow humans.

As technology advances it is likely that there will be increasing challenges to what it means to be human and I believe that it will be beneficial for

[133]*Robo-rights: Utopian Dream or rise of the machines? Accessed via* www.sigmascan.org//ViewIssue.aspx?IssueId=53

society as a whole for Christians to be able to enter into dialogue with the scientific community about that issue.

In a culture of increasing relativism about the value of human life I believe that it will be of assistance to Christian mission and apologetics for Christians to regain and proclaim a fully-rounded view of the whole of human life being made in the Image and, therefore, of the inherent value of each life. This is an increasingly counter-cultural message but we should not make the mistake of confusing either mission or relevance with inculturation. The gospel is about God taking on human form in order to help us, as humans, overcome death. Therefore in a society that accepts death as a lifestyle choice we should not be afraid to profess the sanctity of life.

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Select one the of 'theistic proofs' suggested by natural theology, for instance the *Argument from Design* or the *Argument from Morality*. Explain how it has been questioned and challenged by developments in modern philosophy and science. How convincing do you find the argument you have selected?

Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I am going to be examining one of the most enduring and controversial of the 'theistic proofs', which is the *Argument from Design* or, as it is known, *teleology*[134]. It is one of the most enduring of the arguments for the existence of God because, it could be argued, that the very existence of an orderly creation has provoked humankind to contemplate the existence of a creator from the earliest days of self-consciousness and, certainly in the Judeo-Christian context, God's position as creator and designer of everything from the entire universe down to the plants on Earth is the starting point of scripture. This understanding of God as creator and designer is contained not only in the Genesis creation stories but is reflected throughout the Bible, for example:

> "*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made…*"[135]

This is a good example not only of the belief that one is created by God but also of praise for God arising from the sense of wonder at the design found in creation, in this case the complexity of the human body. However teleology is also one of the most controversial of the theistic

[134] *Telos* being Greek for "order", "end" or "purpose"

[135] Psalm 139:13,14

proofs because in seeking to deduce the existence of God from the design of the natural world it has always been open to challenge on both philosophical and scientific grounds this continues in the intelligent design versus evolution debate which has been given much publicity in the recent writing and broadcasts of Richard Dawkins. I will therefore be looking at the teleological arguments in the light of that on-going dialogue in order to assess how convincing the Argument from Design remains as a proof of God's existence.

The *teleological* arguments stated

The classic teleological position starts from the fact that complexity and order exists in creation (ranging from the order of the cosmos to the intricate functioning of the human body), that such complexity and order appears to be perfectly designed to maintain life, and to infer from the appearance of design that there must be a designer who is identified as God. An argument in these terms can be traced back to, at least, St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who used this argument as the fifth of his Five Ways[136]. This form of teleological argument is well exemplified in William Paley's (1743-1805) famous analogy between nature and a watch[137]. Paley's analogy was that if one came across a watch for the first time then, having ascertained that it appeared to be intricately made to achieve a particular end (i.e. keeping time) then it would be reasonable to infer that the watch had been made by an intelligent designer. Paley argued that we should draw the same inference of deliberate design from the complexity and suitability for purpose found in so much of nature. In the absence of any other explanation for the phenomena of complexity this was not an unreasonable position to take although, as we shall see, it was open to philosophical challenge even at the time and has subsequently been substantially undermined by scientific advances, particularly in the field of evolutionary biology.

However teleology has moved on (evolved if you will) since Paley and Richard Swinburne gives us a useful definition of modern teleology:

[136] From the *Summa Theologica*

[137] N.B. Paley did not originate this analogy which can be traced back to Cicero and was also used by Robert Hooke and Voltaire.

> "*I understand by an argument from design one that argues from some general pattern of order in the universe or provision for the needs of conscious beings to a God responsible for these phenomena*"[138]

It is interesting that Swinburne emphasises the "*general pattern of order*" as being the basis for the argument from design and this more generalised teleology is echoed here:

> *"In sum the post-Darwinian, inductive teleological argument asks not who made the amoeba or the elephant but how one accounts for the entire system that, developing from the simple to the complex, from the non-living to the living, portends conscious life.*"[139]

This more modern alternative to analogical teleology is known as the probabilistic or anthropic teleological argument.[140] In simple terms the argument runs thus: given our scientific knowledge of astrophysics and chemistry it appears highly improbable that a universe could have been created which is capable of supporting life and, further, that even given the existence of such a universe it is highly improbable that life would actually have arisen. Therefore the fact that such a finely tuned universe does exist and that we exist within that universe is so improbable (calculated as one in a 10,000,000,000[141]) that the fact that we do exist can be best explained by the actions of an outside agency that desired our existence.

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[138] *The Existence of God* p.153

[139] *Reason & Religious Belief, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, p.106

[140] N.B. Richard Dawkins views the anthropic argument as the refutation of the probabilistic argument rather than being synonymous. See *The God Delusion* p.135 and further below.

[141] *Reason & Religious Belief, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* p104

The philosophical challenges to teleology

The teleological argument (in both it's classic and probabilistic forms) could be reduced to the following premises:

x (which could be anything from the universe to the human eye) is too complex / orderly / improbable to have occurred by chance;

Therefore *x* must have been designed or created by a being which desired to bring *x* about for a purpose;

God is that being;

Therefore God exists.

When stated in these rather bald terms the philosophical challenges to the teleological argument become immediately apparent: each of the steps from 1 to 4 contains a logical *non-sequitor* and, therefore, the conclusion that "God exists" cannot be supported by the opening proposition. Whilst it is certainly the case that complexity in the natural (as opposed to the man-made) world does not, as a matter of logic, imply design (i.e. the leap from step 1 to step 2) this challenge to the teleological argument is best made on scientific grounds. It is the leaps from step 2 to 3 to 4 which are most open to challenge on philosophical grounds. In short, even if one accepts the premise that complex organisms were designed for a purpose this does not lead one inexorably to the conclusion that the designer is the theistic God of Judeo-Christian tradition. It would appear to be equally permissible to conclude that the universe was designed and set in motion by a "watchmaker" deity who need take no further notice of creation as it simply fulfils its purpose in a mechanical fashion (which is a view somewhat removed from classic theism) or, even, given the size and diversity of creation that there may have been a multiplicity of supernatural beings each "designing" a part of creation.[142] Therefore even if one accepts the possible existence of a designer there is no logical co-identification between such a designer and the theistic God.

[142] This was a view put forward by the character Philo in David Humes' *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing 1970 reprint.

In addition whilst the existence of apparently perfect design may point towards the existence of a perfect designer it is also the case that the human body contains examples of elements which are either redundant (i.e. the appendix) or are imperfectly suited to purpose (i.e. the spine which is best suited for walking on all fours). It is also undeniable that the human body is extremely susceptible to disease and death in innumerable ways and there are many viruses which seem perfectly "designed" to kill people efficiently and even inventively. The philosophic point is obvious: if perfect design is used to support a notion of a perfect designer then what about imperfect design or elements of creation which are downright anti-anthropic? Do they point to an imperfect designer? David Hume put it thus:

> "*This world is very faulty and imperfect, and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance…*"[143]

Some may argue from Genesis that the presence of imperfection and suffering in the human body is a direct result of the fall of mankind (rather than either the imperfection or non-existence of God) but I would suggest that it is intellectually rather disingenuous (and therefore unconvincing) to seek to establish the existence of God, on the one hand, by citing the elements of creation which seem perfectly designed for purpose and, on the other, either discounting elements which seem imperfect or even put the blame for the imperfections on mankind as a result the primeval disobedience of Adam and Eve. That argument may have long theological roots but, in my view, it does not help to establish a theistic proof.

Whilst the philosophic challenges above apply equally to both the analogical and probabilistic teleogical arguments there is an additional point to be made about the argument to God from improbability which is this: no matter how improbable the confluence of circumstances giving rise to self-conscious life the fact is that this is the only universe / planet in which we are able to live and, therefore, the fact is that it *had* to be this way in order for us to be able to ask these questions at all. Interestingly this anthropic argument is used both for and against the existence of

[143] *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ante.*

God! Richard Swinburne gives the example of a man who is kidnapped and locked in a room with a card dealing machine (loaded with ten decks of cards) who is told that unless the machine draws ten ace of hearts in a row that it is wired to explode and kill him. The machine deals the cards and, much to the man's amazement, it draws the ten aces of hearts and he lives. The man seeks an explanation of his good fortune but the kidnapper says:

> " *'You ought not to be surprised…that the machine draws only aces of hearts. You could not possibly see anything else. For you would not be here to see anything at all, if any other cards had been drawn.*" [144]

However, Swinburne himself then goes onto disagree with the kidnapper's pragmatic sentiment and says that the man is right to be amazed and to look for reasons behind his continued existence in much the same way that teleologists are right to look for the cause behind the life-giving order in our universe and, by implication, are right to label that cause "God". This probably brings us to the heart of the matter: the teleologists are amazed at the fact of existence (against all the odds) and seek to argue from the evidence found in creation to God as the cause. Those who argue against teleology as evidence of God may be equally amazed at the fact of our existence but either deny the need for a cause at all (existence as brute fact without underlying cause or reason which is the position of atheists and scientific materialists) or (and this my position) deny that evidence of a theistic creator can ever be found within creation using scientific methods. I will return to this in the conclusion.

The scientific challenges to teleology

As noted above we now live in a post-Darwinian world and the main scientific challenge to the classic teleological position is evolutionary biology. In a society which cannot explain how the human eye came to function as it does it was understandable (although not philosophically flawless) to conclude that 'God did it'. However time and scientific

[144] *The Existence of God* p.157

knowledge moves on. In his book *The God Delusion* Richard Dawkins uses the analogy of the mountain that has a sheer cliff face on one side and a gently sloping side on the other.[145] To paraphrase slightly, Dawkins says that if all one can see is the sheer cliff face with something perched on top that could not have scaled the cliff in a single leap then it may be natural to conclude that an outside agency was at work in placing the object on top of the mountain. However, he goes on to say, evolutionary biology gives us access to the gently sliding slope on the other side of the mountain, the existence of which makes clear that what had seemed a miraculous single bound is, in fact, the result of gradual ascent in small steps over a considerable period of time.

> "*Thanks to Darwin, it is no longer true to say that nothing that we know looks designed unless it is designed. Evolution by natural selection produces an excellent simulacrum of design, mounting prodigious heights of complexity and elegance.*"[146]

In order for the classic "Argument from design" to retain any credibility in relation to biology it is necessary for its proponents to put forward something which is so "irreducibly complex" that to remove or substantially change one element would render the whole organism useless and thus disprove the evolutionary claim to gradual improvements through the process of natural selection. This is the approach taken by the proponents of "intelligent design"[147] and recent candidates for irreducible complexity have included blood clotting, the human immune system and the bacterial flagellum.[148] The problem with this approach, and it is one that Dawkin's attacks with particular gusto, is that it is an argument for God from a position of ignorance, i.e. it is the equivalent of saying that because we do not yet fully understand how a particular organism has developed therefore it must be irreducibly complex therefore it must be evidence that God designed it. The problems with an argument to God from ignorance are not only is it

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[145] *The God Delusion p.*121

[146] *ante.* p. 79

[147] See www.discovery.org/ This is the homepage of the Discovery Institute which appears to be the centre of the current Intelligent Design proponents,

[148] Dr Michael Behe *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*, Simon & Schuster

intensively unattractive as an intellectual position but as science inexorably comes to understand more and explain the previously inexplicable and incomprehensible so the evidence for God from design diminishes. Not only is this potentially extremely damaging to the continuing faith of those who put their faith in such "evidence" but it also reinforces the impression to those of no faith that the Christian God in no more than a God of the gaps in scientific knowledge and, therefore, of ever decreasing relevance.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was clearly aware of the inherent danger of seeking God in the gaps:

> *"...how wrong it is to use God as a stop-gap for the incompleteness of our knowledge. If in fact the frontiers of knowledge are being pushed further and further back (and that is bound to be the case), then God is being pushed back with them, and is therefore continually in retreat. We are to find God in what we know, not in what we don't know; God wants us to realize his presence, not in unsolved problems but in those that are solved."*[149]

At the biological level, I would suggest that on the philosophical and scientific grounds outlined above that the game is essentially up for those seeking to prove the existence of a theistic God from the apparent design found in creation. God did not leave behind any obvious 'fingerprints' which cannot (or will not eventually) be explained by natural processes.

It is, however, interesting that when one moves up the scale to astronomy or down the scale to quantum physics that some scientists in those fields (e.g. Stephen Hawkins in *A Brief History of Time*) are more likely to use the word "God" to explain both the apparent fine tuning behind the constants in the universe which allow life to exist and the mysterious ways in which particles at the sub-atomic level behave and this may lend teleology on these macro and micro scales more credibility. Indeed the scales of size and time involved at these levels are so difficult to comprehend that it becomes all the more tempting to see God at

[149] Dietrich Bonhoeffer *Letters and Papers from Prison* edited by Eberhard Bethge, translated by Reginald H. Fuller, Touchstone, 1997

work. As noted earlier theologians such as Richard Swinburne have sought to redefine teleology away from the particular (e.g. the human eye) to the "*general pattern of order*". However, in my view, there are real dangers in getting too excited when scientists talk about God in this context or even in pursuing this line of teleological thought. In a sense the dangers are obvious: for a scientist to use the term "God" for unknown physical laws in no way implies that they are actually talking about the theistic God of Christianity (there would certainly be no understanding of a Trinitarian God in that context) but, more importantly, there is considerable risk of simply repeating the "God of the gaps" scenario as science comes to a greater understanding of what is still unknown or theoretical. There are, as one would expect, many theories to explain the anthropic fine tuning behind the universe including the "multiverse" theory which posits the notion that there may have been an infinite number of universes (giving an infinite number of chances at getting the various constants "right") and that we inhabit the one where the physical laws allowed for life to arise. [150]

The point is that science will continue to theorise about, experiment upon and describe the laws which govern all aspects of the physical universe but can it ever prove or disprove the existence of God? Should theologians seek to use the physical sciences to prove the existence of God and, just as importantly, should scientists seek to use the lack of evidence for God found by scientific methodology to disprove the existence of God and to discredit religion generally, as *per* Richard Dawkins? To adopt the language of the essay title am I convinced that the teleological argument continues to present credible arguments for the existence of God?

Conclusion

In my view the short answer to all of the above is 'no'. I will, however, unpack and qualify that a little!

[150] E.G. see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiverse_%28science%29

Whilst this dialogue about proving the existence of God using scientific methods is fascinating and, despite the best efforts of the defenders of intelligent design and writers such as Richard Dawkins to keep it in the public domain, it strikes me as being quite an old fashioned debate and demonstrates a rivalry between theology and science which seems better suited to the nineteenth century than the twenty first. Science and theology are concerned with finding the answers to very different types of question:

> "*The warfare model [of science versus theology] misunderstands the character of both theology and science. Science simply cannot answer the questions that are addressed in religion, nor can religion hope to answer merely scientific questions from its basis of faith. Religion answers questions about ultimate concerns and spiritual or moral conundrums. The special sciences are concerned with factual issues concerning the natural and human world and with the interpretation of human actions and institutions.*". [151]

To put it in perhaps clichéd terms the proper realm of science is answer the *how* questions whereas theology is about the *why* questions. An atheist may well take the view that there simply is no *why* to be answered but it seems to be a category error to take that view on the basis of the answers to the *how* questions. Of course it is theists who are largely to blame for this state of affairs not least because they were the ones who started trying to prove the existence of God from the evidence of design in nature.

However, not only does this debate seem to confuse the respective purposes of science and theology but it also seems to represent a misapprehension of the nature of God:

> "*The transcendental God is outside nature and in no scientifically comprehensible process is God directly discernable, not even in the formation*

[151] Padgett, Alan. G Science and the Study of God, A Mutuality Model for Theology and Science. Eerdmans 2003 p. 4

of the universe. God's absence from natural processes should not be a surprise: indeed, it must be so if God and nature are distinguishable." [152]

In other words God is not an object within creation whose existence can be proved or disproved by looking for clues within the laws of nature. The theistic God of the Judeo-Christian is believed to have created the cosmos and continues to sustain creation as an act of love with a view to entering into personal relationships with those beings made in his image. Love is not something that can be seen through a microscope or a telescope and, therefore, we should not expect to find God in that way.

[152] Arnold Benz The Future of the Universe, Chance, Chaos or God? p.48

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Compare and contrast the way Christian theology has tried to understand the place of suffering and evil in God's world with that of another faith (e.g. the Buddhist approach to suffering as expressed in the four noble truths, or the reaction of Jewish thought to the Holocaust).

Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I will be seeking to compare and contrast the way in which Christian theology has addressed the issues of suffering and the existence of evil in God's world with the way in which those issues are understood within Buddhism. In order to do this I will be looking at the Christian and Buddhist responses to three key questions: *What is the cause of suffering and evil? Why do individuals suffer?* and *What is the solution to suffering and evil?*

What is the cause of suffering and evil?

Christians and Buddhists approach this question in markedly different ways and it is necessary to spend some time exploring their respective approaches in some detail before attempting to draw together any common themes.

Christians believe that God created the universe and that He called it "good".[153] Many Christians also believe that God has certain characteristics which are: omnipotence (being all powerful), omniscience (having all knowledge), omnipresence (being present in the whole of creation at the same time) and benevolence. However, the existence of both a good creation and an all-powerful benevolent God does not often

[153] Genesis 1:31

accord with people's daily experience of suffering and evil. This leads to an experiential "gap" between the Christian's beliefs about the nature of God and the experience of living in a world that can sometimes feel far from good or under the control of a benevolent deity. This gap represents a genuine problem for Christian theology and appears to necessitate either reconciliation between God and the world or, at least, a convincing explanation. This issue is not simply an academic debate but it does represents a real stumbling block to faith in such a God for many non-Christians and, for many Christians, it can become a substantial challenge to continued faith following a first encounter with genuine suffering or evil.

Saint Augustine put the problem in succinct terms:

> "*Either God cannot abolish evil, or He will not; if he cannot then He is not all-powerful; if he will not then He is not all good.*"[154]

Christian theologians have put forward various theodicies to overcome this logical problem since the earliest days of the Church and I shall look briefly at the two major schools of thought. Having started with Augustine's statement of the problem of evil it makes sense to start by looking at Augustine's proposed solution. In essence Augustine denied that evil had any substance of its own and was, therefore, not something that God had created. Rather, Augustine argued, evil is the result of a deprivation of good (*privatio boni*) which arises when beings with free will renounce their proper place in the God-given scheme and act against their God-given nature. Thus Lucifer and his angels fell from grace because of their free will and introduced a *privatio boni* into the cosmic realm and, similarly, mankind fell from grace because of the rebellion of Adam and Eve and that mankind continues to exercise its free will against God's-will. Augustine therefore places free will as the central reason why things are less good then they should be. The so-called Free Will Defence has been the dominant theodicy in Western Christianity and has been much developed in recent years by, amongst others, Alvin Plantinga.[155]

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[154] Saint Augustine, *The Confessions.*

[155] E.G. *The Nature of Necessity* Clarendon Press 1974

The second major school of theodicy was that advanced by Irenaeus. If Augustine's theodicy could be characterised as *soul-deciding* then Irenaean theodicy could be described as *soul-making*.[156] In Irenaean thought it is the purpose of life for mankind to recapture the likeness of God that was marred by the fall and that in order for souls to be able to make moral decisions and thus be able to grow towards God they need to be faced with trials and hardship. One needs only to think of the book of Job and even of the temptations of Jesus in the desert (e.g. Matt 4) to understand the basis of this line of thought. In a sense, fallen humanity is seen as a raw material and can only "evolve" in Christ-likeness by successfully overcoming evil (or the temptation to evil) with good. Of course, underlying this theodicy is the assumption that the means (i.e. the evil and suffering we experience in the world) justifies the end (God's goal for humanity) and there are serious challenges to be made about that assumption; it may be that the end that God has in store (whether it be dwelling in heaven, the New Jerusalem or otherwise having union with God) does justify the evil that is experienced but I find the following sentiment to be highly salutary:

> "*Jewish theologians sometimes accuse Christians of not taking suffering seriously enough and demand that any theology should be capable of being undertaken in the presence of burning children. In other words, if talk about God does not make sense in the presence of extreme suffering, then academic philosophers and theologians have no business in getting involved in such talk.*"[157]

As we do not *know* the end that God has in mind I believe that it is impossible to maintain that the extreme evil of, for example, Auschwitz either made any souls or could be justified. I would certainly find it impossible to stand in the presence of burning children and proclaim that their suffering was not logically contradictory to the existence of a loving and all-powerful God because the end that God has in mind justifies their suffering in the here and now. Whilst this could also be used as an argument against both the Free Will Defence I find it easier to maintain that extreme evil is the result of mankind's misuse of its unfettered free will rather than being part of God's plan to "grow souls".

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[156] Philosophy of Religion, Peter Cole, p. 92

[157] Vardy, *The Puzzle of Evil* p.76

Therefore, on balance, I find Augustine's Free Will Defence more convincing, more defensible in the face of evil and, ultimately more reconcilable with a benevolent God. On that basis suffering and evil are not created or intended by God in order to put mankind to the test but, rather, they arise from the fact that God gave us the freedom to make moral choices and the risk of such freedom is that free moral agents can make the wrong choice and thus produce suffering and evil. Therefore God in no way intended any particular evil to happen but in giving us free will he created the potential for both the greatest good and the greatest depravity.[158]

Finally, when discussing suffering and evil in the world from the Christian perspective we cannot ignore the terminology of sin. Sin is not distinct from the concept of free will but, rather, sin is the consequence of free will exercised in opposition to God's will. Following the Augustinian tradition touched on above sin first entered the world when Adam and Eve (and indeed Lucifer and his angels) disobeyed God and it is therefore sin, or incorrect use of free will, which is the ultimate cause of suffering and evil.

Buddhism has a very different perspective on the existence of evil and suffering. As we have just seen, for Christians the existence of evil and suffering in the world can be seen as a philosophical "problem" which needs to be reconciled with the nature of God. In contrast, as a non-theistic belief system, Buddhists are capable of acknowledging the brute fact of suffering and evil without having any need to reconcile that fact with the characteristics of a creative deity.

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[158] I am more than aware that there is so much more to be said on this subject such whether or not the creation of free will by God in circumstances when an omniscient God would have known the evil that would result calls into question the benevolence of God, whether God's 'failure' to intervene and prevent the worst excesses of human evil similarly challenges both omnipotence and benevolence and, even, whether Christians are justified in ascribing the classic theistic attributes to God at all. In addition the above has only addressed 'moral' evil resulting from human choices rather than 'natural' evil that does not succumb so easily to the Free Will Defence. Unfortunately, given the scope of this essay and the limitations of space it is only possible to acknowledge that those issues exist without being able to fully explore them here.

> "*So the Buddhist attitude to evil is not to deny its presence or try to reconcile its existence with the creation of the world by a good God, but to observe its presence and, by studying its nature and causes, to eliminate it.*"[159]

Therefore, for Buddhists, suffering is a "problem" to be dealt with but it is not a problem in the sense of being a potential argument against the central tenets of faith; rather the existence of suffering *is* one of the central tenets of faith. It could be said, that Buddhism was born out of suffering with a view to ending suffering and that its theology is therefore firmly grounded on the fact of suffering.

What does it mean to say that Buddhism was born out of suffering? Well, Buddhist legend has it, that it was the experience of witnessing old age, sickness and death for the first time that caused Prince Siddartha Gautama to undergo the "existential angst" that led to his spiritual search and ultimate enlightenment. Following his enlightenment the Buddha proclaimed the "Four Noble Truths", the very first of which acknowledges the fact of suffering:

> "*What then is the Holy Truth of Suffering [dukkha]? Birth is suffering, decay is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering. To be conjoined with what one dislikes means suffering [dukkha]. To be disjoined from what one likes means suffering. Not to get what one wants, also means suffering…*"[160]

So it could be said that whereas Christianity starts with the goodness of creation and then has to explain the fact of evil Buddhism commences from the perspective that most of existence itself *is* suffering.

Having noted that physical existence is suffering [*dukkha*] what do Buddhists say about the *cause* of suffering? It is important to understand that Buddhist philosophy actively discourages its adherents from spending too much time wondering about the ultimate or prime cause of

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[159] *The Concept of Evil in Buddhism*, Kongaswela Piyaratana Dialogue & Alliance Vol 8, No. 2 1994 p 10.

[160] Problems in Theology 2, p.30 Quoting Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, OUP 1974 (1951 Edition) p.43

suffering and, rather, encourages them to deal with the effects and to prevent further suffering. This is well illustrated by the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow in which the Buddha teaches that when one faces suffering it is the effect that should be dealt with (i.e. removing the arrow and the poison) rather than considering the ultimate cause (i.e. who shot the arrow and why) as such speculation is likely to result in dying before the problem is resolved:

> "*To look for the metaphysical causes of evil is deemed to be intellectually stultifying and morally fruitless. If we are struck with an arrow, our immediate task should be to remove it rather than investigate the credentials of the person who shot it.*"[161]

This reluctance to address ultimate causes appears to arise from pragmatism, agnosticism and, perhaps most importantly, from a sense of the cyclical nature of creation; put simply if the universe is an endless cycle of cause and effect then there can be no ultimate or first cause. This world view is in marked contrast to the Judeo-Christian perception of creation happening at a fixed point in time and moving towards a conclusion: In a cyclical cosmology with no possible first cause it is futile to consider the issue whereas in a universe which begins time with the word of God it makes more sense to look to God for an explanation of creation as we find it.

Whilst Buddhism does not dwell on the *ultimate* cause of suffering it does have a great deal to say concerning the *immediate* causes of suffering. That brings us to the next question under consideration:

Why do individuals suffer?

In answering this question first from the Buddhist perspective it would be appropriate to start with the second of the Four Noble Truths:

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[161] *The Concept of Evil in Buddhism*, Kongaswela Piyaratana Dialogue & Alliance Vol 8, No. 2 1994 p 6.

> *"What then is the Holy Truth of the Origination of Suffering? It is that craving which leads to rebirth, accompanied by delight and greed, seeking its delight now here, now there, i.e. craving for sensuous experience, craving to perpetuate oneself, craving for extinction."*[162]

For Buddhists the cause of suffering is the craving [*tanha*] of individuals for the physical world that ties them to the continuous cycle of rebirth [*samsara*]. It is the individual's inability to end *tanha* and thus to break out of *samsara* that perpetuates the existence of suffering. This cycle of birth and death results in the concept of reincarnation and, similarly, the law of cause and effect results in the concept of *karma.* The interaction of reincarnation, karma and the problem of evil is addressed here by Bradley Hawkins:

> "*Another idea that developed at this time was the concept of karma. This concept hinged on the simple premise that all actions had reactions. Good actions had good reactions, and bad actions had bad reactions. But what about those individuals who performed good acts, but suffered nevertheless? Or those who were exceptionally evil, but prospered anyway? Here again, reincarnation provided an answer. If the effects of one's actions were not felt in this life, they would be felt in one's next life or even the life after that….When seen from the perspective of karma and reincarnation, bad things happen to good people as a result of previous bad actions on the part of the individual.*"[163]

For the Buddhist, therefore, it is conceivable that there is no such thing as undeserved suffering, even in relation to the youngest child, on the basis that the suffering of children is as a direct result of the *karma* they have carried over from previous incarnations. Whilst it may sound harsh to non-Buddhists for a Buddhist to stand in the presence of burning children (picking up the Peter Vardy quote above) and to essentially blame them for their suffering as a result of their own past actions it is, at

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[162] Problems in Theology 2, p.30 Quoting Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, OUP 1974 (1951 Edition) p.43

[163] *Buddhism* Routledge 1999 p.33

least, an internally consistent and robust explanation of the problem of evil in relation to individuals.

The Christian response to the reason for the suffering of individuals is, of course, intimately related to the issues that were touched on in the first section. If one takes, for example, the Free Will Defence to its logical conclusion then the suffering that is undergone by an innocent may be entirely undeserved and happens simply because another free moral agent has exercised its free will in a manner which causes suffering to that innocent. Conversely if one prefers the Irenaean theodicy then the suffering of innocents may still be entirely undeserved but may be part of God's will for the testing or growth either of that innocent or, perhaps, of others.[164]

Having said that whilst, of course, neither Christianity nor Judaism has any concept of reincarnation or karma it is interesting to note that the idea of punishment for sin (and indeed reward for not sinning) being handed down from one generation to the next is by no means entirely alien:

> " *…You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.*"[165]

And it is apparent that this understanding of God continued in the Jewish consciousness into the time of Jesus:

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[164] If God's will is being acted out in this way via other free moral agents then this does call into question the genuine free will of those agents. This is another reason why I tend to prefer the Free Will Defence as the alternate model has a tendency to turn the world into a stage with "free" moral agents simply being God's players.

[165] Exodus 20:5-6

"*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*"[166]

Whilst this concept did not carry over into Christian theology (so innocent suffering can be truly innocent and, in a sense, harder to understand) nevertheless the concept of generational punishment for sins still exists within Judaism and it is even the case that some Jewish theologians understand the Holocaust as God's punishment for the unfaithfulness of previous generations.[167]

What is the solution to suffering and evil?

On one level the Christian and Buddhist responses to suffering and evil are similar and both involve the adherent making a conscious effort to overcome the effects of evil or *mara*:

"…*'One should conquer evil with good'* (*asadhum sadhuna jine*)."[168]

and

"Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good"[169]

However when one goes into a little more detail some more interesting similarities and quite stark differences emerge.

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[166] John 9:1

[167] For example Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocaust_theology

[168] *The Concept of Evil in Buddhism*, Kongaswela Piyaratana Dialogue & Alliance Vol 8, No. 2 1994 p 6.

[169] Romans 12:21

The Buddhist response to suffering is to lessen the craving for the world by following the "noble eight-fold path".[170] By following the eight-fold path of Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Behaviour, Right Occupation, Right Effort, Right Contemplation and Right Meditation the adherent reduces the effects of *karma* and, like the Buddha, may become Enlightened and enter into Nirvana. This breaks the cycle of *samsara* and, essentially, results in the total extinguishing of any soul, ego or any other spark of self. The chain of cause and effect comes to an end. As Buddhism views existence as suffering so non-existence becomes the cure for suffering.

Whilst Christianity undoubtedly has its moral codes of conduct, and whilst there have been long and bitterly fought debates about "faith versus works" throughout Christian history, I suggest that it is generally accepted within Christianity that "salvation" (perhaps the Christian equivalent to enlightenment?) cannot be achieved by simply doing the right thing and is, in essence, awarded purely through the grace of God. Indeed Christians would generally view the laudable behaviour exemplified in the eight-fold path as flowing from the result of being saved rather than a way of earning salvation.

And what is the goal of Christian salvation? As touched on above there are many understandings of the end that God may have in store, which range from creating the kingdom of God in the present, to making a new creation and a New Jerusalem on Earth in the future, through to the Kingdom of Heaven being an ethereal realm in another, non-Earthly, dimension. However, I would suggest, in none of these understandings of salvation or heaven is there a sense of an extinguishing of self or personality. On the contrary there is a good argument that the goal of Christian salvation is that individuals will become more fully the persons that God made them to be and that heaven, in whatever form it takes, will be comprised of persons in perfect relationship with God and each other.[171]

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[170] The Third and Fourth of the Four Noble Truths respectively.

[171] E.G. The concept of the bodily resurrection (1 Cor. 15) and the visions of life in heaven presented in Revelation.

Conclusion

For both Christianity and Buddhism the existence of evil and suffering in the world is a problem to be overcome and it is interesting to note that the answer to what causes suffering is quite similar: for many Christians the answer is "free will" and for Buddhists the answer is "craving". Put in these terms it becomes clearer that for both Christianity and Buddhism the day-to-day cause of suffering and evil is that people choose to act badly; they exercise their free will to satisfy their cravings and thus create further evil.

However we should not allow this interesting similarity between the two faiths to obscure the very different philosophies that underlie the systems: For Christians suffering and evil in the world is a problem because it is not how things "ought to be" given the fact of creation by a good God and the ultimate goal of Christianity could be said to be the redemption of ourselves and creation by overcoming of the effects of free will exercised in opposition to God and the restoration of relationships between persons, creation and God. In contrast Buddhism appears to view the fact of existence as intrinsically marred (therefore without the possibility of redemption) and, accordingly, the goal of Buddhism appears to be the removal of souls from creation into the void of Nirvana.

In conclusion, Buddhism has a number of philosophical attractions: its understanding of suffering is pragmatic, it does not have the problem of reconciling the experience of evil with a belief in a benevolent God and the doctrines of reincarnation and *karma* help to explain otherwise inexplicable evil. However, there appears to be both pessimism and even nihilism at the heart of Buddhism. In contrast, and despite the undoubted philosophical challenges touched on above, Christianity could be said to be more affirming of the ultimate goodness of life and the created order and essentially more optimistic about the purpose of existence.

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What is the new perspective on Paul? How might it affect the traditional Reformation reading of Galatians?

Introduction

THIS QUESTION pre-supposes that there is one "new perspective" on Paul and that this new perspective can be set against the traditional Reformation reading of Galatians. In reality the new perspective movement is now over thirty years old and the views of its leading proponents are not homogenous[172] and, of course, the traditional Reformed movement is five hundred years old and the views of its leading proponents (e.g. Luther, Calvin & Wesley) are even more divergent.[173] However, for the purposes of this essay, it will be assumed that the traditional Reformation reading of Galatians is that which flows from Martin Luther and that the new perspective is based largely on E.P. Sander's 1977 work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* and N.T. Wright's later writings.[174]

In order to answer this question I will be looking first at the Lutheran interpretation of the main theme in Galatians before going on to look at how the new perspective has challenged that interpretation and will then, briefly, consider the reaction of some who are not convinced by the new perspective. However, for the sake (I hope) of additional clarity I will start with a short review of the context of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

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172 "…there are probably almost as many 'New Perspective" positions as there are writers espousing it – and I disagree with most of them." N.T. Wright *New Perspectives on Paul* p. 3 accessed via www.ntwrightpage.com/Wright_New_Perspectives.html

173 A detailed discussion of the differences that exist within the different perspectives can be found in Stephen Westerholm's *Perspectives Old and New on Paul, The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* Eerdmans 2004.

174 See Bibliography and later footnotes for citations of the works being considered. I appreciate that this is a very narrow definintion of both the old and the new perspectives on Paul but space does not permit an exploration of all the possible positions or arguments.

and identify, for the purposes of this discussion, the main theme of the letter that is interpreted and re-interpreted by the perspectives old and new.

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians – Context and Central Theme

Between the time of Jesus' death (c.33 AD) and the fall of Jerusalem (c. 70 AD) the earliest Christians consisted firstly of Jewish believers[175] and then, as the faith spread beyond Jerusalem, of believers from a variety of Gentile backgrounds.[176] It is clear that following the fall of Jerusalem Christianity *became* something entirely distinct from Judaism but during the 35 – 40 years during which Christianity *emerged* from within Judaism there were real struggles over believer's relationship with the law and, especially, over whether Gentile believers needed to become demonstrably Jewish by, for example, being circumcised and by following the dietary laws.

This dispute led to the Council of Jerusalem which decided that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised and only had to follow a very limited version of the dietary code. [177]

Unfortunately the exact chronological relationship between the events set out in Acts and Galatians is unclear and it is therefore not certain

[175] See Acts 9:2 & 11:26. It is also interesting that Judaism itself was split along "party" lines (e.g. Sadducee, Pharisee, Essene) but also along racial lines with both Semitic and Hellenised Jews. This racial division is reflected in the character of the earliest Christians – see Acts 6 –7.

[176] An interesting exposition of this expansion can be found at: www.wheaton.edu/DistanceLearning/Progress.htm

[177] Acts 15. Of course this decision does not imply that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem therefore thought of *themselv*es either as any less Jewish or any less bound by the Law and the Council of Jerusalem can be interpreted as an 'aid to mission' amongst the Gentiles (i.e. not setting the barriers to entry too high) rather than as a definitive statement of the status of the new faith as a whole in relation to Judaism and the Law.

whether Paul's conflict with the 'Judaisers'[178] recounted in Galatians was later resolved at Jerusalem or, alternatively, whether the Judaisers chose to ignore decision of the Council. In any event it is clear that Galatians was written at the height of the theological 'tussle' for the identity of Christianity. Bearing in mind that disputes tend to polarise views and that this Epistle was expressly written against the "different gospel" of the Judaisers, who were leading the Galatians away from Paul's earlier teachings (Gal 1:6), it is perhaps unsurprising that Paul writes so vehemently against the law and, at times, is so graphic in his use of language against the circumcision party (Gal 5:12). However, it is worth noting that Paul appears to have been more of a contextual than a systematic theologian and, given a different context, Paul is capable of taking a much more conciliatory view of the law (e.g. Rom 3:35). Therefore whether one prefers the traditional or new perspective on Paul one should not make the mistake of confusing Paul's view of the law as demonstrated in Galatians as representing the *whole* of his view throughout his ministry. As James D.G. Dunn comments, Galatians is "*theology in the making*".[179]

The central theme of Galatians, for these purposes, is the relationship between Gentile converts and the requirements of the law; in particular, whether such converts are 'justified' by having faith in Jesus Christ or, alternatively, whether such justification comes through doing the 'works of the law'.[180] Actually, as we shall see, even this use of terminology reflects a traditional interpretation and the meaning of the term 'justification' is itself an important part of the distinction between the old and new perspectives.

In Galatians Paul argues strongly that faith in Christ and the grace of God are sufficient for justification and equally strongly against reliance on the law, e.g.:

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[178] Used here as shorthand to identify those who wished to maintain the Jewish roots of Christianity by 'making Jewish' all converts.

[179] James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* p.64

[180] It is actually most likely to have been argued by the Judaisers that to be a follower of the Way required both faith in Jesus and to obey the Law, see below.

> "*We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."* (Gal 2:15-16)[181]

Paul thus creates an apparently clear juxtaposition between faith and law and, by extension and with the passage of time, this turned into a perceived juxtaposition between Christianity as a religion of grace and Judaism as a religion of legalism. This brings us onto Luther.

The Lutheran / Traditional Reformation interpretation of Galatians

Martin Luther (1483 – 1546) spent his early adulthood as an Augustinian monk but, as he studied the bible and compared it with his unhappy experience of religious life, he began to believe that the Catholic Church had become a religion of 'works righteousness' and had lost sight of the original Christian message of justification by faith as exemplified, *inter alia*, in his reading of Galatians. Luther's disillusionment with the Catholic Church resulted in his challenge of the 95 Theses and, ultimately, his excommunication in 1521.

The Lutheran interpretation of justification in Galatians could probably be summarised thus: in order for someone to be 'justified' before God, which in this context means to come into a right relationship with God and to be found 'not guilty' of sin, the only thing necessary is to have faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ. This is contrasted with Paul's picture of the Judaisers' 'gospel' of justification requiring compliance with the law that in the context of Galatians, means accepting circumcision. The Lutheran view of justification in Judaism is, therefore, one in which God's favour on the individual is 'won' by following the law.

As noted above Luther was excommunicated in part because of his belief that Rome was promulgating a gospel of salvation by works rather than

[181] See also e.g. Gal 3:5. 3:11 and 3:23-25

faith and examples of the influence of Catholicism on Luther's view of the interaction between faith and law are to be found throughout his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (1535)[182]:

> "*The false gospel has it that we are justified by faith but not without the deeds of the law. The false apostles preached a conditional gospel. So do the papists. They admit that faith is the foundation of salvation. But they add the conditional clause that faith can save only when it is furnished with good works. This is wrong.*"[183]

The point of this line of argument is this: Luther's *Commentary* is a foundational document in the traditional Reformed interpretation of Galatians and Luther has influenced generations of subsequent biblical scholars including F. Weber, Schürer, Bousset and Bultman and has thereby contributed to a protestant 'mind-set' that continues to juxtapose 'works righteousness' Judaism against 'grace-filled' Christianity. And yet the *Commentary* does not seem to deal with the law as actually understood within Judaism at the time of Paul but, rather, it treats the law and first century Judaism as analogous to sixteenth century Catholicism. That is certainly the view taken by E.P. Sanders:

> "*One must note in particular the projection on to Judaism of the view which Protestants find most objectionable in Roman Catholicism: the existence of a treasury of merits established by works of supererogation. We have here the retrojection of the Protestant-Catholic debate into ancient history, with Judaism taking the role of Catholicism and Christianity the role of Lutheranism.*"[184]

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[182] Accessed via www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-luther.html

[183] *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* 2:4,5

[184] E.P. Sanders *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* p.57

Interestingly even writers who are inimical to the 'new perspective' on Paul nevertheless acknowledge Luther's confusion of roles and the impact this has subsequently had.[185]

Given the context of this essay it is also worth making the point that Luther became increasingly anti-Semitic during the course of his life and he wrote *On the Jews and their Lies* in 1543 in which he called Jews "…*the devil's people*".[186] Therefore, one cannot ignore the fact that Luther's views on the interpretation of Galatians were deeply influenced by his issues with the Catholic Church and, possibly, by incipient anti-Semitism. Consequently, if our understanding of Judaism is taken from the *Commentary* and Luther's successors then we should be aware that we may be looking at Judaism through a distorting lens as Luther adopts Paul's view of Judaism and uses it to address his own issues with Catholicism and, possibly, Judaism.

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the apparent faith versus law (and subsequently the Christianity versus Judaism) dichotomy that is magnified by Luther I would suggest it is necessary to try and reduce the effect of this distorting lens by, if possible, recovering an historic understanding of Judaism's own views on the law's relationship to justification and righteousness. That, in part, is what the proponents of the new perspective on Paul have sought to do.

The New Perspective on Paul

Although E.P. Sanders did not originate the term 'new perspective on Paul'[187] it was his seminal work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*[188] that changed

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185 Peter Stuhlmacher Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification, A Challenge to the New Perspective p.35

186 Luther, Martin *On the Jews and their Lies*, 154, 167, 229. Cited in Michael Robert *Holy Hatred: Christianity, Antisemitism, and the Holocaust*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006 and accessed via http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther

187 This honour belongs to James D.G. Dunn from the title of his 1982 Manson Memorial Lecture

the scholarly landscape by seeking to carry out a comprehensive review of Jewish texts (including Tannaitic literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha) in order to try and regain an historic understanding of Judaism as it existed at the time that Paul was writing his Epistles. As a result of this work Sanders came to the view that the Lutheran interpretation of Judaism as equating justification with carrying out works of the law was wrong or, as some would have it, "*grossly distorted*"[189]:

> *"The frequent Christian charge against Judaism, it must be recalled, is not that some individual Jews misunderstood, mis-applied and abused their religion, but that Judaism necessarily tends towards petty legalism, self-serving and self-deceiving casuistry, and a mixture of arrogance and lack of confidence in God. But the surviving Jewish literature is as free of these characteristics as any I have ever read. By consistently maintaining the basic framework of covenantal nomism, the gift and demand of God were kept in an healthy relationship with each other, the minutiae of the law were observed on the basis of the large principles of religion and because of commitment to God, and humility before the God who chose and would ultimately redeem Israel was encouraged.*"[190]

As can be seen, E.P. Sanders found that the basic framework of Palestinian Judaism was one of '*covenantal nomism'*. Covenantal nomism is, essentially, this: the covenant between God and Israel was given by God as a matter of grace and not as a result of any human effort on the part of Israel, either collectively or individually. Therefore, the whole nation is already within the covenant and individual justification is not required: to be Jewish is to be within the covenant and, in that sense, to be justified. However, the law is also given by God as part of the covenant and obedience to that God-given law is essential to maintain one's place within the covenant. Therefore, covenantal nomism holds that it is not necessary to obey the law in order to be justified however it is necessary to obey the law in order to remain justified and to demonstrate that one is within the justified community. Applying this to the specific example

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188 Published 1977, ECM Press

189 Mark M. Mattison, *Confronting Legalism or Exclusivism? Reconsidering Key Pauline Passages* p.1 accessed via www.thepaulpage.com/passages.html

190 *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* p. 427

of circumcision (which is appropriate in the context of Galatians) it would seem that the act of circumcision *per se* is not an action that is required in order to come within the community of God's covenant but it is an action that is required by the law as a *sign*[191] that one is within that community.[192]

Although he does not use the language of covenantal nomism James D.G. Dunn is also clear that Paul's use of the phrase "*works of the law*" in relation to Judaism did not mean that the Jews thought of themselves as becoming justified by performing such works but, rather, that performing the law was the obligation of those who had already been chosen:

> "*An obvious meaning for the phrase 'works of the law', then, is the human activities required by the law of those within the covenant…works of the law are what God expects of the people he has chosen as his own, the obligations which membership of God's covenant people placed upon them. But that included the obligation to maintain Israel's distinctiveness from the other peoples not chosen by God. To live as God's people was to live precisely in a manner which would show them to be different from other peoples.*"[193]

Given this understanding of the purpose of the law it is perhaps unsurprising that the Jewish followers of Christ should require Gentile converts to be circumcised in order to demonstrate that they too were now within the Jewish covenant. And this brings us back to the heart of the theological tussle noted above: The Judaisers appear to be of the view that God's chosen people must continue to be defined around the Jewish covenant and the law, and that the 'Jesus event' could be subsumed within that paradigm, whereas Paul was of the view that God had redefined his people around the person of Jesus and, specifically, around those that have faith in Jesus as the one promised by God. As N.T. Wright puts it:

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[191] Or an '*ethnically distinctive Jewish boundary-maker'* as N.T. Wright might term it.

[192] See also Gen. 17:10,11

[193] James D.G. Dunn *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* p.77

"*Faith, not the possession and / or practice of Torah, is the badge which marks out this family, the family which is now defined as the people of the Messiah.*"[194]

The new perspective on Paul could therefore be characterised as a new perspective on Judaism which informs our understanding of Paul. According to the new perspective the Judaisers against whom Paul was arguing in Galatians could not have been promulgating a 'gospel' of justification by undertaking works of the law because that was not how Judaism perceived either justification or the law. Rather, it is argued, Paul was against the Judaisers because they were attempting to bring the Gentiles within the Jewish covenant by conferring the 'badges' of being within that covenant and that they thereby failed to recognise that God's covenant in the Messiah was intended to extend beyond Judaism. The 'sin' of the Judaisers, and the cause of Paul's wrath, was to try and keep the covenant as exclusively Jewish (demarcated by the law including circumcision) whereas Paul, as the Apostle to the Gentiles, was of the view that God's covenant was for the whole world unencumbered by any such ethnic boundary markers and demarcated solely by faith.

Criticism of the New Perspective

In his article " 'Works of Law' in Paul"[195] Thomas Schreiner is clear that the proponents of the new perspective are right to caution against reading Judaism through the lenses of the Reformation and that a fresh appreciation of Judaism is necessary, not least because of an element of anti-Semitism that may have crept into NT exegesis. However, he says, this necessity for a re-appraisal of Paul does not mean that the interpretations of the new perspective scholars should be accepted 'uncritically'.[196] In relation to the issue of the law being a boundary markers Schreiner believes that this is simply too narrow an

[194] N.T. Wright *Paul: Fresh Perspectives* p.113

[195]Novum Testamentun XXXIII, 3 (1991) pp 217 –244 accessed via ATLA Serials http://search.atlaonline.com

[196] ibid. p224.

interpretation[197] and, further, that despite the efforts of the new perspective to portray Judaism as a religion of grace rather than legalism Schreiner believes that Paul really was opposing legalists in the 'Lutheran' sense:

> *"…it is probable that when Paul speaks against righteousness by 'works of law' in the context of Rom 3:27-4:5, he is opposing legalism, i.e. the attempt to earn salvation by doing good works."*[198]

How does this square with Sanders' model of covenantal nomism? The most common answer is not that Sanders was wrong to identify covenantal nomism within Judaism, as it is patently a supportable conclusion from the sources he reviewed but, rather, that he was wrong to present it as normative and that he failed to give sufficient weight to the variety of interpretations and practices that existed within Judaism at the time. It could be said that in attempting to free Judaism from the 'straightjacket' of pure legalism Sanders went too far in imposing his own straightjacket of covenantal nomism and that neither does justice to the more likely reality that second temple Judaism was far from uniform and that different strands within Judaism could have had highly diverse views on the subject of the interaction between justification and the law.[199]

This does not mean that the new perspective is wrong to question the Lutheran assumptions about Judaism; on the contrary, it could be argued, the new perspective needs to give even more thought to the existence of diversity within Judaism and, in particular, the possibility that notwithstanding covenantal nomism as a pattern of religion that there may also have been those who were seeking to undermine Paul's teaching of faith with a teaching that it was necessary to comply with the law in order to be justified.

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[197] Ibid. p229

[198] ibid. p234

[199] See Deibert "*The Justification of Covenantal Nomism, Reflections on Justification and Variegated Nomism*" accessed via www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/Tyndale/staff/Head/JVN%20Reflections%20for%20PDF.pdf

Conclusion

So, how does the new perspective on Paul affect the traditional Reformation reading of Galatians? On one level anything that increases our understanding of the theological and historical context in which Paul was writing is useful, as it must help to reduce the effect of the 'distorting lens' noted above. Judaism was not a monolithic system of legalism from which the grace of God was absent and it was not helpful for Luther to allow his views of Catholicism, and even his incipient anti-Semitism, to cloud his interpretation of Judaism. Conversely Judaism was also not a uniform system of grace followed by works and the criticism that Sander's system of covenantal nomism does not take account of complexity in practice is well made. By achieving a greater (although imperfect) understanding of Judaism the new perspective helps us to avoid perpetuating the simplistic dichotomy between Christianity and Judaism: This is undoubtedly useful and may even help to address misunderstandings which, it could be said, have been sustained by some proponents of the traditional Reformed school.

But, having said that, to what extent does it really change our understanding of Christianity? In relation to the central theme of justification by faith (*vis à vis* Christianity) I am not convinced that the new perspective changes the traditional Reformed reading of Galatians to any material extent: both Paul and Luther were clear that in order for Gentiles to be justified by God then the only thing necessary was that they should have faith that Jesus has already done all that is required, that they should 'die' to themselves and allow Christ to live in them (e.g. Gal 2:20) and that there are no 'works' that can be done to win favour with God apart from having faith. To that extent, despite the fact that justification may well have been understood differently within Palestinian Judaism and despite that fact that I am no Lutheran, I suspect that the traditional Reformed reading of Galatians in relation to Christian doctrine has plenty of life left in it. Of course when it comes to making pronouncements about the nature of Judaism I would commend the approach of Schreiner and suggest that the proponents of the traditional Reformed reading of Galatians should not be afraid to learn from the new perspective and, in particular, to appreciate that Judaism is more nuanced and multi-faceted than suggested by Paul, Luther or even Sanders.

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Compare and contrast the books of Amos and Hosea, exploring the ways in which the message of each of these prophets is rooted in the theological and narrative traditions of Israel. What light do these texts shed for contemporary readers on the question of God's objectives for human society?

Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I will be looking at the books of Amos and Hosea, two of the 'minor' prophets of the pre-exilic period,[200] and will be seeking to 'tease out' and examine some of their similarities and differences. It will become clear that whilst both preached a message of Yahweh's judgment on Israel they had quite different *charisms* and therefore presented their concerns and their message in quite different ways.

Whilst this examination could be done purely on the basis of the texts themselves I think it would be useful to try and establish the historic and theological context in which both prophets were working. This can be no more than the lightest of background sketches but it may help to provide an additional perspective on the prophets and their message. Finally it will be interesting to see what lessons, if any, these pre-modern books have to teach a post-modern society.

[200] See, for example, Claus Westermann, *Handbook to the Old Testament* p 178

Both Amos and Hosea were active as prophets in the northern kingdom of Israel when Jeroboam II was king (c.793 – 753).[201]

Israel in the early to mid-Eighth century BC was a prosperous small nation and enjoyed a brief period of relative stability. The Syrians had been defeated in the Aramaean-Ephraimitic wars, the Transjordan had been recaptured and the rapid changes of monarchy and the threat of the Assyrians still lay just over the horizon.[202] Whilst the wealth of Israel was unevenly divided and there was significant social injustice from a secular perspective, in material, military and political terms Israel was a successful country. However this was not to last long and, from the mid-Eighth century onwards, the revitalised Assyrian empire became an increasing threat that proved ultimately devastating to Israel:

> "*It was only with Tiglath Pileser III that Assyria's land-grabbing policy was systematically directed against Palestine, and this was the time of Hosea, Amos and Isaiah. From then on the political independence of Israel and Judah was at an end – it was only a question of time, and of Assyria's tactics, until the death-blow fell. About 733 BC Tiglath Pileser seized the northern provinces of the Kingdom of Israel (II Kings 15:29f.)*"[203]

The fall of the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians is only a part of the story and, to help place the ministry of the prophets more firmly in context, it is worth taking a longer view.

The apogee of Israel's wealth and power had been nearly two hundred years before the Assyrian victory when Israel and Judah had been united under the monarchies of David and then Solomon. However, despite his

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[201] Amos 1:1, Hos 1:1. Dates of reign as per NIV Study Bible. All dates given are BC or BCE. I will be looking at the dates of their respective ministries in a little more detail in the next section.

[202] See, for example, J Alberto Soggin, *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah* pp 228 - 229

[203] Rad, Gerhad von *The Message of the Prophets* p.10

fabled wisdom, Solomon's idolatry and use of conscripted labour to build the temple led to the prophet Ahijah 'annointing' Jeroboam I to separate the ten tribes of Israel from Judah and this division came to fruition in around 930, following Solomon's death. [204]

This division of the kingdom caused substantial issues in the religious life of Israel that continued to the time of Amos and Hosea and formed a significant aspect of the message of both prophets. The centre of Yahweh worship was the Temple in Jerusalem, in Judah. Whilst, presumably, those living in Israel could have continued to worship in Jerusalem it was not expedient for Jeroboam I to have Israel's centre of worship located in another country and, for that reason, he established altars at Bethel and Dan.[205] However, in order to serve at these altars, he also created an alternate, non-Levitical, priestly caste, he installed golden calves and he also instituted a new festival date.[206] These actions resulted in an immediate visitation of a 'man of God' from Judah and a prophecy against Jeroboam by Ahijah, who had previously anointed him.[207]

The actions of these tenth century prophets in condemning Jeroboam's deviation from orthodox Temple worship brings us to a vital point in seeking to understand the theological and narrative tradition in which Amos and Hosea clearly stand; that is the Deuteronomistic (re-) interpretation of Israelite history and the role of the prophets in the (re-) formation of the Yahweh cult.

It is uncontroversial that the biblical books that deal with pre-exilic history were either written or edited during or after the Babylonian exile in order to explaining Yahweh's apparent abandonment of his chosen

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[204] See 1 Kings 5:13, 1 Kings 11:5,6 and 1 Kings 12

[205] 1 Kings 12:26

[206] 1 Kings 12:28-33. The golden calves (or bulls) are symbols strongly associated with Canaanite practice and probably constitutive of the golden calf episode in Ex. 32

[207] 1 Kings 13 & 1 Kings 14:9-12. The parallels between this 'man of God' and Amos coming from Judah to denounce the practice at Bethel are striking

people and / or legitimating the post-exilic cultic practice.[208] The underlying theology behind this "Deuteronomistic" explanation of history is not complex: It says, in essence, that when Yahweh's people (usually represented by their monarch) do what God requires then the nation will prosper but if they turn their backs on him by, for example, worshipping other gods or not following his commandments, then Yahweh will punish his people. On that basis, for the writer of Kings at least, it was the institution by Jeroboam of 'irregular' cultic practices at Bethel and Dan, and their continuation by his successors, *inter alia*, which led to God's judgement on Israel in the form of the Assyrians. This brings us back to the position of the prophets.

One interpretation of the role of the prophets is that they were calling Israel back to an earlier time of monotheistic purity and were seeking to reject the later syncretisms of, for example, Baal worship. An alternate view is that Judaism emerged gradually from polytheistic cults and that the revelations and subsequent theologising of the prophets actually helped to create a strongly monotheistic view of Yahweh which subsequently fed into the Deuteronomist's view of Israelite history. [209]

However, whether one takes the view that the prophets were forth-telling God's judgement on Israel for having compromised a pre-existing faith of ethical monotheism or, alternately, whether their prophesies were in some way constitutive of such a faith (or indeed whether the truth lies somewhere between the two) it is apparent that they are anything but 'minor' in their contribution to our understanding of God's relationship with his chosen people and, bearing that in mind, I will now look further at the books of Amos and Hosea.

[208] Naturally there is significant literature on this point but, by way of example only, see J Albert Soggin *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah* p. 199

[209] See, for example, *ante*. p. 69

Amos and Hosea: One God, Different *Charisms*

In this section I will be seeking to pick out the significant similarities and differences between the books of Amos and Hosea in relation to some key areas and relating these to the background sketched in above. The areas I will be looking at are: *Who were Amos and Hosea? What are their primary concerns?* And, *The Day of Yahweh.*

Who were Amos and Hosea?

When one looks at earlier prophets, such as Elijah, the texts we have are in the form of stories that clearly convey the prophetic message but which also paint vivid pictures of the men who were acting as God's messengers.[210] By way of contrast, in the books of Amos and Hosea, it is the prophetic message itself that is dominant and the men behind the message are almost entirely eclipsed. There are, however, some biographical clues to be gleaned.

As noted earlier both prophets were active during the reign of Jeroboam II but, if one digs a little deeper, then it appears that Hosea was active for longer than Amos as both also date their ministry with reference to the kings of Judah. On that basis, Hosea prophesised during the reigns of Uzziah (792-740), Jotham (750-735), Ahaz (735-715) and Hezekiah (715–698) whereas Amos only appears to have been active during the time of Uzziah.[211] It is believed that Amos carried out his ministry around 760 whilst Hosea may have commenced slightly later but continued for a number of years up to the time of the capture of Samaria by the Assyrians in 721.[212]

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[210] For example, with Elijah we do are not simply given his polemic against Baal worship but we have a dramatic account of his defeating the prophets of Baal in combat by fire. See 1 Kings 18:16-46

[211] Amos 1:1, Hos 1:1.

[212] See, for example, Klaus Koch, *The Prophets, Volume One. The Assyrian Period* p 36 and Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets* p.110. There are issues with the dating of Ahaz's and Hezekiah's reigns (perhaps overlapping regencies) which can date the start of Hezekiah's reign to 727 BC which would mean that he was reigning at the time of the fall of Samaria in 721 BC. However there is

We do know that Amos was from Judah, that he made his living from the land as a shepherd and arborealist and that he prophesised, at least in part, at Bethel.[213] His message was rejected by Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, and it is possible that his ministry finished shortly thereafter.[214] It is clear that Amos did not belong to the caste of 'professional' prophets and that he carried out his calling in Israel as an outsider. Whilst this may have given him an element of objectivity in relation to the situation in Israel it is unlikely that these characteristics did anything to make his message more acceptable to the Israelites, as the reaction of Amaziah may indicate.

If the biographical information about Amos is sketchy it nevertheless looks full compared to that which we have for Hosea. The text gives us a fascinating story of his marriage to Gomer, the birth of three children, Gomer's adultery or prostitution and their reconciliation.[215] However it is entirely unclear whether this story represents real prophetic actions (in which case it is probably as heroic as anything done by Elijah) or whether the story is wholly metaphorical. However, in biographical terms, this story does little to help us to understand Hosea's place in Israelite society. It is, however, generally believed that Hosea was from Israel, and was therefore much more of an 'insider' in relation to the society about which he was prophesying.[216]

What are their primary concerns?

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an interesting question about the kings named by Hosea, which is this: If Hosea was active until the time of Hezekiah then why does he not mention the kings Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah and Hoshea of Israel? For a discussion of this issue see e.g. A.A. MacIntosh Hosea pp 2-4.

[213] Amos 1:1, 7:12- 7:14

[214] Amos 7:12-13. See also Rad, Gerhad von *The Message of the Prophets* p.48

[215] Hos 1:2-11, 3:1-3

[216] As an aside it is interesting to note that Gerhard von Rad believes that Hosea was connected with the Levitical caste and that this played a role in his opposition to the 'non-orthodox' worship that was taking place in Israel.(*The Message of the Prophets* p. 110). It has also been posited (by Rainer Albertz in *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* p 181) that Hosea and his disciples left Israel in the face of the Assyrian invasion and moved south to Judah and that their influence there helped to bring about the later reforms of king Hezekiah.

Hosea establishes both the central theme of his prophecy, and his primary metaphor, clearly from the beginning:

> "*…the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.*"[217]

Of course before there can be adultery there must be a relationship and, in order to illustrate this basis of the relationship between God and Israel, Hosea reminds the Israelites of the Exodus story.[218] There is a close (covenanted) relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites and this is illustrated by metaphors such as a parent's relationship with their child and, in particular, through the story of Hosea's marriage.[219]

So, how has Israel committed 'adultery' against God? In essence, through being unfaithful to the God who brought them out of Egypt by worshipping other gods. Hosea's ire is clearly focused on idolatry and, the centre of this false worship is at Bethel. Hosea recalls that Bethel, or "house of God", once played an important role in the story of Israel but it has now become Beth Aven, or "house of wickedness" and is condemned by Hosea, who instructs the Israelites not to go there.[220] Hosea rejects all forms of idolatry and Baal worship[221] but specifically rejects the 'calf-idols'[222] and he echoes, and thereby condemns, the words with which Jeroboam I carried out their installation some 200 years earlier, when he says:

> "*…We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made…*"[223]

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[217] Hos 1:2 see also 2:2, 4:1, 4:12, 4:15, 5:4, 5:7, 7:4, 8:9, 9:1,11:7

[218] Hos 2:15, 8:13, 9:10, 11:1, 12:13 and 13:4-6

[219] Hos 11:1- 3 & Hos 1:2 and 3:1

[220] Hos 12:4 & Hos 4:15, see also 5:8, 8:11, 10:5, and 10:15

[221] Hos 2:8, 2:13, 2:17, 4:13, 4:17, 5:11, 8:4, 9:10, 10:6, 11:2, 13:1 and 13:2

[222] Hos 8:5 and 10:5

[223] Hos 14:3 cf. 1 Kings 12:28

However, it should be noted, Hosea was not *solely* concerned with cultic matters and does also condemn the lack of social cohesion in Israelite society and the oppression of the poor through unfair practices.[224] Nevertheless it is probably fair to say that Hosea's *primary* concern was Israel's idolatry, syncretism and Baal worship.

Amos, in common with Hosea, placed great emphasises Israel's 'election' to a special relationship with God:

> "*You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth…*"[225]

Because, of course, it is the neglect by Israel of its elected status that lies at the heart of God's judgement; had there been no covenant to breach then God could not hold the nation to account.

As noted earlier, Amos delivered his prophetic message at Bethel and, also in common with Hosea, the condemnation of Bethel and the idolatry that went on there does constitute a substantial portion of his message.[226] However, whilst Amos is undoubtedly concerned with idolatry, he is a man of the land and his *primary* concern is the economic oppression of the poor by the newly wealthy urban elite:

> "*They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground.*"[227]

This inequality of wealth and power had emerged from a substantial change in the make-up of Israelite society as it underwent a gradual transition from an agglomeration of affiliated tribes to something more closely resembling a nation state:

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[224] Hos 4:2, 7:1, 10:4 and 12:7

[225] Amos 3:2, see also 2:10-11and 9:7

[226] Amos 2:4, 3:14, 4:4, 5:5-6, 5:21 and 7:9

[227] Amos 2:6b-7a, see also 4:1, 5:7, 5:10-12, 5:15, 5:24 and 8:6

"*Because of the burden of taxation, the peasant, economically weak, became less and less able to remain a free man on his own land – his old influential and honourable status in the time of the ancient Israelite amphictyony as a free man liable for military service dwindled away, and ownership of land came more and more into the hands of a small number of capitalist town-dwellers.*" [228]

These changes in Israelite society were viewed by the prophets as the abandonment by Israel of its God-given ideals and the embrace by it of a Canaanite life-style, which included both a more recognisably capitalist economy and, of course, Baal worship. Therefore, whilst it is true to say that Amos is primarily concerned with oppression of the poor and Hosea is primarily concerned with the corruption of Yahweh worship (although both also refer to each other's primary issues) the important point is that the issues of idolatry and social oppression should be seen as two aspects of the same underlying issue, which is the failure by Israel to live by its covenant with Yahweh. This failure carries consequences for Israel as the prophets proclaim in their different ways.

The Day of Yahweh

Amos is unequivocal that God is sending his judgement on Israel for its apostasy from the covenant and that this judgement will be both terrifying for those involved and devastating to the nation. However, it is important to remember that this judgment did not come without warning. Not only has God revealed his forthcoming judgment to Amos, who proclaims that the people should "seek the LORD and live",[229] but he has also sent many previous warnings to the nation: God warned the Israelites by means of famine, drought, locusts, plagues and other destruction but, on each occasion, there is the poetic refrain:

"*…yet you have not returned to me, declares the LORD.*"[230]

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[228] Rad, Gerhad von *The Message of the Prophets* p.10

[229] Amos 5:4, 5:6 and 5:14

[230] Amos 4:6, 4:8, 4:9, 4:10 and 4:11

In another echo of Moses Amos has also interceded with God to avert destruction and, on the first two occasions, this prophetic intercession works and God 'relents'.[231] However, as the nation's behaviour does not change, God sends Amos the vision of the plumb line (with the implication that the people are not standing upright in God's eyes) and says:

"*…I will spare them no longer.*"[232]

Amos has already set the scene for the scale of God's judgement when he speaks about the punishment sent on Israel's neighbours – in each case judgment will take the form of a "consuming fire".[233] The punishment on Israel will be no less severe: it will be overrun by an enemy, it will be crushed, its altars torn down, its armies destroyed and the people dragged away 'with hooks' into exile.[234] The thoroughness of God's judgment is illustrated in Amos 9:2-4 which says that whether one digs to the depths of the grave, climbs up to the top of a mountain or flees abroad there is no hiding place from God's wrath – this is the chilling 'dark twin' of Psalm 139. For Amos the 'day of Yahweh' is to be a day of darkness, wailing and death.[235]

Is there any hope for Israel according to Amos? Just two small glimmers: if the people change their ways and seek good rather than evil then "perhaps" a remnant will be saved and, in the closing verses, a promise that the exile will not last forever and that Israel will once again be 'planted' in the land.[236] Despite this hope for the post-Exilic future Amos's message to Eighth century Israel is almost entirely bleak.

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[231] Amos 7:3 and 7:6

[232] Amos 7:8

[233] Amos 1:4, 1:7, 1:10, 1:12, 1:14, 2:2 and 2:5

[234] Amos 3:11, 2:13, 2:14, 4:2, 5:2, 5:27, 7:7 and 7:17

[235] Amos 8:9 and 8:3

[236] Amos 5:14, 9:8 and 9:11-15

The bleakness of Amos' message stands in some contrast to the tone of Hosea. There is no doubt in Hosea that the day of punishment is coming, that the altar of Bethel will be destroyed and the calf idol carried off to Assyria, that the Israelites will go back into exile and become 'wanderers among the nations'.[237] Nevertheless, whilst the restoration of Israel and the reconciliation between Yahweh and his people feels rather like an afterthought in Amos, this theme is integral to the whole of Hosea's message. Whilst God is aggrieved by Israel's adultery it is also his desire to 'woo' her back:

> "*Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her.*"[238]

The desert of exile, therefore, is not simply a place of punishment it is also a place for healing and, amazingly, an opportunity for the relationship between God and his people to be placed on a new and more intimate footing:

> *" 'In that day', declares the Lord, 'you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'* " [239]

While there are hard times ahead for Israel it is also a 'door of hope' for a new and loving relationship.[240] For Amos, the day of Yahweh is a day of darkness to be feared but, for Hosea, the coming of the Lord is like the rains coming to water the earth and an opportunity for wounds to be bound up and healed.[241]

Amos and Hosea were therefore both called to prophesy in strong terms against the falling away from a proper relationship with Yahweh that they

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[237] Hos 8:13, 9:7, 9:17, 10:2 , 10:6 and 10:8

[238] Hos 2:14 and this reconciliation is reflected in the story of Gomer in chapter 3.

[239] Hos 2:16

[240] Hos 2:15

[241] Hos 6:3 and 6:1

saw in Israel. Nevertheless it is clear that they were quite different people with different *charisms*: Amos was called out of his pastoral life in Judah for a short while to deliver an uncompromising message of punishment primarily for endemic social injustice, and this message was leavened only by a hope for the distant future. In contrast Hosea seems to have prophesised in his homeland for much of his life and his message of punishment primarily for the sin of syncretism, although strong, nevertheless strikes an entirely different tone and is one of a wronged parent or spouse rebuking a person that they continue to love and with whom they long to be reconciled.

Amos and Hosea: Pre-Modern Prophets for Post-Modernity?

So what light, if any, do these texts shed for contemporary readers on the question of God's objectives for human society? There are, of course, clear parallels to be drawn between pre-exilic, pre-modern Israelite society with its substantial discrepancies of wealth and power, an oppressed underclass and widespread idolatry and our post-modern society which, quite obviously, displays all of those features. It would therefore be easy to say that these texts demonstrate that God wants social structures to be just and that, of course, is entirely true and is something for which society should continue to strive at all levels.

However, perhaps there is another lesson to be drawn from these prophets that has to do with being in a covenanted relationship with God. As both Amos and Hosea were at pains to point out, the primary reason that God was punishing Israel was not because there was injustice or idolatry in the land *per se* but, rather, because these things were in breach of the covenant that God has established with his people and to which he was seeking to call them back. Modern, gentile, society stands under no such general covenant with God. However, as we know, there is a new covenant that was extended to individual gentiles through the person of Jesus and that Christian covenant is no less demanding in its requirements both of social justice and commitment to God.[242] Therefore, rather than society as a whole standing under judgement for failing to live by the standards required of the covenant perhaps we should consider that those within the Christian covenant have a special

[242] e.g. Mark 12:30-31

responsibility to resist injustice, idolatry and hypocrisy in all their forms and we will be judged accordingly. Of course, whether that judgement will resemble Amos' 'day of darkness', Hosea's 'day of healing' or something else entirely remains to be seen.

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Chose a pastoral situation in which you have been involved. You may use your experience in your home church or at your place of work or in your local community.

(a) Carefully describe the situation abiding by rules of confidentiality.

(b) Demonstrate your understanding of the situation and your involvement in it with reference to the issues and approaches to Christian pastoral ministry that you have explored in the teaching sessions (e.g. the dynamics of interpersonal process, issues of human development etc.)

(c) Using the understanding you have gained, reflect upon and critically evaluate the way in which you dealt with the situation in relation to the values of God's kingdom.

Introduction

I HAVE NOT been able to choose a single, self-contained, 'pastoral situation' which can be made to fit within the parameters of this question. Instead I have chosen to tell the story of my friendship with Naomi (not her real name) as this friendship has generated a number of situations over the course of several years in which she has sought help, guidance or advice from me in the capacity of a friend, a solicitor, a Christian and even as an ordinand.

Carefully describe the situation abiding by rules of confidentiality.

I first met Naomi in about November 2000 shortly after I started working for a large firm of Solicitors in the City of London. I had joined the firm as a Senior Associate in the Employment Department and Naomi was a Trainee Solicitor who wanted to be taken on in that department following qualification. I was told that she had had about six months sick leave during her training due to 'Scarlet Fever' but the implication was that it was actually a stress related absence. However, I could empathise with someone who had suffered with stress during

training as, some eight years earlier, I had become so stressed in my first few months as a trainee solicitor that I had found myself driving home one night on the wrong side of the road. I went to bed for about two days and then felt much better but the experience certainly taught me the reality of the effects of stress. In any event, when my views were sought on the suitability of appointing Naomi I was supportive of her application and she subsequently joined the team.

Between November 2000 and September 2001 the Employment Department was a thriving place to be. There were two partners (one of whom I will call Harry), myself as the Senior Associate and eleven other Assistant Solicitors. Although it was a busy and sometimes pressured environment it was also a very sociable place and the team had regular drinks and lunches together and became a close-knit group. Therefore whilst I was Naomi's 'line manager' we were also friends.

One evening, at a social event, Naomi said to me: "You're a Christian, aren't you?" When I agreed that I was she told me that she was too, that she had never told anyone at work this before but she had now decided to come out of the Christian closet. This revelation added another dimension to our relationship as we now related as colleagues, as friends and as fellow-Christians.

Following the events of 11 September 2001 and the bursting of the "dot com bubble" our firm became much less thriving. Harry's behaviour became quite erratic (he drank heavily at lunchtime) and Naomi, in particular, found him to be a real cause of stress and she decided to move on. In approximately October 2003 Naomi got a job as an Assistant at a slightly smaller firm in the City. Not long after Harry also left our firm to take up a partnership elsewhere and shortly after that my firm carried out a redundancy exercise in which, unfortunately, I was one of the casualties.

Naomi was happy at her new firm and things settled down for about eight months. And then, irony of ironies, in mid-2004 Harry's new firm took over Naomi's new firm and he once again became the partner in charge of her department. This cause a great deal of stress for Naomi not only because she was again being managed by the person who had

substantially contributed to her leaving her previous job but, in addition, the newly merged firm was much bigger and busier then the firm she had chosen to join and its culture more prone to treating its Assistants as "cogs in the machine" rather than people.

By January 2005 the pressure proved too much and Naomi was signed off work by her doctor with 'stress and depression'. It was at this point that I became more formally involved as Naomi instructed me to act as her solicitor against her employer. This was an 'interesting' position for me because not only was I representing Naomi as a friend and former colleague but I also ended up negotiating direct with Harry who, of course, had previously been my boss.

Over the course of the next six months things got a little more complex as I had to deal with Naomi's exit from her firm acting professionally as her solicitor but I also spent a lot of time talking to her about her future career / life plans in the capacity of a friend but also expressly as a Christian. Naomi had been quite badly damaged by her time in the City and she was convinced that she would never work as a solicitor again. She knew that I had recently gone through the ABM selection process and was about to start ordination training and she was also interested in doing something "theological", although she did not think she had a vocation to ordained ministry. This meant that I was advising her formally on her legal situation but was also having long conversations about Christian vocation which, inevitably, involved sharing my own experience. In the next section I will reflect further on this aspect of our discussions.

By July 2005 we had achieved a good exit package from her employer and Naomi decided that she would like to start a three year degree course in Christian Counselling, starting in September that year, whilst working part time as an administrator for her church. Unfortunately, within a few months of starting the course it became clear that whilst she was very interested in the theological elements of her studies the counselling aspect was not of huge interest and she had decided that she did not want to become a Christian Counsellor. This again raised the question of whether she should be exploring ordination as an option and, at Naomi's request, I sent her a list of the books that I had read a few years earlier on the subject. Interestingly, after some discussion, Naomi again decided

not to explore ordination any further on the basis that the vicar of her church was such a 'busy' person that Naomi could not envisage herself living that life without suffering from undue stress. Of course I explained that she should not view her vicar's ministry as being the only way of being a priest but, conversely, it was certainly not my place to try and convince her to explore her vocation unless she felt a strong call to do so and I did not wish to pretend that the selection, training and experience of ministry could ever be entirely stress-free!

Happily Naomi met someone with whom she fell in love at this stage and they decided to get married in the summer of 2006. She therefore decided to finish the first year of her course so that she could leave with a Certificate and so that she could maintain the *status quo* in her life until the wedding. My wife and I went to the wedding and it was good to see her looking so happy.

For approximately the next year (from August 2006 to June 2007) Naomi continued to work as an administrator in her church but was increasingly conscious that she needed to do something else with her career. At one point we discussed the idea of her becoming a German teacher but, unfortunately, I was not able to offer her much practical insight into that path, although I think she soon realised that being a teacher is far from being a stress-free occupation. Sometime in June 2007 she called me at work to discuss the possibility of her re-starting work as a solicitor but in a firm outside London. She was obviously now feeling much stronger and had begun to appreciate that she was a good lawyer and would be able to thrive in a less pressured environment than exists in London. By this time I had worked as a solicitor both in London and in the provinces for some time and I was able to reassure her that not all firms are like the ones she experienced in the City and I offered to act as a referee for her if required. I think that this helped to give her the confidence to make an application to a firm in Exeter and, I am pleased to say, that Naomi and her husband have recently relocated there to start life as non-City lawyers.

Of course this is not the end of the story, as life and our friendship continues, but it is good that Naomi has re-discovered her vocation as a lawyer and has healed sufficiently to resume that vocation, albeit in a different environment. I do not presume for one moment that I was the

only person assisting her through this difficult time (as she has a supportive family, plenty of other friends and, of course, a new husband) but I hope that I played some small part in the process. I will now reflect on this a little further.

Demonstrate your understanding of the situation and your involvement in it with reference to the issues and approaches to Christian pastoral ministry that you have explored in the teaching sessions (e.g. the dynamics of interpersonal process, issues of human development etc.)

The situation, of course, starts with Naomi and her reaction to the circumstances of her life at the time. I have used the word 'stress' a great deal in the first section to describe both the *cause* of Naomi's reaction and as a word describing the reaction itself. This is misleading as it seeks to make 'stress' into both an objective concept within the workplace (or the home or the church) and it portrays stress as a discrete medical condition. In reality stress is a highly subjective issue as it is entirely to do with the way in which individuals react to circumstances rather than the inherent nature of the circumstances themselves. Similarly stress is not a medical condition *per se* as the symptoms of being over-stressed normally manifest themselves as variety of identifiable medical conditions such as depression, heart disease and other complaints.[243]

In Naomi's case she is a perfectionist with an eye for detail who likes to take time to think through the ramifications of every scenario. Whilst this may be a good set of characteristics for a lawyer to possess the reality of life in City law firms is the pressure to keep working on as many matters as possible as quickly as possible. This way of working can be overwhelming for a perfectionist and, for Naomi, this pressure was intensified by the management style of Harry who is a less intellectual, 'big picture', person who simply could not understand Naomi's need to think things through in such detail. The deep mismatch between Naomi's personality and the substantial demands of her job was so 'stressful' that it overwhelmed her ability to cope and she became depressed.

[243] See Mental Health Foundation website: www.mhf.org.uk

Having to leave her firm in these circumstances was the first time that Naomi had failed to achieve her personal goals and this sense of failure only added to her depression. At the same time she felt enormous guilt at letting down her colleagues and, most importantly, at 'disappointing' her parents. She was therefore both angry with her employers for putting her into this situation but also angry with herself in being unable to cope with it. As her solicitor it was obviously my role to deal with her employer but, as Naomi's friend, I also found myself discussing at some depth the much deeper issues of her self-directed anger and, later, her future direction.

This brings us to the issue of the multiplicity of roles and the dangers of role confusion. As Naomi's solicitor I had a clearly defined professional role however, as her friend and fellow-Christian my role was much less clear. There is no doubt that boundaries and mutual understanding of roles is important and that confusion between them has the potential to be damaging:

> "*…it is also important to recognise that clients can become confused, or damaged, when the people who are trying to help them become enmeshed in role conflicts through attempting to be counsellor as well as, for instance, teacher or nurse.*"[244]

In practice I am pleased that this did not end up becoming an issue and, perhaps subconsciously, we seemed to develop an effective *modus operandi* which protected this separation of roles: quite simply if Naomi telephoned me at work then we would discuss her legal issues but if she wanted to discuss her more personal issues then she would call me at home in the evening. In addition, but perhaps most importantly, I never sought to subject Naomi to amateur counselling whilst acting in the capacity of her solicitor but, rather, was simply available as a friend who was familiar with her situation on a number of levels and whom she could seek out when she wanted to talk.

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[244] McLeod, John. *An Introduction to Counselling* p.9. On "Dual relationships" in pastoral situations see also Litchfield, Kate *Tend My Flock* p. 82

The fact that Naomi frequently sought my support during this time and the fact that we did relate on a number of levels perhaps raises issues of dependence, co-dependence, projection, transference and counter-transference (to use some of the counselling 'toolkit'). Was Naomi becoming dependent on my support? It is possible that she was dependent on my help for a while but I knew that she was not *solely* dependent on me as, despite Naomi's concern about disappointment, her parents were very supportive throughout and her church & later her husband were also there for her. I do think that Naomi used me as one of her props when she was feeling at her worst but that, of course, is not inherently wrong provided that dependency is not sustained longer than necessary or becomes co-dependency. I am certain that we never became co-dependent because, whilst I was always happy to help, I did not *need* to be her helper and never sought to encourage her dependency in order to validate myself. At the risk of retrojection I think that I conducted our discussions in the spirit of non-possessive warmth / unconditional positive regard (which forms an important part of 'person centred counselling[245]) and was always seeking to encourage Naomi's self-confidence and independence.

On the questions of projection and transference I was certainly not aware of this taking place and, for example, I cannot recall any unwarranted reactions from Naomi which may suggest that she was projecting onto me. However the question of counter-transference (i.e. the extent to which I may have been working out my own issues during my conversations with Naomi) is a little more challenging. Whilst I don't believe that I consciously subjected Naomi to my own issues I cannot deny the possibility that an element of this may have taken place at a sub-conscious level. Not only had I experienced something of the effects of stress at work but I also knew what it was like to work in a City law firm, I had worked closely with Harry, I had been made redundant from the firm where Naomi and I had worked together and I was starting ordination training. Did I over empathise on the stress issue because I had been there? Did I want to somehow 'get my revenge' on either City law firms in general or Harry in particular because of being made redundant? Did I want to encourage Naomi to seek ordination to somehow validate my own choice on that front? The answer to all of

[245] For example see Person Centred Counselling in Action, 3rd Edition, p95 onwards.

these is "*I don't believe so*" and I think that is supportable as I conducted myself professionally in relation to her legal issues and I never spoke about the ordination route further than Naomi wanted to, and certainly never pushed it as panacea. Nevertheless it has been extremely interesting to have spent some time dwelling on the extent to which this *might* have been the case and will doubtless be useful to bear in mind for the future.

Using the understanding you have gained, reflect upon and critically evaluate the way in which you dealt with the situation in relation to the values of God's kingdom.

On the whole I hope that I helped Naomi to deal with her crisis in a mature and constructive manner. I was available whenever she needed to speak (both at work and at home) and, although I could empathise with her on a number of levels and we had some issues in common, I don't believe that I over-identified with her to the extent of seeking to work out my issues via her situation. In addition to exercising empathy and unconditional positive regard I hope that I also acted in a congruent fashion and Naomi has known me long enough to spot any incongruity. Other than guiding her through the legal process (in a professional manner) I do not think that I was overly directive in helping her to decide on "next steps" but I hope that I was sufficiently supportive that Naomi gradually gained the confidence to test the waters on a number of options before, eventually, going back to the law. Would I have done anything differently? It is always tempting to say that I wish I could have done more but, actually, had I sought to involve myself much more then I think that the risks of dependency, co-dependency and counter-transference would have become much more pronounced. As it is I hope that I played a part in supporting Naomi through her crisis and I am not sure that I could have done much else or done it much differently.

How does this all relate to the values of God's kingdom? On the grounds that it would take a whole other essay (at least) to explore the question of the values of God's kingdom I am afraid that this can be no more than the lightest sketch of an answer. What are the most pertinent values of God's kingdom in this situation? I would suggest Love, Healing and Resurrection.

As Christians we are primarily called to love God and to love our neighbours and this love of each other is illustrated through the practical actions of the Good Samaritan in the parable.[246] I hope that, however imperfect my actions or motivations, my availability for and support of Naomi contained something of this *agapé* love for the needs of the other.

The most common miracles in the Gospels are undoubtedly those connected with healing: Wherever Jesus went he sought to set people free from the bondage of physical or mental illness.[247] *Wholeness* of body and mind therefore appears to be intimately related to the *holiness* of God's kingdom. I certainly do not claim to have healed Naomi (as that was between her, her doctor and God) but I hope that I did something to uphold her along the path to healing.

Finally, the ultimate expression of healing is resurrection which was presaged in the bible by the resurrection first of Lazarus, then of Jesus and the promise of a general resurrection and renewal of all things.[248] At the start of Naomi's crisis she felt that her career in law was finished, her mental health was poor, she was single and directionless. Two years later she is married, she is re-establishing her legal career in Devon and she is again confident and full of hope. In many ways Naomi's life and career has been resurrected and it has been a privilege to have played however small a part in that process.

[246] Luke 10:25-37

[247] E.g. Matt 4:23, 8:3, 8:16.

[248] E.g. John 11:44, Matt 28:6, Rev 21:1-5

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Compare and contrast , examining their strengths and weaknesses, the different historical models of atonement and conclude by outlining which model, if any, best suits the mission of the church in our post modern world.

Introduction

IN THIS ESSAY I will be seeking to assess the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the historic "models of the atonement" including the *Christus Victor* model, Anselm's *Satisfaction* model, Abelard's *Moral Influence* model and, of course, the *Penal Substitution* model before seeking to decide which, if any, best suits the current mission of the church.[249] The doctrine of the atonement lies squarely at the heart of Christianity because, in seeking to understand the atonement, we are seeking to understand the *purpose* and *effect* of Jesus Christ and, by extension, something of the *motivation* or even the *character* of God the Father. If the church is to be able to communicate the Christian faith in this culture then it needs to be able to articulate its understanding of the atonement in ways that are culturally relevant.

However, when considering the atonement, it swiftly becomes apparent that we face the substantial challenge of the limitations of human language to express divine purpose. Of course this affects all areas of theology but it is a challenge that seems particularly acute here. This is because each of the models of the atonement are built upon the language that their proponents find in the bible; however, not only does the biblical imagery support more than one model of the atonement (and there would be little scope for debate if it did not) but we also have the question of how we are to interpret the apparently clear but simultaneously metaphorical language with which we are presented. To take a pertinent example what does it *really* mean to be "*made white by the*

[249] It should be appreciated that one cannot fully critique four models of the atonement and relate them to post modernism within the confines of 3000 words therefore this should be treated as sketch of the issues rather than a portrait.

Blood of the Lamb"?[250] On the one hand it seems to have the 'clear' meaning that sinners are purified through the sacrifice of Jesus but, on the other, it is quite clearly metaphorical language and this should sound a note of caution in the way in which it is interpreted.[251] Therefore the danger inherent within each of the models is that they become edifices erected upon metaphors.

The Early Church & Christus Victor

Whilst the roots of the *Christus Victor* model lie with some of the most prominent theologians of the pre Great Schism Church it is notable that the early Church itself never adopted a comprehensive model of the atonement and any attempt to distil such a model from the writings of the Church Fathers is futile. As J.N.D Kelly says:

> "*The student who seeks to understand the soteriology of the fourth and early fifth centuries will be sharply disappointed if he expects to find anything corresponding to the elaborately worked out syntheses which the contemporary theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation presents…Instead he must be prepared to pick his way through a variety of theories, to all appearance unrelated and even mutually incompatible, existing side by side and sometimes sponsored by the same theologian.*"[252]

That certainly reflects my experience! Of course this does not mean that the early Church did not consider the saving work of Christ (far from it) and, it is illuminating to look at what the Nicene Creed[253] says about the context of Jesus and salvation:

> *"…who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he*

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[250] Rev 7:14, paraphrased slightly for clarity.

[251] As Gerald O'Collins SJ puts it: "*The use of metaphorical language suggests how problematic it is to express redemption in literal speech; the use of a plurality of metaphors indicates how no metaphor by itself is even minimally adequate*". *Jesus Our Redeemer* p.120.

[252] J.N.D. Kelly *Early Christian Doctrines* p.375

[253] As amended by the Council of Constantinople in 381.

was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father."

Whilst the Nicene Creed is not meant as an exhaustive exposition of Christian theology it is an almost universal statement of faith (certainly within the churches claiming apostolic succession) and it is interesting that it does not locate the saving work of Christ in a particular moment, for example the cross or the resurrection, but in the totality of the "Christ Event" from the descent of the pre-existent *logos* to the ascension and even the continuing reign of Christ. This "holistic" view of the saving work of Christ, as opposed to some of the rather more legalistic or transactional models of atonement, is something to which I will return in the conclusion.

Notwithstanding the lack of a universal model of the atonement in the early Church theologians such as Irenaeus, Origen and Gregory the Great produced a wealth of material that was later revitalised and synthesised first by Martin Luther and later by Gustav Aulén in his book *Christus Victor*[254]. The *Christus Victor*[255] model holds, in essence, that in his death Christ paid the necessary price to free humanity from its fallen state and, in his resurrection, Christ was victorious over the power of death and sin.

The basis of the *Christus Victor* model is found in scripture and the notion of Jesus' death constituting a "ransom" is found in Jesus' own words:

"*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (□□□□□□) for many.*"[256]

In terms of post-ransom victory the Book of Revelation is replete with imagery of Christ victorious and, for example, in Revelation 5 we find both the "triumph" of Christ and the "purchase" of men together.[257]

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[254] MacMillan 1931

[255] Also known as the Classic or Dramatic model

[256] Mark 10:45, see also Matt 20:28

So, in the *Christus Victor* model, humanity is reconciled with God by virtue firstly of the ransom or the purchase of fallen humanity which is effected by Christ's death (certainly a transaction of same nature takes place) and, secondly, this atonement is guaranteed by Christ's victory over the powers which had previously held humanity captive.

This model undoubtedly contains essential truths and, in common with each of the models, we need to be wary about not discarding those truths simply by critiquing the model. However the danger of erecting edifices upon metaphors is especially pronounced here and the concepts of "ransom" and "purchase", if taken too literally or too far, quickly raise the question of to whom the price is paid and this can lead to dualistic notions of God having to negotiate a price with the Devil in order to redeem mankind. Further Christ did not stay dead which means that God must have tricked the Devil when entering into this transaction and Gregory the Great even pictured Christ as the "bait on the hook" by which the Devil was caught. Whilst this makes for good drama it is clear that this account quickly looses touch with its biblical roots and its apparent dualism could even be said to be reminiscent of pagan mythology or Gnosticism. It even succeeds in making God's actions in tricking his counter-party (even if it was the Devil) seem morally dubious!

Of course modern proponents of *Christus Victor* would say that the above is a gross characterisation of the model's most vulnerable points and that the whole model should not be judged on Gregory the Great's dramatic imagery.[258] There is undoubtedly some truth in that. However a more serious criticism of *Christus Victor* is not that it is unbiblical but, rather, that it's biblical roots are not sufficiently broad. Given these limitations it is therefore unsurprising that theologians would continue to look for other ways of understanding the work of Christ. That brings us onto Anselm of Canterbury.

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[257] Rev 5:5-9

[258] For an interesting modern defence of the Christus Victor model see: Finger, Thomas. *Pilgram Marpeck and the Christus Victor Motif* Mennonite Quarterly Review 78 (Jan 2004)

Anselm's *Satisfaction* Model[259]

Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033 – 1109) rejected both the implicit dualism of *Christus Victor* and the idea that God could or needed to be involved in any elaborate plan of deception. In his work *Cur Deus Homo*[260] Anselm focused on the righteousness of God and on the offence caused to that righteousness by the sinful disobedience of humanity. Anselm possessed a logical and legalistic mind and the steps in his argument could be summarised thus:

1. God created humanity with a view to bringing them to eternal blessedness;
2. However sin prevents obedience which jeopardises eternal blessedness and appears to frustrate God's purpose;
3. Sin thus offends God's righteousness and the situation can only be remedied if appropriate *satisfaction* (or compensation or reparation) is made for the offence;
4. However because of the infinity of God's offended righteousness (because of the infinity of God's nature) it is impossible for finite humanity to make appropriate satisfaction; therefore
5. Satisfaction can only be made by a "God-man" (i.e. Jesus) who possesses both the *ability* to make satisfaction (as God) and the *obligation* to do so (as a human).[261]

Anselm's model certainly has the attraction of being a self-contained logical system that maintains the focus on the relationship between God and humanity and does away with drama and dualism. One can also draw from it a picture of the incarnation as a self-offering of God as being the only means possible of overcoming the barrier of sin. However it is rather more ambiguous whether this self-offering is by a loving God who wishes to rescue his creation from sin or whether it is a wrathful God who needs to punish someone in place of sinful humanity. In fact

[259] Also known as the Juridical Theory.

[260] Why God became Man.

[261] These steps are paraphrased from Alistair McGrath's *Historical Theology* pp135-136.

these categories do not seem to work with Anselm whose portrait of God seems to owe much to a feudal lord of the manor whose "offence" seems neither loving nor wrathful, merely legalistic. Two more significant shortcomings in *Cur Deus Homo* are identified by Gerald O'Collins SJ, and these are the omission of:

> *"…(1) the resurrection (with the gift of the Holy Spirit…), and (2) the full significance of Jesus' life and public ministry. For the scheme of satisfaction it was enough that the incarnation occurred and that Christ freely gave his life to make reparation for human sin. Cur Deus Homo turned Christ's life into a mere prelude to death.*"[262]

This important criticism could also be made of the penal substitution model that, as we shall see, was built by later theologians upon the foundations laid by Anselm's work. However, despite the fact that the penal substitution model grew out of the satisfaction model, they are certainly distinct and Anselm did not portray God the Father *punishing* Jesus *in the place of* sinful humanity but, rather, as the "God-man" Jesus was the only possible being capable of satisfying the debt of sin owed by humanity to God.

Notwithstanding it's logical appeal Anselm's model can leave one feeling rather unmoved lacking, as it does, drama (ironically), love, mercy or even wrath. It reduces salvation to the settlement of a debt and, by extension, it reduces God to a debt-collector. It also leaves the atonement as something which takes place within the internal life of God that does not seem to create or require any subjective response on the part of humanity.

Before going onto look at Anselm's intellectual successors we should look at his near-contemporary Abelard who had a quite different understanding of the atonement.

[262] Gerald O'Collins SJ *Jesus Our Redeemer* p.136

Abelard's *Moral Influence* Model[263]

In contrast to Anselm, Peter Abelard (c.1079 – 1142) saw the incarnation of Christ as being motivated solely by God's love for the world[264] and that the purpose of Christ was not to achieve a mechanistic settlement of an obligation owed by humanity to God but, rather, to provoke a subjective change within humanity, i.e. for humanity to respond to God's demonstrated love for the world with reciprocal love towards God. This does not involve any change in the nature of God[265] but is intended to provoke a freely willed change in the nature of humans, namely to move from sin to love.

In Abelard's own words:

> "*Everyone is made more righteous, that is more loving towards God, after the passion of Christ then before because people are incited to love…And so our redemption is that great love for us shown in the passion of Christ, which not only sets us free from the bondage of sin, but also gains for us the true liberty of the children of God, so that we should fulfil all things not so much through fear as through love.*"[266]

On one level this model is attractive as the open invitation to respond to God's act of love as exemplified in Christ with our own love certainly feels more natural than the imagery of the payment of ransom or settlement of debts and, to modern ears, may be much more acceptable than imagery of blood sacrifice needed to placate an angry God. However, despite this attraction, and despite this model not being without support[267], it cannot be ignored that Abelard's model has some

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263 Also known as The Exemplarist Model

264 Which finds support in John 3:16

265 Which is consistent with the concept of the impassible God and see also Heb. 13:8

266 *Historical Theology* p. 139

267 E.g. Hastings Rashdall in his Bampton Lectures *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* in which he argued that the exemplarist model isolated the

serious shortcomings, which include the following: (1) If Christ's work merely exemplified or signified God's love for his people but without *achieving* anything new in itself then to what extent does the "Jesus Event" really move beyond the Old Testament revelation / covenant? And (2) Abelard does not deal adequately with the crucifixion nor the associated biblical imagery of judgment or sacrifice. It could be argued that being obedient to God unto death was morally exemplary in itself but, in reply, if that death did not have a concrete purpose then it is difficult to understand how one is provoked to love a God who sends his Son to a pointless death.

Abelard's model of a God who sends his Son to the world out of love with a view to provoking a reaction of love is an admirable antidote to Anselm's model of feudal relationships in need of repair and has much to commend it in a world in need of love. Unfortunately, it is incomplete and does not adequately address much of the sacrificial biblical imagery. Perhaps it is for that reason that subsequent generations of theologians have built on the foundations of Anselm rather than Abelard, and it is to that continuing legacy which we now turn.

Penal Substitution Model[268]

Whilst Anselm portrayed Christ as making *satisfaction* for human sin he did not envisage Christ's death as either a vicarious *punishment* for that sin or as being required to *placate* a wrathful God. The way was paved for this development by Thomas Aquinas (c.1225 – 1274) who said:

> *"In the proper meaning of the term one calls sacrifice that which is done to render God due honour with a view to placating him."*[269]

Aquinas' propitiatory (as opposed to Anselm's expiatory) language was adopted by the Council of Trent (c.1547) and, from a Protestant

"central truth", that the atonement was a revelation of the love of God intended to call forth an answering love in man.

[268] Also known as the Sacrificial Model.

[269] *Summa Theologiae* 48.2; 48.4

perspective, both Calvin and Luther expanded further on this theology with the concept of Christ taking upon himself the sins of the world and being sacrificed and punished *in place of* humanity. Subsequently the penal substitution model has been seen as a distinctly Protestant view of the atonement and has become something of a Shibboleth of "orthodoxy" amongst some evangelical protestants.[270]

In essence the penal substitution model could be summarised thus: God and humankind are separated by a barrier of sin, which arose as original sin and is subsequently perpetuated by all humankind. Sin is a breach of divine law and, as God is just, such a breach of law requires punishment (God's desire to punish this breach may be expressed as God's anger or wrath). However, if that punishment were to be carried out on each person who fell short of divine law then the whole of humanity would have to be punished and, whilst remaining wholly just, God is also merciful and loving and wishes to save humankind from universal punishment. In order to preserve justice, love and mercy together it was necessary for a substitute to be punished in place of humankind and the only substitute that could adequately pay the price was the hypostatic union of God and man in the person of Jesus. Therefore, by sacrificing himself to death on the cross, Jesus received upon himself the punishment due to the whole of humanity and overcame the barrier of sin between God and humans.

The undoubted strength of this model is that it has substantial biblical support: the New Testament is replete with the language of penal substitution, and this imagery is to be found not only in the Pauline epistles[271] but also exists in Johannine texts[272] and can certainly be

[270] Unfortunately space prohibits a full exploration of this development but it should be noted that a penal subtitutionary understanding of the atonement is one of the "Basis of Faith" of the Evangelical Alliance, to which members are required to accede, and any departure from this understanding of the atonement can lead to approbation within the evangelical community as evidenced by the reaction to Steve Chalk's book *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Zondervan 2003). For a recent and fascinating discussion of that dispute, see NT Wright's article *The Cross and the Caricatures* to be found at www.fulcrum-anglican.org.uk/page.cfm?ID=205.

[271] E.g. Galatians 3:13, 2 Cor 5:21.

[272] E.g. 1 John 7

inferred from the institution of the Lord's Supper in the gospels[273]. The sacrificial language of penal substitution also carries strong Old Testament resonance in relation to the system of Temple sacrifices[274] (which system the author of Hebrew states to be fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ e.g. Heb 9:12) and, of course the imagery of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah[275]. In offering any critique of this model one is immensely conscious not only of the weight of this biblical imagery but also of the fact that as recently as 1995 the Doctrine Commission's report *The Mystery of Salvation* [276] stated that this model contains "*a vital truth*".[277] Therefore, as above, the offering of a critique is not to imply a wholesale rejection and we need to hang on to the "vital truths" whilst addressing the points of vulnerability.

However the penal substitution model could be said to be vulnerable on, at least, the following grounds: (1) In common with Anselm it appears to treat Jesus' ministry as a mere prologue to the crucifixion and does not appear to give sufficient weight to the victory over death of the resurrection[278]; (2) it does not appear to take sufficient account of the "anti-sacrifice" elements within the Old Testament[279], (3) it's emphasis on wrath and sacrifice make it too easy to lose sight of the God of love; and, (4) as above we need to beware at all times of building doctrinal edifices on metaphorical language. In relation to this last point I would suggest that it is possible to maintain wholeheartedly that one is saved "*by the blood of Christ*" but without in any way *limiting* the atoning work of Christ to the actual shedding of his blood on the cross.

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[273] E.g. Matt 26:28 and Mark 14:24

[274] E.g. Lev 4 & 16, especially the "scapegoat" of Lev 16:21

[275] Isaiah 53. See also Psalm 22 which has especial resonance with Jesus' words on the cross.

[276] Church House Publishing 1995

[277] *Ante*. p.212

[278] For a fascinating discussion of this subject from the Eastern Orthodox perspective see "*I confess the Cross because I know the Resurrection*" by Vigen Guroian, St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly 50:4 pp 339 - 355

[279] E.g. Micah 6:8, Hosea 6:6 cf. Matt 9:13

Conclusion

So which of these models is best suited to the mission of the Church in the post-modern world? The danger with putting the question in this way is that one is tempted to select the model of the atonement that is believed to be most "acceptable" in a mission context rather than that which is believed to be most true. However, as we have seen, the difficulty we have here is that the objective or divine truth underlying the atonement can only be expressed using a variety of metaphorical language and that none of the models erected upon such language can adequately contain or express the whole truth. As James Atkinson said:

> *"…the truth lies less in one theory, perhaps not in their sum, but rather in the illuminating cross-light they shed on a profound mystery."*[280]

On this basis not only are none of the models sufficient on their own but they are not even sufficient in synthesis and, therefore, any attempt to create an acceptable post-modern model of the atonement is always doomed to inadequacy.[281] Perhaps this brings us to the point: maybe it is the mark of a "modernist" Church that seeks to provide answers to the inner workings of God's economy but a Church that is truly in touch with post-modern sensibilities should not be afraid to re-embrace the concept of mystery. I would suggest that far from being an abrogation of responsibility to use our rationality to discover and proclaim the truth it is, in fact, a highly congruous acceptance that in relation to God our rationality can only take us so far and beyond that point is mystery. In a mission context this means that we can say, with integrity, that we believe we are reconciled with God because of the *whole* of Christ's work - we are saved because of the incarnation, because of Christ's teaching, because of the crucifixion, because of the resurrection and because of the continuing reign of Christ.

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[280] *A Dictionary of Christian Theology* p 24

[281] *The NonViolent Atonement* by J. Denny Weaver perhaps being a good example of this.

Perhaps the pre-modern composers of the Nicene Creed, with their holistic view of salvation, have something to teach the post-modern Church?

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Chose a situation from your own experience either of the workplace or the life of your home church, which manifests the kind of transformation that signifies God's kingdom or rule. Where do you see the gospel of God's kingdom at work in it?

Introduction

> "*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink*…."[282]

IN THIS CASE study I am going to examine the transformative effect that participation in a 'Soup Run' has had on myself and a number of congregants from my home church.

When I talk about the 'transformative effect' on myself and others I do not mean that anyone has been changed entirely from one state of being to another. Rather I mean that in seeking to express our Christian faith by ministering to the poor (rather than, for example, listening to sermons about ministering to the poor) we are incarnating the gospel of God's love for the poor and, consequently, we journey closer to becoming the people that God called us to be. We are thereby participating in a *process* of transformation, which may also be called *sanctification* or *deification*. As a result of my experience in taking part in the soup run I am convinced that the Christian life can only begin to be made complete when the 'intellectual' love of God and love of neighbour is transformed into practical service of Christ by serving one's neighbour.

I can put it no better than Karl Barth:

[282] Matthew 25:35 See also Isaiah 58:2-9, Amos 5:24, Micah 6:8 and Luke 4:18-19

"The community attains its true order as His body when its action is service. And its members, Christians, attain their true order when they serve."[283]

So, by serving others, both the church and individual Christians attain their 'true order' or become what they were created and called to become. This is transformation with the values of God's kingdom at its heart.

In the following sections I shall: give some background to my church's involvement with the Soup Run; reflect on my own experience of taking part over the last couple of years; relate the thoughts and experiences of some of my fellow 'soup runners'; and, finally, offer a brief theological reflection underlying the view that Christians are called to serve the poor.

The Soup Run and my church's involvement

The soup run provides food and drink to the 'homeless' in our local large town. It happens in the same place between 8pm and 9pm every evening, just behind the High Street. Many of the recipients are not actually homeless as some are in night shelters, squats or living with friends. However, for whatever reason, they are in need of food and there are no questions asked about people's means or accommodation. As will be seen later this policy does lead to cynicism on the part of some volunteers. The soup run is run entirely by volunteers from local churches on a rota basis.

Our Church first became involved in early 2006 as a result of our incumbent's contact with the co-ordinators when one of the smaller churches withdrew from the second Tuesday of the month slot. Although our church had been active in supporting local homelessness charities by donating money and clothes we did not have much of a history of 'active' engagement with social need. Our incumbent was a little unsure of the likely response:

[283] Theological Foundations for Ministry p.707-708

"I hoped that a few folk might be wanting to support an important project like this and one which so clearly was a way for people to become involved in Christian ministry in a practical way. I was surprised and delighted when SO many 'hands went up', expressing interest. It seemed that I had touched on a latent force which had been waiting to be released in some way."[284]

We ended up with so many volunteers that each team is usually only needed every three or four months. Each team comprises four 'servers' who take the food to the site and distribute it and also has between two and four 'preparers' who make the soup, sandwiches and drinks in advance. That means that there are about 30 people from our church actively involved. If these numbers are typical for other churches on the rota it could mean that, in this town alone, as many as 900 local Christians are quietly involved in feeding the hungry.

My experience of participating in the soup run.

When my incumbent starting seeking out volunteers I offered to help despite having a number of reservations. On one level I was concerned about the time commitment but, on a deeper level, I also think I was quite scared. Apart from buying the occasional *Big Issue* and making sporadic donations of change into polystyrene cups I had not had much contact with the homeless. This was definitely stepping out of my 'comfort zone'. However I felt motivated to take that step because I was beginning to realise that God is often to be found waiting for us outside our comfort zones and, on a deeper level, I was also being increasingly challenged by the gap between my Christian 'head knowledge' and my lack of putting that knowledge into practice. To put it bluntly I felt that God was giving me a golden opportunity to get out there and to put my beliefs into practice. Ordination training by itself was just too safe and cerebral – I had to incarnate the gospel or risk become a 'clanging cymbal'.[285]

[284] Extract from an email from my incumbent. All emails quoted in this case study are used with permission of the author.

[285] 1 Cor 13:1

So I volunteered to be on one of the serving teams; however, I was also asked to be one of the team leaders, responsible for an evening's soup run and writing up the logbook. How could I say no? The team leaders had to be trained before our place on the rota began so, after a session with the co-ordinators in which they explained the 'rules of engagement', we went on our first soup run. That evening was intended to be a familiarisation so, rather than having the food prepared at home and taking it to the site, we went to a church close to the site and the food was prepared there. I remember being shocked by the attitude of some of the people there: while they making the soup there was no effort to produce something that might taste good, instead they were emptying the contents of what seemed to be dozens of random packets into a large saucepan – tomato soup mixed with oxtail mixed with powdered vegetable soup and so it went on. However what was most shocking was not the random recipe but the comments such as '*this'll do*' and *'they won't care'*. These people would not have dreamed of serving this foul concoction to their family but it was somehow acceptable to give it to someone who was homeless. This seemed to make a mockery of serving the poor out of love.

Anyway, it was soon 8 pm and I was serving soup and sandwiches to the homeless for the first time. At the risk of hyperbole I have to say that it was an amazing evening that affected both my 'head' and my 'heart'. In terms of intellectual knowledge I quickly learnt that there is no such thing as 'the homeless' as a meaningful homogenous term. Every person there was an individual with their own story and with very different levels of need. There were older 'tramps' who appeared to have been living on the streets for years and who may have had drink, drug or mental health problems and who obviously relied on the soup run as their only regular source of nourishment. There were middle-aged people who had lost their homes as a result of divorce or imprisonment (or both) and there were older teenagers and people in their early twenties who had either run away from home or had been 'kicked out' for a variety of reasons. Some of these people had nothing other than the clothes on their backs and were sleeping rough while others had accommodation but still needed the support of the soup run. As one of my fellow soup runners says below it is impossible not to recognise the fact that any of 'us' could be in 'their' position at any time. It really opened my eyes to the fellow-humanity of those behind the 'homeless' label.

The second thing I experienced this evening was a powerful feeling of joy – I had responded to a God-given opportunity to express Christian love in a practical form to those most in need and it felt good. In fact it felt better than good; it was as if a major piece of what it really means to be a Christian had slotted into place that evening and started to grow. To echo Barth's language I felt as though I were attaining my '*true order*' as a Christian in a manner that can never be achieved via an assent to faith or even in worship. Going onto the streets in order to serve the poor in the name of Christ and recognising both the humanity and Christ-like-ness of the people being served was, for me, the most visceral and incarnational manner possible of experiencing God's kingdom at work. I will return to the theology of this briefly in my closing section but the feeling of joy that I experienced that night has not diminished with subsequent soup runs and, I am pleased to say, that the experience of serving Christ is also not diminished even when the people being served are sometimes less than Christ-like in their behaviour!

The experience and reflections of some fellow 'Soup Runners'

Whilst my experiences and thoughts are, of course, utterly fascinating I was really interested to know how my fellow volunteers had been affected by being part of the soup run. I therefore emailed everyone on the rota and asked them. I decided not to create a questionnaire; instead I simply shared some verses from Matthew (25:35-40) and asked everyone to think about whether those verses 'resonated' in any way with their motivations for taking part or whether they had become more meaningful as a result of taking part. I also asked everyone not to be bound by my question at all and to simply take the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences. Had everyone waxed lyrical about the spiritual benefit of serving the poor then I would have been concerned that I had been too prescriptive in the way I framed my initial email. Fortunately I am pleased to say that people were honest enough with me for that concern not to arise:

> *"…I get slightly cynical about it all when one day I was sitting on the wall talking to two apparently strong healthy men about thirty when they both said to me that they both wanted to go back into prison. I made all the obvious remarks about families etc. but they had a point. They said in prison they got three meals a day, were warm, had their own what they*

referred to as their 'room with private facilities', a television and lots of activities, whilst in the real world they had no roof over their heads are were coming to us to be fed."

This was the most 'negative' reply I received. I was certainly aware that some people felt cynical about some of the soup run 'customers' and there was one person from our church who asked to come off the rota when he overheard a customer use his mobile phone to call a taxi to take him home when the food had been handed out. Another respondent tackled the challenge of cynicism head on with a more positive personal outcome:

"*I was therefore disappointed to hear some people say that we should not do it as it encourages them. Certainly talking to our customers, they are clearly not all without shelter and not without money so you could easily question why we do it. They do certainly all have serious problems, which prevents them having an equal chance in life. I hope by us being there we show them that some people do care. I am always left with the impression after talking to some of them that if I had had some bad luck along the way, I could be there myself. It is easy to take for granted the lives we live. It does give me a greater sense of perspective on my own worries."*

Another respondent got a measure of satisfaction from the act of taking part but did not feel that it had any sort of 'spiritual' impact on her:

"As yet I have not felt either that my faith has been challenged or that it has been strengthened, but I do know that this is something I am very glad to do."

However, the overwhelming majority of replies were more positive and I set out below some examples:

"I would agree very much with your comments about Matthew. In fact, doing the soup run inspired us to do something I'd meant to do for years, and we helped out with the Christmas Day lunch at the URC in Red Lion Square. I can honestly say it was one of the best Christmas Days I've ever had…"

"…I have to say the experience has changed my perception of homeless people and I feel very humble when I go home to my warm house and hot food. I also feel grateful that I have an opportunity to help people, who are not so well of emotionally as well as materialistically as me."

"Your words capture well the reason I decided to help in the soup run as I thought it was a practical step to show why being a Christian makes a difference."

"I have become stronger since joining the Church and instead of feeling paralysed by the pain and suffering I see around me, I now feel able to do something to help. Even though I am at the beginning of my journey with God, being involved in something such as the soup run and helping make another human being's life more bearable brings me closer to Him and in doing so eases my own pain."

"…I was absolutely terrified but as ever God has a purpose in all things and he was challenging me to relate better to others and to be prepared to work at my people skills. I find the experience a challenge every time and every time I think 'Why am I doing this? But the answer still comes back 'because they need you' and I have been very humbled by the manners and kind comments of those we serve."

I think it is apparent from these comments that I was far from alone in being deeply affected, and even transformed, by the experience of taking part in the soup run.

Theological Reflection[286]

As indicated above Matthew 25:35-40 has been pivotal in my relationship with the soup run and in the way in which I relate to those served by it. Jesus did not simply require his followers to do good works for the poor because such works are inherently good but, rather, in serving the person in need we are encouraged to serve that person as if one were serving Christ. In commenting on these very verses Eldin Villafañe goes further and say that serving others could also be seen as giving *worship* to God:

> "*There is a great mystery here, for as we give and serve with justice the poor and needy in our midst, we are in a deep yet spiritually profound sense doing it to the Lord – we are ascribing worth to our Lord, we are worshipping him.*"[287]

The perception of serving (or worshipping) Christ in the other is capable of changing one's whole view of social activism. In human terms the person being served may be entirely 'undeserving' for a host of reasons but, nevertheless, we are called to respond as if Christ himself were asking us for food. In addition to seeing Christ in the other we should not lose sight of the Church's vocation to be the 'body of Christ' in the world and that we, as Christians, are part of that body.[288] On that basis the soup run is not simply one group of individuals giving sandwiches to another but it can be perceived as the living body of Christ serving Christ-in-need to the sanctification of all concerned.

However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that Matthew 25:35-40 is set in the context of eschatological judgement, i.e. the sorting of the 'sheep' from the 'goats' on the basis of service given to the poor. This raises a number of important questions such as justification by 'faith' or 'works'

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[286] It will be appreciated that there is simply so much theology that can be called on in this area that I cannot hope to do justice to this subject in the context of this case study. I am therefore simply reflecting on a couple of issues arising from the Matthew verses cited and acknowledging that this is not intended even as an overview of the whole subject.

[287] Beyond Cheap Grace p.79

[288] 1 Cor 12:27

and the individual Christian's motivation for undertaking such service – is it through love of one's neighbour or the desire to secure one's place among the sheep?

In response to the first question (faith versus works) this has obviously been one of the defining characteristics of Protestantism since Luther and, at the risk of generalising, anything that smacks of 'works' (other than the work of evangelism) has been viewed somewhat suspiciously ever since. I think that this position is gradually changing as some evangelical writers have re-appropriated the language of sanctification and emphasised that whilst we are saved (justified) by faith we are only sanctified by the way we live out that faith:

> "*We've taught that this act of justification settles the issue…rather than teaching that a call to believe in Christ should also compel to follow him. In other words, the point of salvation (justification) isn't the finish line; instead it's the starting line for a lifelong journey (sanctification). Discipleship flourishes when we present the gospel as a seamless journey of transformation that begins with new life given by God and moves right along with the joy of following Christ every day.*"[289]

In response to the second question (love versus eschatological hope) Steven Williams says:

> *"…I propose that we do not think of social responsibility as a labour of [eschatological] hope….we regard our social responsibility as a labour of love, not a labour of hope…. Love for God entails the holy yearning that all in His world should be as He wants it to be. Love for neighbour entails aims to transform structure when victims are not men beaten by thieves on the roadside but men, women and children being oppressed within structures that deny the privileges God means us to have.*"[290]

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[289] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* p. 43. I would also cite the works of evangelical writers such as Tony Campolo and Richard Foster in relation to the re-discovery of spiritual disciplines and social activism as essential to post-justification growth in faith and discipleship.

[290] The Limits of Hope and the Logic of Love p. 61, 62

And I would simply add that social action that *is* motivated by hope of eschatological reward and *not* out of love for neighbour will probably be disappointed!

Conclusion

Taking part in the soup run and having the opportunity to offer practical service to some of the poorest members of our society has had a profound effect on me and on many of the others from within my church that have been involved. The poor and outcasts are our neighbours and, as every Sunday school child knows from the story of the Good Samaritan, we are called to love our neighbours by offering real help. However the difference between *knowing* that call intellectually and *responding* to that call incarnationally is substantial.

I will close with some final thoughts from my incumbent:

> "*In my mind there is no doubt that this kind of practical service touches a nerve – people wanting to give expression to their faith in a practical way. Their experience must, in a subtle way, feed into the life of the church family and the way in which we see ourselves and the way in which we are see in the community. And in the process perhaps we are helping to bring in the values of the kingdom*."

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Do you find the distinctive features of the Christianity of the Fourth Gospel as compared with the Synoptics to be convincing evidence for the existence of a 'Johannine Community'?

Introduction

IF ONE IS seeking to use the Fourth Gospel (FG) as evidence for the existence of a Johannine community then one has little option other than to read the Gospel on (at least) two levels. This is because the FG was expressly written:

> *"…that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*[291]

In order to achieve that stated purpose, the FG is presented as an account of the ministry of Jesus and does not expressly mention the community from which it arose or to whom it was addressed. We can therefore only seek to *discern* that community, and something of its context, by closely examining the 'surface' level text of the FG and seeking to understand what the peculiar concerns of that text (when compared to the Synoptics) may reveal about the particular concerns of the author and / or the author's community. That is the approach pioneered by J. Louis Martyn[292] and Raymond Brown[293] and, for the remainder of this essay, will be the approach taken by me. However this approach is not without its challenges or critics:

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[291] Jn 20:31

[292] In, for example, *Gospel of John in Christian History*, Paulist Press International 1979

[293] Most comprehensively in *The Community of the Beloved Disciple*, Paulist Press 1979

> *"….the two-level strategy cannot be applied to every part of the narrative and is generally applied inconsistently to the parts of the narrative to which it is applied…For these reasons every reconstruction of the Johannine Community's history based on the two-level reading strategy is riddled with arbitrariness and uncertainty. The more one realises how complex and selective the use of this reading strategy must be the less plausible it becomes."*[294]

Whilst accepting the inherent difficulties of the two-level reading strategy and the provisional nature of any conclusions reached, it seems to me that unless an effort is made to 'read between the lines' then we may as well abandon all further effort to extract any historical information from the texts.

When considering the distinctiveness of FG and, by extension, of the Johannine community it may be too easy to fall into the trap of assuming that, during the first Century, there was a fully formed Petrine 'Great Church' (with clearly defined and normative structures and doctrines) and on the other there was the Johannine community. On the contrary we should bear in mind throughout that neither Christianity nor the Church arrived in first Century Judea fully formed; Jesus and the apostles were Jewish and the *ekklesia* only emerged from within Judaism over time as a result of growing theological differences, historical events and increasing cultural divergence between orthodox Jews, Jewish Christians and then Gentile Christians. This diversity within nascent Christianity is hinted at in many places throughout the New Testament.[295]. I would suggest that the 'Great Church' itself consisted of numerous Christian communities from different backgrounds and in different situations each

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[294] *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* Richard Bauckham p.104-5. See also *John's Gospel: A Two-Level Drama?* Tobia Hagarland JSNT 25.3 (2003) pp.309-322

[295] By way of brief example: there is tension over the unequal treatment between the Hebraic Jews and the Grecian Jews (Acts 6); there are different understandings of baptism between Apollos and Paul (Acts 18:24-19:7)[295]; perhaps leading to an element of rivalry between them and warnings over division in the Church (1 Cor. 1:12 and 1 Cor 3); Paul's disputes with the "circumcision party" (Gal 5:12) and the disputes between Paul, Peter and the Jerusalem believers over food laws (Gal 2:11); there are teachers of 'false doctrine' in Ephesus (1 Tim 3,4); and further mention of heresies within the churches of Ephesus and Pergamum (Rev 2:3,6, 14 & 15).

discovering and exploring their catholicity and the limits of orthodoxy and gradually coming into *koinonia* with one another. The 'Great Church' was (and, largely, still is) a community of communities.

But does this mean that the Johaninne community was simply one Christian community amongst many? Raymond Brown says:

> *"The Fourth Gospel is startlingly different from the other Gospels in its presentation of Jesus…so that scholars have theorized that Johannine Christianity may have been a "backwater" sectarian phenomenon…"*[296]

This reframes the essay question slightly, and perhaps helpfully. Rather than simply looking for evidence of the *existence* of a Johannine community, we should rather be considering the *nature* of that community and seeking to discern from its distinctive (or 'startlingly different') theology the extent to which it may have been 'sectarian' or 'backwater' and the challenges it would have faced in achieving *koinonia* with the non-Johannine Christian communities.

In this essay I will be looking closely at the FG in relation to the two themes of Christology and the relationship of the FG with Judaism and seeking to discern something of the existence and nature of the Johannine community from any 'startling differences' that may emerge between the FG and the Synoptics in relation to those themes. There are, of course, many other themes or distinctive elements that could have been chosen such as eschatology, pneumatology, hierarchy or authority within the church, the relative absence of 'the poor", the relative prominence of women, the treatment of John the Baptist, the distinctive use of language & imagery and so forth but, even in a extended essay, it is necessary to strike a balance between comprehensiveness and detail and I suspect it is likely to be more productive to look at a narrower range of subjects but in more detail.[297]

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[296] Raymond Brown *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* p.7

[297] Similarly I would also have liked to consider the evidence of the Johannine Epistles as they have a great deal to tell us about the Johannine community including its ecclesiology and the Christological divisions which may have split the community between those who did not believe in the physical incarnation

I have chosen *not* to discuss authorship of FG; rather I am content, as a working hypothesis for the purposes of this essay, to accept the traditional view that the primary author was the Apostle John, son of Zebedee and brother of James (Mark 1:19) and that this is the same person referred to throughout the FG as the 'Beloved Disciple' (e.g. John 21:20).[298] Of course this does not preclude the probability that FG was later redacted by other members of the Johannine school as their theology developed in response to their circumstances and, whilst theology and history will be considered, within the themes mentioned, I will not be looking at authorship *per se*.

Christology

"Although the differences between John and the Synoptics can perhaps be exaggerated, there can be no denying that at many levels John presents a radically different presentation of the life and ministry of Jesus. There are differences at the more superficial level of dates and places, but there are also differences in the whole mode and content of Jesus' own teaching, and the area where this is most prominent is precisely the area of Christology." [299]

The question, 'who is Jesus and what is his relationship to God?' lies at the heart of Christianity and the FG approaches the answer to that question in a manner unique amongst the Gospels.

The Gospel of Mark (generally thought to be the earliest) does not deal with the physical origins of Jesus at all, beyond acknowledging that he

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and those who remained or became 'orthodox'. Unfortunately that discussion is not only outside the ambit of the essay title but space has not permitted that indulgence. I would, however, make mention of a fascinating article on this subject: *Diotrephes: A Study of Rivalry in the Apostolic Church* Melvin Storm Restoration Quarterly 35 no 4 1993, p 193-202.

[298] Naturally there is considerable literature on the subject of authorship of FG and the identity of the 'beloved disciple' but I would refer here particularly to Culpepper, R.A. *John The Son of Zebedee, The Life of a Legend* T&T Clark 2000

[299] Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament* p.151

had a family (Mk 3:31), and commences the narrative with Jesus' baptism. At that baptism God proclaims that Jesus is his "Son" (Mk 1:11) as he does again at the transfiguration (Mk 9:7) and the title "Son of God" is used in relation to Jesus by Mark at the outset (Mk 1:1) and by others about Jesus in the narrative (e.g. Mk 15:39). However, it would be a mistake to assume that this language of 'Sonship' implies divinity in any Trinitarian sense and it is certainly possible to interpret Mark's Christology as one of the human Jesus being anointed as the Christ at his baptism and, in a sense, being 'adopted' as God's Son at that point.

Matthew extends Jesus' background by providing a genealogy from Joseph back to Abraham via King David and thereby, perhaps, seeking to prove his human legitimacy to be a leader of Israel (Matt 1:1 – 17). Perhaps paradoxically, Matthew also states that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt 1:18) and that Mary was a virgin (Matt. 1:23). Matthew thus seeks to establish Jesus as being both of Davidic descent and of divine conception. As in Mark, Jesus is anointed as the "Son of God" both at his baptism (Matt 3:17) and at the transfiguration (Matt 17:5). Conception by the Holy Spirit and this 'double anointing' is certainly not a 'low' Christology as it puts Jesus into a unique relationship with God but it does not imply any form of existence *prior* to conception and, although the relationship with God is unique, it is still presented as one of vertical relationship rather than one of equality.

Luke extends the human genealogy of Jesus even further, going back to Adam (taking a different route from Matthew) although he does acknowledge, if only in passing, the paradox inherent in this exercise (Luke 3:23).[300] Luke extends the nativity story (and provides a parallel story for the conception and birth of John the Baptist) and also says that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is the "Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Luke, like Mark but unlike both Matthew and John, provides us with a story of Jesus' Ascension (Luke 24:51 and Acts 1:9) and this *could* be interpreted from a 'high' Christological perspective. However, this should be treated with caution, not least because OT figures such as Enoch (Gen 5:24, Heb 11:5) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) also experienced 'ascensions'.

[300] St. Paul certainly seemed to have a low view of "endless genealogies" 1 Tim 1:4 & Titus 3:9

There are two pertinent conclusions that can be drawn from this swiftest of overviews of Synoptic Christology: the first is that none of these three Gospels were *primarily* intended to make Christological claims *per se* but, rather, that they are primarily narratives about the life and work of Jesus from which Christological views emerge or can be inferred and that their Christology is, therefore, ambiguous. The second is that none of the Synoptics imply any form of existence to Jesus prior to conception and none suggest a relationship between God and Jesus higher than a Father – Son relationship which tends to suggest one of subservience and obedience rather than ascribing to Jesus personal attributes of divinity. On the evidence of the Synoptics alone there is little that could give rise to the Trinitarian understanding of God.

How does this compare to the Christology of FG? Picking up on the language of Raymond Brown, above, there is a 'startling difference': If the Christology of the Synoptics is rather ambiguous and only emerges from their respective narratives then, in contrast, FG makes its Christological claims apparent from the outset and those claims place Jesus in a position unparalleled in the Synoptics:

> "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only…No-one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only…*"[301]

This co-identification of the person of Jesus with the concept of the Word (*Logos* or λ ο γ ο ζ) is unique amongst the Gospels and, as a concept, the *Logos* is one that is deeply rooted in Greek philosophical discourse.[302] However, the concept was not entirely alien to Judaism and as Jewish culture became increasingly Hellenised so the *Logos* began to be applied to Jewish theology and the most striking example of this, outside the FG itself, is to be found in the works of Philo of Alexandria (c. 20

[301] Jn 1:1, 1:14, 1:18

[302] The concept of the logos is used in a variety of ways by Ancient Greek philosophers from Heraclitus (c. 500 BC), Aristotle and the Stoics.

BC – 50 AD). Although Philo's views on the *Logos* are complex, and defy easy summary, I was particularly struck by this:

> "*The Father eternally begat the Logos and constituted it as an unbreakable bond of the universe that produces harmony (Plant. 9-10). The Logos, mediating between God and the world, is neither uncreated as God nor created as men. So in Philo's view the Father is the Supreme Being and the Logos, as his chief messenger, stands between Creator and creature. The Logos is an ambassador and suppliant, neither unbegotten nor begotten as are sensible things* (Her. 205)."[303]

So, according to Philo, the *Logos* is the eternal mediator between a transcendent God and his material creation and it is not difficult to appreciate the influence of this theology / philosophy on the opening lines of the prologue to FG.[304] However it is interesting to note that whilst FG is obviously influenced by the concept of the *Logos* it is not entirely *constrained* by Philo's understanding of that concept and, in particular, the incarnation of the *Logos* as one particular person (as opposed to having a general influence on all people) would seem to take the concept in a peculiarly Christian direction.[305] It will be appreciated that the concept of divine beings becoming incarnate as humans is not unique to Christianity and is apparent in earlier Greco-Roman paganism, Egyptian religions and, further east, in Hinduism. That said, Christianity *is* unique in its concept of the incarnation creating a hypostatic union between humanity and the divine. However, this "Chalcedonian" understanding of the incarnation only emerged as doctrine considerably after the time of the Johannine community[306] and, although we cannot explore them here, it is clear from the Epistles that disputes over the

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303 http://www.iep.utm.edu/p/philo.htm#H11

304 The links between Philo and FG are explored in detail in *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* by CH Dodd.

305 However it is also interesting to note that the concept of the logos as a cosmic 'agent' of God nevertheless continues to influence Christian theology through other Hellenised philosophers such as Justin Martyr – see, for example, Chapter XIII *The Second Apology of Justin.*

306 As the Council of Chalcedon took place in 451 AD.

nature of the incarnation seem to have played a significant part in the subsequent fragmentation of the community.[307]

In any event it can certainly be argued that to understand what the author of FG is saying about the *Logos* in the prologue is to unlock much of what FG is saying about Jesus throughout the Gospel:

'The introduction of the Logos into a literary construction which follows the convention of certain ancient Greek prologues in that preparation is vital for a correct understanding of the Johannine Gospel. From the prologue onwards the evangelist skilfully unveils the full identity – the metaphysical identity, one might say – of the protagonist of this cosmic drama, the Logos μ ο ν ο γ ε ν η ζ θ ε ο ζ, Jesus Christ."[308]

So, having set the Christological agenda in the prologue that the 'protagonist' Jesus is divinity incarnate how does the FG then pursue that agenda? As one would expect this is done in a number of ways but, uniquely amongst the Gospels, Jesus himself is reported as claiming both pre-existence and divinity:

> *"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am*!"[309]

This phrase, which sounds rather strange in English, of course echoes the name "I AM WHO I AM" that God applies to himself (Ex. 3:14 & 6:3) and Jesus' Jewish hearers certainly recognised the blasphemy of this claim as they '*picked up stones to stone him'* (Jn 8:59). This claim to equality with God followed by threatened death by the Jews also reflects an earlier exchange (Jn 5:17,18). Therefore not only is the author of FG claiming divinity and a pre-incarnation existence for Jesus as a matter of doctrine in the prologue but he also has Jesus claim those things for himself and, importantly, those claims are a cause of conflict with the Jews.

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[307] See e.g. 1 John 3:22-23

[308] Elizabeth Harris *Prologue and Gospel, The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 107, Sheffield Academic Press 1994 p.195

[309] Jn 8:58

In addition to the remarkable "I am" statement of Jn 8:58 Jesus also suggests his pre-existence with God when he says:

> "*I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father*"[310]

And Jesus also makes a considerable number of statements about the intensely close relationship between himself and God and about their shared will and identity. For example:

> "*When a man believe in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.*"[311]

I suspect that this type of statement, especially when considered in the context of the prologue, tells us a great deal more about the Christological outlook of the FG than the bare use of 'titles'.[312] However, one interesting title that is both unique to FG and pertinent to the question at hand, is '*Saviour of the World*' (Jn 4:42 and 1 Jn 4:14). This is

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[310] Jn 16:28. Of course it could be argued that this statement could apply to divine conception without implying pre-existence. However I would suggest, given the theological thrust of the prologue, this is unlikely to be the point being made by the Gospel writer.

[311] Jn 12:44. See also 7:28, 13:20, 14:9 - 20

[312] Nevertheless, for the sake of comparison, it should be noted that in common with the Synoptics there is significant use of the titles "*Son of God*" (e.g. Jn 1:34, 1:49, 3:16), "*Son of Man*" (e.g. Jn 1:51, 3:13) and "*Messiah*" (e.g. Jn 4:25). However, it is open to debate whether each of the Gospel writers understood and used these terms in the same way and, given the demonstrable differences between, for example, John and Mark it is quite conceivable that even when these same titles are used they are understood by the Gospel writers (and their intended audience or community) quite differently. In FG (but less so in the Synoptics) Jesus is also called, or calls himself: the '*Lamb of God*' (Jn 1:29) the '*King of Israel*' (Jn 1:49, 18:37), the '*Bread of Life*' (Jn 6:35), the '*Good shepherd*' (Jn 10:11,14), the '*resurrection and life*' (Jn 11:25), '*the way, the truth and the life*' (Jn 14:6) and '*the true vine*' (Jn 15:1), each of which deserve closer examination than is possible here.

interesting not just for its Christological and soteriological significance but, in the context of this essay, because it is applied to Jesus not by his Jewish disciples but by converts from Samaria. Given the antipathy between the Jewish and Samaritan people (e.g. Jn 4:9) it is significant that FG demonstrates non-Jews attributing such high significance to the person of Jesus whilst 'the Jews' are generally portrayed as rejecting him.

So, in contrast with the Synoptics, the FG could be said to have an unambiguous Christology: Jesus is not *just* the one anointed by God (the Messiah or Christ) nor is he *simply* the Son of David, the Son of Man or even the Son of God, all of which are understandable categories with Judaism. Rather, Jesus *is* Yahweh.

Put in those rather bald terms it will be clear why FG reflects a fundamental rupture with Judaism and that this probably says something about the nature and identity of the Johannine community. Relying solely on the Synoptics one can certainly see how it would be possible for a Jewish Christian to accept that Jesus was a person anointed by God to create a new covenant between God and his chosen people, Israel. This would be a valid fulfilment of Hebrew Scripture and would not fundamentally challenge one's belief about the nature of God, as transcendent and entirely singular. It would seem that Jewish people could legitimately take different views on whether Jesus was the expected Messiah whilst remaining within the ambit of Judaism. However, from the opening lines of the prologue the author of FG makes claims about the nature of God, i.e. that there might be more than one 'person' in the Godhead and that God could become incarnate as a person, that would seem to place any adherent to this Gospel entirely outwith Judaism.

At the level of individual believers this would tend to suggest that there was little room for an ambiguous relationship between Judaism and Christianity so that one could either be Jewish or be a Christian but with no scope for being both and, at a community level, this would also suggest a much clearer division between the Jewish and Christian communities than is apparent from the Synoptics (or other parts of the NT). I will explore the division between the Jewish and Johannine Christian communities further below.

As noted previously, Christianity first emerged as a movement from within Judaism and the relationship between the earliest Jewish followers of Christ and 'mainstream' Judaism was complex. This complexity was exacerbated by the fact that, prior to failed Jewish rebellion against the Romans and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, Judaism itself was a multi-faceted religion that incorporated the different 'castes' and beliefs of the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, disciples of prophets such as John the Baptist and so forth.

Given such a milieu, the 'Jewishness' of Jesus and his disciples and the fact that FG purports to tell the story of Jesus within that culture it may therefore come as something of a surprise to find the term 'the Jews' used both generically and pejoratively. To take a slightly more current (although admittedly not exact) comparison one would not expect a biographer of Mahatma Gandhi using the term 'the Indians' or 'the Hindus' in such a fashion. And yet, as we shall see, in its use of language and in its stories the FG reflects a division and an enmity between Jesus and 'the Jews' which may tell us as much, if not more, about the context within which FG was written and the community for whom it was written than it does about the historical events it seeks to portray. However, in order to determine the extent to which this is a 'distinctive' or 'startlingly different' element of the FG it will be necessary to have a brief overview of the treatment of 'the Jews' in the Synoptics.

The Gospel of Mark uses the term 'the Jews' a total of six times. He uses it once in his capacity as 'narrator' in a descriptive and a non-pejorative fashion (Mk 7:3) and the remaining times it is used by him it is in the form of speech by Pilate or other Romans (Mk 15:2 – 26), whom one might expect to use such generalisations about an occupied people. Mark makes much more use of the terms 'Pharisees', 'Saduccees', 'chief priests', 'teachers of the law', 'elders' and 'Herodians'.[313] Mark only makes

[313] For example Mark reports Jesus being questioned by the Pharisees, Sadducees and 'teachers of the law' (Mk 2:18, 2:24, 7:5, 8:11,12:18-23), that the Pharisees and the Herodians are plotting together (Mk 3:6, 12:13), that Jesus would be '*rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law*' (Mk 8:31, 11:18), that people should '*watch out for the teachers of the law*' (Mk 12:38), that the chief

one comment that *could* be interpreted as disparaging Jewish people generally:

> "*You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues.*"[314]

However, in the context of the remainder of Mark, I would suggest it is clear that this is refers to the leaders within Judaism rather than being any form of condemnation of the Jews *per se.* It is therefore reasonably clear that Mark is not making generalised accusations against the Jews but, rather, he is identifying those groups within Judaism that felt threatened by Jesus and who reacted accordingly. Without exception those groups are those who hold either spiritual or temporal authority and not the poor or politically powerless Jewish people.

The Gospel of Matthew follows a similar pattern: Matthew uses the term 'the Jews' five times: once as a description (Matt 28:15) which, although generic seems non-pejorative, and, in common with Mark, the remaining uses of the term are in the dialogue of non-Jews; first the Magi (Matt 2:2) and then by the Romans during Jesus' trial and crucifixion (Matt 27:11, 27:29, 27:37). Again it is particular groups within Judaism who are portrayed negatively and not Judaism as a whole.[315] Indeed, it is clear that

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priests, teachers of the law and the elders were the ones who sent people to arrest Jesus at Gethsemane (Mk 14:43), that it is the chief priests and the Sanhedrin that initially try Jesus (Mk 14:53-65) and it is the chief priests who stir up the crowd before Pilate to have Barabbas released and Jesus crucified (Mk 15:11-15).

[314] Mk. 13:9

[315] For example, John the Baptist calls the Pharisees and Sadducees '*You brood of Vipers!*' (Matt 3:7), as Jesus does subsequently (Matt 12:34, 23:33), Jesus preaches '*woe*' to the Pharisees (Matt 23:13 -29), the Pharisees and Sadducees repeatedly put Jesus to the test (Matt 9:11, 12:38, 16:1, 19:3, 21:23, 22:15, 22:23, 22:34), the Pharisees plot against Jesus (Matt 12:14, 21:14, 22:45, 26:4), Jesus warns about the '*yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees*' (Matt 16:6, 11), the Pharisees make accusations against Jesus and the disciples (Matt 9:34, 12:2, 12:24, 15:1), Jesus warns that he will '*suffer at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law'* (16:21, 20:18), it is the chief priests, elders and Sanhedrin who are principally responsible for arresting Jesus, trying him and encouraging the Romans to have him crucified (Matt 26:47, 26.57-68, 27.1, 27:20), the chief

the Jesus of the Gospel of Matthew is *not* in dispute with 'the Jews' as a whole, rather, they are the very people whom he has come to save:

> "*Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel.*"[316]

Finally, in relation to the Synoptics, the Gospel of Luke follows the familiar pattern and uses the term 'the Jews' only four times: once as a narrator (Lk 7:3) and the remaining three times, in the context of reported speech by the Romans (Lk 23:3, 23:37 & 23:38). In common with both Mark and Matthew the Gospel of Luke reports that it is the Pharisees, Sadducees, teachers of the law that are singled out and there is no confusion between these groups and 'the Jews' as a whole.[317]

Luke's Gospel is ambiguous in relation to the Samaritans, which will become relevant in relation to the FG; on the one hand, the Samaritans are a source of opposition (Lk 9:51) but, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, they are still capable of higher morals than a Jewish priest and a Levite (Lk 10:25-37). Nevertheless, the Gospel of Luke is not straightforwardly against either the priestly caste nor the Temple; for example John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, is a priest (Lk 1:5) and Jesus' family faithfully attend the Temple (Lk 2:22 and 2:41).

It could therefore be said that the Synoptics are written from the perspective of having an understanding of the inner workings and subtleties of Judaism; they understand not only that different groups exist within Judaism but also that they have quite different *raison d'etre* and

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priests and elders mock Jesus on the cross (Matt 27:41), and who plan a deception about the resurrection (Matt 28:12).

316 Matt 10:5 & 15:24. The comment about the Samaritans is also interesting when compared with the much more favourable light in which they are treated by FG.

317 For example, as the object of some of Jesus' teaching (e.g. Lk 11:39-52, 12:1, 18:9-14, 20:19), that plotted together and sought to test Jesus (e.g. Lk 5:21, 5:30, 6:2, 6:7, 11:53, 14:1, 15:2, 16:14, 19:47, 20:2, 20:20, 20:27, 22:1) and, ultimately, had him arrested, crucified and who 'sneer' at him on the cross (Lk 22:52, 23:1-10, 23:20, 23:35).

agendas. The Jesus of the Synoptics is firmly rooted in his own Judaism, he is descended from the line of David, he has relations who serve as priests and he sees his mission as primarily towards the '*lost sheep of Israel*'. The opposition he faces is not from 'the Jews' but from particular groups within Judaism that have both political and religious vested interests in preventing his teaching from gaining ground amongst the Jewish population at large.

This would all *tend* to suggest that the writers of the Synoptic Gospels not only understood Jesus within his Jewish context but, further, that the 'audiences' for whom the Gospels were written would have also have had that understanding and, further, that they may not have perceived being a follower of Jesus to be fundamentally incompatible with being Jewish, albeit that it may have been incompatible with being a certain sort of Pharisee or Sadducee. So, how does this compare with the portrait of Judaism that we encounter in FG?

Once again FG is 'startlingly different'. FG uses the term "the Jews" a total of sixty one times. If one discounts the times it is used as the reported speech of those who are not Jewish, i.e. the Samaritans or Romans (Jn 4:9, 4:20, 18:33 & 18:39), we are nevertheless left with fifty seven occasions when the author of FG either refers to 'the Jews' in his capacity as narrator or uses it in the reported speech of Jewish people talking about themselves or each other. As we have seen none of the Synoptics uses the term more than once each in that capacity. It should be noted that FG *does* use the term 'Pharisee' (a total of 19 times) and there is a recognition that the Pharisees are a distinct and powerful group within Judaism[318], so it cannot be argued that FG was written without any appreciation of the internecine subtleties at work within Judaism. Nevertheless it should be noted that FG does *not* refer to other groups such as the Sadducees or the Herodians at all and, as we have seen, its makes significantly more use of 'the Jews' to apparently refer to all of Jesus' fellow countrymen without distinction.

Of course, simply speaking of 'the Jews' does not, of itself, imply that the term is being used negatively and, on occasion, it is arguably used in a positive context by Jesus when speaking to the woman at the well:

[318] See, for example, Jn 7:48, 8:3, 12:42

"*…we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews.*"[319]

And, sometimes, the term is simply used collectively without any particular positive or negative connotations:

"*Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing…*"[320]

However, on many occasions, the FG does use 'the Jews' both collectively and negatively, for example:

"*…the Jews tried all the harder to kill him…*"[321]

Talking about 'the Jews' in such a collective and largely undifferentiated manner would tend to suggest either that the author was not overly familiar with the Jewish milieu (which is unlikely if one accepts that the Apostle John was the author) or that the FG was written to be read by a non-Jewish audience. The theory that the readers of FG were not intimate with Judaism is further supported by parenthetical asides in which the author feels compelled to explain Jewish words or practices to the reader:

" '*We have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ)*"[322]

and

" '*You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter).*"[323]

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[319] Jn 4:22. Although it could be argued that there was a certain irony in this statement given that Jesus goes onto say that God wants those who worship in 'spirit and truth' and the Samaritans 'believed in him' but without there being any suggestion that they became Jewish.

[320] Jn 2:6. See also Jn 2:18, 5:1, 12:11, 18:20, 19:20

[321] Jn 5:18. See also Jn 2:18, 2:20, 5:10, 6:41, 6:52, 7:1, 7:13, 8:48, 9:18, 10:31, 18:32.

[322] Jn 1:41

In both cases the author is translating Hebrew or Aramaic terms into the equivalent Greek, which strongly suggests that the Johaninne community was more Hellenistic that it was Hebraic. There is also an interesting 'prophetic' comment:

> "*Will he go where our people live scattered among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks*?"[324]

Although the Jesus of FG does *not* go to the Greeks this comment would certainly lend credence to FG taking the message of Jesus to the Greeks on the basis that 'his own' did not receive him.[325]

The story of the man born blind in John 9 is especially interesting with regard to the relationship between FG and Judaism. Adopting, for a moment, the two-level reading approach, on the 'surface' this is a story of a miraculous healing by Jesus.[326] However, the healing takes place on the Sabbath (9:13) and this breaking of the Sabbath gives rise to a fascinating discourse between the Pharisees / the Jews[327], the healed man and his parents that ultimately results in the man being thrown out of the Synagogue (9:34) and this results in Jesus condemning the 'spiritual blindness' of the Pharisees (9:41). However, this story invites us to look beyond the surface reading precisely because this 'putting out of the Synagogue' (9:22) is unique to the FG. Although, as we have seen, the Synoptics warn that followers of Christ may be '*flogged in the Synagogues*"[328] the FG us unique in using the Greek word "*aposunagogos*"[329] which

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[323] Jn 1:42. See also Jn 2:6.

[324] Jn 7:35

[325] Jn 1:11

[326] For other FG miracles see 2:1-11, 4:46-54, 5:1-9, 6:5-13, 6:19-21, 11:1-44, 21:1-11

[327] This chapter switches between 'the Pharisees' and 'the Jews' between 9:16 and 9:18 and is a good example of them being used interchangeably or synonomously.

[328] For example Mk 13:9 above

[329] At 9:22 and also 12:42 and 16:1

strongly implies an excommunication of followers of Christ from the Synagogue. This goes beyond any breach between the Jewish and Christian communities that we find in the Synoptics (or, for that matter, in Acts or the Pauline Epistles) and this would tend to suggest that this story is more likely to reflect the historical situation that existed after the fall of Jerusalem rather than during the time of Jesus' ministry. Although not universally accepted Raymond Brown makes a connection between the "*aposunagogos"* and the reformulation of the *Eighteen Benedictions* in 85 A.D. which placed the "Nazarenes" under a curse and which would seem to make a clear distinction between the communities and would not seem to permit ambiguity between being Jewish and being Christian. [330] Therefore there is a strong argument to be made that John 9 is a good example of the FG telling us about the later experience of Christians (not necessarily limited to members of the Johannine community) through the medium of a story about Jesus and his relationship with 'the Jews'.

Elsewhere the FG continues not to tolerate any ambiguity between Judaism and being a follower of Christ: Jn 8:31-58 contains a remarkable discourse in which Jesus addresses "*the Jews who had believed in him*" (8:31). However, it is clear that although they 'believed' in Jesus they still considered themselves '*Abraham's children*' (8:39) and this leads Jesus into accusing them of actually being '*children of the devil*' (8:44) and they, in turn, accuse him of being a '*Samaritan and demon-possessed*' (8:44) and, as we saw earlier, the exchange concludes with Jesus making the "*I am*" claim (8:58) and the Jews attempting to stone him (8:59). The message could hardly be clearer: Jesus rejects the self-proclaimed 'children of Abraham', even though they claim to also believe in him, and they end up rejecting and even trying to kill Jesus.[331]

Conclusion

When comparing the 'distinctive features' of FG with the Synoptics I have used the word 'ambiguous' a number of times. By this I mean that

[330] For example, Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* p.22

[331] This story is also reflected in the, slightly less dramatic account, in Jn 6:60 when many (presumably Jewish) disciples desert because of his teaching about the meaning of the bread and wine.

the Synoptics appear content to leave the issues of Christology and the relationship with Judaism as 'open' questions whereas the 'startlingly different' FG in unambiguous: to be a Christian is to accept that Jesus is God and that one is either a follower of Jesus or one is Jewish but one cannot be both. The FG has 'light' and it has 'darkness'[332] but it has no room for the penumbra of ambiguity.

It should therefore be reasonably clear that the FG was written for (or perhaps from) a different 'community' than the Synoptics and the evidence tends to suggest that this community was Hellinistic, possibly also Samaritan (Jn 4:39), and unfamiliar with Jewish customs, the details of Israelite society or the Hebrew language. Therefore I believe that there *is* convincing evidence that there was a distinct Johannine community, by which I mean a community of Christians that was distinctly and unambiguously not Jewish. However, from the evidence examined here, I would suggest that it is *not* clear that this was a 'sectarian' or 'backwater' community in relation to other Christian communities (as *per* Brown) or whether the differences between the Synoptics and the FG actually reflects the fact that it is likely to have been written later than the Synoptics and, in particular following the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and, perhaps, the expulsion of Christians from the Synagogues in 85 AD. On this basis the two-level reading of FG would still be valid in the sense of 'reading back' the split between Christianity and Judaism into the language, stories and theology of FG but rather than drawing the conclusion that the FG was the Gospel of a sect in isolation from the 'mainstream' Petrine Church I think it is valid to suggest that it was (or soon became) a 'catholic' Gospel precisely because the context of the whole church in relation to Judaism had been radically changed in a relatively short period. The fact that FG *was* incorporated into the canon of Gospels, notwithstanding its undoubted distinctiveness, certainly suggests that it reflected or came to reflect the experience and beliefs of a wide range of Christian communities and that should, at least, militate against an overly sectarian interpretation.

In conclusion, I would submit that the FG is 'startlingly different' from the Synoptics not because the Johannine community was startlingly

[332] Jn 1:5

different from its contemporary Christian communities but, rather, because the FG was written at a different time from the Synoptics and therefore reflects a different part of the story of the development of Christianity. The use of Hellenistic language and concepts was necessary for making the Gospel relevant for the increasing numbers of non-Jews coming into contact with the *ekklesia*, and, further, the incorporation of sophisticated and abstract philosophical concepts such as the *Logos* indicates that the Johannine community was far from being a 'backwater' phenomena and, indeed, may suggest that it was on the philosophical and theological 'cutting edge' of what it meant to be a Christian as Christianity came to understand itself as something unambiguously distinct from Judaism.

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