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# PASTORAL ETHICS

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**David Atkinson**

THINK AGAIN

PERSONAL STUDY NOTES

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## Preface

Since much of the material in this book first appeared in 1989, there have been a number of significant changes. More church reports have appeared about sexuality; there is wider public acceptance of cohabitation; changes have been proposed in divorce legislation; the enormous changes in Eastern Europe have placed discussion of nuclear deterrence in a different light; the Gulf War and the situation in Bosnia have brought the reality of modern conventional warfare much more clearly into focus; and medical ethics continues to advance faster than many of us can keep up with.

When the possibility of reissuing this material in this new format as a textbook was being explored, we were faced with a choice: do we try to update all the chapters, giving different contemporary examples, while realizing that they, too, may not remain in the headlines very long? Or do we let most of the original text stand, since the primary focus is on the principles of pastoral ethics, and the examples serve to root those principles in pastoral practice? We have taken the latter course, in the hope that, as this book is used for class work in theological colleges and seminaries, individual readers will wish to relate the theoretical and theological material here to a wide range of current situations appropriate to their own pastoral settings.

I am delighted that it has been possible to extend the scope of the previous publication drawing on the expertise of Nigel Biggar, Richard Higginson and Sam Berry. I am very grateful to them for their contributions, which I hope will considerably extend the usefulness of this book.

I am very grateful to Robin Keeley of Lynx Communications for his encouragement and enthusiasm in making this material available again.

<sup>1</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (5). Lynx Communications: London

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## Introduction

This book is a series of essays in what I like to call pastoral ethics. It is offered to the general Christian reader in the hope that it might stimulate some thought, give some guidance in the processes of decision making, increase sensitivity to the complexity and delicacy of some of the moral and pastoral questions which face us, and perhaps provoke some action.

I have drawn on, modified and updated some material which I have written before. Latimer House published a small paper called *Tasks for the Church in the Marriage Debate*, some of which has found its way into Chapters 2 and 3. The chapters on sexuality and homosexuality adapt a paper which I prepared for a conference organized by Care and Counsel. The chapters on the state, nuclear deterrence and science have all grown out of lectures to churches in Michigan and Oxford. The work on medical ethics has made use of background material I prepared for my little book *Life and Death* (Oxford University Press), from the Tyndale Ethics Lecture of 1982 (published in the *Tyndale Bulletin*, 1983) and from articles in *Crusade* and *Third Way* magazines.

I am very grateful to David Brown, formerly Fellow and Chaplain of Oriel College, Oxford, and now Van Mildert Professor of Divinity in the University of Durham, for his ready agreement to my including the chapter 'The Future of the Family'. He and I wrote this chapter together for *Stepping Stones*, edited by Christina Baxter, and published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1987. I am also grateful to the editor and the publishers of that book for their agreement that this chapter may be reproduced.

I hope that in offering the material in this present form, it might become a basis for some discussion in church groups, and perhaps help some people in the development

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of a more Christian mind, more pastoral heart and socially more sensitive conscience.

Just as our theology should be integrally related to and an expression of our commitment to Christ and his gospel, so our ethics should be integrally related to our theology. Good theology, so it seems to me, has three related features. It is 'dogmatic' in the proper sense of asking critical and probing questions into our knowledge of God, with the expectancy of receiving some answers, and trying then to get that knowledge into some order. It is 'doxological' in the sense that all we learn of God and say of God should become part of our worship of God. It is 'pastoral', or 'practical', in the sense that it must then affect how we live with one another within God's world, and how we treat the world within which we live.

I have called this book *Pastoral Ethics* because it is the third of these features of the theological task which is primarily in mind. And here we need to work at several different levels. As Don Browning has shown in his *Religious Ethics and Pastoral Care* (Fortress Press, 1983), there are many ingredients in the mix from which moral decisions are made, many levels to the moral and pastoral task.

There are, first of all, the empirical facts of a particular situation, including the needs and temperament of the decision maker. A decision to divorce, for example, might mean one thing in the case of a rich young man of twenty-one who married against all advice at eighteen, only to find that he had made a mistake. It might be very different in the case of a woman of fifty-five who has struggled for years to stay with her drunken and violent out-of-work husband, on the seventeenth floor of their high-rise apartment block, and who simply cannot cope any more. The personal and social context forms part of the moral decision.

Secondly, there is the framework of assumed moral values within which the empirical facts are evaluated. Some people make moral judgments mostly on the basis of moral principles, of right or wrong attitudes or actions. Others decide on the basis of which action is believed to lead to the

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best consequences in the long run for those involved. The debate in the church on homosexuality, for example, illustrates how moral judgments based on the morality of actions can lead to a different view from those based on what is believed to lead to the greatest personal happiness and fulfilment.

Many writers in Christian ethics rightly show that neither of these approaches to moral decisions are adequate on their own. They are neither appropriate to the sort of God who makes himself known in history, in the Scriptures and supremely in Jesus Christ—a God who relates to us in personal love, and before whom the moral task becomes a form of personal response. Nor are they appropriate to the complexity of the moral situation, involving as it does people made in all the richness of God’s image, and yet still living as sinful people in a fallen world.

So thirdly, behind a person’s assumed moral values lies a set of even more fundamental assumptions about the world, and about what makes for the best for human life. If we were to start with Freud’s psychoanalytic approach to human personality, for example, we would understand human beings mainly as biological mechanisms, and the good would be achieved by controlling lower instincts. Freud’s ‘ultimate metaphor’ is mechanistic. By contrast, Jung’s ultimate metaphor is of opposites (male-female, good-evil, and so on), and wholeness for him is found in integrating the opposites in a person’s experience. More recent psychologists, such as Maslow, work with a hierarchy of personal needs, on the basic assumption that ‘self-actualization’ is the highest good.

Within an explicitly Christian worldview, it is also true that different basic assumptions—our guiding metaphors for God, for example—lead Christians to different ways of seeing moral questions. If a person understands God mostly as Creator, Law-giver and Judge, the moral life may be approached primarily in terms of obedience to moral rules. If a person’s guiding metaphors for God are Redeemer, Reconciler and Sanctifier, however, the moral

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life may be understood much more as a journey towards wholeness through forgiveness, healing and growth. Clearly a whole range of metaphors including all these are important, and the understanding of the moral life may be more complex than we often think.

For the Christian, our faith will help us to determine the criteria of relevance of the empirical facts. It will help us to be clearer about the moral values at stake in our decisions. It will clarify our fundamental metaphors about what is ultimately true of the world and of ourselves.

Our faith also brings to us the resources of God's grace in Christ through the Holy Spirit to strengthen us in our growth in moral maturity. In our tasks we are helped by the traditions of moral thinking which Christians of earlier ages have developed, and we can learn from the ways in which they brought their Christian understanding to bear on the problems of their world.

Behind all these traditions, informing and correcting them, we have the Bible. However, the use of the Bible in moral and pastoral theology has often been the subject of dispute. For that reason we begin this book with a discussion of the place of the Bible in Christian ethics. From there we select a number of themes in sections on personal relationships, social issues, and questions of life and death, and try to explore a Christian way of coming to decisions in these areas.

I have tried to keep references to a minimum in the text, but I include a list of suggested books at the end, many of which take the issues of these chapters further and in greater depth.

I am most grateful to various friends who have responded to different parts of this book as it has come gradually into being. In particular, David Cook of the Whitefield Institute, Oxford, generously gave time to work through the text with me and to make many helpful suggestions.

I had the privilege for some years of serving as the Theological Consultant of Care and Counsel, which was,

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until its recent close, a London-based service offering counselling and pastoral training in a Christian context. I am pleased to honour their pioneer work in Christian counselling by dedicating this book to the many friends who were associated with Care and Counsel.

*David Atkinson*

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## The Place Of The Bible In Christian Ethics

Christians take the Bible very seriously. We do so because, as Christians, we accord supreme significance for our faith in God to Jesus Christ. And almost the only record we have of the life, death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus Christ comes to us through the writings of the earliest Christians recorded in the New Testament. These authors bear witness to Jesus Christ as Lord. They bear witness to the Old Testament as the history of God's covenant with his people leading up to the events surrounding the coming of Christ. They understand themselves as witnesses and conveyors of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ.

The Bible has always, therefore, been authoritative for Christians—both for developing a Christian mind and for guiding Christian behaviour.

### ***Problems***

But *how* is the Bible to be used when it comes to making moral decisions? How is it actually relevant to the decisions we have to make? There are a number of problems to be faced. There is no reference to trades' unions in the Bible nor to contraception. There is no state education, no *in vitro* fertilization, no international arms' trade, not even any gunpowder, no Aids, no transplant surgery. Our social patterns are very different from those of ancient Israel. In many societies today there is no dowry for marriages; no bride price to be paid. There is no Old Testament word for the small social unit we call the nuclear family.

Even when we decide it has relevance, there is a real problem about the character of the Bible's literature: some of it is poetry, some history, some prophetic oracles, some narrative and some dreams. Sometimes Christians are urged to 'obey' the Bible. We might know what it means to

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obey the Sermon on the Mount, but what does it mean to obey the Second Book of Chronicles or Lamentations? The Bible is unsystematic and selective. The Old Testament talks mostly about one small country the size of Wales, at the other end of the Mediterranean, and offers very few hints about the other major civilizations of the time. How can God's revelation in such a very particular setting, in such a variety of literary forms, be relevant to our very different global village and different thought forms?

Then there are problems of interpretation. Some of these problems are to do with exegesis: what does the text say? One notorious example is the meaning of 'unchastity' in Jesus' reply to the Pharisees on the question of divorce, as recorded in Matthew chapter 19. There are several different possibilities for the meaning of this word in the literature—and yet, if we are to use the text as a guide in our decisions about divorce, surely we need to know what it means?

There are other problems to do with interpretation. What are we to make of the fact, for example, that Matthew seems to allow for an exception (sexual sin) to the rule against divorce, Mark and Luke don't refer to any exception, while Paul, in discussing marriage, does not consider divorce for sexual sin at all, but does discuss separation from an unbelieving partner? Why, we may be tempted to say, has God made this so hard for us?

How are we to reconcile what seems to be a divine approval of warfare in some parts of the Old Testament, with Jesus' example in Gethsemane, his words in Matthew chapter 5: 'Do not resist one who is evil,' and the blessing he gives to peace-makers?

What are we to say of all this?

### ***Different approaches***

There have been a number of approaches to the use of the Bible in Christian ethics.

At one extreme, for example, we find what is often called *biblicism*. By this we mean the highly literal approach to the

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text of Scripture, which attempts to use the Bible as a moral textbook, and uses proof texts as though they settled any further argument. Thus Leviticus 18:22 is a ruling against male homosexual intercourse, and some Christians quote this as settling 'the biblical view' of homosexuality. What they do not do is show why this text has to be obeyed, but that Leviticus 19:19—'You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff'—can these days be safely ignored.

Biblicism is necessarily selective. Its approach to the text by 'sticking a pin in' to find a relevant verse is a most inadequate appreciation of what sort of book the Bible is. And yet this 'pin-sticking' selectivity has all too often been used in Christian ethics. Were not some aspects of South Africa's apartheid policy (now thankfully superceded) based on a very selective view of some Old Testament texts on racial discrimination?

This approach raises the further question: are we at liberty to make up our own minds on issues on which the Bible is silent, or may we only do what the Bible (understood in this way) teaches? This is the issue underneath the refusal of some Christians to have an organ in church: 'There were no organs in the New Testament.' (Nor were there electric lights, nor glass windows, nor coffee ...)

Again, this false dilemma arrives because of a mistaken view of the nature of the Bible. Biblicism fails to recognize that the Bible is written by very different human beings with very different backgrounds, temperaments and concerns. It also fails to understand what purpose the Scriptures are given to serve within the Christian church. We will come back to this point.

At the other extreme, we find the view which we may call the *cultural gap* view. The Bible, we are told by those who hold this view, is a historical book. The biblical writers were children of their age. St Paul was a first-century Jew. (And, of course, all this is true.) But then the conclusion is drawn

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that we cannot therefore expect the biblical authors to give us any useful information for our very different world.

Such a despairing view also fails to take the Bible seriously enough. It fails to recognize the sense in which the Bible comes to us as revelation from God. It fails to recognize that many ancient texts convey wisdom about the nature of God, the world and human beings which—though expressed in a culturally conditioned form—is none the less true. It fails to hear the word of God in these words of human writers.

We, too, of course, are children of *our* age—we are culturally conditioned by twentieth-century, post-Enlightenment, technological Western civilization. But this does not mean that the Bible is irrelevant to us. It means, rather, that there is a careful task of interpretation to be done. The task of interpretation is so to bring together the horizons of the authors and our own that the word which God spoke in that way then, still speaks to us today. This task is often difficult, but inescapable. Thankfully, God gifts some members of his church with skills of scholarship to help the whole church in this task.

### ***A better way***

What, then, is the way between these extremes of biblicism and cultural gap? How are Christians to use the Bible in making moral decisions?

It will be clear from what has been said, that we need first to recognize what sort of book the Bible is. Then we need to learn how to use it to develop a Christian mind by building up a biblical theological framework within which to try to understand our moral issues in the light of the broad sweep of biblical teaching and literature.

For the Bible is first and foremost given to instruct us in our knowledge of God. There is an experience of God behind its theology—and therefore behind our theology. And there is a theology behind our ethics. Christian ethics belongs within Christian theology—a systematic way of describing

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what is involved in living for Christ, loving Christ and imitating Christ.

Secondly, we need to remember that the Bible is a story arranged around various themes—of creation, covenant, sin and redemption, pilgrimage, hope and glory—to name a few.

Thirdly, the Bible is the record of a process—the gradually deepening awareness by God’s people of their obligations as his people, and of their knowledge of him. Therefore single passages of the Bible need to be interpreted in the light of their place in the whole story.

Fourthly, the Bible is the book of the church. The Holy Spirit, through the ages, has been guiding Christian leaders and thinkers, as well as ordinary Christian believers, into the knowledge of God. We belong to a communion of saints. We need to learn from the ways in which Augustine and Aquinas, Luther and Calvin struggled to relate their problems to their understanding of the biblical texts. Traditions of Christian understanding have grown within the church. We do well not to overthrow accepted Christian tradition unless there is a very good reason. (And, of course, sometimes there is. There was a good reason for overthrowing the tradition of slavery last century; many think that there is good reason for changing the tradition concerning women’s ordination today.) As the body of the church, we remind ourselves that we need one another in our tasks of clarifying a Christian mind and finding guidelines for Christian behaviour. It is with ‘all the saints’ (Ephesians 3:8) that we come to know the love of God.

There is in fact no ‘biblical ethics’ which stands apart from theology and spirituality. For the people of God in the Bible, morality and spirituality are two sides of the same coin. ‘Biblical’ ethics are primarily the ethics of *allegiance* to God. In Old Testament terms this can best be expressed as obedience to the covenant God. In New Testament language, it may be described as ‘following Christ’, or ‘living as a member of God’s kingdom’. Christian ethics involves

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surrender to the Lordship of God in Christ, in loving obedience to his will and in the power of his Spirit.

So the question as to the use of the Bible then becomes: what role does the Bible play in helping us in our allegiance to God? Our use of the Bible in ethics is closely related to its use in doctrine and in spirituality. It is part of the resource we need by which our 'faculties [are] trained by practice to distinguish good from evil' (Hebrews 5:14).

We misuse it and we get things wrong if we try to use the Bible simply as a moral textbook, and by seeking out proof texts (as though 'Thou shalt not kill' settled all the moral problems of life and death).

The harder, but necessary, task is to ask of any biblical passage: 'what is this telling me about God and his will, which was expressed in that way then, which I need to know for my life and decisions now?' We thus seek *theological* guidelines, not proof texts. The Bible simply does not have a ready answer to all our moral questions, but it can serve as a way of deepening our knowledge of God and his will. It shows us through law, through parable, through poetry, through history, and especially through the life and teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ what we need to know to make us into more mature Christian disciples. With the biblical theological minds and attitudes we so develop, we then make our moral judgments in allegiance to the God we are coming to know.

### ***Love and law***

Certain theological principles which come clear to us in our reading of the biblical text (and which are refined and re-expressed in each generation through the work of systematic theologians) serve as essential guidelines in knowing what it is to express allegiance to God. The fundamental nature of our allegiance is love. God is love, and we are called to love. The first commandment is to love God, and the second to love our neighbours. All our duty may be summarized by these two commands. However, in this fallen world we need guidance in loving. We need to be

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able to separate out the claims of God's loving will from the claims of our own stupidity or sinful self-indulgence. This is why love is given a moral shape in much of the biblical teaching. 'This is the love of God,' said St John, 'that we keep his commandments' (1 John 5:3).

At this point it is important to clarify the relationship of God's love to God's law. One of the most helpful approaches is to go back to the Old Testament notion of covenant. God, in love and grace, calls a people into covenant relationship with himself. He rescues them from bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt and sets them free to be his own. He then takes them straight to Mount Sinai where the law is given to Moses as a pattern of life appropriate to people God has redeemed. Within the covenant of grace, the law—or better, 'torah' (God's fatherly instruction)—is given as a gift of grace, 'Law' does not then have the sense of condemning requirement that our much more Greek notion of a code of law carries. 'Law' in the Old Testament is primarily a description of the character of God, and therefore the character that should be seen in God's people. Most of the laws of the Pentateuch, particularly Deuteronomy, can be interpreted as specifying in detail in certain situations what it means to 'love the Lord' (Deuteronomy 6:4) and to "love your neighbour" (Leviticus 19:18).

A careful understanding of the place of God's law, understood as 'torah', in the gospel of love will save us from legalism on the one hand (which reduces Christian allegiance to simply a matter of following a code of rules) and from antinomianism and its neighbour, situationism, on the other hand (in which in practice almost 'anything goes', because the only rule is an ill-defined notion of love).

Attention to the biblical teaching on love will also help us to distinguish the claims of justice in ordering human affairs from the motivation of compassion in our handling of them. Both are important.

***Some guiding principles***

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Now we can summarize a few of the guiding biblical theological principles which set a framework for our moral thinking.

☒ **God is our Creator**

This implies that our universe is disclosed to us with a certain divine order. It is this physical order which the scientific enterprise seeks to understand and articulate. This order we must respect. It implies also a moral order, a reflection of the Creator's character, and to live consonantly with this makes for the best for human well-being.

☒ **We human beings are created and fallen**

This warns us against claims to human autonomy; it warns us also against making morally normative whatever happens empirically to be the case. There is an abnormality about the way the world is now in its fallenness, which should caution us against reading moral values from just what happens to be there.

☒ **Human beings are stewards**

There are obligations on us to be exercised in the light of our understanding of God's purposes for his world. The Bible tells us certain things about the rest of creation, and our human responsibilities for it. It tells us certain things about one another, and the sort of society God intends for us, and this lays on us certain obligations regarding our concern for the growth of Christian character in ourselves and in one another, and our concern to establish the sort of environment and justice in society which facilitates that growth.

☒ **In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has acted decisively in this world**

God has confronted the powers of evil, to vindicate his creation and its order, to overthrow the forces of destruction and death, and to inaugurate a new age in which 'righteousness dwells', in which his goodness can be seen. The gift and power of his kingdom are centred in Jesus

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Christ, and in union with his life we are offered that gift and that power.

☒ **God's redeeming grace is given to us in Christ**

This implies that we who are 'in Christ' are called on to share in his redeeming and healing work by his Spirit. Part of this healing work of the Spirit is effected by what older theologians called 'common grace': the holding back of the forces of disorder within the world so that God's truth may be disclosed. In this sense, the scientist has a 'healing' function, confronting disorder and promoting order. The politician, too, has a responsibility for the ordering of society in such a way that justice can be established and vindicated, and that neighbour love between people is a possibility. Both scientist and politician, among others, can be servants of Christ and mediators of his 'common grace'.

☒ **God's covenanted love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit he has given to us (Romans 5:5)**

As we 'live in Christ', the Holy Spirit renews our minds into the mind of Christ, directs our wills in line with the will of the Father, and strengthens us to serve Christ within the family of the church. Through the work of the Spirit through the mutual ministry of his gifts within the church (Ephesians 4:11ff), individuals can grow into maturity in Christ, and learn in lives and relationships to express something of his character—the character of the covenant God of faithfulness and love.

☒ **What God requires of us, that he also gives us**

This summarizes what it means to live in the context of God's covenant. So the ethical question becomes: how are we, in the covenants that we make with one another—husband to wife, employer to employee, doctor to patient, politician to constituent, and so on—to give expression to something of the covenant of God? What does 'covenanted faithfulness and steadfast love' imply for these contexts of human interrelationship?

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☒ **The Christian church is the body of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit**

This reminds us of our interdependence in mutual ministry and mutual understanding. It also reminds us of our mutual moral accountability. We need one another for mutual growth (Ephesians 4:11–16).

☒ **The coming of Christ**

This assures us that we are not trapped in a fatalistic determinism. History has a direction; our lives and our choices have eternal significance. Our ethics is directed towards a future goal. Our moral life—even with all its failures—is none the less set in a context of hope (for example, Romans 13:11–14).

***Particular moral principles***

Within such a framework, albeit so briefly sketched, there are parts of the Bible in which God makes his will clear in more specific ways. Parts of the Bible make more particular the general claims of allegiance to God. The Ten Commandments, for example, summarize much of the particular moral teaching which gives specific expression in specific contexts to the meaning of love to God and to neighbour. These commandments are implicit in the teaching of the prophets, they underlie the Sermon on the Mount and the ethical teaching of many of the New Testament epistles. Other parts of the Bible contain, by story, narrative, example, prophetic oracle and vision, imperatives for Christian living and loving which may then be expressed in moral principles. The imperatives arise from the indicatives: you are the people of God; this, then, is the way you should live.

Problems arise, of course, when in a particular situation of moral choice, there is a conflict of principles. The Bible itself sometimes operates with a hierarchy of moral values. There are some circumstances in which it is right to go against a lower order principle (such as the law about working on the Sabbath day) in order to fulfil a higher one (for example, the

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claims of human need, and that the Sabbath was made for man).

The very existence of a conflict of principles (seen most poignantly, for example, in conflicts between 'life' and 'truth' in the resistance movement in the war, or between 'life' and 'life' in some cases of abortion), is itself a pointer to the fallenness and abnormality of this present world.

There is no easy and straightforward 'answer' to many of the moral dilemmas which face us. Often we need to make our choices, asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit and trusting in the divine promise of mercy and forgiveness. But what we bring to our choosing, if we learn to use our Bibles properly, is a mind and a character that is being trained towards the mind and character of Christ. The Bible is given to us as a resource for that training—and thus has a crucially important place in our ethic, at all levels of the complex moral task. It is not the place the biblicist gives to it: that of a moral textbook in which we can look up easy answers. Nor of the cultural relativist who regards it as but an interesting comment on an earlier age.

No, it is the story of God's revelation of himself then and now, through the covenant community on their pilgrimage. There is diversity and development within an underlying unity. The moral guidelines and theological principles are set in a particular historical context which we need to try to discern and then appropriate for our moral judgments.

So Christian ethics takes place in the dialogue between a biblically informed theology and a biblically shaped spirituality on the one hand, and the demands of living in the modern world, on the other.

We do not honour God by ignoring the Bible in this process; nor do we honour the Bible by using it inappropriately.

In the chapters which follow, we shall try to see how this understanding of the Bible's place in a Christian's life and as part of his or her moral decision-making illuminates the questions we face in various areas of pastoral concern, in

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personal relationships, in society and specifically concerning certain questions of life and death.



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## PART ONE

### *Pastoral Ethics and Personal Relationships*

## 2

### **Marriage**

So far as we can tell from the statistics, and from the numbers of people booking in with clergy and registry offices, marriage is (almost) as popular as ever. To be sure, increasing numbers of couples who get married have been living together for some while before they decide to marry—and some of our society's arrangements for mortgages and income tax have for some time ensured that 'living together' has distinct financial advantages. But marriage as an institution seems firmly part of our culture, and will be for the foreseeable future.

However, that is not to say that everyone agrees what a marriage is. The statistics also show that divorce is an increasingly common feature of our society and that one out of every three or four marriages is likely to end in divorce. In some people's minds, therefore, marriage is a transient arrangement, convenient for a time, or while love lasts, but with no binding obligations involved. Some people get married, it seems, on the basis of 'seeing how it works out'. Other people think of marriage only as a civil contract for regulating sexual behaviour. Many others, however, understand marriage as involving some sort of special bond between man and wife which, when once properly made, should not, or even cannot, be broken whatever the quality of the relationship is like. Some sociologists suggest that, although traditional marriage will be likely to remain among the options available for a long time to come, it will not have the monopoly—people will choose other sorts of relationship patterns to suit their stage



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in life and their sexual preferences. Many younger people are unsure of their answer to the question ‘why get married?’, particularly when it is asked in the form ‘why bother with the piece of paper?’ And what about divorce? Is it true that once married means always married? Can divorce ever be a good choice—and if so in what circumstances? Should divorced people be allowed to marry again—and in church?

There is clearly some confusion in our society about the nature of marriage. How does the Christian view of marriage hold together in this context? Does the Bible offer insights to guide us?

I say the Christian view, but in fact the Christian churches have by no means all spoken with one voice. There are fundamental differences between Christian people on at least three central issues.

First: what makes a marriage? All Christians are agreed that God’s will for marriage is that of a permanent and lifelong union of one man with one woman, to the exclusion of all others. But can a valid marriage once entered into ever be broken in God’s sight? Is marriage ‘indissoluble’ in fact, so that divorce is not even a possibility?

Secondly: what, if anything, breaks a marriage? All Christians agree that divorce is a grievous departure from God’s will for marriage. But if a marriage cannot in fact be broken in God’s sight whatever the law of the land may say, how is the church to view divorced persons? If marriages can, in some circumstances, be broken, what sort of circumstances would count before God as breaking a marriage?

Thirdly: what is the church’s task in this area? The church is called on to witness to God’s truth: his will for marriage, and his gospel of grace and forgiveness. How, in its teaching and its practice, is the church to hold together its prophetic role in pointing to God’s will, and also exercise pastoral compassion and reconciling love to those who find that their

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relationships are in difficulty? Can the Bible help us to find our way in this confusion?

What follows is an outline of some areas of pastoral concern for Christians in these debates about marriage (in the rest of this chapter), and about divorce (in the next). As we proceed, we shall try to make responsible use of the Bible in setting the moral context of our discussion, and we shall try to draw on the understanding of Christians of earlier times who, in their own contexts, have wrestled with these questions.

### ***What makes a marriage?***

Even within the Christian church there are different views about the nature of marriage. Let us look at two major emphases. In the Catholic traditions (of the Church of Rome and parts of the Church of England), marriage is often spoken of as a 'sacrament'. We need to go back to St Augustine—writing early in the fifth century—to get our bearings, for it is largely from him that the use of the word 'sacrament' comes. It derives from the reference in Ephesians 5:32 to marriage being a great 'mystery'—which was translated in the Latin Bible as *sacramentum*. By calling marriage a sacrament, Augustine meant that in some special way a marriage between Christians carried the 'imprint' of Christ's 'marriage' to his church. This led on to talk of marriage as 'indissoluble', by which Augustine meant that a marriage should not be dissolved; it was intended to be permanent.

By the Middle Ages, the notion of 'indissolubility' had been strengthened much further. Many Christians came more firmly to believe that a marriage, once validly made, *cannot* be dissolved. The Catholic traditions have always held to the 'indissolubility' of marriage. To them, divorce—the breaking of the marriage bond—is just not possible. However, they have developed procedures for dealing with marriages in difficulty by trying to see whether in a particular case of marriage breakdown, there really was a valid marriage in the first place. Some marriages may be declared

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‘null’ by the Catholic church on various grounds, and the way opened for a proper marriage to take place.

The Reformation traditions within the churches, by contrast, have not been happy with the concept of marriage as a sacrament, and with the idea that marriage is absolutely indissoluble. The Reformers, like Luther and Calvin on the continent, and Archbishop Cranmer and Peter Martyr in England, believed that this was going further than the Bible did. They also objected to the growing and ever more complicated procedures of dispensation and annulment by which burdensome marriages were being all too easily dissolved in fact by overcoming or evading the law of indissolubility. This, they thought, brought the whole ideal of the permanence of marriage into disrepute. The Reformed Churches, and the reformed strands within the Church of England, therefore did not take an ‘indissolubilist’ view of marriage. They believed that the Bible indicated that there were circumstances in which divorce could be permitted, and they allowed remarriage of divorced persons on some occasions.

### ***Marriage as covenant relationship***

One of the biblical ways of understanding marriage is as a ‘covenant’, and this is a word picked up in some recent Anglican and Roman Catholic writing on marriage. Much of the story of the people of God in the Old Testament is told in terms of the covenant relationship which God establishes with them.

A covenant is a commitment based on a promise; it is publicly known; it leads to the growth of a relationship based on that promise and that commitment. God promises himself to his people, and is known as a God of faithfulness, love, patience, forgiveness and grace. He tells them, ‘I will be your God.’ The covenant obligation is then placed on the people: ‘You will be my people.’ The people of God are intended to show in their lives and relationships that they are the people of God. Something of God’s character is meant to be seen in them.

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At times in the Bible, God's covenant with his people is described in terms of a marriage (the story of Hosea is one example). At other times, husband and wife are encouraged to build their married lives on the pattern of God's love and faithfulness. (This is picked up in the New Testament in Ephesians 5:21–33, where husbands and wives are told to love each other in response to the love of Christ to his church.)

So if marriage is a covenant—a commitment based on a promise, publicly known, centring on a growing personal relationship, then the partners in the marriage covenant are intended to show in their relationship something of the character of God's covenanted love, faithfulness, steadfastness, grace and so on. This is the primary purpose of marriage: its creative and joyous potential. This is marriage's vocation. Furthermore, by receiving God's love and forgiveness into a marriage, husbands and wives can find a rich resource of grace through which they can be enabled to learn to love and to forgive.

The covenant model points to marriage as a dynamic, changing, growing relationship, not a still-life.

So now we come back to the question we asked some while ago: what makes a marriage covenant?

A marriage covenant is a freely given and accepted consent between a man and a woman to marry each other, and to live in committed love and faithfulness with each other throughout their lives. It is a publicly known commitment, with which goes some publicly accepted accountability

One text in the Old Testament is referred to several times in the New as the basis for an understanding of what marriage involves. It indicates that the marriage covenant stands, like a kitchen stool, on three legs—if any one of them is missing, there is no marriage.

The text is Genesis 2:24, in which after describing the creation of the woman and the joyous delight in which the man and woman discover each other, the narrator goes on:

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‘Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.’

Coming as it does in the context of the stories of creation, this text makes very clear that marriage is part of God’s intention for the way human beings should live their lives. In the record in Matthew chapter 19 and in Mark chapter 10, Jesus is recorded as referring to this verse as a pointer to God’s creation intention. These Gospel texts also remind us that God made us male and female in his image (Genesis 1:27), and by putting these two texts together, the Gospels indicate that a marriage is God’s way of ordering human sexual life so that something of his image is expressed in the communion of man and wife.

According to Genesis 2:24, the marriage covenant depends on ‘leaving’ and ‘cleaving’ and ‘one flesh’.

‘Leaving’ points to the establishment of a new unit in society: it is now known that this man has left father and mother to set up home with his wife. They are committed to each other, and are not available to anyone else. Marriage, though centring on relationship, includes a social and institutional dimension. A private arrangement between a man and woman to commit themselves to each other is not marriage. Marriage is recognized by society; it is part of the social structure which God intends societies to include. This fact can act as a social support to strengthen the wills of the couple to remain committed to each other, even in the harder times when love grows cold. The partners relationship with each other affects and is affected by their united relationship outwards towards others. So society is involved in each new marriage, and has a proper concern in any decision to break it. That is the point of ‘the piece of paper’.

‘Cleaving’ is the second ‘leg’ on which the marriage covenant stands. It is the covenant faithfulness word—the quality captured by the old English word ‘troth’. It is a commitment of loving faithfulness—the word used of Ruth who ‘clung to’ Naomi in faithful love (Ruth 1:14). In the context of marriage, it points to committed faithfulness—to

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a promise, to a calling, to the relationship, to the person. Marriage is rooted in the decision of the will of each person to be married to the other—and the vow, the promise, is a solemn undertaking to remain in love and faithfulness together. Loving faithfulness of this sort can only be expressed within a permanent and life-long structure. If marriage is not considered a permanent trust for life, it is in a permanent crisis of uncertainty.

Thirdly, 'one flesh' points to the full personal intercommunion of husband and wife at all levels of their lives. It does not primarily mean the sexual relationship, though it includes it. The sexual union is intended to express and deepen the 'union of hearts and lives' (as the Church of England Alternative Service Book has it). This is something which begins as an ideal, and which can gradually become more and more a reality as the journey, or pilgrimage, of marriage—with its joys and its pains—is undertaken as a joint venture of husband and wife together. The 'one flesh' may also point forward to the creativity of married love in the 'one flesh' of a child. Married love is intended to be creative, and it is part of God's intention that marriage and family should be the context in which children are born and grow. Normally, therefore, part of the commitment of marriage is a commitment to parenthood, though of course there are circumstances in which having children is not possible or not wise.

### ***Building for faithfulness***

If the covenant model points us to 'steadfast love and faithfulness' as the key idea in marriage, then one primary task for the church is to help people understand the meaning of this sort of love. It is also important that we should help one another to grow into the sort of character which is capable of giving this love-faithfulness in all its joyous and creative possibilities. The commitment to marriage is a promise to contain all future uncertainties (joys and pains) of the relationship within the structure and support of this relationship. This needs the sort of character which can make this kind of commitment. 'Marriage

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preparation' thus begins from the earliest days in childhood, when our capacities to love and to be faithful are being formed.

### ***The wedding***

As Lewis Smedes has written, 'Marriage is an invention of God; weddings are the inventions of cultures.' When young people ask why they should bother with the piece of paper, they are asking why they should submit to a cultural custom. We need to be careful here. As we have said, there is within a proper understanding of marriage as covenant, the recognition of its public and social nature. There is need, therefore, for public witness when the covenant is made. And our culture has specific legal ways of regulating that covenant-making. But there is no Christian theology of particular sorts of wedding ceremonies. 'Why have a wedding?' is more to do with the (very important) question of responsibility to one's society than it is to the theology of marriage.

### ***Supporting marriages***

Relationships between people change; marriage relationships are meant to grow. Whereas for a long time the church seemed only to be concerned with the external, institutional, side of marriage, many recent church reports and statements have placed the personal relationship at the centre of the meaning of marriage. The Lichfield Report, for example, speaks of the 'cluster of expectations about the relationship of a man and a woman (loving, sexual, biological, social, economic) which is formalized in a legal institutional relationship.'

To focus on relationship, rather than institution, is to keep in our minds the idea of marriage more as a pilgrimage than of having arrived; more of a spiritual harvest, a process of growth, than a once-for-all fixed pattern; more of a continually changing mobile, adapting and moving, than a still-life.

Relationships change and can grow—or stagnate—in time. And fruitful growth needs work. There will be different ways

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of expressing mutual love and support within a marriage at different stages of life—before the children are born, when they are young, when they leave home—and it takes working at to enable the relationship to deepen and not become stuck as circumstances change. It is a further task of the Christian church to provide support, fellowship, counsel and example which will help couples at differing stages of life to discover the resources needed for growth.

### ***A healing environment***

One extreme fringe of psychological opinion (for example, David Cooper in *The Death of the Family*) sees monogamous marriage and the small family as a repressive, emotionally tight system which can only damage the personal growth, authentic life and mental health of the members. By contrast, the Christian psychiatrist Jack Dominian stresses that precisely because God relates to us in forgiveness and love, human personal relationships can through his grace themselves be environments for forgiveness and love, healing, maturing and growth. This is especially so in modern marriage, which is so much more aware of the possibility of relationship in a way that earlier generations did not have the time or strength to be (being hampered so often by sickness or poverty in a way that most of us are not).

There is in modern marriage, says Dr Dominian, a unique opportunity for healing psychological wounds from the past and of learning what human relating is all about. Some people, for example, may have stored up memories of childhood hurts. Others may have had difficult experiences in early adulthood of one sort or another. All of us bring to marriage personal needs. Wounds can be soothed, pain from difficult memories healed, and difficulties used creatively in an environment of acceptance and love. And in marriage, couples can learn to provide that.

On the other hand, of course, the renewed stress on the quality of relationship, coupled with social changes which have freed many modern couples from the preoccupation of their forefathers in simply surviving, means that modern

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couples expect more from each other. While marriage can, as we have said, be a healing experience, it can also make great demands. When the selfish goal of 'fulfilment' becomes the only thing that matters, this can lay on a marriage burdens too great for it to bear.

It is another part of the church's task to help people understand how marriage can be an environment of healing and sustenance and growth.

***Factors that work against stability***

*Social conditions*

In certain parts of the country, and in certain sectors of society, there are pressures which militate against marriage being a stable, healing and supportive environment. Age is one factor. In those groups where there is a pressure to marry young, there is also a tendency for marriage not to be a very supportive environment. All the statistics show that marriages between people under the age of twenty are less likely to be stable than marriages between people who are older. In one Canadian Roman Catholic Diocese, a minimum age for church marriage has been established.

Other negative pressures on marriage include the influence of poverty and unemployment, on the one hand, and the commuter lifestyle on the other. It is easier to provide a relationship of commitment and stability in a social environment in which this is encouraged, such as some of our rural areas, than in the high-rise flats of the inner city while struggling with long-term unemployment, or in the stockbroker belt of commuters and jet-setters where time for marriage and family life is minimal. Severe illness or handicap can also create strains in a relationship which are sometimes too severe to be coped with.

This all underlines the importance for the Christian church to take seriously its commitment to social justice. The church needs constantly to monitor programmes for social reform in the light of their effects on family life. The inequalities of wealth and conditions, and the provision of

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health care resources, are by no means irrelevant to the quality of marriage and family life.

### *The law*

Changes in the divorce laws in 1969 and 1973 had a marked effect on the number of divorces in this country. The new law which provides for divorce in situations of 'irretrievable breakdown' (which are decided according to certain criteria), replaced the law which was based on the 'matrimonial offence'. In the working of the present law there are the advantages of it being in some ways more just (there being no need to prove adultery, for example), and certainly less painful. But in other respects, divorce has become considerably easier to obtain, and is often now seen as the first resort rather than the last resort to marital difficulties, and in some ways abandons the idea of justice in favour of the idea of misfortune.

Christian concern in the law stems from the belief that (among other functions) the law does set standards in society, and can help to create the conditions within which Christian patterns of behaviour can be encouraged. It is part of the church's pastoral task to monitor the workings of the law, and to press for changes which make for justice and for social conditions in accord with the Christian ethical tradition.

### *Inner stresses*

Inner personal stresses can often be destructive of the health of a marriage. Loneliness and boredom in a wife—especially if she is a career person who has given up her career to have children; a husband's preoccupation with work; the change in the sexual 'pace' of one partner but not the other at different stages of life; the readjustment of parents when children leave home, and so on, can all have an effect.

The disintegration of local community life can also lead to a sense of anonymity in which the social pressures which used to buttress marriages are much less, and in which unfaithful behaviour becomes a stronger temptation.

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Many of these factors are rightly the concern of the church. Christian people need to come to terms with the social and psychological pressures which work against marriages being, and becoming more and more, the joyous, satisfying, healing relationships which reflect something of the nature of the covenant God.

It is part of the church's prophetic and pastoral task to find ways of witnessing, through teaching and through practice, to its belief that marriage is part of God's provision of human life and well-being, and that marriages which reflect something of the nature of God's covenant love also make for the best for human life.

It is another part of the church's work to find ways of responding appropriately to the widespread pain and turmoil caused by marriages in difficulty. We turn to that in the next chapter.

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## Once Married, Always Married?

In his writing on divorce, John Stott wisely says that in pastoral practice he refuses to discuss the question of divorce until two other matters have been addressed, namely marriage and reconciliation. It is a sad fact that many people struggling with marriage difficulties have found more help in secular counselling agencies than they have within the body of Christ. The church ought to be known as an agency of support and reconciliation, and provide resources for those whose relationships are struggling to find ways towards stability again. Paul Tournier, writing in his little booklet *Marriage Difficulties* includes this paragraph:

*You have problems? That's quite normal; all couples do. As a matter of fact it is a good thing. Those who make a success of their marriage are those who tackle their problems together and who overcome them. Those who lack the courage to do this are the ones whose marriage is a failure.*

However, the fact is that increasing numbers of marriages are being broken, and relief is sought in divorce. Some would say that it is not only lack of courage, but in some cases a lack of shared understanding about the nature of marriage, a lack of knowledge about resources of grace and of social supports, a lack of the capacity to sustain a commitment, and so on. At all levels the church ought to be known as an agency of reconciliation, and John Stott's priorities need to be strongly underlined.

What we said in the previous chapter about the marriage as a covenant, patterned on the covenant of God, helps to strengthen this view of pastoral priorities. For one of the marks of God's covenant with his people is that it is an eternal covenant. And when, through sin, the people of God fail to keep the obligations of the covenant, God remains

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faithful and willing to forgive and reconcile. The whole point of the book of Hosea is to illustrate that God remains in faithful, steadfast, reconciling love, even to his people Israel who have gone off after other gods and taken part in Canaanite rituals (Hosea 3:1). So one of the key words at the centre of the marriage covenant should be forgiveness—the willingness to recognize wrong in the relationship, but a refusal to allow the wrong to destroy the relationship. Forgiveness involves a willingness to use the experience of breakdown in friendship creatively in building more strongly for the future. One of the tasks of the Christian community is to enable us to learn how to forgive and accept forgiveness.

The human reality, however, is that in some cases of marital breakdown, there seems—despite attempts by one or both couples—no way to find reconciliation. So the pain of marriage breakdown is increasingly widespread. Couples and their children are facing the trauma of loss, guilt, family upheaval and sense of failure. Society is getting used to the fact that the sort of marriage we believe in seems to have high divorce rates.

So the Christian pastor needs wisdom and compassion in responding to a complex network of personal needs. The pastoral task can be analyzed at several different levels, which include the following.

There is the level of pastoral discipline within the church: how is a Christian congregation to react to the circumstances of a divorce among the membership? There is the level of pastoral care for the couple and the family, providing resources for dealing with the complex of emotions and pains that are involved. There is the level of moral obligation which to some degree sets limits to what is appropriate in terms of pastoral responses. There is the fundamental level of our guiding metaphors about God. Those who look to God mostly in terms of Creator, Lawgiver and Judge may well approach the question of divorce in terms of moral rules and the need for discipline. Those who approach God primarily through the categories

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of grace and salvation might emphasize not only the reality of sin, but of the promise of a new start in the Gospel and might look to future good consequences as a moral guide. Those whose experience of God begins with a sense of the Holy Spirit's guidance might wish to evaluate each personal situation on its own merits, and try to discern what God is asking of this particular person at this stage of their life journey. Clearly all these metaphors are important and necessary—and the complexity of the pastoral task is how best to give expression in our practice and our teaching to all these aspects of the truth of God and his gospel.

The church has taken different views on all this at different times. As we saw in the last chapter, there are different views concerning the nature of marriage. There are also different views about what could be considered 'grounds for divorce'. And the whole debate is complicated by some very different understandings of and uses of the biblical texts which deal with the topic of divorce. We will need to look at these texts in a moment, but we will begin with a brief historical sketch.

### ***Some history***

Generally speaking, although there are few references to divorce in the early centuries of the Christian church, the evidence points towards the view that the early Fathers of the church were against divorce. By the sixth century, though, the Eastern Church had developed a tradition of allowing divorce with right of remarriage for a variety of causes, and the Eastern Orthodox Church today sometimes uses the concept of the 'death' of a marriage—which gives a particular meaning to the phrase 'till death us do part'. The Western Church, as we saw in the previous chapter, however, held firmly to the view that marriage was indissoluble—not only that marriage should not be dissolved, but that a valid marriage once made in the sight of God could not be dissolved. This view was maintained in the Roman Church, and is held by Christians of Catholic traditions. In the Middle Ages, alongside this rejection of the possibility of divorce, a complicated set of procedures for

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dispensation and annulment grew up, by which burdensome marriages could be all too easily dissolved in fact, by showing that there never had been a true marriage in the first place. In different ways, the Catholic traditions today use procedures of annulment as a pastoral response to some marriage breakdowns.

The continental Reformers, people like Luther and Calvin, tried to bring the church back to what they thought was a more biblical understanding of marriage. They rejected the notion that marriage was a sacrament, and they disagreed with the idea of absolute indissolubility. They also objected to the annulment procedures which were sometimes bringing the ideal of the permanence of marriage into disrepute. They believed that some parts of the New Testament allowed divorce with right of remarriage in certain circumstances.

The Reformers in England inherited thinking from both the Western Catholic tradition and from the continental Reformers. Archbishop Cranmer's proposals for a revised Canon Law for the Church of England (the *Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum*—which never in fact became law), would have included provision for divorce for adultery, malicious desertion, prolonged absence without news, attempts against the partner's life and cruelty. It prescribed severe punishment for adultery, but allowed the innocent partner to remarry.

Since the Reformation, the Church of England has lived with a tension of opposing views. The strong Catholic tradition is upheld—and has been supported by Church law at some times. At other times (in the seventeenth century, for example) there were a number of divorces procured by private Act of Parliament, which were followed by remarriage in church. This tension has been seen recently in the various Church of England Reports concerning divorce and remarriage (the Root Report of 1971 and the Lichfield Report of 1978—and all the discussions following these concerning the remarriage of divorced persons in church).

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How is the church to find any clarity in this confusion? Both sides believe they are upholding a long-standing Christian tradition. Both sides would want to claim a biblical backing for their views. Did Jesus uphold the indissolubility of marriage, and so put aside the Old Testament rules which allowed divorce? Or does the New Testament allow divorce in certain circumstances, and if so which?

It is to a closer look at the biblical material that we must turn our attention.

### ***Old Testament background***

It is likely that in early Old Testament times marriage was commonly arranged by parents, and that the financial transactions involved showed that marriage was intended to be lifelong. Although possible, divorce would have been rare, because only the very rich could have afforded the heavy costs involved.

After the exile the customs were similar, but the costs had fallen, and women could then sue for divorce as well as men.

The laws of the Pentateuch which are concerned with sexual relationships appear to support the view that in marriage a man and a woman are united together in what was intended to be a permanent, lifelong and exclusive union.

There is one section of Deuteronomy (24:1–4) which forms the background to some of the New Testament discussions of divorce. The older translations make it look as though a man was required to divorce his wife if ‘some indecency’ is found in her. This is not so. Modern commentators are agreed that this is legislation giving permission for divorce, not giving a command. The point of the law was to prevent a woman who had been divorced because of ‘some indecency’ (probably serious sexual misconduct short of adultery; adultery carried the death penalty), and who had subsequently married someone else, from then returning to her first husband if the second also divorced her. The law recognized that divorce happened, but it did not encourage

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it. It also regulated divorce—the husband had to give his wife a ‘bill of divorcement’ and this was presumably to provide some protection to the wife. The curious prohibition about remarriage to the first husband may indicate a curb on male cruelty if there was some custom of ‘lending out’ wives for a time.

It seems clear that the Old Testament recognized divorce and not just separation. The word ‘divorce’ is related to the word for hewing down trees, even cutting off heads. It indicates the severing of what was once a living union. Divorce, then, in the understanding of Deuteronomy, was a kind of amputation: it could not happen without damage to the partners concerned.

The Old Testament Law, therefore, recognized that some marriages are broken, though divorce is not approved; it saw the need for some civil legislation for the sake of society (‘the bill of divorcement’); it tried to protect the divorced woman and legislate against cruelty. In its own negative way, then, it was seeking to preserve God’s ideal for marriage as far as possible within a sinful world.

After the exile, it appears that the practice of divorce may have become easier and more trivialized. The prophet Malachi needed to remind the people that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16).

### ***New Testament***

The New Testament divorce material was written in a context in which the Old Testament law was held dear (although it was variously interpreted by different groups of Pharisees), and in which Greek and Roman customs were exerting some influence (thus Mark 10:12 recognizes that women could initiate divorce—as was permitted in Roman law—as well as men, but Matthew 19:9, written for a Jewish readership, does not say this).

In Jesus’ day there was a dispute between groups of Pharisees about the meaning of Deuteronomy 24:1–4, and about what counted as valid grounds for divorce. (This lies behind the way Matthew frames the question in 19:3—‘Is it

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lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' Contrast Mark 10:2.) The Shammaite Pharisees interpreted Deuteronomy strictly: divorce was only permitted for serious sexual sin. The more liberal Hillelite Pharisees (with whom Jesus might have been expected to agree), understood 'If she ... finds no favour in his eyes' (Deuteronomy 24:1) to be permission to divorce for the most trivial of reasons—'even if she spoil a dish for him'. It may well be that even the Shammaites did not practise what they preached. Josephus, for example, a Pharisee with Shammaite leanings, had three marriages. So perhaps divorce on fairly trivial grounds was common in the time of Jesus (although rare by modern standards).

In New Testament days it was assumed that divorce was the penalty for adultery. It is very unlikely that the death penalty for adultery was carried out—even in Hosea's day, the death penalty for adultery was not exacted. Indeed, the Jewish courts could compel a husband to divorce his wife on certain grounds. It is highly likely that Jesus' hearers would have assumed that divorce after adultery was required.

The divorce material in Matthew 19:3ff and Mark 10:1ff has been the subject of considerable debate among scholars. Despite much disagreement, the following seems clear. Both Gospels show Jesus bringing divorce and remarriage under the heading of adultery. The Pharisees had trivialized divorce by reducing their concerns to the level of 'grounds for divorce' and the need for a certificate. Jesus' teaching points back to God's intention in creation, in the light of which every unfaithfulness, every breaking of the 'one flesh' commitment, every 'putting away' of the partner is sin. In the light of our discussion about marriage in the previous chapter, we could argue that divorce is covenant breaking.

At this point, however, Christians disagree. Some Christians believe that the Gospels are referring not to divorce as such but to separation. The emphasis would then be on remarriage as adultery in the physical sense. Jesus is presented as tightening up Moses' law in Deuteronomy: he is being even more strict than the Shammaites. Divorce is

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not permitted for Christians. Remarriage is adultery. This is the reason for the shocked reaction of the disciples to this teaching (Matthew 19:10).

Other Christians believe that the reference is to divorce and not just to separation. Separation without right of remarriage was unknown to Jesus' hearers, and if he was using 'put away' in a new and restricted sense (particularly in a discussion of Deuteronomy 24 in which remarriage was assumed—prompted by disagreements between Shammai and Hillel, both of whom also assumed remarriage), would Jesus have been so understood without further explanation? It seems plausible to assume that 'divorce' in the Gospels includes the right of remarriage, and that the sin of adulterous 'covenant-breaking' is the sin of putting away one's partner.

To see divorce as covenant-breaking is to see it as a serious and sinful act. However, it also allows us to argue that in circumstances in which sin traps us such that none of the ways open to us is good, divorce may in some circumstances be seen as a 'lesser evil' choice. But taking God's covenant pattern as our guide, divorce is never obligatory—never the first resort. Even the sin of sexual unfaithfulness (as we learn from the story of Hosea) is to be an occasion if at all possible for forgiveness and reconciliation.

In this second view, two principles need to be held together: God's creation ideal for the permanence of marriage as a covenant partnership of personal (one flesh) communion, and divorce as a concession—a last resort in some circumstances. These two principles are arguably found in the Gospels. They are also, we may suggest, found in the teaching of St Paul. In Romans 7:1ff and 1 Corinthians 7:10, the Apostle gives the divine rule: marriage is permanent. But there is a tiny concession in brackets in 1 Corinthians 7:11 acknowledging the reality of separation, and there seems to be a permission for divorce in the case of a Christian deserted by an unbelieving partner in 1 Corinthians 7:15 ('the brother or sister is not bound').

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## Grounds for divorce

There is further disagreement among Christians concerning the grounds on which divorce, if allowed at all, may be permitted. At this point we must refer to what is called the 'exceptive clause' in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9—'except on the ground of unchastity (*porneia*). There is considerable disagreement about the meaning of this phrase, although it seems most likely that it refers to serious sexual sin including adultery. There is some dispute about its authenticity, but most scholars recognize it occurs in all the best manuscripts. And if not the words of Jesus it is Matthew's interpretation of Jesus' mind in Matthew's particular context (for why do Mark and Luke not mention it?).

One explanation is that Matthew, with his particular concern for law and order for his Jewish readership, is recognizing the requirements of the civil law obliging a husband to divorce his wife if she was unfaithful to him. Mark and Luke give the rule about marriage without this exception, which may have been assumed. The exceptive clause may point to an interpretation of the 'some indecency' of Deuteronomy 24. It recognizes that, although being a sinful departure from God's plan for marriage, divorce may sometimes be permitted in a sinful world.

Other Christians, who believe that the New Testament is opposed to all divorce, understand the reference to *porneia* (unchastity) in Matthew 19:9 as showing that Jesus is deliberately departing from the teaching of the Old Testament. The meaning would then be: 'Whoever puts away his wife—in spite of what Deuteronomy says—commits adultery.'

But if the exceptive clause is a concession to human sin and need, we still need to ask whether Jesus is giving a new law here? Is divorce permitted only for *porneia*? Or may we rather say that since the Old Testament law was concerned with cruelty, since Matthew points to sexual misbehaviour and since Paul is concerned with desertion in some circumstances, these serve as examples of the extreme

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seriousness with which the question of divorce should be approached, and suggest the sorts of situations in which divorce might be considered as a possible last resort and lesser evil.

### ***Pastoral implications***

If we are right to take the view that the Bible allows divorce with right of remarriage in some circumstances, though it always falls under the shadow of a broken covenant, what does this mean for the pastoral work of the church?

First, we need to find ways of helping one another to develop characters capable of committed love-faithfulness. The learning of the capacity to make a commitment begins early in a child's life, is helped by a 'facilitating' home environment, and is often hindered by a context of fractured relationships. Can the church find ways of supporting homes and families in the often stressful years when young children are growing up?

Secondly, how is the Christian community to become better known as a context in which help is available to move marriages towards becoming environments for healing and personal growth, rather than environments for pain and destructiveness? The trend in some churches to establish support groups for parents, or for mothers and toddlers, within which stresses can be aired and shared and sometimes material and emotional resources found, is surely to be welcomed.

Thirdly, when marriages are broken, the pastoral task seems at least twofold: acceptance, and support and guidance.

#### *Acceptance*

For a long time all that the church has been heard saying to divorced people is a word of judgment and rejection. This is not to say that church discipline is unimportant, nor that the church does not have a prophetic role in making clear God's purposes for marriage. But many who suffer the trauma of divorce are as much victims as agents. And the

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Christian community needs to find ways of displaying that character of God seen in Jesus' acceptance of sinners as persons, and helping them towards a renewed experience of God's restoring grace.

### *Support and guidance*

The church has an important role in helping the divorced person both to come to terms with the pain of the present, and also to build for the future. This may mean emotional and material care. It will mean recognizing the range of losses that are involved in divorce (loss of home, status, friendship, sexual partner, perhaps children, perhaps income, social approval, and so on), and the complexity of feelings of grief, anger, guilt and confusion that surround such a great trauma. For some it may involve searching out the rights and wrongs in the thorny question of another marriage.

### ***Second marriage***

The most serious consideration in the whole complex debate about the rights and wrongs of a second marriage when a former partner is still alive, is that such a step effectively closes the door to reconciliation with the first spouse. The covenant model points us to the need for reconciliation as the first and second and third steps in marriage breakdown, and to see divorce only ever as a last resort.

However, if it is accepted that in some circumstances divorce is permitted as a lesser evil, does that ever or always justify another marriage?

From what we have seen earlier in this chapter and the previous one, the question of second marriage raises issues at a number of levels.

There is the exegetical level: the meaning of the biblical texts, and as we have seen there is much debate about that.

There is, secondly, the moral level: how are we to use the Bible in our decision making? And do we need to make some moral distinctions between people who have

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divorced for different reasons? To seek for a divorce with the intention of marrying another person (like Herod—perhaps that is the reason behind Luke’s strong word in Luke 16:18) is rather different from the desperate acceptance of the need for divorce from a cruel and destructive partner. The person who married far too young and now realizes what was obvious to everyone else, that their marriage was a mistake, is in a different category from someone who blatantly refuses to keep his or her marriage vows. Although second marriage must always fall under the shadow of the broken covenant of the first, not all divorces are morally the same, and neither, therefore, are all situations in which a second marriage is contemplated.

One crucial moral issue in any question of remarriage is whether there are any outstanding covenant obligations from the first marriage (with regard to any children, for example) which can and should still be met—and which remarriage would cut across. We would also need to judge that the overall possible personal good of a second marriage in a particular case would justify the threat that such an action poses to the institution of marriage in our society. No doubt from the perspectives of a gospel of forgiveness and of a new beginning, there are some Christian grounds for that justification for some people. But remarriage can never be set as a norm without the social fabric of permanent marriage in our society being called in question.

Thirdly, there is a pastoral level: freedom for remarriage is by no means the same as remarriage being necessarily the wise or right course. Some people may be called by God to future singleness. Others may need help with the personal problems which may have contributed to the breakdown of the first marriage. The church can play a part in the delicate task of helping divorced people find and come to terms with God’s will for their future.

Fourthly, there is the level of ecclesiastical discipline. The rightness or wrongness of remarriage is a different question from the role of the church in solemnizing such a marriage. Here the crucial question for the church to ask is how best

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to witness in its disciplines and its liturgies both to God's will for marriage, and to the gospel of grace and the possibilities of a new start. Should second marriages be solemnized and so blessed in church? To do so might seem to be collusion with sin. To fail to do so might seem to indicate a harder moral line than taken by the Scriptures and a failure to offer a ministry of forgiveness.

There have been some attempts to provide services of blessing for divorced people who have married a second time in a civil ceremony. Many clergy see this as the best compromise arrangement. The paradox is that for clergy to refuse to act as registrar but to be willing to give the churches blessing is the reverse of what some believe—namely that the 'civil' side of marriage can be recognized, but that God's blessing should not be given.

Others do believe that a second marriage can be solemnized in church with the blessing of God, though many would wish such a service to include a note of penitence—a note in which both couple and congregation could join. This might give liturgical expression to the recognition that second marriage falls under a shadow but also that sin is partly a matter of individual responsibility but partly also a matter of the social factors which sometimes place on a marriage burdens too great to be borne. Different churches have different disciplines in this matter. But central to the task is finding ways of recognizing and responding to the complex of personal needs in the area of divorce and remarriage without letting go of the church's prophetic task of bearing witness to God's will for marriage.

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## Sexuality

At the start of each academic year, Oxford undergraduates used to receive a copy of 'The Little Blue Book': a booklet produced by students for students about sex. One interesting statistic given in the book a few years ago is that over 50 per cent of students will leave Oxford without having had sexual intercourse with anybody. It is hard to obtain statistics like that and it is also difficult to know what effect the spread of the HIV virus which causes Aids has had on sexual habits over the last few years, but it seems likely that quite a high proportion of students do not have sexual relationships with anyone while at university. This would have to be set against the impression often given in the media that university life is almost solely about drugs and getting someone else into bed

This is not, of course, to say that this 50 per cent are not sexual beings. We are all aware of our sexuality, whatever we decide to do about it. There are those for whom their sexuality is a source of fun. They enjoy being with members of the opposite sex; they find exploring relationships with them a source of delight; they like finding themselves sexually aroused.

Other people cope with their sexuality by trying to deny it, because the feelings and fantasies associated with sex are too powerful or painful. Sometimes a person has been abused as a child, or had a frightening sexual encounter later on in life, and—though they would not tell their best friend—they are just very scared of the whole subject. There are those who find their sexual fantasy world gets out of hand. Sometimes this will be linked with masturbation, which many people—certainly many men—enjoy sometimes, though sometimes it is coupled with strong feelings of guilt. Sometimes they indulge in furtive glances at pornographic magazines, or get turned on by some 18-

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rated film which they justify seeing to themselves as creative art.

Some people discover that their sexual feelings and fantasies are directed to members of their own sex rather than to the opposite sex. They may know that nearly everyone goes through a homosexual phase in their sexual development—a phase which usually starts in adolescence and can remain until the early twenties. (In fact, it is not easy to speak of a settled sexual orientation until someone is over twenty.) But they may fear that they are homosexual, and may perhaps be wondering whether to tell anyone else, or what their family will think, and what it will mean for the future. They see other homosexual people apparently glad to be public about their sexual orientation, and they wonder whether they should ‘come out’ as well.

Then there will be those who are struggling with that usual mixture of excitement and disappointment in boyfriend-girlfriend relationships, falling into and out of love, and trying to decide how far they should go when alone in the dark on the back seat of their dad’s Volvo.

Our task in this chapter is to explore some of the resources of the Christian faith which are important in trying to bring our sexuality and our commitment to Christ together, leaving the specific issues of homosexuality to the next chapter.

We must first acknowledge that the history of the Christian church is not a very helpful one in this area. From St Augustine’s turbulent adolescence onwards, too many Christian people have learned that sex is something negative, if not downright evil, and that the dominant Christian word in anything to do with sex is ‘don’t’. Early on in the church’s history there were those who taught that celibacy is more godly than marriage. There were even some who entered into what they called spiritual marriages—sharing the same home and even the same bed with a partner but supposedly without sex (an idea which didn’t last too long!).

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The church has a poor record in its treatment of homosexual people. Too easily the mood of intolerance towards minority groups has been coupled with a very judgmental attitude of hostility which has not only made clear the church's opposition to homosexual intercourse—and that is a matter for further discussion in the next chapter—but has also shamefully too often been part of denying to homosexual people their basic civil rights as citizens, which is a matter of common justice, whatever view we take about sexual morality.

Even where the church has been clear in its teaching, it has also been confusing. 'Keep sexual intercourse for within marriage,' says the church. 'Do not commit adultery.' 'Homosexual intercourse is wrong.' It seems very clear—until we ask why? What underlies these rules, for they are clearly not self-evident. If 50 per cent or more students do not sleep together, then there must be 50 per cent or less who do. And for the church to say 'no' without apparent reason is just confusing.

Allen Verhey writes:

*I remember sermons, usually based on the statement in the Heidelberg Catechism 'God condemns all unchastity' which were full of prohibitions and warnings. I always remember how exciting and adventuresome such sermons made unchastity sound, and how boring righteousness seemed.<sup>1</sup>*

We all enjoy a fascination with the forbidden.

Then, when older and wiser Christians say, 'It is because sexuality is such a great and wonderful gift of God that you should not spoil it before marriage,' the lure of the forbidden is made worse. What is it that is so wonderful and special that we are not allowed to try it? And in any case, looking at some of the marriages we know, and perhaps remembering some of the things that happened in our home, and reading countless newspaper articles about rape

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<sup>1</sup> Allen Verhey, lecture on Sexuality given at Calvin College, Michigan.

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and sexual assault, what are we to make of this great and wonderful gift anyhow?

There are three other features of our present culture which make some of the church's ambiguity about sex even more confusing; aspects of our culture which, I suggest, present us with a very stunted view of what sex is all about.

First, we are bombarded all the time with a romantic notion of love. Sex equals love, and love, we see from all the adverts, is to do with feelings. Not only feelings about people. There are adverts which seem to display housewives lifted to the heights of sexual arousal by the sight of a newly polished kitchen floor. And the erotic dimension to many of the TV commercials seems to feed this notion that the most important thing in life is romantic feelings expressed sexually. In this sickly Mills and Boon culture, there is no sense that sex might be to do with something deeper and ultimately more fulfilling than sentimental romance. There is no sense of depth; of the 'agony and ecstasy' in human relationships. There is no sense that love might be something much more to do with a commitment of the will than only with the feelings.

Secondly, we are also becoming immunized by another approach to sex which robs it of all mystery. Sex is just one human activity alongside others. Some people enjoy a pint of beer with their friends, others play chess, others have sex. It's fun and relaxing, and as long as no one gets hurt, why not enjoy it? There is considerable literature available about sexual technique, but much of it has no sense of mystery, of wonder, of delight in the presence of another. This 'realism without mystery' is the approach to sex we find, for example, in Jean Paul Sartre's *The Age of Reason* when Boris, having made love to Lola, then says, 'What's the point of choosing a girl-friend, it would be just the same with anyone—its physiological.' And he repeated with disgust, 'physiological.'

Yet this is the message that seems to be conveyed by a great deal of sex education in our schools, where sex means anatomy, physiology, technique and condoms. One

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fourteen-year-old girl assured her mother, 'I know all about it, Mummy—all about it. We did sex with Mrs Patterson in the third year.'

There is another aspect to this loss of mystery which our consumer culture magnifies: sex becomes a commodity for trade. By this I mean not only the sex-without-relationship and the commercial exploitation, most frequently of women, in pornography, but also the way we can trade our own sexuality with each other, such that sex can become the required way of saying, 'Thank you for a nice evening out.'

Contrast the mystery of personal communion to which Mellors and Lady Chatterly take each other in D. H. Lawrence's novel. Whatever view you take of their adulterous relationship, Lawrence knows that sex is more than a commodity or a technique. More than a romanticism without commitment on the one hand, and a 'realism' without mystery on the other.

Thirdly, we are coming at these questions in the context of post-Enlightenment liberalism which tends to emphasize the autonomy of the individual, and suggests that everything to do with values and moral choices is a matter for private individual decision. What you do with your sexuality is only a matter for you. Sex, we have learned, is private and personal and not a matter for social ethics at all. Those who, like the church, have tended to want social guidelines for sexual lives are, we are told, really only concerned with social control for political ends. This style of liberalism is often coupled with an approach to moral questions which is predominantly consequentialist. We decide what is right or wrong on the basis of consequences. This leads us to judge moral values only by such criteria as 'will anyone get hurt?' If it doesn't hurt anyone, it is thereby defined as good. Much of the advertising campaign against the spread of Aids seems to take this line.

This individualized liberalism is also seen in the very widespread view that one cannot be a really fulfilled, complete and healthy person without a regular active sex

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life. This owes more to Freud than to reality, and the life of Christ himself decisively calls that view into question.

But we are still left with a prevailing view in our society which suggests that sex is a technique for individuals to gain happiness and fulfilment.

It is in this context that we now need to move to the question: what biblical resources can we bring to bear to help us get our experience of sexuality and our Christian faith together?

### ***Created in God's image***

We begin with the foundational truth of our faith: God is a community of love. 'Interpersonal communion' is a way of expressing something of the nature of God. The Holy Trinity is a communion of persons in love and communication.

We human beings are 'made in the divine image'. The doctrine of our creation in the divine image *affirms our human value*. 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27). The glory of our createdness in the divine image must be the basic assumption of our approaches to one another. It rebukes all judgmental discrimination against others, whether of race, creed, colour or sexual preference. Homophobia, rejection, ridicule, and stereotyping must have no place in Christian relationships. It is on the basis of personal value in the image of God that Christians should insist on civil rights for all people, irrespective of sexual orientation or lifestyle. Whether or not we agree with a homosexual person's sexual behaviour, whether or not we agree with a heterosexual person's adultery, should not have a bearing on their rights as citizens. We as Christians need to separate our witness for sexual morality in personal relationships from our concern for social justice and civil rights in the public realm. Both are important.

Secondly, the doctrine of creation *affirms body-life*. We are embodied persons. The picture of the Creator making us of the dust of the ground with his hands, as a potter moulds

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clay, is a picture of his intimate involvement with our bodiliness. Human life is not to be understood as the life of a soul imprisoned within an evil material body. No, our physicality is to be affirmed. It is *flesh* which the Word became in the incarnation; it is the resurrection of the *body* to which we look forward. This should remind us of the goodness of our bodies, including the pleasures of our bodies. Life on earth is inescapably physical.

And because we are embodied, we are all sexual beings.

Thirdly, the doctrine of creation *affirms personal relationships*. It is not good that we should be alone. To a large degree our identity as persons is defined by the fact that we realize our personhood in mutual relationship with one another. Just as the Being of God himself is personal communion within the Trinity, so to be in the image of God is to be in personal communion with other persons. Aloneness is not part of God's creation intention. Love, in all its aspects, including friendship, has its meaning in personal relationships.

One of the things we need to recover within the Christian community is the beauty and value of friendships, both between the sexes, and between members of the same sex. We need to think through the appropriateness of different ways of expressing friendship, and the cultural considerations which are part of the traditional English caution about touching and embracing. Our churches should be communities of friendships, to stand against all the factors of our industrialized way of life and post-Enlightenment individualized ways of thinking which make for an awful sense of loneliness.

Fourthly, we need to note that there are *several dimensions* to our sexuality, all of which can express the joy and delight of persons in communion with other persons, and all of which can become disordered and misused. There is the *anatomical* level of male and female hormones and of bodily differences. There is the dimension of *feelings and will*, a sexual dimension to our thoughts, fears, and fantasies. There is the level of our *behaviour*. We can give

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expression to the feeling and willing dimension to our sexuality through our bodily behaviour: speaking, touching, caressing, hurting. Within friendship relationships, appropriate physical expression of affection will, no doubt, be different for different people and in different settings. A hug and a kiss might be appropriate signs of affection in one setting and not in another. The *genital* dimension of our sexuality is the most intimate and powerful mode of interpersonal encounter. It can express love and commitment in the deepest possible way; without love and commitment, it can be one of the most harmful of human encounters.

Fifthly, the biblical teaching about creation encourages us to affirm *sexual complementarity*. As the theologian Karl Barth put it, our sexuality is part of the 'god-like' in us. God created man in his own image: male and female. There is something about male-female complementarity which expresses something of the nature of God. We need to be careful here, because the church—along with much of Western culture—often expressed male-female difference in terms of patriarchal male dominance and female subservience. Certainly, after the story of the Fall in Genesis 3, there is a picture of the ruling male and the struggling female. But that is a description of the distortions caused by sin. Genesis 2 gives us a picture of an equality of status and a complementarity of difference.

The reaction against male dominance has all too often, however, led to a rejection of any differences between men and women—almost as though our bodily and hormonal differences were of no significance. But for a faith which affirms the body, Christians must also affirm the importance of male-female differentiation, especially in regard to our different modes of creativity, related as these are to the most significant bodily differences between the sexes.

The image of God surely points to a complementarity of sexuality. We human beings, so to speak, come in two sorts. There is a particular creativity in relation to the mystery of the 'other'. One way of trying to express this is

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to make use of the work of developmental psychologists who suggest that during adolescence, very generally speaking, male sexuality is focused on the physical, with thoughts about performance, and female sexuality is focused on the emotional, with thoughts about personal warmth. In both males and females growing into maturity involves bringing together the physical with the emotional, the 'masculine' with the 'feminine', in creative complementarity.

### ***Purposes of sexuality***

At this point we need to ask what human sexuality is for in the purposes of God. The Christian faith has usually spoken of three purposes for human sexuality, though it has often unhelpfully concentrated more on the third than the first. These three are pleasure, mutuality and creativity.

#### *Pleasure*

First, the Bible encourages an affirmation of sexual love. The delight of the man for the woman in the Garden—'This at last is bone of my bones' (Genesis 2:23); the joy of the bridegroom for his bride in the free eroticism of the Song of Songs; the positive words about sexual delight in Proverbs 5:18ff and so on, encourage the view that sexual relationships are to be pleasurable, rejoiced in and affirmed.

#### *Mutuality*

It is clear from the creation narratives and elsewhere in the Bible that the authors understand physical sexual intercourse as signifying and deepening the full personal commitment of husband to wife and wife to husband in marriage. 'They become one flesh' says the narrator of Genesis 2, and 'one flesh' is a phrase which is not exclusively about sexual intercourse, though it includes it. 'One flesh' means a full, intimate, personal communion of a man and a woman at all levels of their being, a communion which is symbolized by and deepened through the physical sexual union. 'One flesh' is essentially a relationship of heterosexual complementarity and creativity.

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It is this phrase to which Jesus refers in his statements about the permanence of marriage in Matthew 19, and which is also the basis of the analogy between husband and wife and Christ and the church in Ephesians 5. It is also the phrase used in 1 Corinthians 6 where Paul is arguing against those in Corinth who wrongly believed that their physical sexual activities could be separated out from their spiritual commitment to Christ. Genital sexual encounter is a very special way of expressing personal communion.

According to many discussions of psychosexual development, many of the friendships we make during adolescence and student age are not only valuable in themselves, but are also our way of discovering the sort of person with whom we might wish to make a permanent bonding attachment. In Jack Dominian's *Sexual Integrity*, for example, he illustrates how adolescence and young adulthood is the time for the sort of friendships between the sexes through which we can discover about ourselves and others. But he argues that sexual intercourse is not an appropriate way of expressing such friendships, and indeed that such personal exploration is not helped by sexual intercourse. One way to explain why this is so is to reflect that full sexual intercourse is a way of saying, 'I am giving myself to you; physically, emotionally and spiritually you are uniquely special to me.' Full sexual intercourse is thus a way of expressing the sort of love and commitment which needs a context of continuity, exclusivity and faithfulness—the sort of loving pair-bonding most societies call marriage. Intercourse can express and maintain such an affective bond between two people. Intercourse does not help to discover whether this or that friend is the one with whom I wish to make such a bond.

The marriage relationship is a way, over time and through struggles no doubt as well as through joys, of learning to love another person, and learning how to receive love. The 'one flesh' sexual union symbolizes and deepens this growing into personal communion with another, which is the journey and pilgrimage and adventure of marriage.

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*Creativity*

The third purpose for human sexuality, alongside pleasure and mutuality, is creativity. We have already said that the male-female complementary nature of our humanness is part of the way God has made us. Each needs the other for a sense of wholeness in life. In the relationship between the sexes—in a relationship with one who is mysteriously other than I am—there is a potential for creativity which expresses something of the creativity of God.

This is underlined and symbolized by the importance which the Christian faith has given to linking sexuality with having children. The Christian faith believes that in God, love and creativity belong together, and that for human beings made in his image, the relational and the procreative aspects of our sexuality therefore also belong together. Children are meant to be brought up by, and not just begotten by, their parents in the context of a committed loving relationship. This is why the church has always so closely linked marriage with family life.

This is not to say that all married couples must have children, nor that the use of contraceptives which separates the relationship from procreativity on any particular occasion is wrong. But it is to say that procreativity is part of the normal meaning of marriage, and that sexual intercourse is appropriate in a context in which sexual pleasure, mutuality and creativity including the possibility for procreativity all belong together.

***Celibacy***

Alongside the calling to marriage, the Christian faith has also affirmed another way of expressing our sexuality—namely celibacy. The Christian tradition has sometimes exalted celibacy over marriage. It has always recognized celibacy as a gift which God gives to some, just as marriage is a gift he gives to others. (St Paul uses the word *charisma* of both marriage and celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7.) But this is not to say that there are no sexual dimensions to the celibate life. Celibate people are sexual people, and though genitality

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may not be appropriate, other dimensions of sexuality can be used to foster creative friendships in which personal communion can be enjoyed. The life of Jesus Christ illustrates how the celibate life can be fully human and fully whole. He was a sexually alive person, in intimate creative friendships with men and with women, but without the genital dimensions. Celibacy can set a person free to develop creative friendships of love and service with many within the community. It is not a denial of sexuality, but another means of expressing it.

We need to recognize the difference, however, between those for whom celibacy is a freely chosen path, in response to the calling of God, and those for whom celibacy seems forced upon them by the circumstances of their lives, when they would very much have preferred otherwise. Although in both cases we may wish to speak of God's gift, for some it is clearly not as welcome a gift as for others, and for some the celibate life carries particular and unwelcome connotations of loneliness and pain.

In summary, God's purposes for human sexuality, expressed either in marriage or in a celibate lifestyle, are for pleasure, mutuality and creativity. These carry with them a sense of mystery and joy which is so lacking in much of the contemporary reduction of sex to technique or sentimental romanticism.

### ***Sin***

As we have hinted several times already, it is all too often true that our relating is marked not by love but by selfishness, not by joy but by lustful self-indulgence. There is fear rather than faithfulness, harassment rather than harmony. Many sexual encounters do not express personal communion at all. We need to remember that we are living in a fallen world, and that our sexuality is not exempt from the disordering effects of sin. This is seen in the ways in which all too often we, and our culture, try to separate out what God has joined together: to separate sexual pleasure from commitment, or mutuality from creativity. The results may often be disappointment and frustration. And of course

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it is hard to distinguish the claims of love from our own sinful wants or the claims of passion.

At this point the guidelines concerning sexual behaviour given in the Bible are important—not as restrictive rules but, as with all biblical law, as guidance in loving. Biblical guidelines do more than guide; they also indicate boundaries which can protect us at our most vulnerable. The rules against incest, or against premarital under-age sex, serve among other things to protect the vulnerable. But these are not the only examples. All of us have vulnerabilities, and our experience as sexual beings exposes these very clearly. At this point the grace of the Holy Spirit can enable us to develop habits of mind and patterns of behaviour which are appropriate for people seeking to love Christ in their relationships with each other.

### ***Biblical norms***

In Lewis Smedes' book *Sex in the Real World*, he sets out three biblical norms for sexual behaviour, taken from the Bible. With some emendations, what follows is largely drawn from him.

#### **☒ Our sexuality is meant to be woven into the whole of the rest of our character and our quest for human values**

The temptation is to pretend that we can separate off our sexuality from the rest of us. This was the problem which St Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 6. Some of the Corinthians thought they could indulge their sexual feelings in the brothel in Corinth without affecting their spiritual relationship to Christ. Paul argues that this cannot be so. As Smedes puts it: 'There can be no such thing as casual sex, however casual we may be about it.' Whether we acknowledge it or not, the whole of us is involved when we have sexual intercourse with somebody. And if my body is saying, 'I am giving myself to you' while my mind is making no such commitment, I am living a lie.

This guideline calls in question all casual sex. It also forbids all adultery. What we do with our sexual organs actually involves the whole of us.

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☒ **Our sexuality is meant to move us towards personal communion with another person or with other persons**

We have met this biblical theme earlier in our discussion of the image of God. But the temptation is often to depersonalise sex. The sex-without-relationship of pornography; the sex for trade in prostitution; the use of sex as a means to some other end: all these break this guideline, and are a means a exploitation rather than personal communion.

At this point we should say a brief word about masturbation. Many people, certainly many men—some occasionally some more frequently—masturbate during adolescence and sometimes for years afterwards. Many Christians have regarded this as a serious sin, and have added to the feelings of guilt which often accompany sexual fantasies. However, we need to make some distinctions. If occasional masturbation is enjoyed as a pleasurable release of sexual tension during that transition stage in life between puberty and the growth of a committed relationship with someone, or at a time in a committed relationship when full intercourse is not possible, many Christians would not now regard it as particularly problematic. When solitary sexual pleasure becomes bondage to a habit, however, and a person becomes trapped in behaviour which then gets in the way of making mature relationships with other people, this is more serious. Problems may also arise if masturbation is so linked to a fantasy world that a person prefers to live in the dream world than in the real world. But then the problem seems to be not so much masturbation itself as difficulties in relating to people. For our sexuality is meant to move us towards personal communion with another person or with other persons.

☒ **Genital sexual intercourse is meant to express full personal commitment of heterosexual love to one other person**

As Jack Dominionian argued, intercourse is meant to deepen committed love between a woman and a man. This is the

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meaning of the biblical phrase 'one flesh'. This is why the church has a rule about marriage: for if genital sexual intercourse is a way of expressing a total commitment of faithful love to one other person, it needs a permanent context of continuity, trust and exclusiveness which is what is meant by marriage. If intercourse is meant for heterosexual marriage, then intercourse outside marriage is to a greater or lesser degree inappropriate, and breaks the biblical rules about loving.

In the light of the above, the central personal and pastoral questions in deciding on sexual behaviour concern how our choices fit into the story which our lives are telling. Are our choices reflecting a view of the world in which sex is an impersonal commodity, or an unrealistic romantic feeling, or simply a technique for getting individual satisfaction? Or are our choices reflecting a view of the world in which personal relationships of committed love are possible—and not only possible but, despite all their sinful distortions actually reflect something of the nature of God, and therefore of what makes for the best for human life? For our choices are all built into habits of mind, character and behaviour which are woven into the whole story of our lives. We Christians need to find ways of celebrating our sexuality as a God-given part of our humanness, of not letting it become stunted by the depersonalizing pressures of the prevailing culture towards exploitations of various sorts. We also need to find ways of expressing it appropriately which deepen our respect for one another made in God's image. At the end of the day, whether we marry or remain single, God calls us all towards wholeness in Christ, in which the appropriate expression of the sexual dimensions of our lives reflect something of him.

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<sup>2</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (6). Lynx Communications: London

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## The Church And Homosexual People

We turn now to the specific moral and pastoral questions raised for Christians by the experience which some have of finding our sexual feelings being always or sometimes directed towards people of our own sex.

We do so remembering that pastoral attitudes between Christian people are to be marked by the word of St Paul in Colossians 1:28—‘Him [Christ] we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ.’ We remember also that each of us is called ‘to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him’ (Colossians 1:10). As we approach a question which has proved divisive in the church we need to set all our discussion in such a context. Especially when—in some people’s experience—the personal and pastoral responses found within the church have been destructive and not

In some ways the question of homosexuality is simply one way of expressing the question of human sexuality, and it is important that the previous chapter is read before this one. We all have to come to terms with the fact that our bodies are either male or female (with a very tiny minority of people whose anatomy is abnormally ambiguous). We all have to come to terms with elements of what may be termed ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ within each of us. We all have to learn how to understand and come to terms with the excitement and trauma of our sexual feelings and fantasies, and live with sexual temptation.

In the Christian tradition we are still suffering from a heritage which keeps sexuality in a quiet, if not negative or downright evil, category in the Christian mind. This is, of course, very different from the prevailing culture which screams sex at us from every hoarding and glossy magazine. Thankfully, many Christians are now becoming

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freer to affirm and delight in sexuality, and discover a freedom from earlier Christian prudishness. But all of us, homosexual and heterosexual, need to learn for ourselves what an appropriate expression of our sexuality will mean in different contexts. What will expressing the character of Christ mean for us in our relationships with members of the same and of the opposite sex? All of us have to come to terms with the fact that this issue is dividing Christians from one another within the body of Christ, and we all need to find appropriate strategies for handling conflict within the church.

In other respects, the Christian person with homosexual feelings and fantasies is in a different category from the heterosexual person. He or she is asking and trying to answer these questions in a context which is calculated to make it difficult. The history of oppression, resentment, hostility and ridicule against homosexual people has created an atmosphere of extreme caution within some churches, and of extreme caution in many homosexual people in the mainline churches, in admitting their sexual preferences. There is pressure from the tradition of biblical interpretation which has censured everything homosexual as an 'abomination', and which has contributed to what has become known as 'homophobia': the fear and subsequent rejection of homosexual people by members of the heterosexual majority.

There is pressure from the Gay Liberation movement outside and within the Christian church who urge the view that homosexuality is simply a natural variant of human sexuality—as natural as red hair or left-handedness—to be affirmed and rejoiced in, and that its expression in fully loving physical sexual embrace is well within the purpose and will of God.

There is particular pressure on those who believe that the Christian tradition has been right in saying that sexual intercourse is reserved for the one context of heterosexual marriage, for whereas an unmarried heterosexual person may yet entertain the hope of marriage and family—while

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perhaps gradually coming to accept the fact of their singleness—the homosexual person within this traditional Christian view has no such hope. She or he must start from the fact that her or his sexual orientation has traditionally been understood as a calling to celibacy, and the absence of a sexual partner is most likely to be a fact of life for ever.

This discussion must also be set in the context of rapidly changing attitudes in society, and also of changing attitudes within the church. Whereas thirty years ago the subject was taboo, it has now passed through the headlines of a liberation crusade to the point where social tolerance—and increasingly social acceptance—of homosexual people and practices is more taken for granted. Then, male homosexual genital acts were criminal offences; now, homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private is not subject to the criminal law. Then, the homosexual condition was often considered to be pathological in some sense. Now, there are a significant proportion of medical people and therapists of various schools who regard it as a natural and normal variant of human sexuality.

In recent years, the threat and spread of Aids has had its effects on social attitudes. In some people it has encouraged a deliberate rejection of a promiscuous lifestyle and a much more careful regulation of sexual life—whether heterosexual or homosexual. In others, for whom Aids has too often been seen as a ‘homosexual disease’ (which is by no means the whole truth), homophobic prejudices and fears have resurfaced in a backlash of rejection and legalism.

All these changes have been reflected in the flood of literature from Christian sources over recent years. There seem to be three main Christian viewpoints.

First, a *traditional* viewpoint: the homosexual condition is one mark of the fallenness of our human nature, and homosexual behaviour is in all cases sinful and wrong. This view has sometimes been coupled with an attitude of hostility towards homosexual people, as though they were wholly responsible for what has been regarded as a self-

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chosen perversion. A number of Christian writings (by David Field and Richard Lovelace, for example), have sought to uphold traditional morality, but without the note of censure or hostility which has marred some others, and with a constructive sense of Christian mission and ministry towards the unchurched homosexual person and community.

Secondly, there is a range of *mediating* positions, in which the objective wrongness of homosexual acts may be affirmed, but coupled with a belief nonetheless that since many homosexual people are not capable of a heterosexual response, an appropriate Christian morality for sexual life will allow that there are circumstances in which 'individuals may justifiably choose to enter into a homosexual relationship with the hope of enjoying a companionship and physical expression of love similar to that which is found in marriage'.<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, yet others have developed a theology which *affirms homosexual practice* between a committed and loving homosexual couple as wholly within the purpose and will of God, and that sexual acts between homosexual people should—if they are to be judged at all—be judged by exactly the same moral criteria as heterosexual acts in a committed heterosexual marriage relationship.

### ***Focus on behaviour***

At this point it is worth noting that much of the discussion has centred on the morality of homosexual acts. Many would wish to shift the discussion to centre on the needs and gifts of homosexual people within the Christian community. Some needs are sexual and relational. Others lie in the area of civil rights and social habits. Does the church have anything to say about the police harassment of some homosexual people, about the discrimination against homosexual people in the housing market, about unfair dismissal from employment on grounds of sexual orientation, or the lack of equal opportunities in finding

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<sup>1</sup> Church Information Office, *Homosexual Relationships*, 1979, paragraph 168

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work? Why does the church have this stress on sexual behaviour?

### ***Biblical background***

Part of the answer lies in the fact that wherever the Bible talks about homosexuality, its attention is focused on the wrongness of sexual activity between members of the same sex. At least, that has been the traditional interpretation of the Bible. Here, once more, the debate has opened up, and the question of the appropriate use of the Bible in such debates is important.

The specific texts usually taken to refer to homosexuality are the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 and Judges 19; the law of Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26ff; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. These are all discussed in much of the literature mentioned at the end of this chapter. There has, of course, been dispute about the interpretation of these verses, as we shall see, but the traditional understanding of St Paul—still adopted by many—is well expressed by Peter Coleman: ‘Taken together St Paul’s writings repudiate homosexual behaviour as a vice of the Gentiles in Romans, as a bar to the Kingdom in Corinthians, and as an offence to be repudiated by the moral law in 1 Timothy.’ Coleman notes that in taking this view, St Paul is conforming to the view of the Rabbis (presumably he had Leviticus in mind?), and also to Christ’s teaching limiting sexual activity to monogamous and permanent marriage. All these references, however, arise in parenthesis, and St Paul assumes that homosexual behaviour will have been abandoned at conversion if it had occurred before.

As we begin where the Bible does, we must endeavour not to lose the wider theological and social issues which the experience of homosexuality raises in contemporary society. For the reality is that the biblically based tradition of the church is under considerable challenge at the present time through the experiences of many homosexual Christian people for whom it seems unreal or inadequate.

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The traditional viewpoint was based on an interpretation of the Bible which rules out all homosexual acts as sinful. The contemporary views which challenge this do so in two different ways. The first way, seen in Sherwin Bailey's ground-breaking study *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, maintains that the traditional understanding of the Bible was wrong, and that there is no biblical warrant for regarding homosexual acts between exclusively 'invert' homosexual people as sinful. Bailey's exegesis has been challenged, and the majority of exegetes now accept the traditional interpretation: in those few cases where the Bible refers to homosexual behaviour it is without exception condemnatory. Bailey's approach has been followed to some extent by John Boswell in his influential *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality*, but despite many praiseworthy features of this wide-ranging book, his use of the Bible, like Bailey's has received severe criticism in the scholarly literature.<sup>2</sup>

The second challenge to the traditional approach says: even if the traditional interpretation of the Bible is right, this is not decisively relevant to the way we now make ethical decisions. Clearly the biblical material is culturally conditioned; the New Testament writers were children of their age. With our wider knowledge, we understand much more about human sexuality than they did—this is part of the promise that the Spirit would guide us into all truth—so we are not bound today by the narrow biblical view.

This second view is increasingly common, not least within the Gay Christian movement, but it is not a question about homosexuality as such; it is a question about the authority and the use of the Bible.

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See Richard Hays, 'Relations Natural and Unnatural—a Response to John Boswell's exegesis of Romans 1', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, volume 14, number 1, 1986

David F. Wright, 'Homosexuals or Prostitutes', *Vigiliae Christianae*, volume 38, number 2, 1984

J. Robert Wright, 'Boswell on Homosexuality: a Case Undemonstrated', in *Anglican Theological Review*, January 1984

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In reply, it may be argued that, of course, it is unsatisfactory to focus attention on isolated texts which proscribe certain sexual practices (like Leviticus 18:22). That can rightly be shown to be a highly selective sort of biblicism which is an irresponsible use of the text. However, we must not stop there and presume therefore that such texts have no relevance at all. We need to ask deeper theological questions than that. Why was it, in the cultures of those times, that such condemnation of homosexual activity was made? What theology of human sexuality; what meaning in sexual activity what concern for human well-being lay behind such texts—and what do we do with such theology today? That is our task in these next sections.

### ***Is homosexuality a natural alternative?***

As natural as red hair or left-handedness, the gay liberation literature is fond of saying. But what do we mean by 'natural'? To be sure, homosexual sex feels natural to someone of a homosexual inclination. But in Christian tradition the word 'natural' involves more than feelings. In Romans 1, St Paul relates 'nature' to his understanding of God as Creator. And as we saw in the previous chapter, the Christian understanding of creation gives us several markers for our understanding of sexuality.

The doctrine of creation affirms our personhood and rebukes unjust discrimination; it affirms relationships and friendships; it affirms body-life with all the dimensions of sexuality; it affirms male-female complementarity as reflecting something of the nature of God. From our discussion in the previous chapter on sexual complementarity, it is now clear why the church has understood same-sex relationships which exclude the 'other' as somehow problematic.

If human beings, so to speak, come in two sorts, and if there is a particular creativity in the complementary relationship between the sexes, then an exclusively committed same-sex relationship is effectively denying the 'otherness' of sexual complementarity. Perhaps this is part of the reason why St Paul chose homosexuality (with its concentration on

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the 'same') as an illustration of idolatry in the gentile world of Romans 1. The gentile world 'worshipped the creature' rather than relating to the mystery of God as Other than creature. God's judgment is seen in giving pagan society over to their choice of practices which also focus on the 'same'. By so doing they fail to express what male-female human sexuality was intended to express, the 'face to face' complementary intimacy of human beings in relation to one another, as a symbol of our human intimacy face to face with God.

From our further discussion of creativity, one other aspect of the divine image in us, and the fact that our human creativity finds one of its most profound expressions in the procreativity which is so much linked to the male-female relationships, it is also clear that whatever creativity may be present in homosexual relationships, this important capacity for procreativity is absent.

We can now begin to see why the doctrine of creation led the church to believe that homosexuality cannot simply be affirmed as 'natural'. In the story of Genesis 2, the 'not good' of the Creator that man should be alone is met by the provision of woman to complete and complement him. The male is made 'less than whole' by taking 'something from his side', and only becomes whole again through giving himself in creative love in relationships of heterosexual complementarity, which are most intimately expressed in the 'one flesh' of marriage. The consistent biblical witness is that marriage is the one 'natural' context for sexual relationships, and that all sexual relationships outside heterosexual marriage are disordered. Homosexuality is not simply something 'natural'. It is this view which underlies the Levitical codes which include the prohibition against homosexual intercourse.

From such a point of view, the homosexual preference has to be seen as one indication among many others that the whole of our human sexuality now shares in the disorders of our humanity in its fall from God's creation intention. In other words, all human sexuality in its heterosexual and

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homosexual forms is to some degree abnormal. Heterosexual marriage and the calling to celibacy are, however, ways of expressing our sexuality which are in the direction of God's creation pattern of sexual complementarity. Sexual preferences and behaviour outside marriage are in a direction away from that pattern.

*The approach of psychoanalytic theory*

Of course, words like 'disorder' and 'abnormality'—even 'handicap'—have been and can be used perjoratively. We need to make it clear that no question of moral blameworthiness is implied in describing the homosexual orientation as 'abnormal'. Though many within the Gay Movement dislike the approach of psychoanalytic theory to issues of homosexuality, there do seem to be some strands of thought from such developmental psychology which provide a fruitful link with Christian doctrine of creation.

Elizabeth Moberly, for example, suggests that the homosexual, whether male or female, has suffered from some unresolved deficit in the relationship with the parent of the same sex. This *maybe* due to ill treatment or neglect or absence, but it is very often not a question of parental culpability at all. This deficit implies that certain needs that are normally met through the growing child's attachment to the parent of the same sex remain unmet. Such needs are for love, dependency and identification. Dr Moberly also indicates that it is precisely these unmet needs that the homosexual attempts to meet through the medium of same-sex—i.e., homosexual—relationships. If she is right, then what we are speaking of are not abnormal needs but normal needs which have, abnormally, been left unmet in the ordinary process of growth.

We are not, from such a viewpoint, any more than from the Christian doctrine of creation, able to endorse the claim that homosexuality is in every way on a par with heterosexuality.

*Aetiologies*

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By no means all would share the psychoanalytic viewpoint, with its concentration on early learning experiences. Some would want to argue for a genetic basis to the homosexual orientation, or that the hormonal balance in the *foetus* in the womb is determinative of later sexual orientation. Others would dispute whether there is any biochemical factor at all, and discuss the entire aetiology in behavioural terms. Perhaps with so much unknown, we need to be willing to speak of 'aetiologies'—and perhaps of 'homosexualities'—rather than basing our entire moral and pastoral approach on one viewpoint.

Whichever view we take of the causes of homosexuality in a particular person (and we need to be very careful that we do not merely choose an approach to aetiology which seems to fit our moral views), we do well to avoid the dismissive labelling classification—'He is a homosexual'—as though the noun describes the whole of his person. The noun feeds the notion of an absolutely fixed and static view of human nature. The adjective (she has homosexual inclinations) allows for an affirmation of the person without necessarily affirming his or her homosexuality, and it allows for the dynamic possibilities of growth and change. This is not to say that change of orientation is common, let alone easy, nor that even change of attitude in coming to terms with one's homosexuality is straightforward. It is, however, avoiding shutting the door on hope of change, which is implied by the affirmation that homosexuality is 'natural'. It reminds us that human life and Christian pilgrimage are journeys in the grace of God with constant possibilities of change.

### ***Homosexual people in the Christian fellowship***

As we have already seen, some Christian homosexual people challenge the traditional approach to homosexual relationships. Some have chosen to meet their personal needs for love, friendship, identity, growth and acceptance—needs which we all have—by entering a loving committed sexual relationship with another person of the same sex.

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As will by now be clear, I find myself unable to see how the affirmation of homosexual relationships as morally equivalent to heterosexual relationships can be consistent with biblical guidelines. Everywhere the Bible refers to homosexuality (which admittedly is not often), it does so in a negative light. Everywhere the Bible affirms sexual intercourse as an expression of the 'one flesh' communion of persons, it does so within the context of heterosexual marriage. It seems unambiguously clear that to the biblical writers, homosexual genital intercourse is wrong.

In the previous chapter, we noted the three purposes for human sexuality as pleasure, mutuality and creativity. We saw the way the Christian tradition has encouraged expression of these in marriage and in celibacy. And, drawing on the writing of Lewis Smedes, we set out three biblical guidelines for sexual behaviour, in terms of personal wholeness, personal communion and heterosexual commitment. In the light of these, it is clear that sexual relationships between people of the same sex are out of line with this Christian tradition. What we have to face, however, is that the experiences of many homosexual Christian people are calling this tradition in question, and asking the church to consider whether—as with slavery in the last century—we need now to reconsider whether the tradition has been wrong.

The predicament which the Christian homosexual person faces is this: that of knowing himself or herself, through early learning experience or in other ways, to have inherited a disposition, the full expression of which in the way which feels natural is not compatible with the traditional understanding of biblical norms of sexual behaviour.

Many such Christians see themselves as in a similar situation to others whose background has left them with emotional or relational needs, and with behaviour tendencies which are incompatible with the revealed will of God. And in one way or another that includes all of us. Some have found that the healing power of Christ, particularly through the ministry of 'healing of memories',

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has set them free from a homosexual lifestyle in a liberating way. Some Christian agencies, such as True Freedom Trust, offer such support.

Others have tried through prayer to find the same healing, but without apparent success. Some accept their situation as a calling to a life of celibacy—some with joy, others with much pain and reluctance.

Increasing numbers of other Christians, however, are regarding their experience of same-sex love as posing a challenge to the Christian tradition—and calling for a radical reappraisal of Christian attitudes to homosexuality. Many want to affirm their homosexuality as God-given and good, part of the rich spectrum of diversity within God's creation. They believe that sexual relationships within the bounds of tenderness and fidelity are appropriate for Christians, and increasing numbers of male and female same-sex couples are finding what they describe as the blessing of God on their relationships.

Some homosexual people regard the traditional understanding of a homosexual orientation as a calling to celibacy unrealistic. But this seems to be based on the false view that everyone *has to have* a sexual relationship with somebody. By contrast, the Christian tradition in general and the example of Christ in particular show how sexual abstinence is not only possible, but often enriching.

Such an affirmation of gay sexual relationships does not seem to me to be congruous with the theology of sexuality which we elaborated earlier. But we need to be clear whether or not this is an issue on which the Christian church must divide, or whether we can give each other freedom of conscience in our different understandings of the will of God. Even if we cannot endorse a homosexual lifestyle, can we live in a church with those who do?

Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged—as Jack Dominian does in *Sexual Integrity*—that a committed and faithful gay partnership is far to be preferred, especially in this age of Aids, to a life of homosexual promiscuity. Indeed, he

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suggests that the encouragement of such gay partnerships, which he seems to suggest could then move towards sexual abstinence, is the answer to Aids for the gay world.

In 1979, I was asked by Latimer House to write *Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship* as a contribution to the current debates in the Church of England. My primary focus was on the understanding of the Bible and the moral questions relating to sexual behaviour between gay people. I still hold to the views I took then concerning the interpretation of the Bible and the moral framework within which pastoral ethics belongs, although there are, no doubt, many places where I would now express myself differently. I would, though, want to expand the links between moral theology and pastoral practice more clearly and sensitively than I did then. In particular I would wish to give greater prominence to two minor themes in that book which I would now want to stress more strongly.

First, I then suggested that although sexual relationships between gay people are alike morally wrong, not all alike are morally blameworthy. I would now wish to develop this in terms of a person's spiritual pilgrimage or journey towards wholeness in Christ. While still holding to the view that homosexual intercourse falls short of the will of God for human sexuality, I do not believe that we should see the expression of an adult loving commitment, or of an adolescent sexual adventure, or of a transient relationship entered into at a time of particular emotional need, as morally identical with a life of homosexual promiscuity. We cannot simply bring all gay relationships together under one dismissive heading. Pastoral responses to each will be different, in the light of God's purposes for human sexuality and in the light of the place that each particular person has reached on their journey towards wholeness in Christ.

The second minor theme I would now underline more strongly is this.

I then wrote:

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*Although we have described the homosexual condition as 'learned', it is usually acquired involuntarily, and a recognition of this fact should provoke sympathetic and caring responses rather than moralistic abhorrence or legalistic coercion. We are not at liberty to urge the Christian homosexual to celibacy and to a spreading of his relationships, unless support for the former, and opportunities for the latter, are available in genuine love.<sup>3</sup>*

Sadly, the first word the homosexual person usually seems to hear from the Christian church is one of moral rebuke. The picture of God reflected in such a response is of the Creator of moral boundaries and the Judge of sinful aberrations. And of course at many stages in our Christian pilgrimage we all need to make responsible choices for our lives in the light of the Creator's will and his judgment, to ask his forgiveness for our sins, and seek his grace for a change in our lifestyle. But what many of us need to hear first and foremost—especially those of us struggling with emotional needs, with relational starvation, with sexual guilt or sexual temptation, or simply with confusion concerning our identity or role, is that God is loving, caring, understanding and accepting. To begin with 'sin' may be to add guilt to guilt, isolation to isolation, and rejection to rejection. To begin with 'love' may be to provide a context of personal relationship within the safety of which change can be contemplated forgiveness can be received, and growth towards wholeness in Christ can be furthered. It is often only when we have learned what love means through the experience of sharing in the love of a supportive community that we are able to sort out the changes of lifestyle which the demands of love require.

With that, and our earlier discussion, in mind, the following pointers are suggested in clarifying our attitudes, personal and pastoral, towards homosexual people:

☒ The homosexual person is my neighbour; the homosexual minority and the heterosexual majority in the

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<sup>3</sup> David Atkinson, *Homosexuals in the Christian Fellowship*, Latimer House, 1979, page 118

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Christian fellowship both need to work at the question of how neighbour love is appropriately to be shown by each to the other.

☒ A recovery of the faith that the gospel of grace is a powerful resource for human living is essential both for those who feel trapped in bondage to an unchosen condition and to those who are trapped in an irrational fear of those whose sexual preferences they do not understand. The love of God casts out fear; the power of God releases from bondage. The ministry of 'healing of memories' is bringing to some a recovery of the experience of the power of the gospel in these areas of need and difficulty.

However, as Elizabeth Moberly has noted:

*The homosexual condition implies both a state of incompleteness and a drive towards completion. The suppression of the homosexual response is not to be equated with the elimination of the needs involved in homosexuality. A non-practising homosexual is still a homosexual in whom there are certain deficits and unmet needs. For this reason the mere suppression of homosexual acts cannot be equated with healing. Eroticization may be unacceptable, but the problem of deficits in growth remains, and it is only the meeting of these needs that may justifiably be regarded as healing.*

This is the need we all have for a supportive community of Christian love.

☒ If we are right in saying that movement towards healing is not appropriately expressed through a genital sexual relationship with a person of the same sex, how can it be expressed? What avenues are there for the celebration of a celibate person's sexuality, without genital expression? At this point we need to re-emphasize the value of friendship between people of the same and of the opposite sex, and the fact that the Christian fellowship can and should be a place in which, by mutual ministry, in mutual acceptance and love, and through desire for mutual progress towards maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-16), each can be used by

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God to meet the needs of others—and this includes emotional and relational as well as material needs. If genital intimacy is not appropriate, there must be adequate substitutes, and within the love and security of the Christian fellowship other opportunities for intimacy should be available. If they are not, they should be made so.

☒ A distinction between sin and temptation would help many homosexual people rid themselves of a burden of needless guilt. They should be encouraged to refuse to accept a burden of guilt for an orientation which they have not chosen and for which they are not responsible.

☒ We need also to recover a sense of the pilgrimage of Christian faith. This may enable us to live with the view that certain patterns of behaviour, though not in themselves God's will, are a least detrimental option—or a morally best choice at a particular stage in a person's pilgrimage—in a flawed situation. We need to avoid regarding all homosexual behaviour as morally equivalent. Promiscuity is one thing, a committed sexual relationship is another. Both are different from uncertain sexual explorations at a particular stage in a person's pilgrimage of faith and self-discovery, in their journey towards wholeness.

☒ The existence of Gay churches stands as a rebuke to the lack of love and friendship in many of the mainline churches towards homosexual people. As we noted earlier, we are only at liberty to encourage homosexual people to see their orientation as most likely a calling to celibacy, and encourage them to spread their relationships with their brothers and sisters in Christ, if support for the former and opportunities for the latter are available in genuine love. Where such support and such opportunities are not available, the homosexual person has then to choose an optimum morality within a difficult situation. It ill behoves an unloving heterosexual community to stand in judgment on a homosexual person in such circumstances for choosing a loving sexual partnership within which to express, as well as he may, something of the love of

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Christ—however objectively wrong such a liaison may be considered to be.

There is still much for the wider church to repent of, to learn from and to offer in ministry to the homosexual person and the homosexual community.

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## The future of the family

### *Threats to the family*

A common conviction, at least in the USA and the UK, is that 'the family' is under threat. There is less agreement, however, when it is asked why this is so, what external or internal factors may pose a threat to the family, and especially whether the predicament which the family is thought to exhibit is a good or bad thing.

In his Reith Lectures of 1968 Sir Edmund Leach spoke disparagingly of 'the family with its narrow privacy and tawdry secrets'. Radical psychiatrists like R. D. Laing and David Cooper have written about 'the death of the family', arguing that the whole concept of family militates against the independence and therefore the emotional and mental well-being of the individual. Some writers in the tradition of Marx and Engels see the family as a barometer of the class struggle, and their prescription for a classless future requires the eventual demise of the family. Some radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone have argued that the family destructively perpetuates what Betty Frieden in *The Feminine Mystique* called 'the cult of domesticity'. For such writers the threat to the family is seen as a positive good, an affirmation of the autonomy of the individual, a step towards the essential restructuring of society to allow more satisfactory social patterns to develop.

By contrast, *Family Portraits*, published by the Social Affairs Unit in 1986 (edited by Digby Anderson and Graham Dawson), outlined threats to the 'normal' family, described as the family of husband, wife and their children, the parents intending to stay together, the husband being the principal if not the only, breadwinner. These authors argue that there are increasingly pressures (from feminist ideology, from some legislative changes, from patterns of

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sex education, and so on) which undermine the stability of family life. This viewpoint, most strongly advocated by the conservative right, came to prominence on the political scene in the 1970s, primarily as a reaction against the 'wild detours' of the 1960s. It takes its stand on the positive values of the 'traditional family'. The family is in danger because of decadence. The positive stress on the family is usually coupled with a negative stress against pornography, abortion, homosexuality and feminism.

The ideological debate about the family came to a focus in the USA in 1980 in the White House Conference on Families. The purpose of the conference was to clarify national policy on family-related issues; the result was a growing scepticism as to whether a unified policy was possible.

Alongside the ideological war over the family between the radicals and the traditionalists, there is a third interest group: 'the professionals'. In *War over the Family*, Brigitte and Peter Berger write of a built-in tension between belief in the sacrosanct nature of the family and the claims of professional expertise. The increase in helping professions, such as social work, and the increasing incompetence of families to deal with some of the needs of dependent members leads, according to the Bergers, to 'the disenfranchisement of families by professionals in alliance with government bureaucrats'.<sup>1</sup>

These three diverse groups with interest in the future of the family agree in one respect: the family is under threat.

Concern for the future of the family is by no means a Western phenomenon, however. In Western industrialised societies, the change from extended family patterns to nuclear families has taken place over time. The relocating of certain economic, educational and problem-solving functions away from extended kinship groups and on to the wider political and social community has not all happened

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<sup>1</sup> Brigitte and Peter Berger, *The War over the Family*, Harmondsworth, 1983, page 45

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at once. In some other parts of the world (parts of Africa, for example, and in the Far East) the change from rural living, with a subsistence economy, to urbanization and a cash economy has been extremely rapid. Coupled with a massive population growth, the move into the towns, especially by husbands, has left rural populations of women, children and elderly people without adequate supports. Western-style nuclear families, based on privacy and materialism, are being established in towns—with very high expectations and consequently high disappointments. Sometimes a husband will take a ‘town wife’ and start a new family as well as having a ‘rural wife’ in the country. The divide between rich and poor, especially in a country such as Kenya, is growing fast. The breakdown of extended family life is causing social and economic problems on a scale in places too large to be coped with. The loss of the social and emotional resources provided by a context in which marriage was not a private matter of individual choice and romantic attachment, but was a link between not only individuals but also their wider kinship groups, has in some places yet to find adequate compensation.

In many parts of the world, therefore, there is concern for the future of the family. But what *is* the family?

### ***What is ‘family’?***

In many of the debates between differing ideologies and professional groups, the assumption is made that ‘family’ means what has become known as the ‘nuclear family’—the normal family’ of *Family Portraits*—comprising working husband, wife at home and two children. However, the proportion of the population who actually live in such families is and always has been astonishingly low. In *The Third Wave*, Alvin Toffler suggests that only seven per cent of the population of the USA still live in this type of family. He goes on:

*Even if we broaden our definition to include families in which both spouses work, or in which there are fewer or more than two children, we find the vast majority—as many*

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as two-thirds to three-quarters of the population—living outside the nuclear situation.<sup>2</sup>

In fact the concept of the 'family' is used in a very wide-ranging and fluid way. This can be illustrated by selecting three commonly assumed features of family life: marriage, parenthood and residence, and noting the wide range of possible combinations. Only where all three are together do we have the complete nuclear family. Where two of the three are present, we may have families dispersed through children leaving home or through separation of spouses (marriage + parenthood); childless couples (marriage + residence); a couple living together with a child or an unmarried parent with a child (parenthood + residence). Where only one of the three is present, we may have a separated childless couple ('marriage' in name only); an illegitimate child adopted or otherwise separated from its biological parents (parenthood only); or a couple 'living together' but unmarried (residence only).

There is debate about the meaning of 'marriage', particularly with the increasing number of homosexual liaisons; there is debate about the nature of parenthood, particularly with the recent work on *in vitro* fertilization, embryo transfer and surrogacy; there is no clarity about the meaning of family residence—lodgers, friends, older relations may share the family home, while children may be far away.

Clearly there is ambiguity in the use of the concept 'family'. Clearly also, other family forms are developing and anti-family patterns of living are increasingly canvassed.

A rapidly growing proportion of the adult population of the Western world chooses to live alone. Many do so while they are 'in between' marriages. A quarter of all first marriage partners in the UK live together before marriage. More couples are choosing to be 'child-free' for the sake of their personal independence and career needs. There are more than one million one-parent families in Britain—a proportion which has grown considerably with the rise in

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<sup>2</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave*, London, 1980, pages 208–209

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the divorce rate in the past decade or so. The proportion of remarriages has increased over the last twenty years from fourteen to thirty-five per cent of all marriages. Over thirty per cent of all British babies are born outside marriage. In some areas in the USA one in four children is brought up by a single parent.

The social, ethical and legal questions raised by these shifting patterns are complex. Some, for example the legal questions of kinship and inheritance being posed by some of the possibilities of reproductive medicine—AID (Artificial Insemination by Donor), embryo transfer, surrogacy—are only now being asked: What will the future bring?

The sociologist Jessie Bernard wrote as long ago as 1972:

*Not only does marriage have a future, it has many futures. There will be, for example, options that permit different kinds of relationships over time for different stages in life, and options that permit different life styles or living arrangements according to the nature of the relationships. There may be, up to about age twenty-five, options for childless liaisons; for years of maturity, stable or at least 'temporarily permanent' marriages involving child-rearing; for middle age and beyond, new forms of relationship, perhaps even polygynous ones. People will be able to tailor their relationships to their circumstances and preferences. The most characteristic aspect of marriage in the future will be precisely the array of options available to different people who want different things from their relationships with one another.<sup>3</sup>*

Given this diversity, we need to come back again to the question, 'What is a family?' It is clear that the assumption that 'family' means 'nuclear family' is not well founded. Furthermore, the nuclear family pattern is a long way from the family patterns in other cultures and in other generations. Indeed, prior to the seventeenth century, it appears that *none* of the meanings attached to the word

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<sup>3</sup> Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Marriage*, Harmondsworth, 1972, pages 281–82

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‘family’ had the connotations so common today, of a small group of immediate kin sharing a dwelling.

The Roman *familia* was a household, the members of which were the servants (*familus*—servant) of the head of the household, the *paterfamilias*. It was not a kinship group. This was a common usage of ‘family’ in pre-nineteenth century England. Alternative uses indicated a widely dispersed group of relatives, loosely linked by blood kinship, but not necessarily part of one household. As Edmund Leach notes in *Social Anthropology*, most English people now use the word in several different senses. ‘With all this variety it becomes almost a truism to say that families exist in all kinds of human society. But it is a statement that is quite devoid of interest.’<sup>4</sup> As many sociologists argue, it is difficult to avoid having some sort of family structure as the basis of child-rearing and the regulation of sexual relationships even if we wanted to.<sup>5</sup>

The issue for Christian moral theology is not whether the family will continue, but what sort of families *should* exist, and what assumptions, values and resources are needed to sustain them. These are the basic theological questions to which we must shortly give our attention.

### ***A Christian theology of family***

The modern Christian church has responded to the changing patterns of family life in a variety of ways. There has, for example, been a flood of popular literature calling the church not to give way to current permissiveness and calling Christian homes ‘back’ to the pattern of white middle-class American traditional nuclear family life. Other Christian writings have been more careful. The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*, said that ‘the well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life.’ It agreed that ‘the family is, in a sense, a school for human enrichment’ and said that ‘Christians ... should

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<sup>4</sup> Edmund Leach, *Social Anthropology*, Oxford, 1982, page 182

<sup>5</sup> For example, C. C. Harris, *The Family*, London, 1969, pages 87–88

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actively strive to promote the values of marriage and the family.' It gives some discussion of the meaning of marriage, but comparatively little on what is meant by 'the value of the family'. The Church of England Report to the Archbishop of Canterbury before the 1958 Lambeth Conference, published as *The Family in Contemporary Society*, and G. R. Dunstan's book, *The Family is Not Broken* (1962), were both serious theological discussions. It is striking, however, that the majority of Christian ethical texts which discuss family issues concentrate on marriage and divorce, and do not develop a very full theology of family at all.

What, therefore, we shall seek to do in what follows is produce some suitable theological models for discussing the family. For it is only when our understanding of that is securely based that the Christian church will then be able to speak meaningfully and helpfully on the escalating departures from the norm that are now occurring.

First, however, what we say about the family must be placed in the wider context of what we are prepared to say about the church as a whole.

### *The wider context*

This can perhaps best be introduced by noting the way in which biblical allusions to the family more often than not refer to the extended family.

In the Old Testament, for example, we find a very broad conception of 'family'. Hebrew has no word for the small social unit we call family. The concept covered by *mishpachah* is a fluid one, stretching from the smallest kinship group to the clan, tribal unit, and even the nation. *Bayit* carries the meaning both of 'dwelling-place' and of 'household'. The family concept refers sometimes to the communal lot of those who dwell under one roof, and sometimes also the biological link between generations: the heirs and descendants who are under obligation to one another for mutual support and protection. Noah's family includes his wife and sons and sons' wives (Genesis 7:1, 7);

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Jacob's family runs to three generations (Genesis 46:8–9). The family in ancient Israel included the servants, resident aliens, widows, orphans and all who lived under the protection of the head of the family who was male. The members of the family had an obligation to help and to protect each other, seen most vividly in the *go'el* obligations in the desert communities to engage in blood vengeance to protect vulnerable members against unjust oppression. These early families were self-sufficient economically. By the eighth century, however, some things had changed. The transition to a more settled life, and the rise in material welfare, meant that the family was no longer self-sufficient. There was more division of labour. Some judicial functions passed from the fathers to the elders of the town. The duty of mutual help was too often ignored: the prophets had to plead on behalf of the widows and orphans. Blood vengeance was severely curtailed by law. Family solidarity grew weaker.

It remains true, though, that by and large throughout the Old Testament, the family is never an isolated institution. To be part of a family is to be part of the covenant community with a share of the land inheritance and with a commitment to pass on to the next generation the knowledge and worship of God. The usual family pattern is the extended family of three generations. Although the narrator of Genesis 2:24 mentions that a man *leaves* father and mother to cleave to his wife, the new family unit was geographically close at hand. The Old Testament family is part of a religious, moral, social and economic context which gives it its point, its values and its resources. As with the extended families in pre-industrial Britain and in much more recent Kenya, family strength derived from mutual obligation, family honour and mutual protection.

As in the Old Testament, so in the New, the family concept is a broad and fluid one. *Oikos* meaning house, including 'dwelling together', and *patria* meaning 'lineage' are both used. They come together as synonyms in Luke 2:4 'the house and lineage of David'.

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As we glance through the New Testament, we find references to households with masters and servants (for example, in some of the parables). We find Simon and Andrew living together with Simon's mother-in-law. We read of the household of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, but no mention of children. We find whole households coming to faith together in the book of Acts (the centurion and *his* household in 10:2; Lydia and *her* household in 16:15). In the Pastoral Epistles we read both of those men who aspire to be bishops and of younger widowed women who marry that they must 'rule' their households. The household codes of Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 seem to focus attention on the nuclear family of husband and wife, parents and children, but obligation to wider kinship groups are stressed in Jesus's discussion with the Pharisees in Mark 7:9ff and in 1 Timothy 5:8, 16. There seems to be a variety of patterns of family life, and of authority structures within households.

There are three inferences to be drawn from this. The first is that we need to be careful not to draw specific structures of family life from selected parts of the Bible. Some Christians have sought, for example, to find social and economic norms for today's society from the social patterns of ancient Israel. This seems not to take seriously enough the discontinuities between the Old Testament and the New (particularly the fact that the people of God are no longer defined in national terms, and that the significance of the land as the setting for social cohesion has been superseded by the 'fellowship'), nor the extent to which some of the institutional aspects of the Old Testament life are fulfilled and made obsolete in Christ.

The second is that biblical allusions to extended family life explain how family language could come to be used for the church as a whole, without thereby implying either that the modern Western nuclear family is an absolute commitment or that it is the only way of fulfilling one's vocation under God.

Thus Jesus's treatment of his family in Mark 3:31–5 and his remark about hating father and mother (Luke 14:26) leave

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one in no doubt that he always required family commitments to be properly subordinate to a higher commitment. As these passages are sometimes read as an attack on the family, it is important to note that Jesus continues to use family language for this more fundamental commitment. 'Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.' In speaking of 'hating' father and mother, Jesus in fact merely illustrates the common Hebrew resort to contrast where we might more naturally speak of priorities; compare, for example, Genesis 29:30–31 and Deuteronomy 21:15–17. Again the Marcan passage should not be taken as an attack on his mother, but simply as a reminder that there are times when natural ties are to be transcended. Indeed, when all this is combined with his central use of *abba*, it cannot be sustained that Jesus was in any sense attacking the family. Rather he at once endorses its imagery and at the same time insists that the implications of that imagery be extended by his disciples to all fellow-members of his kingdom and ultimately to all people. In so doing he continues a process which had already begun in the Old Testament. There one finds numerous references to fellow-nationals as 'brothers' (for example, Exodus 2:11; Leviticus 10:6; Deuteronomy 15:3; Jeremiah 34:14), and indeed it is to this notion that Paul appeals in Ephesians 3:14–15 with his pun on *Pater* (father) and *patria* (tribe or family). What Jesus does is simply take it one stage further. All human beings are now part of the one family under God the Father, and it is this fact which legitimates modern talk of the church as the family of God, not simply endorsement of the nuclear family as the norm.

Third, Old and New Testament usage means that those who do not conform to the nuclear norm, such as widows, single adults or the divorced, can none the less just as easily be seen as part of such an extended family. So in using family language of the church, what is being stressed is the intimate social bonds of interdependence which exist between us in the Body of Christ under God our one Father, not any suggestion that those who fail to conform to the nuclear norm are somehow inappropriately regarded as

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part of the family of the church. Indeed, the New Testament insists that marriage and family life are something to be chosen as a call or vocation, not the only path, since both in the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 19:10–12) and in Paul (1 Corinthians 7, especially verse 32) celibacy is placed alongside marriage as an equally legitimate option. However, three qualifications need to be added. First, if for much of the church's past the danger has been that celibacy was exalted too highly, and marriage sometimes seen only at best as an inferior good, a present danger is that we may fail to take celibacy seriously as an option at all, and so also distort our view of marriage as a vocation in the process. But second, the New Testament never recognizes a vocation to individualism and singleness *per se*. Both Jesus and Paul mention some further objective. Social outreach and interdependence thus continue to be stressed, which is one reason why family language continues to be equally apposite for those whose vocation is celibacy. Third, there is one clear and obvious sense in which the family must remain the primary category to which other conceptions of our relation to the social will remain subordinate. This is because our growth and development as children, whatever our present status, will have come through a family model, or something closely analogous to it.

To the consideration of that norm we therefore now turn.

*Getting our models right*

J. D. Zizioulas opens his book, *Being as Communion*, by saying that the church is not simply an institution. She is a 'way of being'.<sup>6</sup> The same should be said of the family. The family, we argue, is a way of being which derives its meaning from the being of God. Our approach to the meaning of family begins by exploring our understanding of the nature of God 'the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named' (Ephesians 3:14–15). While we necessarily bring our own understanding of 'fatherhood' to the biblical text we also—and more importantly—need to allow the text to tell us what it means by the Fatherhood,

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<sup>6</sup>J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, London, 1985

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or Parenthood of God and then ask what that implies for our understanding of the nature of human family life.

☒ **Fatherhood and intimacy**

The most common mode of reference to God used by Jesus Christ in the Gospels is 'Father'. This description of God has few Old Testament antecedents. There are some comparisons between God and earthly fathers (for example, Psalm 103:13; Proverbs 3:12; compare Deuteronomy 1:31; 8:5). But other references are few. When they occur, they refer primarily to the relationship of God to the whole people of Israel (compare Deuteronomy 32:6; Isaiah 63:16; Jeremiah 31:9)

In Palestinian Judaism the description of God as Father is rare.

In the New Testament, by contrast, the concept takes on a new importance and a new intimacy. Here, primarily and supremely, the Fatherhood of God is seen in the relationship between God and one man, Jesus Christ. He is the 'only begotten of the Father'. It is in relationship to him that Christian believers are 'adopted as sons' (Galatians 4:5; compare Romans 8:15) into the family of God. The epistles constantly refer to members of Christian communities as 'brothers' and 'sisters'.

In the patriarchal societies of the ancient world, the father figure is endowed with two primary characteristics: authority and the responsibility of protecting other members of the family. While these characteristics are true of God, the most significant characteristic of the 'family' of Father and Son is personal intimacy in relationship. This intimacy is seen clearly in the prayer recorded in John 17. It is seen, too, in the invocation 'Abba' by which Jesus addresses God (see Mark 14:36; see also the use that is made of it in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6). Such fatherly love and personal intimacy can also be experienced within the Christian community: those who 'with all the saints' comprehend something of the length and height and depth

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of the love of God made known in Christ (Ephesians 3:17–18).

It is this relationship within the Godhead which lies behind one traditional Christian interpretation of the Genesis text: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’ (Genesis 1:26f). The relationship between the sexes derives from and is intended to reflect something of the nature of ‘being as communion’ in the nature of God.

Here is our starting-point for a theology of family. Family is not merely a social arrangement, a conventional institution for the sake of exercising certain functions. Family is a ‘way of being’ in this world: a way of being which is essentially communal and personal because that is the way God is. The central focus of the Bible’s view of family is not on the institution, but on the personal relationships within it of child to parent, of wife to husband, of all to God.

In *Marriage and Permanence* O’Donovan writes that ‘the only answer to the question “Why marriage?” is that God has made it so’.<sup>7</sup> He acknowledges the controversial nature of this answer, but puts it in that form to express the Christian conviction that marriage is a ‘natural institution’ in the sense that no one invented it, and no one can abolish it: it is simply part of the way things are in the created world as Christians claim to discern them in the light of divine revelation. This claim would certainly seem consistent with the Genesis affirmation made by the narrator in 2:24: ‘For this reason a man shall leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This text forms the basis of Jesus’s reply to the Pharisees concerning the permissibility of divorce, and it is linked there with the text from Genesis 1: ‘From the beginning ... God made them male and female.’ The same text underlies Paul’s caution to the Corinthian church about their supposition that they could separate out their sexual behaviour from their spiritual commitment. Even consorting with a prostitute, he

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<sup>7</sup> O. M. T. O’Donovan, *Marriage and Permanence*, Bramcote, 1978

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argues, is engaging in an activity whereby the two 'become one' (1 Corinthians 6:16). Further, the Genesis text is the basis for the exposition of the mystery of Christ's relationship with his church discussed in Ephesians 5. There is, in other words, something primary about male/female diversity and complementarity which requires us to see that (in the mind of the Genesis author and his New Testament expositors) the marriage of a man and wife corresponds to the 'way we are' as human beings in the image of God.

The committed personal communion of man and wife, symbolized by and deepened through sexual union, is described by the biblical authors in the phrase 'one flesh'. This is not primarily a physical concept, though it includes the physical. It is a pointer to the depth of intimacy within the complementarity of male and female diversity which reflects something of the image of God. This is why an exclusive, committed permanent heterosexual love relationship is so seriously taken as normative. The seventh Commandment ('Thou shalt not break the one flesh'), like all the Commandments, reflects something of the character of God, and underlines the seriousness with which marriage is regarded. It is to uphold the 'one flesh' of marriage that the Christian church has always taken a negative attitude towards divorce, polygamy, serial marriage and any sexual relationship outside marriage.

There are good psychological reasons undergirding such a view. As J. Dominian argues, marriage can provide a context for personal healing, sustenance and growth, but only if it is a context of reliability and consistency.<sup>8</sup> To make and keep a commitment to another person 'for better or worse' is not only to offer the other a means of grace by which they may grow, but also reflects something of the character of God's love (see Ephesians 5:21ff).

As we noted earlier, however, the vocation to singleness affirmed in the New Testament requires us to see marriage as also a vocation rather than an obligation. And this means that, important and 'natural' as marriage is, we need also to

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<sup>8</sup> Jack Dominian, *Marriage, Faith and Love*, London, 1981

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affirm that there are other ways of 'being as communion' (singles households, for example, and a range of same-sex and opposite-sex friendships) which can also provide contexts of intimacy which express something of the divine image.

If the husband/wife relationship is one sphere of intimacy, the relation of parents to children can be another. Undoubtedly the family can also be the learning-ground of selfishness, hatred and discord, but—for all its difficulties—it can also, given the right resources, be a 'facilitating environment' for learning how to love. The removal of many of the economic and social functions of extended families has, it has often been pointed out, deprived the family of much of its cohesion, but conversely it has also opened up the way for family members to give more attention to their relationship with one another in the shared tasks of living.

### ☒ **Motherly Fatherhood**

Although the concept 'Father' predominates the New Testament disclosure of the personal nature of God, it is by no means an exclusively 'male' picture. No doubt in the patriarchal context of the times this was the most appropriate language to use. Yet the motherly side to God is not hidden. Just as God-likeness is seen in the cohumanity of male and female (Genesis 1:27), so in the nature of God there are motherly as well as fatherly attributes. Moltmann uses the phrase 'Motherly Fatherhood', and we can give substance to this by recalling the Psalmist's pictures of God as a mother bird (Psalm 17:8), a midwife (Psalm 22:9), a mistress as well as a master (Psalm 123:2). Deutero-Isaiah pictures God weaning the infant (Isaiah 49:15): 'Can a woman forget her sucking child ...? I will not forget you.' Isaiah 66:13 reads: 'As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you'. Hosea depicts God with a tenderness usually associated with motherhood: 'Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk' (Hosea 11:3). The male begetting and female bringing to birth are both pictures used of God in Deuteronomy 32:18,

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‘You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.’

The New Testament pictures the process of new birth into Christ as involving ‘imperishable seed’ and ‘pure spiritual milk’ (1 Peter 1:23; 2:2). Jesus himself illustrates the maternal tenderness of God in his cry over Jerusalem: ‘How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings’ (Matthew 23:37). Christ embodies in himself the ‘Wisdom’ of God (1 Corinthians 1:30) which in Old Testament Wisdom literature is described as ‘She’ (Proverbs 8:1).

Our understanding of fatherhood and motherhood within the human family is to be drawn from the way God is fatherly and motherly to his Son and to his adopted sons and daughters.

☒ **Creativity in love**

The concept of God as creator underlies the whole of the Bible. The concepts of God as Father and Mother bring to the notion of creation a sense of personal intimacy and warmth of love. The Fatherhood of God is frequently linked to his creativity: the begetting of his Son, in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5; the bringing to birth of the believer in the Johannine literature (John 3:7; 8:23; compare 1:12).

The prologue of John, in particular, discusses the creativity of God by echoing the creation narrative of Genesis 1: ‘In the beginning ...’. Speaking of the divine Logos we are then told, ‘All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made ... to all who received him he gave the power to become children of God.’

The recreative power of God is described by John as a work of love: ‘God so loved ... that he gave’ (John 3:16); and the relationship of Christ to his church symbolizes the sort of love a husband should bestow on his wife (Ephesians 5:21f).

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Putting these texts together we have a picture of the Lord through whom all things were made being the Lord who loves his church as a bride. Human marriage and human creativity are to be patterned on this relationship of God through Christ with his people. In him, and therefore in human marriage, love and creativity belong together. 'Procreation' of course, means to be creative on behalf of another—in this case Him who is Love Himself.

Married love is to be creative. Of course not every marriage can be procreative and we need to be on our guard against suggesting that all childless couples are necessarily defective. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that requests for artificial insemination by donor (AID) and *in vitro* fertilization are sometimes caused by socially generated feelings of inadequacy. The person perceives themselves stigmatized, as not fully a man or woman because of their inability to have children. In the face of such pressures it becomes an urgent task for the church to insist that there are equally valid alternative ways of being creative in the divine image. At the same time it must guard against the opposite error of supposing that the presence of children is an optional extra for all marriages, and that their absence does not in turn generate the need to be creative and outgoing in some other direction. Usually, however, marriage involves parenthood, and it is because love and creativity belong together in God that the church has taught that the relational and procreative dimensions to human marriage should not be separated.

This is also a further implication of the phrase we have discussed already: 'one flesh'. In its use in Genesis 2:24, the thought is probably the coming back together again of the complete personal union which was in some way separated in the divine anaesthesia which God caused to fall on Adam. As von Rad puts it, here is an explanation for the powerful drive of the sexes to come together.

*Whence comes this love 'strong as death' and stronger than the tie to one's parents, whence this inner clinging to each other, this drive towards each other which does not rest*

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*until it becomes again one flesh in the child? It comes from the fact that God took woman from man, that they actually were originally one flesh.*<sup>9</sup>

‘One flesh’ thus points to the relational and procreative aspects of the personal and sexual union which is marriage.

Such a framework makes readily intelligible the continuing resistance of some Catholics to the severing of love and procreation through the use of contraceptive measures. Their fellow Christians respond by saying that, though love and creativity do belong together, this does not mean that each sexual act must be open to the transmission of life. But the continuing relevance of the principle is shown by their resistance in turn to such practice as AID and the use of *in vitro* fertilization outside the context of married love.

At least this shows that disagreement is about the application of a shared principle, not about principles themselves.

☒ **Authority for freedom, protection for growth, revelation for understanding**

There are three features of Jesus’s use of the concept of fatherhood, as described in the Gospels, which further illuminate the nature of parenthood. The first is *authority for freedom*.

Reference is often made to ‘the will of my Father’ (see Matthew 7:21; 12:50) as the decisive direction for what is good. The authority of the divine Father relativizes human parental authority, as can be seen in the striking statement in Matthew 23:9, ‘call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.’ But the authority of the divine Father also gives a pattern for the authority of human parents who, according to St Paul, are to bring their children up in such training and admonition as Christ himself would give (Ephesians 6:4). Parental authority is for the well-being of the children. This is the pattern which the Fourth Gospel illustrates. In John 7:17 we are told, ‘if any man’s will is to

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<sup>9</sup> G. von Ran, *Genesis*, London, 1961

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do his will, he shall know whether the teaching is from God'; that teaching is from 'the Father' (8:28), and its purpose is our freedom: 'the truth will make you free' (8:32). 'So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed' (8:36). The authority of the truth of God is an authority exercised for the sake of our freedom. Likewise, the goal of parental authority in the human family is freedom. Parents' authority aims at releasing the child from their authority.

It is a great pity that in the past the fifth Commandment has often been used to reinforce authoritarian notions, with the growing child never seen as moving at some stage beyond the simple subjection to one authority or another. Thus, for example, the Prayer Book Catechism has been used to legitimate authoritarianism. It expands the Commandment thus: 'To love, honour and succour my father and mother; to honour and obey the Queen, and all that are put in authority under her; to submit myself to all my governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters; to order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters.' It is perhaps therefore hardly surprising that the philosopher John Locke found it necessary to offer an alternative theory of parenthood in order to undermine the way in which fatherly authority was being used to bolster contemporary claims to 'the divine right of kings'. Locke offers a much more plausible account when he suggests that parents are there as trustees to ensure that by the use of their authority the exercise of reason comes to take the place of the child's natural wilfulness.

A second feature of the Fatherhood of God depicted in the Gospels is *protection for growth*. The Father is one who cares for and provides for his children so that they need not be anxious (Matthew 6:25). Not a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father knowing (10:29). The birds of the air are fed (6:26) and your heavenly Father knows your needs also (6:8, 32). He can be asked for daily bread (6:11), for forgiveness (6:12, 14) for direction and for deliverance from evil (6:13). He, much more than earthly fathers, gives good things to those who ask (7:11). It is not the Father's will that any little ones should perish (18:14). The Father

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offers a place of security and unconditional welcoming love, even to the prodigal (Luke 15:11f).

Taking this picture as our guide, together with Paul's injunction that fathers should not provoke their children, we can see that parenting involves providing a context of security sufficient for personal growth free from anxiety.

A third aspect of God's fatherhood is *revelation for understanding*, as the very title of the Son as 'Logos' (meaning 'reason' or 'understanding') implies.

Part of the meaning of Fatherhood is to reveal truth to and through the Son. Just as in the Old Testament, the family was the primary locus of education in matters concerning God (Deuteronomy 6:1–8), so in the New Testament, the Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (John 1:18)—and parents are to instruct their children 'in the fear and nurture of the Lord' (Ephesians 6:4). As Eric Berne noted, a parent has done well if the child, on reaching maturity, can say, 'my parents told me the truth about the world ... I have found out that they were right'.

But just as the exercise of authority must lead finally to free decision-making as an adult, and the provision of security and protection to the growth of an individual who can think and act independently of its parents, so also must the conveying of the truth lead to an independent understanding and appropriation.

The meaning of 'honour your father and your mother' now takes on a deeper significance. For if the responsibility of parenthood is to some degree to represent to the child something of the nature of God, then 'honouring' my parents means my accepting that God has entrusted those self-same parents with me. Of course, parents can be abominably wicked towards their children. Someone who has been 'given' very cruel or abusing parents may need counselling, therapy or spiritual help to forgive them enough to be able to honour them. Further, as the story of the young Jesus in the Temple illustrates (Luke 2:41ff), obligations even to the best of parents are sometimes

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overridden by obligations towards God. But it is seldom, if ever, that nothing of the natural bonds between parent and child survive, and so it remains the case that 'honouring' will retain some meaning even in the most extreme situations of parental neglect. By divine dispensation it is that parent who has been entrusted with me and me with that parent, and so, though society may rightly judge it appropriate for me to be removed for a time from my parents, this cannot sever the natural bonds that will continue to exist nor abrogate me entirely from the responsibility as an adult of attempting to restore the relationship. For under God I retain a special obligation towards that person, just as he or she retains a similar obligation towards me.

Thankfully many children are more fortunate, and to 'honour' parents can be expressed more positively, though its practical expression will change with the transition from infancy to adulthood. For a young child, honouring parents will primarily mean acceptance of their authority. For an adolescent, it will be discovered in the balance between imposed and free obedience in the struggle for identity. For an adult child with elderly parents, it will find an expression both in the child's own responsible freedom from his parents as well as in respect for the wisdom of the elders (see 1 Timothy 5:1) and in provision for their needs (see 1 Timothy 5:4, 8; Mark 7:1–13). But it should not be forgotten that even in adulthood the trust given by God remains reciprocal; that not only has the child these obligations, the parent has the obligation to ensure that the child has indeed become a responsible adult and to treat him or her as such.

☒ **Partner not product**

It was not an uncommon view in the ancient world—the view of Aristotle, for example—that children have an economic value for their parents. By contrast, St Paul argues that it is not for children to save up for their parents, but for parents to save up for their children (2 Corinthians 12:14). Parenting consists in considering the welfare of children, and not merely considering them as economic assets. This

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incidental remark is consistent with his view that parents have duties to their children to bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

What is it, though, to be a parent? Why should parents have obligations to their children? And why their children more than anyone else's?

Some see the family primarily in terms of a 'school for character', with the parents as the teachers. Stanley Hauerwas argues that such a view is 'descriptively mistaken and theologically suspect ... No one gets married or begins a family in order to develop character.'<sup>10</sup>

That is true, but equally true is the fact that our growth in faith and trust is learned first of all not in church, but in the nursery. As Erikson argues, the first critical phase of emotional development is the child's need to work through the question of 'basic trust',<sup>11</sup> and he is helped to do so if the mothering is (in Winnicott's phrase) 'good enough'.<sup>12</sup> Parenting involves providing a 'facilitating environment' which is 'good enough' for the processes of maturation for each member of the family—a process which will be different at different stages of life. Parents can help their children to grow and to grow up; children can also be a means of sanctification and growth in their parents.

But why do parents have a special obligation to their own children? Whence does an obligation derive?

The traditional Christian answer has been that children are a 'gift' from God. Children were not thought of as the property of their parents, nor of their community. The contingencies of the acts of procreation means that the begetting of children was understood as part of the unpredictableness of divine providence.

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<sup>10</sup> S. Hauerwas, 'The Family as a School for Character', *Religious Education*, volume 80/2, 1985, page 272

<sup>11</sup> Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, Hythe, 1951, chapter 7

<sup>12</sup> D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, London, 1976

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Advances in medicine have drastically reduced the infant mortality rate, an undoubted blessing, but they are also now bringing so much control over our reproductive processes that it is easy to lose sight of the child as a gift of providence. It can easily become viewed instead as simply a product of human engineering. Thus contraception gives us the freedom to decide when to have children and how many, amniocentesis and other means of antenatal testing can give the knowledge of likely physical handicaps while the child is still in the womb and, most recently, with test-tube babies we now have the power to imitate nature in its early stages. What is worrying about such practices is not that they are wrong in themselves, but that they can so easily lead to wrong attitudes, with the child now seen more as a product than as a partner, as something subject to human will and human disposability, rather than someone who exercises a moral claim to be treated as a neighbour. The danger is that we shall all want the perfect 'product', rather than accepting that for example the mentally and physically handicapped are just as much entitled to life as anyone else, or that adopted children can be just as much *our* children as those that are genetically ours (a religion that calls us all to become adopted children of our heavenly Father could scarcely say anything else). At the same time we should be wary of thinking that this problem of the child as product is simply a creation of advances in medicine. Precisely the same phenomenon is in evidence whenever parents see their child simply as an extension of themselves, or use it for their own ends. Unfortunately there is no shortage of examples of this. One observes it in the pressure on the child to accomplish what the parent in his own life has always longed to do, but been unable to achieve. One sees another side to this in the ever-growing problems of child abuse (particularly in the apparently rapidly growing problems of incest, which, though complex, may often involve the use of the child as an object).

The development of the concept of 'children's rights', as in the 1959 United Nations Declaration, is a reaction against the view that parents 'own' their children, and is instead an

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affirmation that children own themselves. What this ignores is that it is not a question of ownership at all. The concept of personal rights, a necessary corollary of Enlightenment Individualism (a concept within which the notion of 'family' sits rather uneasily), is some distance from the family as the covenant of care.

The question of parenting is not, 'Who owns this child?' It is rather: 'What sort of people should we be, and what sort of social context should we provide, to welcome appropriately a new human life into the human community, and to help her develop her "being in communion" to the full?'

☒ **A covenant of care**

We can draw together much of the preceding discussion of the fatherhood of God and the suggestion that family life is intended to find its meaning in and be patterned on the relationships God has with his people, with his Son, and with his adopted sons and daughters, by referring to the covenant.

From beginning to end of the biblical story, God's relationship with his people is one of loving promise: 'I will be your God'; blessing: 'You shall be my people'; and obligation: 'Be holy as I the Lord your God am holy.' The covenant is a relationship based on mutual trust, mutual acceptance and mutual obligation, and provides the context for the growth of personal relationships through time which are based on that promise and that obligation. The keywords of God's covenanted relationship with his people are 'steadfast love and faithfulness'. The ethical question of family life then becomes: What does it mean for us as parents, for us as children, to give expression to love and faithfulness? Part of the task of the Christian church is to help people grow characters which are capable of faithfulness.

It is in the covenant that a sense of corporate solidarity is fostered. It is in the covenant that individuals find their place and can be helped to grow, and held accountable. The covenant is a dynamic system within an institutional

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framework but centring on relationship. Family is, to use Kegan's phrase, a 'culture to grow in', the sort of social institution which is needed to assist psychosocial development (compare Erikson). Sometimes the story is of struggle and pain and discipline; sometimes of blessing and joy. As with the New Testament reference to Christ who 'though he was a Son learned obedience through what he suffered', so it is sometimes through responsible confrontation with the constraints of family life that 'faculties are trained by practice' (Hebrews 5:14). The covenant community is open, outward looking and inclusive. The covenant is both a means of grace and a means of service. Furthermore, the covenant of God with his people points beyond itself to the 'being as communion' of God himself. And so it is the divine covenant which sets the pattern for all the human covenants we make with one another, and so perhaps best illustrates the various characteristics of Christian family life which we have been seeking to identify.

A family, then, is a group of people bound together in a covenant of care the focus of which is marriage, parenthood and shared residence. But blood relationships do not themselves create family. Merely living together under the same roof does not create family. What binds people together as a family is the covenant of loyalty to one another. Some family loyalties are freely chosen (as between husband and wife). Others are loyalties over which we have no choice (who my parents are). But to be *family* is to recognize a covenanted obligation within this particular group of those who are united by blood kinship or shared residence or both. And to be *family* in a way that is consistent with Christian understanding is to pattern those covenanted obligations and relationships on the nature of God's covenanted love to us.

### *Disorders in families*

C. S. Lewis's essay, 'The Sermon and the Lunch',<sup>13</sup> exposes the hypocrisy and sentimentality of much Christian thinking of family life, by illustrating the contrast between the vicar's

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<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Undeceptions*, London, 1971

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sermon about family on the Sunday evening, and the reality of his family interactions at Sunday lunchtime.

We now need to earth our theological norms in the harsh realities of a disordered world in which the results of sin disrupt relationships, in which the image of God in people is tarnished, and covenants sometimes remain mere external structural frameworks of obligation with no growing personal life within them. There are some families 'in name only', where all personal commitment has died. There are few which fully exhibit the covenant qualities of steadfast love and faithfulness. Most move uneasily somewhere in between. The reality of living in the tension of the 'aeons' between the resurrection of Christ and the final consummation of all things under his rule, is that we are all exposed to the disordering effects of 'the world, the flesh and the devil' and family life here is only ever on the way towards being family in the normative sense.

In a highly individualized and isolationist culture, the sad fact is that many so called families—even 'close nuclear families'—are mere aggregates of individuals sharing the same roof and the same television set, but living their own lives. Lack of real intimacy is a major problem of our age. Part of the church's task is to help people develop the sorts of characters which are capable of making relationships, honouring obligations, of showing love and being faithful. The nature of those commitments and obligations changes with time, from childhood dependence and parental authority, through the years of mature interdependency, to elderly dependency on adult children.

Another of the major effects of the shift in industrialized societies from extended to nuclear family patterns has been the abandonment on a large scale of care for the elderly. This is a growing problem not only in the West, but also for those left in the villages of newly urbanized Third World cultures. The church may be required to take a stand against the prevailing culture at this point, and remind Christians of the strong New Testament stress on care for one's kin (1 Timothy 5:8; Mark 7:9–10).

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There are many disorders within families which could be discussed. In the following paragraphs we outline four of the areas which seem to us to need more Christian attention.

☒ **The sins of the fathers**

One of the disordering effects of family life is related to the fact that, in group dynamic terms, the family is a 'system' of interacting relationships. Disorder, sin or selfishness in one member of the family inevitably disorders the family as a whole. Emotional hurts and burdens can be carried within family systems, as much of today's work in family therapy illustrates. Pincus and Dare wrote *Secrets in the Family*<sup>14</sup> to demonstrate how patterns of emotional response, of basic group assumptions and attitudes, of resentments, guilt and fear, can be perpetuated within family systems, often unconsciously.

One example is the recurring pattern of authoritarianism. Compensating for his own insecurities, a parent may rule his home with a rod of iron. Parental patterns of insecurity may then be taken over by children—or by certain children within the family configuration—who, at a loss how to act outside an authoritarian context, perpetuate precisely the same family dynamics in their turn.

Another example is the controlling grandmother who still has such an emotional hold over mother that the subsequent mother-daughter relationship is affected, with daughter being caught up into the disordered patterns of an earlier generation.

In theological terms, 'the world' exercises its crippling power through such often unconscious patterns of disorder. When parenting is not 'good enough', when the environment of early learning experience does not facilitate normal growth in the child, then 'cycles of deprivation' (to use Sir Keith Joseph's phrase) are activated. 'The sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation. The ministry of the Christian church to families includes the

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<sup>14</sup>L. Pincus and C. Dare, *Secrets in the Family*, London, 1978

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provision of opportunities for other, more satisfactory, forms of relationship than depriving ones. If the church can instead facilitate what Jack Dominian has called 'cycles of affirmation', then some of the disorders of family life can be rectified, and some of the bruising patterns of family life healed. It is of interest that at the same time David Cooper writes of 'The Death of the Family', arguing—rightly in some cases—that the emotional hurts carried in families can be crippling to the mental health and well-being of individual members, the growth of family therapy is escalating. It is a judgment on the Christian church that some people find more help through secular family therapies than they do within the family of God.

☒ **Disordered roles, boundaries and hierarchies**

Some of the disorders within families can be traced to an unclarity concerning the roles adopted by different members within the family system. Where, for example, is authority in any particular family? Sometimes it resides with the parents. Sometimes actual power is located in a weak family member who manipulates the others to serve his interests; sometimes a tantrum-prone three-year-old or moody teenager 'rules' by requiring everyone else to tread warily round them. And who cares for whom? Sometimes it may be that an emotionally deprived mother can want a child in order that the child will care for her. How are patterns of authority, responsibility and care negotiated between family members? Is there an unspoken collusion, leading to unspoken resentments and frustrations? How are sexual roles handled within families? Sometimes the presence of children in a family can disrupt the parents' sexual relationship with each other. The sexual dimension of the relationships between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, and between parents and children of the same sex can be unclear, or unacknowledged, or inappropriately expressed.

Some of the feminist critique of family is rooted in the conviction that family perpetuates a patriarchal structure in which men and women serve. It cannot be denied that

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some Christian teaching has tended to foster such a view of the family. Neither of us wishes to endorse a patriarchal and authoritarian understanding of male/female relationships. We recognize that many Christians interpret the New Testament references which speak of the husband being 'head' of his wife (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23; see also Colossians 3:18–19; 1 Timothy 2:9–10; 1 Peter 3:1ff) as a 'creation ordinance', and argue from this that the complementarity of male and female, and therefore husband and wife, to be is expressed in hierarchical terms of male leadership and female subordination. There is ongoing debate within the Christian church on the meaning of such texts, and it is worth giving a little space to discuss this.

The argument is sometimes based on Adam's naming of Eve as his helper, just as he had authoritatively named the animals. However, it seems to us that the Adam and Eve story points primarily to sexual complementarity in diversity, and the question of female subordination to male domination is raised *descriptively* in Genesis 3 as a *consequence* of sin, not *normatively* in Genesis 2. The notion of Eve as 'helper' does not require the sense of subordination, for the word is used many times of the help that comes from God (see Psalm 33:20). Not until Genesis 3:20 does Adam use the standard naming formula for his wife; in 2:23 the 'naming' is more delight than domination.

The New Testament texts clearly have to be interpreted in the light of the cultural assumptions of the age. One of us argues that the church of today is entitled to go beyond their teaching, both in virtue of the critique inherent within the Bible itself (see Galatians 3:28 and 1 Corinthians 11:11–12) and our better understanding of the social determinants of human psychology. The other of us believes that a 'hierarchical' exegesis is not the only, or the best, mode of interpreting the texts. Indeed, a number of factors militate against such exegesis.

The Ephesians 5 text turns on the analogy between the mutual 'completion' of Christ and the church in their

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relationship with each other, and the mutual completion of husband and wife in 'one flesh' union. This section has to be seen in the wider context which begins in Ephesians 4:1: 'lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called; 'be imitators of God' (Ephesians 5:1); and 'be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Ephesians 5:21). In other words, let the gospel of grace dictate the pattern of your relationships within the church (chapter 4); within marriage (5:21–33); within the home (6:1–4); within the sphere of employment (6:5–9). In that sense, Ephesians 5 can be seen as a sort of reversal of Genesis 3:16. There the man is said to 'rule over' his wife. In Ephesians 5:25, he is rather to 'love' her (a revolutionary teaching!) as Christ loves, that is, put her interests first. In Genesis 3:16, the wife is said to 'desire' in a selfishly grasping way her husband. In Ephesians 5:22 the wife is to 'submit to' (that is, respect; not 'obey', compare 6:1, 5) the husband—that is, puts his interests first. The husband as 'head' (Ephesians 5:23) is to be interpreted in the light of the way Christ is Head of the church (compare Ephesians 4:15f)—by providing a family context in which both can be to the other a source of 'completion'.<sup>15</sup>

The paragraph in 1 Corinthians 11 has also been the subject of much debate, the argument concerning primarily the ordering of worship so that no offence should be given (see 1 Corinthians 10:32). Paul's use of the Old Testament is selective for his purpose (thus only 'man' is in the divine image 1 Corinthians 11:7, contrast Genesis 1:27), and his use of 'head' is related to his discussion of head-coverings. Whereas man is described as 'head' of woman, the sense has to be derived from the way 'the head of Christ is God' (1 Corinthians 11:3). The commentary of C. K. Barrett on 1 Corinthians shows how this passage may well be best interpreted in a non-hierarchical way.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of mutuality rather than subordination (except in the sense of mutual submission, Ephesians 5:21) is also

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<sup>15</sup> See M. Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, New York, 1974

<sup>16</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, London, 1968

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found in 1 Corinthians 7:1f, and is consistent with the 'charter of our humanity' (also from the pen of St Paul) in Galatians 3:28. That the context is baptismal does not affect the fact that Paul is arguing that in Christ discrimination based on race, status or sex is to be set aside. Such, surely, was the attitude of Jesus towards women.

For the church to perpetuate an authoritarian style of hierarchicalism in its understanding of family life is, we believe, both to misread the New Testament, and to open itself to the just rebuke of some feminist critics of family, that the Christian faith discriminates against women. The truth, we believe, is rather that women and men are equal and complementary within the church and within the family. Indeed, given our earlier account of parental trust as the responsibility of bringing the child to a capacity for independent decision-making, it is perhaps scarcely surprising that we should view the relationship between the sexes in marriage as requiring a similar degree of independence within the admittedly overarching framework of mutual interdependence and complementarity. How that complementarity is expressed is more a matter of preference, temperament and gifts than of normative structures.

☒ **Abandonment of authority**

Perhaps a more common problem, at least in modern Western society, is the exercise of too little authority rather than too much. One reason for this is a hangover from the 1960s, the false libertarian assumption that all forms of authority are bad, with the resultant failure to distinguish between legitimate use of authority and authoritarianism. But, as child psychologists are increasingly acknowledging, there is little prospect of a healthy child without the considerable exercise of parental authority. For not only does the failure ever to say 'no' result in a spoilt child unable to see anything except from the perspective of its own selfish interest, but it is also true that clear boundaries are essential to the growing child and that in fact he will

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constantly test the limits until he discovers the secure borders beyond which he may not go.

Normally, however, the reasons why parents do not intervene will not extend quite so far as the suspicion of authority *per se*. Sometimes it will just be a matter of pure selfishness, for example, such a strong desire to pursue one's career that little or no time is left for one's children. This can become a particularly acute issue in situations where both parents work, in a society in which free education is provided by the state from an early age, and in which television can easily be used as a substitute for family interaction. This is not, of course, to say that any of these things are of themselves bad. However, they can be open to the potential abuse of encouraging a selfish abandonment of parental responsibility.

There are also more insidious ways in which even deeply committed Christian parents can be tempted to abdicate their authority. This may be illustrated by common attitudes both to sex and religious education. In the former case, it is widely acknowledged that parents often find it difficult to discuss sex with their children. They are therefore content to leave the matter to schools, ignoring the problem that, while the schools may be excellent in conveying factual information, they are less suitable contexts for dealing with the inseparable emotional and relational dimensions, where the differences in personal psychology become more pertinent, and where, therefore, some discussion in the home must be seen as ideal.

Less widely acknowledged is the fact that a similar problem can also plague religious education. Many parents fail to pass on their faith to their children, not because they themselves do not regularly pray or go to church, but rather because this remains an entirely private activity. It is left to the Sunday school to give such instruction as it can, but the parent is too embarrassed to share his faith either by teaching his child to pray or by raising religious issues. This reluctance is perhaps induced in part by fear that the child may in turn raise questions to which he does not know the

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answers. Here the church itself must surely bear a large measure of blame, both through encouraging too private and personal a view of religion and, secondly, in cultivating too much the notion of priest as the professional expert to whom such tasks ought therefore to be left.

The longstanding and widespread assumptions of Western culture that all education is only the task of professionals and hardly if at all the task of parents, is thankfully now beginning to be questioned (compare the parent—teacher partnerships of ‘community education’), but there is still a long way to go and many questions still to be resolved.

☒ **The Idolatry of the family**

Disorder within families can arise when the family is thought to exist for its own sake. Some of those who speak of the family as a ‘school for character’, says Stanley Hauerwas, can ‘too easily turn the family into an idolatrous institution’. He continues, ‘Too often the church is supported because people care about the family. They assume the church is good because it produces a good family. God is worshipped as a means to help sustain what we really care about—the family.’<sup>17</sup>

When the family is turned into that kind of god it spells disorder. For when family is asked to carry such supreme moral significance, it is asked to carry too much. ‘When the family is invested with such significance, it cannot but be morally tyrannical.’

Part of the temptation to idolatry comes from the temptation to isolate the moral significance of the family from other aspects of the meaning of family life. This was not the case in ancient Israel. One of the intriguing facts of Old Testament family life is the interplay between economic, social and religious factors. In the holiness code of Leviticus 19 for example, there are regulations concerning worship, agriculture, social honesty, property, justice, sex, farming, religion, hospitality to strangers, and so on. And, throughout, the refrain ‘I am the Lord’ indicates that the

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<sup>17</sup> S. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, Indiana, 1981

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people's relationship to Yahweh was the unifying dimension in all this diversity, and the people were to express in all these diverse areas of life the fact that they were the people of God. It is not possible, therefore, to separate out a book of Old Testament religion, another of Old Testament ethics, and a third of Old Testament economics. In the family, moral, spiritual, economic and social concerns are all inseparably linked. The family in ancient Israel stood at the centre of a series of connected relationships: to God, to Israel and to the land. The family was the locus for the primary covenant relationship of the people with God; the family was the basic unit and beneficiary of Israel's system of land tenure, because the land was ultimately owned by God, and was given to families as an inheritance.<sup>18</sup>

Family solidarity was therefore very strong. But the family did not exist as a moral community in isolation from its social or economic context.

One of the difficulties of some modern Christian concern for wholesome family life is that it fails to address the social conditions within which family cohesion is economically viable and socially worthwhile. It is much easier to be 'family' in the stockbroker belt with the sun on our backs than on Merseyside weathering the storms of urban deprivation and long-term unemployment. Easier also than among the 'parking boys' or child prostitutes on the streets of Nairobi; among the abandoned rural kinship groups in the country while the husband seeks his fortune in one of Africa's new towns; easier than in the vast high-rise apartments of Hong Kong. To isolate the moral concept of 'family' from its social and economic context, and from its true meaning within the covenanted purposes of God for human well-being, is to come very close to idolatry.

So in supporting family life, the church cannot disengage itself from wider social issues such as quality of housing, unemployment, the scale of social security or welfare benefits. Nor can the church in the West distance itself from

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<sup>18</sup> C. Wright, *Living as the People of God*, Leicester, 1983

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the pressing political and social questions being forced on the churches of Africa in the rapid changes in family life through 'Westernization'. The church must also be on its guard against romanticized versions of marriage and family that raise absurdly high expectations of the nature of the relationship or which assume that they must substitute rather than complement other social relationships such as friendship.

*The extended family in the Holy City*

One of the surprises the Bible holds is that despite the essentially agrarian character of Jewish society, its future vision, apart from a few exceptions (for example, Micah 4:4; Isaiah 11:6–7) is concentrated on a city. Thus the Jerusalem that is the focus of Old Testament aspirations (Psalms 48; 122; 137) is taken up and enhanced in the New (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:10, 16). One could scarcely have a more effective endorsement of the essentially social character of the Christian vision. But the city can also have negative connotations, as with the use of Babylon in 1 Peter and Revelation. So it is important to qualify the image in the right kind of way and this can perhaps best be achieved through thinking of that holy city as an extended family. Our Lord on the cross can himself be seen as beginning this process when in John's Gospel he enlarges his own natural family by committing his mother to his 'beloved disciple's' care. Symbolically this can be read as inviting all his beloved disciples, that is all of us, into his family since the other half of the declaration implies that equally John has now become fully part of Jesus's family ('behold, your son!... behold, your mother!' John 19:26–27). We are thus called to a relationship at once as deep as the family can be at its best, and at the same time one in which all natural ties are clearly transcended.

The ultimate purpose of the divine covenant is pictured by the apocalyptic writer of Revelation 21 as 'the holy city, new Jerusalem ... and God himself will be with them'. It is here that the covenant of God, the focus of much of our earlier discussion, comes to its consummation. For the covenant

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is the story of a people on their way home. It is in the holy city that the covenant promise is spoken once more: 'I will be his God and he shall be my son' (Revelation 21:7) It is this picture of the ultimate family of God which gives meaning to, and also relativizes, human family life. M. Moynagh calls this the 'eschatological family', rightly noting that the question of the purpose of family life is thus taken outside the family itself.<sup>19</sup> This challenges contemporary tendencies to justify the family in terms of what it achieves for its members. It shows that the eschatological family of the people of God can challenge contemporary families to make God's kingdom more present in the world. Above all it emphasizes the fact that family life is only one way, though the most basic, of our being conformed to the divine image as social and personal, with which these reflections began.

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<sup>19</sup>M. Moynagh, 'Home to Home', in *Anvil*, volume 3, number 3, 1986

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## Forgiveness<sup>1</sup>

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‘What difference does your Christian faith make to the way you do your work?’

This question, reaching to the heart of pastoral ethics, was asked by a person who works for religious broadcasting. He was trying to prepare a series on the impact of faith on peoples’ everyday lives at work. He was at a meeting of some top business executives, politicians, bankers, city people—all Christians. They were embarrassed by his question. He pressed the point: ‘In the way you do your work, what difference is there between you and those who do not share your Christian faith? How does being a Christian affect the way you do your work?’

Eventually someone volunteered an answer: It was one word. ‘Guilt’.

Perhaps the respondent meant that his own working practices fell short of what Christian goodness and justice requires; that when he was made to think about it, the effect of his faith on his work led only to feelings of guilt. Of course, guilt can have an important place in pricking our consciences, but in the light of the Christian Gospel, it was disappointing that among that particular group of people at least, there was not a more positive, a more creative, a more hopeful, response. Was there no way Christian faith could impinge more on the world of work than inducing guilt? Various chapters in this book explore the implications of Christian faith for different work situations. This chapter is concerned with the way the Christian Gospel responds in

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have already appeared in a different form in two articles in *Third Way* magazine in October and November 1982

<sup>3</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (44). Lynx Communications: London

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particular to guilt, namely through forgiveness. There are many books on the Christian doctrine of the atonement, to which, of course, the Christian understanding and experience of forgiveness are inseparably linked. The task of this chapter is not to repeat that material, but rather to focus on the concept of forgiveness as this affects personal relationships and so pastoral ethics. As we shall see, forgiveness is not an easy or pain-free response to guilt, but is nevertheless one which offers opportunities of creativity and growth in situations which are often stuck in resentment or bitterness.

Bishop Stephen Neill makes the following comment in his book *A Genuinely Human Existence*,<sup>2</sup> in his discussion of what he calls the three great enemies of the human race: fear, frustration and resentment:

*When I read technical books on psychology, there is one word I always look for in the index and rarely find. It is the word "forgiveness". There is no other word in the English language which expresses exactly the same idea. Even "pardon" has a different ring and slightly different connotations. If the absence of the word implies also an absence of this central idea from contemporary psychological thought, this may indicate a lacuna the filling of which would be greatly to the advantage of both psychological thought and psychiatric practice.*

### ***Forgiveness and restoration***

Since 1959, when Stephen Neill wrote those words, there have been a number of significant Christian publications on forgiveness, and there is evidence that some parts of the world of psychotherapy are recognising the healing power of forgiveness. But it does not fit easily within many standard psychotherapeutic models, and the practice of forgiveness—if the city business meeting is any guide—is not part of everyday working life. We shall argue that it is not only psychiatric practice that would be advantaged by a recovery of the concept of forgiveness, but that this central

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<sup>2</sup> S. Neill, *A Genuinely Human Existence*, Constable, 1959

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Christian word has implications for many aspects of human relationships.

Forgiveness is the antidote to what Bishop Neill calls resentment. And forgiveness is the creative, positive Christian Gospel response to guilt.

So much of our working world, maybe of our day to day lives, certainly of our international politics, is built on the law of retaliation: 'you owe, so you must pay'; the law of demanding rights and bearing grudges, of holding resentments and living with guilt.

By contrast, the Christian Gospel tells us that forgiveness is something more positive, more creative, more joyous, more healing, though more costly.

Jesus' parable reported in Matthew 18:23–34 is told in response to the question of Peter: 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?' It is the story of the servant, perhaps the king's first minister, who got into a massive debt to the king and was obliged to forfeit all his possessions in order to pay. In response to his servant's pleading, the king in compassion released the debt and reinstated him. He does not pretend there is no wrong. He does not brush it all under the carpet and say it doesn't matter'. Forgiveness is not about pretending that things are good when they are bad. It is not about saying 'there, there, don't worry about it.' It is rather a response to wrong which goes beyond what strict justice and reason my dictate. It lays aside the law of retaliation in a response of sheer grace. It says 'You harmed me; you have done me wrong; in justice you owe me. But I will not allow the wrong forever to stand in the way of our relationship being restored.' Like the father waiting for the prodigal son, forgiveness offers a welcome back home and responds creatively in a way that makes possible a new beginning.

When King Lear eventually comes to terms with the wrong done to Cordelia, he can say 'when thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness; so

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we'll live, and pray and sing and tell old tales, and laugh at gilded butterflies.<sup>3</sup>

Forgiveness is restorative. That is not to say that forgiveness is not costly.

### ***Costly forgiveness***

The Old Testament story of Hosea illustrates the cost of the grace of forgiveness and restoration. Hosea's wife Gomer had gone off after her lovers (Hosea 2:5) in the belief that they would lavish good things on her. This was a picture of the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel towards God. But God tells Hosea to take her back, as a picture of God's forgiveness of Israel: 'Go again, love a woman who is beloved of a paramour and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods.' (Hosea 3:1). Hosea in fact finds her as a slave, up for sale in the market place, and has to buy her back in order to take her home.

The whole story of Hosea is a vivid illustration of the Hebrew word *hesed*, usually translated 'steadfast love', of which the New Testament counterpart is *agape*. 'In this is *agape*, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and send his Son to be the expiation for our sins.' (1 John 4:10).

Nowhere is the cost of forgiveness more clearly seen than in the way the New Testament links the forgiveness of sins with the self-giving love of God in the death of Jesus Christ. 'In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us.' (Ephesians 1:7) The measure of forgiveness is the cost to God in his love, that we might be ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

Forgiveness, then, is something both given and received. It is not automatic. It is grace working with us. God's forgiving spirit is part of his nature; the experience of being forgiven is only open to those who are willing to receive it, who want to be changed by it, who are open to redirect their mind and

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<sup>3</sup> W. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act V, scene 2

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their will towards God and receive his grace. This is the cry of the psalmist in Psalm 51, who longs to receive 'a new heart'.

To receive forgiveness costs us our pride, reminds us of dependence, involves acknowledging that we are in the wrong.

Still further, to receive forgiveness is intended to be matched by the forgiving nature which results. The conclusion to Jesus' parable makes this clear: The king's minister refused to offer a fellow servant who owed him a trifling few pennies the same generous grace that he had received from the king. When the king heard of this unforgiving response, he was angry. 'You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' (Matthew 18:32–33)

The servant had shown by his response that he had never truly understood what forgiveness involves. It is something that happens in a relationship which changes attitudes, frees up creative responses, opens the future to new possibilities. The Christian is called on in all relationships to reflect something of God's forgiving grace towards us. We pray in the Lords' Prayer: 'forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.' The writer to the Ephesians put it like this: 'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.' (Ephesians 4:32)

### ***Characteristics of forgiveness***

We can now draw together some of the characteristics of forgiveness.

Forgiveness reminds us of our accountability. We are responsible people whose choices matter. However much the system diminishes our freedom to move and to choose, we cannot take refuge in fatalism. We are accountable. Forgiveness operates in the area of personal responsibility.

Forgiveness breaks down idealizations. It reminds us that we are not perfect, and that this side of heaven more often

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than not we will get it wrong. But that we are not angels does not mean that we are devils. There is an ambiguity about our human nature. Forgiveness does not imply that we are expected to be perfect. It reminds us that we and others do make mistakes and hurt each other, but that life can still go on. We can live with failure.

***Forgiveness can heal***

The following case study from the *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal* is a good illustration.

*A pretty, intelligent, hysterical girl of 25 entered analysis because of numerous conversion, sexual, social and depressive problems. Much time was spent justifying her plight and blaming her family, verbally, and in attitude and action. There was no doubt that she had suffered a series of actual traumata in infancy, childhood and adolescence. Some of these could have been avoided, for example destroying her pet cat. In some of them, she clearly but unconsciously brought about her own hurt, for example by inducing rejection because of unrealistic and aggressive demands. In yet others, no realistic blame could be attached, such as (the shock induced by) the birth of a younger sibling.*

*The analysis continued for four years. Right from the start she formed a strong transference, ambivalent in nature, with hatred and suspicion of the analyst preponderant, although she considered herself devoted to him ... After much testing of the analyst, she began to be able to gain insight into her own motivations, affects, manipulations.*

*Not long after, she was able to tolerate some of her own previously unacceptable and aggressive impulses, and she began to assess the world around her in similar terms. She did a good deal of testing of her parents at home, and this necessitated the father asking to see the analyst. With her permission, the father was seen. He seemed to grasp the situation and was non-punitive, sympathetic and acceptant of her censure. Where he felt her strictures were justified he acknowledged this, much as the analyst did. Her mother*

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did not understand and conveyed her disapproval of the patient who was infuriated at being blamed for things she (the patient) could not help. She was able to see, however, her own blaming behaviour in reaction to frustration in her mother.

With her recognition of her own 'badness' and its genesis, she began to tolerate this and began to view her parents and analyst in the same frame of reference. She knew enough about her parents' background (both of her grandmothers were still alive) to be able to piece together the kinds of upbringing her parents must have had. With this she was able to see that no less than herself, no less than everyone else in the world, her parents were inevitably caught in the effects of their life experiences and possessed both good and bad qualities. With this came a good deal of genuinely affectful soliloquy in which she abandoned blaming, appropriately accepted responsibility for her own behaviour, recognised the real, impartial, impersonality of much human suffering and, with tenderness and some ruefulness, forgave her parents. She then fell in love, and shortly afterwards, married.<sup>4</sup>

This illustrates something of the costliness as well as the therapeutic power of forgiveness. As Stephen Neill put it:

*[Forgiveness] recognizes the wrongdoer as a person. He has done wrong, and about this there is no pretence. But this is not the whole truth about him. He is still of infinite value as a person, since every person is unique and irreplaceable by any other. Since he has so greatly injured himself by doing wrong, he is in special need of help, and help that can be rendered only by the one to whom he has done the wrong ... Forgiveness can spring only from a self-forgetfulness that is more concerned about another's well-being than about its own, and that longs for the renewal of fellowship even when fellowship has been flouted and destroyed by the wilful aggression of another.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>R. C. A. Hunter, 'Forgiveness, Retaliation and Paranoid Reactions', *Canadian Psychiatric Association Journal*, volume 23, 1978

<sup>5</sup>Neill [note 2]

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What does an abused child need to hear when she believes she is the cause of what happened? What does a sad and distorted adult need to hear, who has given in to the temptation to abuse a child? What does a social worker need to hear when the case has gone wrong and mistakes have been made? (Or when mistakes have not been made, but the tabloid press say that they have, and are at the throat of the social services, loading them with guilt?)

What is needed is a word from God, from others, and from within ourselves that we can be forgiven; and we need to learn to forgive. Forgiveness is a way of saying that all our sins and failures do not simply accumulate against us. We can hear from God, from others, and from within ourselves, that although the past cannot be undone and history rewritten, its wounds can be soothed, its guilt taken away, its wrong directions changed: not by pretending that everything was all right really, because it wasn't, and not by living with the burdensome law of retaliation, but by walking into the fresh air of grace.

### ***Forgiveness and psychoanalytic theory***

It is of interest to explore the way that psychology can throw light on the processes of forgiving.

The nearest that psychological theory seems to come to an exploration of the interpersonal dynamics of forgiveness is found in the concept of reparation developed by Melanie Klein. Psychoanalytic theory is based upon the belief that the emotional responses and behaviour patterns of our adult world have their roots in infancy. Each person, in other words, is a product of both the facts of her own history and of what she has made of them. Subsequent experiences of life either reinforce and confirm, or call in question and modify, earlier experiences and interpretations. In classical Freudianism, as illustrated by Otto Fenichel, for example,<sup>6</sup> forgiveness appears in the context of discussion of pathological defence against too painful guilt-feelings. It

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<sup>6</sup>O. Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946

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is, for Fenichel, a compulsive and mechanistic instinctive response, which has little to do with Christian theological understanding of the concept.

By contrast, Melanie Klein's 'object relations' approach to psychoanalytic theory, through the primacy of relationships rather than instincts, does open up theoretical ways of understanding interpersonal dynamics which correspond much more closely to Christian theology. As Harry Guntrip (another in the Object Relations school) put it: 'A person is a being who is self-conscious, objective or rational, and who realises his essential nature as personal in mutual relationship with other persons.'<sup>7</sup> This is a theme brought into prominence again in recent Christian theological writing on the doctrine of God as a Trinity of Persons in Relation.<sup>8</sup>

Klein's analytical work with very young children led her to postulate a development in childhood through various phases ('positions') of emotional response. In an early lecture, 'Love, Guilt and Reparation', she argued that the struggle between love and hate in a person begins in early infancy, and is active through life:

*My psychoanalytic work has convinced me that when in the baby's mind conflicts between love and hate arise, and the fears of losing the loved one become active, a very important step is made in development. These feelings of guilt and distress now enter as a new element into the emotion of love.<sup>9</sup>*

Even in a small child, one can observe concern for the loved one:

*Side by side with the destructive impulses in the unconscious mind both of the child and of the adult, there exists a profound urge to make sacrifices, in order to help and to put right loved people who in fantasy have been*

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<sup>7</sup> H. Guntrip, *Psychology for Ministers and Social Workers*, 1953, page 180

<sup>8</sup> See C. Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology: The One, the Three and the Many*; A. MacFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*; J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*

<sup>9</sup> M. Klein, *Love, Hate and Reparation*, Hogarth Press 1953, page 65

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*harmed or destroyed. In the depths of the mind, the urge to make people happy is linked up with a strong feeling of responsibility and concern for them, which manifests itself in genuine sympathy with other people and in the ability to understand them, as they are and as they feel.*<sup>10</sup>

To be genuinely considerate implies that we can put ourselves in the place of other people. Such a capacity for 'identification' with others is a condition for real and strong feelings of love and the sacrificing to some extent of our own feelings and desires. Ultimately, Klein continues, in making sacrifices for somebody we love, we play the part of the 'good parent' towards them (as we felt parents did to us, or as we wanted them to), and we play the part of the good child towards his parents, which we wished to do in the past and are now acting out in the present.

Klein goes on to suggest that the emotional adjustments made in response to the ambivalence felt at both loving and hating the one who is loved, which she calls 'making reparation', is a fundamental element in love and in all human relationships.<sup>11</sup>

Klein's theory was considerably elaborated in her work on what she called 'the depressive position',<sup>12</sup> a phase of emotional response whereby a child learns to cope with the fact that the external world is ambiguous. Earlier on, a child responds in terms of 'part objects'—parts of mother, for example—and is able to separate out 'the depriving mother' who lets the child cry from 'the nourishing mother' who makes it content. Now, as the child responds in terms of 'whole objects', the child realizes that its love and its hatred are both directed to the same person. The depriving mother is the nourishing mother. The child has been hating the one who feeds it. New ambivalent feelings arise involving a sense of guilt that the hostile feelings have hurt the loved one, leading to depression and sadness. It is when this

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<sup>10</sup> as above

<sup>11</sup> as above

<sup>12</sup> M. Klein, 'Our Adult World and its Roots in Infancy', in *Envy and Gratitude*, Hogarth Press, 1975

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stage of development is reached in the child, according to Klein, that feelings of concern are possible. At this stage, the child is urged to 'make reparation', a drive arising out of guilt feelings associated with ambivalent loving and hating attitudes. It not only restores a relationship but enables the person to move towards further integration, and is associated with the development of personal maturity, social concern and creativity.

Clearly Klein's theory is controversial. In its most literal terms, it is not possible to know the mind of a young baby and to discern responses of guilt in its emotions. The theory, as with most psychoanalytic theory, is untestable. However, as a model of possible patterns of emotional response, it can serve as a template not only for infantile emotions but also for the sorts of emotional responses we make in the adult world. To that extent, the movement that Klein postulates from seeing the world as split into part objects (black and white, good and bad) to seeing the ambivalences of 'sometimes' and the ambiguity of the human condition, with her recognition that such a movement can give a meaning to guilt and the need for reparation, does offer a model for what may be going on when one person seeks to find reconciliation with another.

The point at which Klein's theory fails to provide sufficient content, however, is precisely at the point theology wishes to speak of forgiveness. The reparation of which Klein speaks is something offered by the wrongdoer to the wronged. Forgiveness, on the other hand, is something offered to the wrongdoer by the wronged. If, however, instead of concentrating on one or other partner we focus on what is happening in the relationship between them, we can see that reparation and forgiveness belong together. Forgiveness has to be offered as a gift if reparation is to be meaningful.

In Kleinian terms, therefore, crucial to the successful development through the depressive position, will be a

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‘facilitating environment’<sup>13</sup> in which forgiveness is offered. If the child receives only destructive responses to his own destructive impulses, he may be held back from successful development. If, however, his experience includes being given emotional space in which guilt feelings can be dealt with, the way is opened for further emotional maturation.

Klein’s work operates primarily with the emotions, but does include actions of the will. Choices are made which affect the future outcome of the relationship. The Christian concept of forgiveness, on the other hand, operates primarily at the level of the human will and the taking of responsible choices, but this will inevitably engage the emotions as well. Perhaps we do best to see forgiveness as a personal response to a person, drawing on many different levels of personal being and interpersonal relationship.

The other value of drawing on the models of developmental psychology as an aid to understanding the interpersonal dynamics of the processes of forgiveness is that such processes may well be crucial for a healthy Christian understanding of the nature of forgiveness from God. Jack Dominian comments:

*Long before we become aware of God we experience our mother and father with whom we have the supremely important experience in which we learn about love and anger and hate. It is these love-hate moments which are transferred later on to the person whom faith has taught us to recognize and accept as a transcendental, mysterious but immutable reality. Closeness to the God of the Ten Commandments and of the Beatitudes has been preceded by the closeness realized in the nursery, playroom and the familiar surroundings of the home.*<sup>14</sup>

In Christian experience, forgiveness (received from God, and offered to others), can parallel some of the experiences of early life in the relationship between parents and child.

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<sup>13</sup> using part of the title of D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*, Hogarth Press, 1965

<sup>14</sup> J. Dominian, ‘Forgiveness and Personality’, in *Theology*, LXXXI, number 581, November 1968, page 494

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Forgiveness enables us to recognize others and ourselves as ordinary and ambiguous, and it assures us that we do not have to carry all our shame and guilt always with us.

This is a theme which Christian theology and pastoral ethics hold in trust and need to make available again to a society which is engrossed in the law of retaliation, of 'you owe, so you must pay', of revenge, retribution and the sort of 'justice' that can never be redemptive; a society so engrossed in the ideal of solving problems by technical intervention that we are losing touch with the personal tendernesses and power of what Martin Buber called 'I-Thou' relationships. Forgiveness is an inescapably relational word.

### ***Social and political forgiveness?***

Can forgiveness make any sense at all in the world of work or in the world of politics?

Let us examine two examples. Every now and then the tabloid press is filled with details of a public figure who has got him or herself involved in some scandal. One person made the headlines well over twenty years ago. Something happened fairly recently to bring his name into prominence again, and of course the media concentrated on the now distant scandal. Nothing was said of the fact that he has put the past behind him, that he has been for years giving himself in sacrificial social service. The wrong for him is in the past, forgiven and put away. But for the press it was the one thing that still mattered. 'You sinned, so you must pay.' How much more generous, more creative, more joyous, if public opinion could somehow make the response of forgiveness.

To take another, more controversial, example: there is an alleged plot to assassinate a public figure. In retaliation, cruise missiles are targeted on the alleged perpetrators. They are warned that they, in their turn, must not retaliate, or they will suffer grievous consequences.

The whole political relationship is based on assumptions of wrong, mistrust, retaliation, vengeance.

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Could there be a politics of forgiveness? What shape would it take? It would certainly acknowledge the reality of evil in the world. It would not be concerned with peace at any price. But it would try to respond to evil in a way that is creative of new possibilities. It would recognize wrong and stand against it, but in a way that tried to take the costly path of reshaping the future, in the light of the wrong, in the most creative way possible. Forgiveness rules out bare retaliation; it tries rather to keep its eyes open for bridge-building gestures which can facilitate the recovery of trust. The recent history of the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa is an illustration of the costly but creative responses to the wrongs of the past.

There can be social and political counterparts to the interpersonal changes which take place when persons forgive each other, but it is the interpersonal dimensions of forgiveness which are the most poignant, and often the most difficult of all.

In the June 1993 issue of *One World* magazine, a German theologian Geiko Johann wrote an open letter to a Jewish Rabbi friend in Jerusalem. It was in response to the latter's concern over the neo-Nazi riots in Germany early in 1993 and his question 'Must we once again be afraid of the Germans?' In the course of the lengthy letter, the German theologian writes:

*And so, dear Jochanan, despite our personal closeness are we forever in separate camps? Do we thus remain, as a Jew and as a German, prisoners of the Nazis, unable to escape the shadow of their crimes? Has Hitler thus achieved the 'final victory' from the grave? God forbid!*

*Hannah Arendt has said that the only way we humans can free ourselves from the chains of past guilt consists in our capacity to forgive ... I am no romantic who imagines that forgiveness ends all conflicts. But it does make a difference whether our conflicts stand under the curse of revenge and retaliation, or under the sign of the covenant. Forgiveness and covenant belong together. Unless forgiveness creates trust, no covenant can exist. Perhaps it is still too early for*

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*such thoughts, because the distress of the shoah is still too great. But therefore I may say to you that I am waiting for the reality of forgiveness. It is very dear to me that it can come only from you and your people. We Germans have nothing to offer here. We cannot pardon ourselves ...*<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps it is appropriate to set that letter alongside this prayer, found on a piece of wrapping paper near the body of a dead child in Ravensbruck Nazi Concentration Camp, where it is estimated that 92,000 women and children died. It is quoted by Martin Israel, by no means as a justification of the evil of Nazism, but as an 'almost unbearably moving testament of forgiveness':<sup>16</sup>

*O Lord,*

*Remember not only the men and  
women of goodwill,*

*but also those of illwill.*

*But do not only remember the  
suffering they have inflicted on us,  
remember the fruits we bought,  
thanks to this suffering,*

*our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility,  
the courage, the generosity,*

*the greatness of heart which has  
grown out of all this,*

*and when they come to judgement,*

*let all the fruits that we have borne  
be their forgiveness.*

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<sup>15</sup> *One World*, June 1993, pages 6–7

<sup>16</sup> M. Israel, *The Pain that Heals*, Hodder, 1981, page 113

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Finally, a paragraph from one of Helmut Thielicke's sermons sets an appropriate tone for the conclusion of this chapter:

*Look at your neighbour; the neighbour standing at your door. Don't you feel your right hand in the hand of God? But what is your left hand doing? Is it a clenched fist, or is it stretched out toward your neighbour so that the divine circuit can be dosed and thus allow the current of creative power to flow into you?*

*Our left hand is capable of doing something different from our right hand ... it can send us staggering down the wrong road, and make us miss the gates of the Father's house, and so miss what we were intended and created to be. For I was intended to be not an echo of the world's evil ... but rather to be an echo of that unceasing love that comes from the cross.<sup>17</sup>*

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> H. Thielicke, *I Believe*, Collins, 1969

<sup>18</sup> Colossians 3:13

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## PART TWO

### *Pastoral Ethics and Social Issues*

#### 8

### **Rulers to obey?**

'You must all obey the governing authorities.' These words of St Paul could be misleading. They come in Romans 13, one of the key biblical passages which are important for us in thinking through our duties as Christians as citizens in this world. But, taken on their own, they could be misleading. For this passage has sometimes been interpreted as meaning that all Christians, wherever they are, must simply and uncritically accept and go along with whoever exercises civil power, whatever form that takes. And we know where that led for some Christian leaders in Germany in the 1930s. They found themselves, with great reluctance in some cases, swept along with the growth of Nazi power, and they acquiesced to it. Does 'you must all obey the governing authorities' mean that? Dietrich Bonhoeffer did not think so. He was a Lutheran pastor in Germany who eventually fell in with a plot to assassinate Hitler—and, as is well known, he was hanged for his trouble in 1945. Was he right?

We will need more than just this text if we are going to find a fully grounded biblical answer.

Underneath much of the discussion lies a question which touches all of us at some point: what is the role of the Christian in relation to the state? Should the 'church keep out of politics', as we are constantly told every time a bishop opens his mouth on some 'social' issue? What should be the role of Archbishop Tutu in South Africa; or of Roman Catholic leaders in Poland? What should be our own role in

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relation to the state in our own country? Should church and politics be kept apart?

This question has been answered in different ways by different Christians at different times. And these diverse views may well underlie other differences of opinion between Christian people—for example, whether it could ever be right for a Christian to bear arms in war.

### ***Historical survey***

Some historical bearings will be helpful. In the early centuries of the Christian church, Christians were by and large a minority sect with little opportunity for exercising political authority. A Christian could not become a soldier, partly because most Christians thought that to bear arms in war was incompatible with the teaching and example of Christ, and also because to do so would involve swearing an oath of allegiance to the Emperor as a god, which of course was idolatry. The Christian calling was one of acceptance and acknowledgement that, however ungodly it was, the civil authority of the Roman Emperor was there for the common good and could be received as God-given.

This is part of St Paul's meaning in his letter to the Romans, written towards the beginning of the reign of the Emperor Nero. The church as it then was simply could not play an active part in political decision-making. That is not to say that the early Christian church was not a force in the political world. If we read between the lines of the Book of Revelation, written a few decades later, we find that the very existence of the church as the people of God provoked the secular authorities into political responses of one sort or another. That church setting was of the awful totalitarian regime of the Emperor Domitian who himself demanded the worship of his subjects—a totalitarian regime described in Revelation 13 as a monstrous Beast rising out the sea.

We will pause in our historical survey to notice the contrast, even opposition, between the understanding of the State in Romans 13 and that described in Revelation 13. As we shall see in more detail shortly, in writing to the Romans Paul had

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a concept of the State as God's servant, an institution with God-given tasks and God-given limits. The officers of the State have a particular role to play in the ordering of human society under God. But the picture in Revelation 13 is very different. The beast which rises from the sea is still under the authority of God, but has rejected that authority and is now tyrannically demanding that men and women accord supreme authority to it—and even offer it their worship. The state, represented by the beast, is described in terms which are chaotic and inhuman. It is set against God, proud and blasphemous. In the beast of Revelation, the state has become an ideological tyranny far removed from the picture of God's servant in Paul's letter to the Romans. The question to be asked is whether the state has here so overstepped the limits of its God-given authority and role that it has ceased in any sense to occupy the sort of place in God's purposes which requires our obedience and respect. The answer to this question may become clearer when we look at the proper role and limits of the state later in this chapter.

For the present, we pick up the historical survey of the way Christians have responded to secular authority. At the start of the fourth century, the whole Roman world was shaken when the Emperor Constantine became a Christian and made Christianity the official religion of the Empire. Now we do find Christians becoming politically active. Some are willing to fight in wars for the defence of the Christian Empire against the barbarians. The cross even became a military emblem. Through the work of Ambrose Bishop of Milan, and of Augustine, the doctrine of the 'just war (to which we refer in the next chapter) became part of Christian thought.

Throughout the Middle Ages, the medieval church struggled with the question of the relation between Christian faith and allegiance to the earthly city. At one extreme we find the Crusades, wars of conquest fought in the name of God supposedly intended to rescue Christian sites from pagans. At the other extreme, some monastic groups withdrew from the world altogether, seeking to live as an alternative society and witnessing to another way of living.

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## ***Christian involvement in the world***

What did the Christians of the Reformation times make of all this? They were as divided as we are. The issue for them at the risk of gross oversimplification, could be focused in the following questions.

Is the Christian called on to come apart from the evil of the world and be separate, to withdraw from anything to do with the secular world, and to be a distinct and holy society which can shine with the light of Christ into the darkness?

Or is the Christian called on to confront the evil in the world by becoming immersed in its life and its needs, with a view to bringing Christ's transforming and redeeming love actively to bear on them and to change them? That, I suggest, is often the way the question still comes to us. Is our Christianity avertive—a withdrawal from the world? Or is it transformative—an engagement with the world?

The former, historically linked, for example, with some parts of the Anabaptist and Mennonite movements, is concerned that neither the church nor the individual Christian should be involved in politics: to do so dilutes the gospel of Christ. An 'avertive' form of Christianity is seen in some Evangelical groups and movements which major on pietism, on individual holiness of life and on the priority of fellowship within the church. It is seen in some of the house churches whose sole concentration is on individual spiritual growth in discipleship. 'Avertive' Christianity is also seen in the many within the churches for whom the call of social involvement and the requirements of social justice simply do not seem to be important.

The latter, the 'transformative' style of Christian living, historically derived, for example, from the radicalism of Calvin, is concerned that the Christian is inescapably a member of this world order, with a divine vocation to serve his neighbour by engaging in social issues, and that the gospel of Christ has inevitable social and therefore political implications. Sometimes Christians who have started with the conviction that all of life is to be lived under the Lordship

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of Christ have in practice found their Christian convictions dissolving into a sort of 'social gospel' which merely identifies Christian faith with social issues. This politicizes the gospel in a way which dilutes it and 'naturalizes' it. But there are many others whose commitment to the supernatural power of Christ's gospel of death and resurrection drives them into the world in Christ's name, with a radical and transformative programme of social concern intended to bring all aspects of our community life under Christ's rule and into line with his will for human life and well-being. On these questions we must each come to our own judgment. What follows is a series of pointers which may help us in our decisions.

### ***New Testament pointers***

The first pointer comes in a text from Matthew's Gospel:

'Render ... to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's' (Matthew 22:21). At first sight this seems to support the former, avertive, view—the view that suggests we should keep things separate, keep the church apart from the State.

Matthew records that a question was put to Jesus by the Pharisees concerning tribute money. 'Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?' (Matthew 22:17). The mass of Jewish people resented paying tribute to the Roman Emperor: it underlined their status as subjects of Rome. Some of them were Zealot extremists who hoped for an eventual political overthrow of the Roman authority. There were some people who tried to tie Jesus in with the Zealot revolutionary ideals. But there were some, the Herodians, who tried to keep in favour with Rome, who would have supported paying taxes to Caesar.

So the question is a trap: if Jesus told the people not to pay the tax, he would be in trouble with the civil authorities; if he said they should pay tax, he would bring down the hostility of the people. The Pharisees set up their question in theological terms: 'Is it lawful ...?' In other words—in the light of the law of God—is it permissible to pay tax?

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Jesus' reply avoids any commitment to Zealot extremism and to political hopes of overthrowing Rome. It rather acknowledges that there is a place for political authority, and that a rightful political authority is not incompatible with the kingdom of God. But, as we said, his reply can be read in an 'avertive' way, which keeps the political and spiritual realms separate.

However, if we probe a little more deeply, it may be that the text reveals something more. It is not merely that Jesus is being put on a spot by his questioners, and turns the tables on them: 'You have Roman tribute money on you—well then you had better pay for the privileges of Roman rule.' More likely, it is somewhat deeper. There is an interpretation of this passage, going back as far as Tertullian, a Christian of the fourth century, which is as follows. You have a coin on you bearing Caesar's image. You must give to Caesar what bears Caesar's image. In a similar way, you must give to God what bears the image of God. And what bears God's image? Why, human beings in all the fullness of their lives and relationships! You must give all of yourself to God.

Rather than encouraging an 'avertive' split between the realms of Caesar and of God, this text is really supporting an inclusive and transformative view. There is nothing which belongs to Caesar which does not first belong to God.

Abraham Kuyper was Prime Minister of Holland at the turn of the century. In the course of a very full life, he founded a university. In his inaugural lecture at the Free University of Amsterdam, he included these now famous words: 'There is not an inch of this universe of which Jesus Christ does not say, "It is Mine." '

Even what in a provisional and limited way is Caesar's concern, and must be respected, is also, and in a more inclusive way, the concern of God.

We can find this 'transformative' attitude illustrated in other examples of Jesus' own attitude to the state of his day. His state was the Jewish State. One of the most instructive

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incidents is Jesus' response to the accusation that his disciples were breaking the state's rules about Sabbath observance by plucking the ears of corn as they were going through the grain fields. Jesus replied, 'The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath' (Mark 3:27). In other words—to borrow the title of a book by Shirley Williams—politics is for people. Jesus is willing to set the state's rules within the wider context of God's concern for people's welfare: the rules are there for the good of the people. And Jesus is willing to confront the rulers in the name of human welfare when their politics has ceased to be for people. Jesus' behaviour before Pilate is also instructive. He acknowledges that Pilate has authority, but makes clear that Pilate's authority is a derived authority 'given you from above' (John 19:11). And Jesus is prepared to bear witness to the truth of God's kingdom even when that meant confronting imperial power (John 18:33ff).

### ***St Paul***

With these pointers in mind we can now return to Romans 13 and try to discern some principles from St Paul's writings which can guide us today.

We need first, of course, to note that it is not at all straightforward to try to apply a passage of Scripture referring to first-century imperial Rome to our very different twentieth-century Western democracies. The patterns of power and responsibility in our society are very different. In the Roman Empire power was centralized in the emperor. Now there are many centres of power—the politicians, the media, the unions, the military-industrial complex. We even have an Institutionalized Opposition to government. However, there are certain principles which underlie Paul's argument in Romans 13 which we can make use of.

The first is that all authority comes from God (Romans 13:1). However much we may dislike or disagree with the policies of a particular administration, the principle of ordered government is a God-given one. God is concerned that human life should be ordered, and the disordering

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effects of sin and selfishness should be restrained. There is an authority invested in government which is from God.

Secondly, therefore, all governments are subordinate to God and his laws. The ruler is 'God's servant' (Romans 13:4) We must beware of the image of totalitarian government the Beast of Revelation 13, which claims the worship of its citizens. Such a state has become a pseudo-church, is claiming an allegiance which belongs only to God, and thus becomes demonic. Governments are subordinate to God and part of the church's task is to hold the ministers of state accountable to God.

Thirdly, the state is God's servant, or God's minister, 'for your good' (Romans 13:4). This is another way of saying that politics is for people. The state exists for the good of the people—and to restrain evil within society. In that 'servant' role, the state is to act as the servant of God, both in promoting the welfare of its citizens (verse 4a), and in executing God's judgment on wrongdoers (verse 4b). We note that whereas individual Christians may not avenge wrong committed against themselves (Romans 12:19), the state may exercise God's 'vengeance' (Romans 13:4) for the sake of the common good.

Fourthly, the need which the state exists to meet is the need for justice. Paul's whole paragraph is premised on the justice of God, and the need for that justice to be vindicated and established. Society is to be so ordered that justice may be done—the sort of justice which reflects the just and righteous character of God.

***Old Testament precedent: justice***

Paul's thinking at this point is very much in line with that high point of the Old Testament's prophetic witness to the justice of God, recorded in Micah 6:8. Nowhere have the links between faith in God and concerns for social welfare been expressed more succinctly:

*He has showed you, O man,  
what is good;*

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*And what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?*

The prophet tells us what is good by referring first to the word translated 'justice'. We need a little care here, because 'justice' in the Bible means more than our common notion of 'fairness'. Justice, righteousness, mercy and forgiveness all merge into one another. God's justice becomes merciful and redemptive. This is not merely to repeat the well-worn cliché about tempering justice with mercy. It is rather to say that the doing of justice, righteousness, mercy and forgiveness are all part of one another in the character of God, and therefore are to be part of one another in the good society which reflects his character. It is, of course, important—and that is why our system of courts and judicial punishment exists—to establish fair dealings in our society. But a fair society is not necessarily a good society. To do justice in Micah's sense is a justice seen not only in the courts, but also beyond them. It is seen also perhaps in actions of forgiveness to a husband or wife, gestures of conciliation to a neighbour and a refusal to live by the law of retaliation towards the tiresome colleague next door.

As George MacDonald put it: 'Man is not made for justice from his fellows, but for love, which is greater, and by including supersedes it.'

Interestingly St Paul moves immediately in Romans 13 from his discussion of the state to writing about love (Romans 13:8ff). This underlines the truth of F. R. Barry's words: 'Justice is the political expression of love.' The state exists to promote the conditions within which neighbour love can be expressed between people—that is the true meaning of justice.

### ***Kindness***

The prophet Micah moved on, as does St Paul, from the external behaviour denoted by 'justice' to the internal attitude. He says, 'Love kindness.' This debased word does

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duty for the Hebrew word meaning 'steadfastness, love and loyalty'. A good society is also concerned for the growth of such human qualities. No state can legislate for steadfastness and loyalty, but it can by legislation further the conditions in which such qualities can have space to grow. And this has implications, for example, for the priority that is given in national and local government to the human cost as well as the financial cost in various courses of action. It keeps the human dimension to the front, in consideration, for example, of prison overcrowding and the granting of parole. In some aspects of medicine, it might mean sacrificing the imperative of research for the sake of human sanctity. In our technological culture, it might mean less concentration on what Martin Buber called 'I-It' relationships in order to make more space for 'I-Thou'. To keep alive in our minds these ordinary, but far from trivial human concerns is surely part of the church's responsibility towards society, and towards the authorities who under God have the task of establishing justice and the conditions in which 'kindness' can grow.

### ***Christian social responsibility***

If these pointers give some guide to the role of the state within the purposes of God, what is the role of the Christian within the state?

He or she is to recognize that the principle of ordered government is God-given. But that is not the same as uncritical acceptance of whatever the powers that be may decide. On the contrary—as with Peter and the apostles—there may be occasions when we have to say, 'We must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). Furthermore, we are called to hold the powers that be accountable to God for their responsibilities in justice, and we must boldly confront them with the truth of the kingdom of God.

We cannot decide for one another where the lines must be drawn. We may not all be called to follow Bonhoeffer's example. But on certain issues of our day (expenditure on weapons of war or nuclear deterrence, for example; experimentation on human embryos which cause their

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death; wide-reaching changes in Sunday trading laws, and so on) there may well be occasions when Christians believe that they must take a firm stand against the powers that be.

It is part of the church's responsibility to the state to make clear God's revelation of his character and his truth. It is part of our task as citizens to hold our leaders accountable to God in their heavy responsibilities of decision-making. This may mean active engagement for us individually in the political process, or it may not. It should certainly mean—as the New Testament authors several times urge—that we should pray for those in authority. 'I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour' (1 Timothy 2:1ff).

Whatever our party-political allegiance; whatever view in conscience we come to take about our vocation under God—whether our expression of faith is 'avertive' or 'transformative'; we are all bound in considering not only our own interests but also the interests of others (Philippians 2:4) to hold those who exercise power in our society in the forefront of our prayers.

### ***Faith***

This is important for another reason which the text from Micah also highlights. 'Do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.' The prophet refuses to advocate the good life and make proposals for a good society apart from faith in the living God. To do so is to speak of impossible ideals or impossible burdens. But the message of grace which is central to Christian belief is that what God requires of us that in Christ he also gives.

Throughout, the biblical story of God's affairs with his world is not one of a call for obedience to arbitrary commands, but for the growth of a relationship of loving allegiance: 'Walk humbly with your God.'

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The church's responsibility to the state must therefore include the calling to men and women to hear again the word of divine address which is at the same time the divine resource: that we in all our different callings are accountable to God, and that in our personal and social lives we should walk in the way that is good, by doing justice and by loving kindness and by walking humbly with him.

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## Christian Concerns In The Nuclear Debate

What is our Christian responsibility in a world which, despite recent encouraging steps towards disarmament, is still dominated by arsenals of nuclear weapons, and in which it is widely assumed that nuclear deterrence is the appropriate mode of defence?

In this chapter we will not get very far into strategic thinking or political judgments. We will concentrate rather on a Christian theological framework: to try to clarify our minds as Christians concerning some of the fundamental moral issues involved in this question. It is then for each of us to make our own personal and political judgments in the light of them.

Let us begin with Good Friday and Easter.

Good Friday points us to the cross: to God's confrontation with evil in the death of Jesus; to the vindication of God's righteousness in a sinful world; to the climax of God's mission in Jesus to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

In the cross we see God's justice, but it is a justice which is redemptive, a justice which is the expression of God's merciful love. It is a justice which is on the side of the poor. In the light of Good Friday, we Christians are committed to take forward Christ's work of confronting evil in his name, and of establishing a justice in this world which is liberating, redemptive and merciful.

Easter Day says more. Because of Jesus' resurrection, we are offered the gift of a new life with God. This new life is marked by the word which Jesus spoke to his disciples that first Easter Sunday evening: 'Peace be with you.' The risen Christ makes peace between us and God. Christ is our peace, breaking down walls of hostility between divided

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groups, even between divided peoples. In the light of Easter's peace, we are committed to being peacemakers in God's world.

Christian ways of establishing justice; Christian ways of making peace. These are both parts of our Christian mission in a nuclear age. And just as Good Friday and Easter belong inseparably together, so true justice and true peace are part of each other.

The story of the Christian church can be told as in some ways the story of how difficult it is to get both sides of this task together.

We can neglect peacemaking, but then our justice would become harsh and punitive. A society built on justice alone knows little of the warmth of personal fellowship. Or we can neglect justice, and then our peacemaking becomes but a shallow covering over of differences, even a tolerance of wrong for the sake of avoiding conflict. Like the false prophets of old it is possible to speak 'peace' where there is no peace.

We need justice *and* peace. Both are aspects of the character of God. Both are held together in the Old Testament word *shalom*, often translated 'peace'. *Shalom* does not primarily mean the absence of conflict; it means human well-being in all areas of life. When the Lord brings *shalom*, there is health, there is conciliation, there is contentedness. When the *shalom* of the Lord is present, there are good relationships between nations and people. And true *shalom* is peace with justice. It is this towards which the psalmist looks on that coming day when 'righteousness and peace will kiss each other' (Psalm 85:10).

It is God's concern that we work towards the things that make for such full human well-being and peace, based on the just, righteous, loving and merciful character of God. And God's concern is not only for us, for also for those who are poor and oppressed. And for those we see as our enemies. These especially Jesus tells us to love and to pray for (Matthew 5:44).

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We have seen that it has been hard—and it still is hard in this disordered and fallen world—to get both sides of *shalom*, the justice and the peace, together. Perhaps we should say that Christians have not always agreed on *how* they should express these two sides of their task.

### ***Some history***

For the first three centuries of the Christian era, Christians were pacifists. This was for a variety of reasons. In the first place, the Christian church was seen by the Roman occupying power as a sect within Judaism, and the Romans forbade the Jews to serve in the imperial army. Christians came into contact with the army, therefore, mostly as the army acted as the agent of the Emperor's persecution. Not many Christians were likely to have wanted to serve in an army which was known for its brutality against Christians. Further, the Roman army was committed to the cult of Emperor worship, and the soldiers were required to take an oath of allegiance to the Emperor as god. There were theological issues at stake as well. For many, the gospel of Christ transformed their understanding of the Old Testament's acceptance of the need for warfare into a 'spiritual' warfare against evil in the world. Some Christians believed that all shedding of blood was against the Christian gospel. Tertullian argued that in disarming Peter ('Put your sword into its sheath [John 18:11]), Christ had 'unbelted every soldier'.

### ***Just war***

In the fourth century, when Emperor Constantine became a Christian, we find a marked change coming into Christian thinking. Christians are now willing to bear arms in war, and to fight for the vindication of God's justice in the face of evil threats to the Christian empire. Christians had to think out how far, and in what circumstances, military service was compatible with their faith. The key Christian thinkers at this stage in the church's life were Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, and Saint Augustine.

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Augustine lived during the barbarian invasions of the Empire and concluded that war for the vindication of justice must sometimes be a Christian duty. Augustine had a radical understanding of the nature of human sin, and recognized that no war could ever be completely just. Nonetheless, and although he longed for peace, he believed that God's justice requires that evil be restrained if necessary by force, and that it is not impossible to please God while engaging in military service. He states very clearly that the 'spirit of the peacemaker' is to be preserved, and this is seen in his ruling about non-combatants, and about the humane treatment of prisoners of war.

Gradually the concept which has become known as the Just War Tradition developed in the Christian mind. It was taken further in the writings of Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, whose teaching remains the basis for Catholic moral theology. He emphasizes the permissibility of war for defence and believed that in order for such a war to be just, three things are necessary: the authority of the sovereign, a just cause and a right intention (to wage war not in order to conquer, but to secure peace). Building on these views, other Catholic theologians like Vitoria and Suarez elaborated the conditions to be observed if a war is to be conducted justly. Their thinking was used by the Dutch lawyer Grotius whose book *On the Law of War and Peace* (1625) laid down rules of justice in war that have found expression in more modern international conventions.

Luther and Calvin both saw war as a necessary evil—an extension of the role of the state in restraining evil and promoting good (from Romans 13).

The doctrine of the just war thus did not seek to justify all wars, but rather to limit war by the requirements of justice. It recognized the need for some use of force to vindicate Justice and to restrain human aggressiveness in the task of establishing the conditions for a just peace

Various criteria were propounded at different times, which we can summarize as follows:

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- ☒ There are circumstances in which the proper authority of the state may use force in defence of its people.
  - ☒ War may only be waged by legitimate authority and there must be formal declaration of war.
  - ☒ The purpose for which the war is fought must be just.
  - ☒ The recourse to war must be the very last resort.
  - ☒ The motive of the war must be just.
  - ☒ There must be reasonable hope of success—that is of securing peace.
  - ☒ The good consequences to be expected from going to war must outweigh the evils incurred in waging it.
  - ☒ Violence must only be directed towards those in arms—the criterion of ‘discrimination’.
  - ☒ The war must be waged in such a way that only the minimum force needed to achieve the aims of the war must be used—the criterion of ‘proportion’.

Clearly many of these criteria, while relevant to the personal and limited wars of the Middle Ages, are hardly applicable in today’s very different world. The criteria of discrimination and proportion, however, are both of contemporary relevance.

By discrimination was meant that force should only be used against those who were armed. This ‘doctrine of non-combatant immunity’ is consistent with the biblically based conviction that innocent human beings have an inviolable right not to be deliberately killed. (There are many prohibitions in the Old Testament, and the theme is illustrated also in the New, against the ‘shedding of innocent blood’: Exodus 20:13; Isaiah 59:7–8; Matthew 27:4; Romans 3:15). Although it was recognized that not all enemy combatants are personally ‘guilty’, by bearing arms they did represent the aggressive force which needed to be checked in the name of justice.

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It was this criterion of discrimination to which Bishop Bell bravely appealed in the House of Lords in 1944 in his condemnation of the Allied saturation bombing of Dresden and Berlin: 'That is not a justifiable act of war.'

The criterion of proportion stated that only the minimum force needed to achieve the objective may be used. This stands as a critique of any theory of overkill.

Christians of the just war tradition have sought to express something of the character of God in the obligation to work for justice. Christians felt obliged by the requirements of the justice implicit in neighbour love to engage in war, and by the requirements of the justice implicit in neighbour love severely to limit it. Down the centuries many Christians have seen defensive war as a last resort, a lesser evil choice in the cause of justice.

It is worth examining some of the biblical perspectives on which many Christians have accepted the tradition of just war thinking.

☒ God is a just God who cares about justice. It is a Christian obligation to work towards justice, especially for the oppressed (Psalm 98:1–2; Isaiah 10:1–21; Luke 1:52).

☒ The sinful nature of human beings and the fallenness of our social order mean that people and societies do not act justly. Our aggressiveness needs to be restrained (James 4:1–6).

☒ True peace is based on the just ordering of society (Psalm 85:10; James 3:18; Isaiah 11:4–11).

☒ God has ordained the authorities of the state to a specific and limited role in punishing evil (Romans 13:1; 1 Peter 2:13–17).

☒ The cross of Christ displays the willingness of God to wage war on the powers of evil to the point of self-sacrifice (Ephesians 6:10–20; Colossians 2:15).

### ***Christian pacifism***

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Alongside those Christians who follow this tradition within the church, there have always been others who have disagreed. Many have held to the tradition of the earliest centuries and been Christian pacifists. One of the most notable was the Anabaptist leader Menno Simmons (1496–1561) from whom the Mennonites take their name. He taught that the Christian is a follower of the Prince of Peace, and is commanded to love his enemies and turn the other cheek when struck. He said:

*Tell me how can a Christian defend scripturally retaliation, rebellion, war, striking, slaying, torturing, stealing, robbing and plundering and burning cities, and conquering countries?... All rebellion is of the flesh and of the devil ... O blessed reader our weapons are not swords and spears, but patience, silence and hope and the Word of God.*

Christian pacifists also claim biblical backing for their position. Their rejection of just war thinking often includes the following:

- ☒ Jesus made no distinction between private and public morality. His command ‘Do not resist one who is evil’ applies socially as much as personally.
- ☒ The Old Testament, often used to justify wars, points more characteristically to the way God worked by miracle (for example, at the exodus) through his people’s vulnerability and their trust in him rather than in chariots (Exodus 14:13ff; Judges 7:19ff).
- ☒ Jesus sets aside his power. His example of non-retaliation is the Christian response to evil (Matthew 27:11–14).
- ☒ The role of the state is to maintain order within society—it is not legitimate to extrapolate from Romans 13 to questions of international warfare.
- ☒ The Christian way is the way of witness to the peacemaking gospel of love: we are to ‘overcome evil with good’ (Romans 12:21).

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☒ The way of the cross is the way of self-giving love and non-violent resistance to violence (John 15:13).

Christian pacifists argue that Christians are to display a different sort of response to the violence of the world—to meet it not with force, but with non-violent resistance. They have thus sought to express something of the character of God’s peace.

Just War Christians have tended to think that Christian pacifists have too optimistic a view of human nature, and do not take sin seriously enough. Christian pacifists, on the other hand, have tended to think that Just War Christians have too small a view of the power of the gospel, and do not take the teaching and example of Christ seriously enough.

It may be that, historically, the church has needed both emphases in order to express the full meaning of *shalom*: God’s character of justice and peace.

***The different traditions come together***

What is very significant now, however, is that both Just War and Christian Pacifist streams are beginning to run together in response to the totally new questions posed for us by the existence of weapons of indiscriminate destruction. Whereas for Christians of an earlier age, war was merely an extension of state policing, and words like ‘chivalry’ and ‘valour’ could mean something, the issue of nuclear (and chemical and biological) weapons, confront us with possibilities of technological warfare on a scale which earlier generations could never have conceived.

In the General Synod of the Church of England debate on the report *The Church and the Bomb*, the then Archbishop of York, Stuart Blanch, opened his speech with these words: ‘We are talking about the end of the world and how to avert it.’ Clearly, Christians in the pacifist tradition reject any justification of nuclear war as part of their rejection of all war. But it is very important to see how many Just War Christians now believe that the Just War tradition is pushing

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them to become 'nuclear pacifists'. Here are a few of the arguments.

The requirement of justice rules out any use of strategic nuclear weapons. One of the key criteria of Just War is that of discrimination between combatants and non-combatants. Strategic nuclear weapons (and indeed chemical and biological weapons) are indiscriminate by design. There is thus an inherent immorality about such weapons, and any use whatever must be outlawed as incompatible with Christian conscience. As Lewis Smedes put it: 'No one can justify pushing the nuclear button, no matter who pushes it, or for what reason.'

A further consideration ruling out all use of strategic nuclear weapons is that if 'defence' is virtually bound to lead to the destruction of all that is being defended, then this is an absurdity. As Archbishop Runcie once wrote: 'There can be no such thing as a just mutual obliteration.'

Furthermore, even to contemplate the decision to bring the possibility of this world order to an end by human decision, and to remove the possibility for future generations (because of threats of radiation damage and 'nuclear winter') of any ordered society is to take to ourselves possibilities which belong only within the providence of God. He sets the bounds for the ending of this world-order: our task is to establish justice in human affairs. To 'play God' in this way is to succumb to the demonic.

But what, we may ask, of tactical weapons which can be accurately targeted on military installations? Is the use of such weapons also ruled out?

It would be possible to think of a scenario—say, an aggressive army in the middle of an uninhabitable desert—in which the use of a counterforce tactical nuclear weapon would be no more immoral than the use of conventional weapons. But in any likely scenario (the battlefield of Europe, for example), the crossing of the nuclear firebreak from conventional to non-conventional weapons, the radiation damage, and the likelihood of moving up to

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strategic exchange, are all so unpredictable that prudence would dictate the grave unwisdom of any use of tactical weapons either.

### ***Nuclear deterrence***

However, we may reply, we do not have nuclear weapons in order to use them, but in order that they never have to be used. This is the paradox of nuclear deterrence. We hold our weapons in order to deter others from using theirs. What does Just War thinking have to say to this paradox?

In this immensely complex area, the following considerations are important.

The Just War concept is based on a commitment to display the character of God's justice in human affairs; a justice which is redemptive, merciful and righteous; a justice which forms the basis of *shalom*. Does nuclear deterrence foster this goal? Does the posture of nuclear deterrence tell the world that we are concerned for that sort of justice in international relations?

No. Its posture of threat says rather, 'We are no longer concerned about establishing justice, but are willing to be known as those 'who would be immorally reckless if provoked.'

Further, even if deterrence is based on bluff, it is a bluff which depends nonetheless on thousands of people in military commands and nuclear silos being committed to the belief that it is not bluff; it depends on convincing potential aggressors that it is not bluff; in other words, it is a policy which depends on a widespread lie. For an administration which is not accountable to an electorate (as in a totalitarian regime) one could perhaps more readily allow for such deceit. But for a government to hold office by convincing its electorate that it will use nuclear weapons if necessary, while privately holding its hand that this is a bluff, is very far from accountable open government.

And if it is not bluff—if it is a genuine threat to use such weapons in some circumstances—it is a 'threat to juggle

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with the morally unthinkable' as O'Donovan put it. This is an utterly unjust means which cannot be justified by however good an end.

A further possibility is sometimes canvassed that we could hold our nuclear weapons and openly say—and mean—that they will never be used. The deterrence works not by our intentions, but by what our enemies think our intentions are. Their uncertainty as to whether we mean what we say is deterrent enough. But this posture also depends on being willing to be known as a country which would use such weapons if pushed hard enough, and that—it seems to me—is unacceptable to a Christian conscience.

Finally, we need to remember that the nuclear issue is not only about the indiscriminate power of weapons. It is also about what President Eisenhower once called the 'military industrial complex': the combination of a spiralling interaction between the armaments industry, military strategists, and diplomatic and political considerations—a spiral in which it is often hard to discern where power or responsibility lies. The commitment of human, financial and other resources in a world of limited means and enormous human deprivation is itself a moral issue to be evaluated by the claims of justice.

The nuclear issue is also about human nature and the fact that we are given up to mistrust. Christian peacemakers are called to build bridges of trust. Are there structures to be established for conciliation: educational, cultural and religious exchanges towards which the Christian churches could contribute? Are there ways of cooperating more with our Christian brothers and sisters elsewhere in the world, and perhaps especially in the Soviet bloc, on such questions?

Are there ways of making clear to those whom we see as our enemies that in Christ's name we wish to love them and pray for their *shalom* as well as our own? For whatever major differences opposing ideologies display (and these are not to be minimized); and whatever social and religious values we rightly may believe it important to preserve, and

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believe that 'the other side' denies, one truth is that we all share a common humanity under God. We are all made in his image, and for all of us the human well-being described by *shalom* is ultimately found through lives and societies shaped by his character.

Our Christian mission in a nuclear age is to find ways of so ordering our lives and our society and our international relations that they display something of the character of God's righteous justice and loving peace.

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## A Christian Theology Of Work

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What is work? There are some ambiguities in the way we use the word. It can refer to a special kind of activity which takes place in a certain place (in the factory, at the office) which separates it from home. Or it can refer to activity at special times (nine to five; the evening shift) which separates it from other times. Or it can refer to activity within a certain context. If I spend my evening working in the garden, or papering the dining-room wall, that is not my 'work', but for a gardener or decorator to do exactly the same thing for me is, for them, their work. If I paint or play cricket that for me is leisure, but for Dali or Boycott it may be work.

One striking ambiguity is 'housework'. It takes effort, time and thought. It is economically significant (if someone else does it for us, we have to pay), but it does not show up on the national employment statistics.

Work is not, then, wholly defined by specific actions. It is usually socially defined. In modern society, work is most often understood as 'paid employment'—activities carried out in exchange for a wage or salary. For centuries in pre-industrialized society, work was regarded only as a burdensome toil. There was no sense in which work might be 'meaningful' to the great mass of those who worked. Meaningful life was that part of life not associated with work.

But modern society, since the industrialization and urbanization of the last two hundred years, has often considered work to be much more the centre of a person's life. Now people speak of work that is 'meaningful'. The pain and indignity of unemployment, and the political

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<sup>4</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (77). Lynx Communications: London

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urgency in getting levels of unemployment down tell us that 'to be out of work' means more than simply 'not earning money'. Indeed, some people receive more money from the dole by staying off work than they would by doing their job—but they would prefer the job. By working we can extend ourselves, we can use our own creativity, we act. Work, many people now believe, is one way of affirming our own existence and worth.

There are several levels to the question 'why do we work?' In economic terms, we work to satisfy certain wants and needs. The management of the economy involves the management of resources, their production and consumption, so as to ensure that groups and individuals can be maintained in certain relationships, in certain standards of living, and that certain basic human needs are met and some wants satisfied.

The process of producing materially necessary and culturally valued items is a social undertaking involving cooperation between groups. The 'division of labour' often increases efficiency by encouraging different people to use different skills. But this leads to other differences as well: between employer and employee; between the worker and his family; between the husband and the wife in the responsibilities for the home. It leads to various opportunities of control by one group over others.

In modern society, there are various trends in the world of work, many of which conflict with other human wants or needs. There is a prevalent tendency to separate work from home. The commuter 'travelling to work' is a consequence of industrialization. (There are some jobs where the boundaries are unclear: the doctor with his surgery at home, or the clergyman who works from the vicarage.)

There is also a tendency towards separating the worker from his product. The 'alienation' of which Marxist philosophy speaks sometimes refers to the worker who owns neither his tools nor the capital; he is separated from his product in its finished form. All of this can lead to a sense

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of deprivation and lack of purposefulness in work; a sense of frustration and loss of self-esteem.

Collective attempts to overcome the sense of powerlessness and lack of control in industrial society has frequently led to industrial conflict and the withdrawal of labour by strike action. The commitment to monetarist policies and a free-market economy has left many individuals feeling lost at the mercy of economic forces over which neither they, nor apparently anyone else, have much control.

Work is closely tied in with self-image. Many find their job contributes significantly to their sense of identity as people. Being made redundant calls in question their very humanity. There is a satisfaction to be found in creative work (such as a craft or farming) which is denied the person on the production line. As the *Communist Manifesto* put it 140 years ago:

*Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to division of labour, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, the most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack that is required of him.*

Of course, work is by no means only concerned with 'production', although that is the model often uppermost in people's minds. The service industries and those involved in the caring professions are two examples of work which is not 'productive' in the sense of having a material or consumable product. In fact, in these areas of work the concept of 'production' is either inappropriate or misused in the sense that the significance of such work can be reduced to its cost-benefit potential. It is all too possible to measure 'worthwhile' activity only in terms of material or financial values rather than personal and social values.

### ***Christian approaches***

The world of work raises many questions of meaning, purpose, conflict and power. It is this world we now have

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to try to understand within a Christian perspective. How has the Christian church responded to the changing demands of the world of work?

The answer is that, by comparison with other areas of Christian moral theology and ethical reflection, the church has thought very little. For some while Alan Richardson's *The Biblical Doctrine of Work*, written in 1952, remained one of the few Protestant writings trying to link biblical understanding with the world of employment. Karl Barth was one of the few Protestant theologians offering a theology of work as part of his understanding of the significance of human action. There was somewhat more going on through papal encyclicals in the Church of Rome (*Rerum Novarum* of 1891, *Quadragesimo Anno* in 1931, *Mater et Magistra* in 1961, and most recently John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* in 1981).

In the last thirty years or so, however, considerable catching up has been taking place, with significant writing on Christianity and economics, the just wage, strikes and the morality of profit.

It will not be our task in this chapter to discuss Christian attitudes to economic theory or practice, nor the politics of profit and industrial action. Some of the books in the list of suggestions for further reading do this. We will concentrate on a narrower, and yet in some ways more fundamental question: how Christians have understood the *meaning* of work within the purposes of God.

There are a number of emphases which it may be helpful to separate out.

### *Work as duty*

Some Christian writing has been an attempt to rescue Protestantism from the charge that it is the source of all that is unacceptable in capitalism. The so-called 'Protestant ethic' derived from the view that work is a duty which we owe to God, either in response to grace or—as with some of the Puritans—as a way of demonstrating our election as one of God's people. From this, it is often argued, spread

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the virtues of thrift, saving and hard work. The critics of capitalism often see its roots in the Puritans (usually without giving much attention to what the Puritans actually taught). R. H. Tawney is nearer the truth when he says that the concept of the 'duty of work' (which started from a religious basis) has for a very long time been cut loose from its religious context, and so has become a secularized ideology. It is this secularized ideology which has been such a powerful force in the capitalist West, often placing a burdensome sense of duty on the worker.

Although there may be some sense of work as 'response to God' which we as Christians wish to hold on to, to cast the meaning of work in terms of 'duty' is very often linked with notions of competition, the motive for profit, and an individualized sense of 'getting on' which sit uneasily with Christian understandings of neighbour love.

#### *Work as vocation*

It was mostly through the work of Martin Luther that the Reformers recovered a sense that all of life, including daily work, could be understood as a calling from God. The monastic orders of the medieval church had embodied a concept of 'vocation' as a calling to the religious life.

Luther's teaching on the 'priesthood of all believers' brought back into the Christian mind the sense that all Christian people have a calling—which can be expressed in the work place as well as in the monastery or the pulpit. 'Every honest vocation is service to God,' writes Luther. This theme is picked up in George Herbert's poem:

*All may of thee partake;  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with this tincture 'for thy sake',  
Will not grow bright and clean.  
A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine;*

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*Who sweeps a room as for thy laws*

*Makes that and the action fine.*

However, 'vocation' as understood in Luther's sense is not sufficient an understanding of the meaning of work for our day. He wrote as though a vocation once given by God was settled for life: we need a concept of multiple or changing vocations in a world of redundancies, retraining and job-sharing. He wrote as though a person's status in society was fixed and unchangeable: justice requires of us concepts of social mobility and social change. He wrote as though to be sure of one's vocation gave a sense of external security and inner peace: we need a concept of the meaningfulness of work which is sustainable in a world of insecurities. He wrote as though vocation were solely an individual matter between a person and God; we need a view of work which takes seriously the context of social and economic structures, of mutual interdependence and mutual accountability, and of the corporate dimensions of human activity.

Individual 'vocation' on its own is not enough.

*Work as service*

Another theme comes to prominence in the writing of Karl Barth. Barth sets his theological discussion of work in the context of human action. Human action is one way of expressing our human freedom. Human beings do not merely exist, like stones, nor merely live, like plants and animals. We can deliberately act in some way in relation to God and others and our environment. There is a 'self-transcendence' about human action.

This raises the question of how we should act, and Barth give us an answer. We will follow his exposition for the next few paragraphs. Barth begins by suggesting that we should understand human activity as being in correspondence to God's activity. Our actions have meaning in so far as they correspond with the actions of God.

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And what are God's actions? In Barth's view, the action of God has a centre and a circumference. The centre is the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ; the circumference around this centre is God's gracious providence overruling all things.

So when we ask about the meaning of human action in correspondence with God's, we need to ask first which human action corresponds with the centre of God's action in the coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ. Barth replies: service. Taking his cue from the action of Jesus Christ as the Servant, giving himself for the sake of the world and for the sake of his Father's glory, so we, in Christ, are called first of all to be servants, and see our human activity primarily in terms of service to God and to our fellow human beings. By giving ourselves in service for and within the kingdom of God, God draws our activity up into his own. And our life of service is to be understood as service within the community of the people of God, whose life is geared to announcing God's kingdom in Christ to the world.

When we have clarified the notion of human action primarily as service, we can then ask the second question: what sort of human activity corresponds to the 'circumference' around this centre of God's action—that is, what sort of human activity corresponds to God's overruling providence? This, says Barth, is the activity which we usually call work. God in his Fatherly providence sustains, directs and cares for his world, and looks after the welfare of his creatures. Our work, therefore, is the form which our human activity is to take, if we are to express our creatureliness as God's people living under his providence. Our work is about sustaining and directing and caring for the world and about the welfare of creation.

Just as God's providence surrounds and supports the centre of his action in the coming of his kingdom in Jesus Christ, so our human work should surround and support our service of the kingdom. We work in order that by so doing, and in other ways, we may serve.

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Jürgen Moltmann takes this theme even further, arguing that work needs to be understood in the light of the pain and struggle of the Passion of Christ. The work of redemption in Christ crucified, the Servant of the Lord, sets all our work in a new context. By designating redemption as 'the pain and work of God', the word 'work' gains a new meaning. The Servanthood and Lordship of Jesus Christ described in Philippians 2 is coupled with the calling to 'have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus'. This 'redirects' the concept of God's work back to human beings and our work. 'All work in the world is thereby placed on the level of Philippians 2, and filled with the hope of the kingdom of God.'

In summary, Moltmann argues that the biblical understanding of work begins with the God who works: 'The God who rejoices in his work finds his counterpart in the human joy in being and joy of self-presentation.' Yet God's work of redemption involves pain and self-renunciation. 'Work and servanthood become the embodiment of God's liberating and delivering action.' So reapplying this theological meaning to human work, Moltmann concludes that through our work and self-giving, we 'participate in the lordship of Christ in the world and thereby become co-workers in God's kingdom which completes creation and renews heaven and earth.'

### ***Work in the Bible***

Barth, and Moltmann, are thus giving us a theological route into the meaning of work. We will follow Barth a little further in suggesting that this makes more sense of the biblical material on work than the 'concordance' approach of some writers which simply looks for particular texts which speak of work, or labour, and which misses out on this wider sense of work as service.

The example of Jesus in the Gospels would not support the very high estimation of work as duty, which some in the Protestant traditions have suggested. The parables certainly assume that work must be undertaken, but when Jesus calls disciples it is away from employment and into the service

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of the kingdom. There is no evidence that Jesus remained a carpenter after starting his public ministry. Work is thus relativized in the light of the kingdom.

With St Paul the same relativizing can be seen, though the emphasis is slightly different. Acts 18:3 tells us that he and Aquilla were tent-makers. More than once he tells us that he earned his own living (1 Corinthians 4:12; 9:6; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 2 Thessalonians 3:8). In several places he urges his congregations to do the same (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:10ff). But once again, work seems to be on the edges of his ministry. He works in order to serve. It is from this perspective that we now look back into the Old Testament which has often in Christian thinking been taken as the starting point for a doctrine of work.

Clearly Genesis 1:28 refers to work—as does Genesis 2:15, with its reference to the man being set in the Garden ‘to till it and keep it’ as part of the goodness of the created order. Many have seen in the creativity which some work entails a reflection of the image of God the Creator. Throughout the Old Testament, work is a fact of life: ‘Man goes forth to his work and to his labour until the evening’ (Psalm 104:23), and the example of the ant reminds him not to be sluggish (Proverbs 6:6–11).

However, in Old Testament agrarian society there was little choice but to work, and work was overshadowed by the curse of Genesis 3:17, with its picture of toil and sweat. Ecclesiastes refers to the weariness and futility of human labour, complementing the goodness of work in the creation stories with this sense of its transitoriness and relative limitation.

To summarize: work has an important place among the activities God asks of us. It thus has its own dignity and importance. But it has only a relative importance, a subsidiary function, within the central task of human activity: service within the kingdom of God.

### ***Implications***

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If our work is seen as a form of our obedience to God's calling to us as human beings, it can never be done or justified 'for its own sake'. Work is for the service and glory of God. This gives work an important place within God's purposes. Christians must work to live honestly in the world (1 Thessalonians 4:11ff); earn their living in order to care for their lives (2 Thessalonians 3:10ff) and to give to those in need (Ephesians 4:28).

But work has a subsidiary, not an absolute, place: the work of all people—whether they recognize it or not—finds its meaning within God's providence, and as a preparation for his service.

Work becomes meaningful, therefore, not in itself but because it has a subsidiary place in God's purposes for human life. Its meaning, as Moltmann says, is set by its limits. As we shall explore further in a moment, the rhythm of work and Sabbath spoken of in the Ten Commandments is the rhythm of 'production' and 'presentation' of ourselves before God, both of which are part of authentically human activity. 'Consequently, life has not only a producing value in work, but also a presenting value in the joy of existence.' Work thus must be seen in the context not only of production, but of human existence before God. To quote Moltmann once more: 'Humane work cannot consist only in acting for purpose and usefulness. It must also encompass freedom for self-presentation and thus playfulness ... We plan and produce history; but we also, therefore and thereby, present ourselves and attempt to reveal and know ourselves. In the seriousness of work also belongs, in a human sense, the relaxed joy of existence: "Let it be!"'

### ***Right work***

It is important, therefore, for us to find in our work an affirmation of our humanness. By work we make our lives available for the service of our fellows in response to the kingly rule of God. Work, then, is a characteristically human activity and should therefore be humane rather than

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dehumanizing. If work is an essentially human activity, there must be such a thing as right or wrong work.

Right work is work which is geared to truly human goals. Barth has severe words against those whose working lives 'are entirely given over to trivia: whole industries devoted to amusement'. The early church regarded the activities of brothel keepers, gladiators and charioteers such as to exclude them from the Christian community. There are certain forms of work which are geared to the destruction of human well-being rather than its support, and such forms of work need to be seriously called in question.

In the light of this, we have to face the fact that much of today's work not only has little worth to the worker, but serves no goal of human well-being, sustenance and preservation. Barth points to the work which exploits the vanity and vices of others and we might here wish to single out some aspects of the advertising industry. The pressure put on us for credit, for example, not only exploits our materialist desires by promising to take the waiting out of wanting, it tempts us into accumulating debts which we simply do not have the means to pay off.

Barth points to the work which can only be done because other people are prepared to 'ruin themselves either physically or morally'. We might here wish to ask questions about some aspects of the entertainment industry, and the exploitation, especially of women, in pornography with its multi-million pound profits. We might also wish to ask questions about what we ask of those who work in armaments factories, and on the silos of nuclear missile systems, whose whole work is geared to the weaponry of mass destruction and a readiness to use it.

Barth then comments on the work which flourishes in one place only at the expense of work being available somewhere else; and on the work which is an 'almost univocally demonic process which consists in the amassing and multiplying of possessions expressed in financial calculations'. We need to have such comments in mind if we are to try to make Christian sense of the rises in house

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prices in some parts of the country, the effect this has on the lower paid, the need that is created for moving to cheaper areas, and the social changes which result in fragmented families and rootlessness. We also need to have this in mind if we are going to make a Christian assessment of trade in stocks and shares in a world in which unscrupulous dealers can affect the life savings of many honest investors, and in which the pressure to get 'in the fast lane' of promotion and career prospects takes its toll on other human values, such as family life and health.

Barth then discusses what we may call the *mutuality* of work. Work is a matter of earning our daily bread. Yet in praying for our daily bread we place ourselves in the context of prayer for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of his kingdom and the doing of his will. These three petitions place us in God's service: the praying of the fourth (for daily existence and co-operation. If all of us are to enjoy some daily bread, there has to be a recognition of mutual need and mutual support. Human life is corporate life, as the New Testament pictures of the church frequently illustrate. Too often the reality is of isolation and mutual opposition. Work in today's world illustrates all too clearly the gulf between God's purposes for us and our human reality. When work stands under the sign of competition which becomes conflict then we have forgotten that work finds its meaning in the fellowship within which true humanness can be realized.

All this implies the need for such things as contracts of employment, the sharing of profits, worker representation at different levels of management structures, worker cooperatives in which the labourer can see and share in his product, and so on. It implies also the need for economic and social structures which maximize fellowship and cooperation, rather than the autonomy and isolation of the individual and the belief that individual enterprise is the most important goal.

***Reflection and rest***

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As active human subjects we are not merely instruments, we are persons. There is an inward and reflective aspect to work as well as an outward and performance aspect. Both are important, and it may well be that one or another may come to prominence at different times in a person's life. There is a place in the world of work for artists and poets as well as mechanics and bankers. The sick and the elderly can sometimes still work in a reflective way when the strength for more 'external' work is denied them.

But for all of us, in both 'inward' and 'external' work, our work can only ever be of secondary significance. What is really at stake is that we should be set free in the service of God, of which our work should be seen as a part.

Work must therefore have its limits. For service also includes worship, and the command to work can only properly be understood in the light of the commandment to keep the Sabbath. Work is to be limited so that there is in our lives a space where we are consciously free for God. That space can, as we have indicated, include play, leisure and simply being in time: opportunities to step out of ourselves and our routines in order to find ourselves and face ourselves. Thereby we also set ourselves freer to hear God. That space will include time for prayer and worship: the enjoyment of the world and its creator, and the offering of ourselves again in his service.

We have based much of this chapter on Barth's discussion of human action, and the view that work is given its meaning as service for God. There are many hard economic, political and social decisions to be taken if the world of work in our day is to correspond in any significant way with the sphere of God's providential care of his world and his people. But a *theology of work* of a sort such as Barth offers us would seem to be essential groundwork for any Christianly based decisions in these difficult political areas. We need as a society to ask what our work is for. Work understood in the light of the activity of God gives it significance. It also sets a limit to that significance. Beyond the limits of the world of work we are invited to rest and

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relax in the fellowship of the Creator, and enjoy his work with him, walking with him in the Garden in the cool of the day.



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## Christian faith and physical science

In a 1988 survey reported in the national press, it was claimed that by far the largest number of people regard 'the destruction of the environment' as their greatest fear for the future. Many more animal species join the endangered list. Deforestation to give ground for quick cash farming is changing the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere and contributing to the so-called 'greenhouse' effect. If this continues, by the middle of the next century the surface temperature of the earth will be several degrees higher, and the level of the seas will have risen so much that the Thames barrier will be irrelevant. Chemicals in aerosols and hamburger take-away boxes are apparently contributing to a thinning of the ozone layer, allowing more ultraviolet radiation to reach the earth, and probably leading to an increase in skin cancers. 'Green' issues have put ecology high on political agendas. Industrial technology takes most of the blame. And behind these perceived evils of technology lies the science that brought it to birth

Many Christians are rightly—if somewhat late in the day—concerned with ecology. Christian belief in the goodness of God's creation, and human responsibility of stewardship of the earth's resources require us to take a stand against the harmful exploitation of the created order and the damaging pollution of the environment. But does this mean that Christian faith has to set its face against science? Some thinkers appear to believe so. One recent book, *The Rape of Man and Nature* by Philip Sherrard, argued that science is to blame not only for the ecological problems of the planet, but for the mechanistic ways of thinking which are effectively robbing us of our very humanity. Critics have replied that Sherrard is mistaking science from the sort of 'scientism' which by definition has no place for spiritual values.

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This chapter will argue the opposite and explore the reasons why, contrary to much popular belief, science and Christian faith are not enemies but belong together as responses to the Creator. We will not attempt to discuss the specific ecological and technological issues which rightly cause so much concern, but will try rather to probe behind such uses or misuses of science to its purpose, assumptions and limits. How does a Christian relate to the world of science? That is our enquiry here.

In 1935 the philosopher John Macmurray wrote: 'Science is the one proper positive element of Christianity that the world has yet seen.'

Although that might be somewhat of an overexaggeration, it does point us to a very close link between Christian faith and the practice of science, a link which is all too often ignored or rejected, and yet a link which was important in the development of science in the past, and is, I believe, crucial for the well-being of science in the future.

If, as Christians believe, God in Christ is the source and sustaining power and goal of *all things* in creation (Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:10), then the scientist, working within this world created by God and dependent on God, can act as a sort of 'priest' or even 'midwife' of nature, bringing to view and to understanding some of nature's secrets and giving them expression. The scientist can also be understood as a 'steward' of nature, confronting the disorders of the natural world and sharing in God's reconciling and redeeming work so that nature's riches can be used for the service of God in his world. Through the work of science—giving mute nature a voice—the created order itself can be heard to sing the Creator's praise.

If all this seems rather a long way from the laboratory, let us try to anchor it down more specifically. We will do so by exploring five themes: the relationship of Christian faith to the birth, purpose, practice, limits, and future of physical science.

### ***Christianity and the birth of physical science***

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Why was it that science as we know it came to birth in seventeenth-century Europe—after a long gestation period from the later Middle Ages—and not in any of the great civilizations of antiquity? Why not in Greece, or Rome, Persia or China? Many of the ancient civilizations had some of the conditions necessary for science: a simple technology; sufficient communications systems for sharing results; mathematical notation and so on. In many there were the beginnings of science, but in each case science was still-born. The necessary other conditions in which science could be viable and grow were not present.

However, in Europe the social and technical conditions were matched with something more: an intellectual and moral consensus—a certain way of thinking about the world and about the significance of human activity within the world which allowed science to come to birth and to survive.

A number of historians of science take the view that this consensus was so significantly shaped by the Christian faith that it was this faith which provided the cradle for modern science. It was this which led to John Macmurray's statement we quoted earlier.

What was it about the Christian faith which encouraged the birth of science, or at the very least was compatible with its growth?

We need first to acknowledge that there are a number of assumptions implicit in the scientific enterprise: that there is a difference between truth and error, that the world is worth investigating, that the world displays a unified sort of order, and that its order is a contingent order which can be apprehended by human minds and so on. Although it is going too far to say that Christian faith produced physical science, it does seem a fair judgment to suggest that the Christian faith of Reformation Europe gave an intellectual and moral backing to the assumptions on which science depends.

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For example, the change in the view of God from a static changeless divine being, who was sometimes identified with Nature, to a dynamic, active God, whose being was seen in his acts, underlay the belief that the order of the world is a contingent and not a necessary order. By 'necessary' order, we mean the sort of order that could be understood by sitting in a Greek philosopher's armchair. 'Contingence', by contrast, means that things do not have to be the way they are. And because the order of the world is contingent—and cannot simply be understood by thinking about Nature—we cannot discover it without investigation and experiment. We have to go out and explore.

Secondly, if world history is believed to have a beginning in God, and is moving towards its goal in God, then it is not a world trapped in an endless fatalistic cycle—which is what some of the earlier civilizations believed. The Christian view of history rescues us from such fatalism, and by doing so makes the events of the world, and our actions within the world, significant. So it becomes worthwhile to discover something: our actions are part of 'history'.

Thirdly, if, as the Reformers among others emphasized, God in grace turns towards the world because it matters to him, then that gives us a very strong motivation for turning towards the material world as well. Some earlier civilizations thought that the material world was evil, and so they had no incentive to get involved with it. Christian faith says that God made it good.

Fourthly, the Christian theologians of the Reformation period brought into clear focus the concern both for the objectivity of truth—what Torrance calls the 'masterful objectivity of God's Word'—and also a recognition of the place of the human subject in knowledge. So Calvin begins his *Institutes* by discussing our knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves, but which is prior to which he cannot say.

Fifthly, the Christian belief that Christ, God's Word, is the source of all rational order (Logos) in the universe out there,

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and also the source of all rationality in our human minds (made in the divine image), means that there can be a correspondence between our minds and the external world. This is why science can work at all.

And so we could go on.

The Christian view of the world as an ordered, rational and contingent universe, deriving from a personal Source, and so apprehensible by the rationality of personal men and women, is the basis of the scientific enterprise.

This is part of the story why the intellectual and moral environment in which science came to birth allowed it to be viable and to grow, and why, historically, there is therefore a very close link between Christian faith and the practice of physical science.

### ***Christianity and the purpose of physical science***

What is the aim of science? What function do scientific theories serve?

Some have believed that the task of science is simply to describe what is there. Scientific theories then become *summaries of data*. This 'positivist' view of science, 'tying facts into bundles', is much less widely held now. This is partly because we have become more clearly aware that we do not start from 'bare facts', but from patterns of experience and relationship which already carry an interpretation. Scientific data are always 'laden with theory'. There are no 'uninterpreted facts'.

The positivist view has been criticized by philosophers like Michael Polanyi:

*No scientist is ever concerned with producing the most convenient summary of a given set of facts. This is the task of the editors of encyclopedias and of telephone directories. It is of the essence of a scientific theory that it commits us to an indeterminate range of yet undreamed consequences that may flow from it. We commit ourselves to these, because we believe that by our theory we are making*

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*contact with a reality of which our theory has revealed one aspect.*<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to positivism, another approach has been 'instrumentalism'. This suggests that scientific theories are useful tools for prediction. The goal of science, it is said, is to show that an event is an instance of a general law. Our theories then become 'techniques for drawing inferences'. This would make explanation logically equivalent to prediction, and would make predictability the primary criterion for a satisfactory theory. But there are theories which have little predictive power (like the theory of evolution) and there are some attitudes to the world—though hardly scientific—which make predictions without explanation (like astrology). It is questionable whether such a total instrumentalist view of science can be held consistently. Theories are assessed by their truth and their validity, not only by their usefulness.

Thirdly, a number of philosophers of science believe that scientific theories are the structures of our own minds imposed on the chaos of sense data. Order in theory bears no essential relation to the world 'out there', and consequently the criteria for an acceptable theory are self-consistency and simplicity. This *idealism* finds few supporters today among philosophers of science, though such a view has been influential since the days of Kant: the only nature we know is the nature that is formed and shaped in our understanding of it. It is a view that is still popularly held.

The theologian T. F. Torrance rejects such a position:

*Astonishing as it may seem, there are lots of people today who really believe this, who think, for example, that mathematics is a pure invention of the mind for it is not something forced upon us by the inherent nature of things, or who think that in the last resort science is about*

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<sup>1</sup>M. Polanyi 'Scientific Outlook: Its Sickness and Cure', *Science*, 125, March 1957

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*propositions, not about realities in the world 'out there' independent of us.*

*But let us look at it quite simply.*

*When a scientist lays bare the anatomical and physiological structures of the human body, he is not creating and imposing patterns upon it. When you yourself observe crystalline formations in the rocks, you are not importing into them geometrical patterns of your own inventing, you think the geometrical patterns you find embedded in them already. That is why our basic statements are formed by way of conceptual assent to what is there or by way of recognition of an intelligibility inherent in the nature of things. This is certainly the astonishing thing that keeps on striking the scientist with wonder and awe, as Einstein used to say, that there is already embedded in nature an inherent rationality which it is the task of science to bring to light and express. Apart from it there could be no science at all.<sup>2</sup>*

Torrance is here committed—and one would think rightly—to a *realist* understanding of the nature of science and scientific theories. Theories are intended as representations of the real external world. Certainly they are not today believed to be literal descriptions, as perhaps Newton might have believed, but they are constructions of our minds which seek as far as possible to reflect the order that is actually disclosed to us. Scientific theories are thus 'disclosure models', to disclose the significance of the order of the world for our understanding, and then our prediction and our use.

Science thus proceeds by an 'interrogation' mode of inquiry: asking positive questions of the world which expect an answer. As Torrance also says:

*Precisely by allowing things to disclose themselves to us unobstructed by our prescriptive patterns of thought, [open enquiry] made room for the kind of knowledge that is forced upon us by the nature and structure of reality, which*

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<sup>2</sup>T. F. Torrance, *God and Rationality*, Oxford University Press, 1971, page 42

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*we must affirm, and which it would be irrational for us not to affirm.*<sup>3</sup>

Such a 'critical realist' view of science is fully consistent with Christian understanding of the nature of the created world as ordered, rational and contingent. The world can be understood as the sphere of God's self-expression. The scientist is thus 'thinking God's thoughts after him'. And in seeking to bring the silent rationalities of the created world to articulation through his theories, the scientist—the priest of nature—enables even the silent world to sing the Creator's praise.

### ***Christianity and the practice of physical science***

After the birth of science in seventeenth-century Europe, the physical sciences rapidly became enmeshed in a deist view of things in which God was separated off from his world. God was detached from the 'receptacle' we call space and time. This led to a rapid growth in the positivist notion of science to which we have referred, and also to the supposed separation of 'scientific facts' from the sphere of 'personal values'. The results of science were thought of as settled facts; explanations and purposes did not belong to scientific knowledge. Unfortunately this view is still popularly held.

Yet, as we saw in our earlier section, this rests on a false view of science. Three philosophers in particular have in recent years done much to dispel the myths of that approach.

First, Karl Popper. In 1959 he wrote *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, arguing that even the most well-attested scientific laws may only be regarded as 'the most plausible possibilities for the present. Scientific 'data' are always open to potential falsification as a result of future work. This relativizes the nature of science: we are only ever dealing with probabilities in our theories.

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<sup>3</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Transformation and Convergence—the Frame of Knowledge*, Eerdmans, 1984, page 268

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Secondly, Thomas Kuhn. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn argues that the very doing of science itself is a subjective and value-laden process. Scientists do not proceed solely by the rules of logic and empirical investigation. They are affected by psychosocial influences within and around them which channel their work in certain directions rather than others. Each scientist works within a framework of 'control beliefs' which governs his or her work.

Thirdly, Michael Polanyi, in *Personal Knowledge*, explored the 'unaccountable element' in science—what he calls the 'tacit dimension'. There are aspects to the processes of scientific work and discovery which are not themselves scientific: the personal appraisal needed for assessing probabilities; the commitments and beliefs which are part of the choice of research projects; which questions are worth asking; the passion and personal drive which motivates the scientist; the skills which are developed in the use of apparatus and in interpreting results. There is a whole range of tacit assumptions which indicate an inescapably *personal* dimension to all knowledge, even in the most 'objective' of the physical sciences.

Knowledge, argues Polanyi, comes by 'participation'—knowledge is a personal interaction between the knowing subject and his material. It involves faith, commitment and an openness to unknown future possibilities.

Such a view of personal knowledge, developed by Polanyi from his work in physical science, is very close to the notion of 'knowledge by participation' of which the Christian tradition speaks. 'Faith seeking understanding' well describes the task of Christian theology. Understanding comes through a prior commitment to the subject matter under investigation, and a belief that reality will disclose itself through our exploration of it.

The older deistic separation between God and the world, between 'values' and 'facts', therefore, will not hold. Christian theology and modern philosophy of science can be partners together in developing a more personal, more

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holistic approach to our knowledge of the world in which we live. Moral and spiritual values are not separate from scientific facts. We need an approach to reality which holds these together.

The Christian understanding of creation provides one.

The world which science explores and harnesses is the natural order created by God, the world described by the Psalmist as 'the works of thy hands'. Yet we need to remember that in biblical usage, 'creation' does not imply that God has merely wound the world up and left it to tick. God is intimately bound up with this world, sustaining it in being at all points and at all time. Every 'fact' is thus inevitably 'laden with value'. It comes to us in a world held in being by a moral Creator. So we clearly cannot endorse the popular view that scientific facts are somehow neutral and moral values are separate and external. We have been wrong in separating fact from value: 'how?' and 'why?' from 'ought'.

Let us give one example which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter: human fertility.

We thank God for medical science. We thank God for the possibilities which medical technology is opening up for the alleviating of misery, the elimination of disease and disorder. Recently, new possibilities have arisen for the circumventing of infertility. This is all part of the healing and redemptive work of science. Yet we get used to thinking that there is no moral claim embedded in the created order; we get used to thinking that science is not intimately connected with moral values; and therefore we get used to looking for some external moral criteria for evaluating the uses to which science is put.

In the Warnock Report on Embryology, for example, we are offered scientific data as though they were morally neutral, and then offered an external utilitarian ethic as the criterion for making moral judgments. But if the natural order is God's creation, there is a moral imperative embedded in it as an *internal* factor. There are no value-free facts. The facts

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are part of a moral order. And a *moral claim* is exercised on the scientist by the *material of his study*. Medical technology itself, therefore, is already a morally loaded exercise.

The question presses on us whether we are going to use our scientific and technological interventions in the natural order in line with created nature, and in accordance with that of which God said, 'It is good.' Or whether we are seeking moral criteria of our own, externally applied to nature, as if the natural world were not at every point held in being by God. The is and the 'ought' belong closely together in the doctrine of creation. Is technology going to be the servant of God's creation, or is it going to be our master?

These questions underlie much of the right Christian concern with the appalling ecological crises which afflict our planet, crises often caused by our refusal to see that the created order embodies a moral claim and that we are responsible to God for our use of it.

### ***Christianity and the limits of physical science***

Science has an important role in our understanding of God's world, but a role which is limited.

At this point we turn again to another of Michael Polanyi's insights.<sup>4</sup> In his argument against the reductionism implicit in some popular notions of science, Polanyi argues for a *hierarchy of levels* for understanding our world and ourselves within it. This helps to set some limits to the role of science. Reality, he argues, is to be comprehended at different levels, of which physical science operates at one. To illustrate, he gives the example of a spoken literary composition.

A prepared speech can be understood at the level of sound waves and voice production. But there are other levels too: the sounds are also words. Words are subject to the control of vocabulary—which is not itself subject to physics and

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<sup>4</sup> See M. Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, page 233

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chemistry. Thus the spoken words depend on the sounds, but are not reducible to them. To move to a higher level, the words are formed into sentences. Sentences depend on vocabulary, but are not reducible to vocabulary: sentences are controlled also by the rules of grammar. The higher levels of literary style, and of the author's intention, build up a hierarchy from the physics of voice production, through vocabulary, grammar, style and so on. Higher levels *depend on but are not reducible to* lower levels.

In this sort of picture, physical science can be seen to have a crucial but limited role within the hierarchy of levels of understanding. In understanding the human person, we also need to operate at the levels of biophysics and biochemistry, but also of psychology, sociology, morality and so on. Each science has its own limits, its own methods and its own interpretative modes. None are reducible to the others.

At this point another of Torrance's insights becomes relevant, indicating how Polanyi's understanding of levels is consonant with, indeed is given credence by, the Christian understanding of God's self-disclosure in the 'Word made flesh'—God who became incarnate right down to the level of our genes.

*Just as within the multilevelled structures of the universe, as they come to view through our scientific inquiries, we find that each level of reality is finally integrated not through its own operational connections but through relation to connections at a higher level to which it is open at its own 'boundary conditions', so the Incarnation as a whole provides, as it were, the intersecting vertical dimension which gives the horizontal coordinates of the universe the integrative factor providing them with consistent and ultimate meaning, in a way which a merely deistic asymptotic relation between God and the universe could never do.<sup>5</sup>*

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<sup>5</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, Oxford University Press, 1981, page 24

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In other words, the worldview provided by the Christian theological understanding of incarnation is a worldview within which physical science can be seen to have its own proper level of investigation and its own limits. And it is the Christian understanding of the rationality of the universe in terms of Logos which allows us to draw a unified picture of integrated levels at all.

### ***Christianity and the future of physical science***

Clearly science has moved a very long way from the Christian commitments of its earliest practitioners. No longer do we think in terms of 'thinking God's thoughts after him'. We have accepted a utilitarian, positivistic notion of science which, though challenged by Popper, Kuhn, Polanyi and others, still holds sway in many of our minds. Science has become secularized.

And so the question has to be asked: is the secularization of science going to lead to end of science altogether?

Where is science going?

Once the scientist severs his commitment of searching and exploring and sharing in the healing of the world from the belief that this is God's world, dependent on him and deriving its purpose and its goal from him, then science inevitably ends up in the sort of utilitarian positivism which merely becomes another means of a human being's own self-assertion. Things only matter because of their usefulness to us. We exploit the environment for selfish ends because we think that so doing will benefit us. When we lose the moral and intellectual truth from which science derives, science dissolves too easily into man-centred technology.

In 1978 the chemist Walter Thorson wrote:

*Having finally understood that scientific truth is a source of power, man has made the crucial decision that from now on the will to power and the uses of power should dictate the relevance and value of that truth. Because of that decision, 'pure' science, the science of the past four hundred*

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*years, will begin to be altered in subtle ways, and will eventually disappear.*

Thorson writes about our obsession with technique, rather than with truth. He continues:

*The fusion of science and technology means that increasingly the moral decision as to the uses of truth will be made pre-emptively, before the truth itself is even sought; we shall seek only the truth which fits our purposes.<sup>6</sup>*

This does not deny the immense value of appropriately used technology. It simply reminds us that if technology rules, then science dies. Is this hysterical scaremongering? Is this a failure to recognize the difficulties of the constraints which necessarily limited resources place on the choice of research topic? Or is this a prophetic warning against the cost-benefit manipulation of truth?

The problems of the uses of power in our society are not only limited to technological power, however. The moves in government policies which restrict research grants to some sectors in higher education; the deliberate channelling of public money into some directions rather than others; the disincentives for science teachers in schools; the enforcement of a national curriculum through the recent Education Reform Bill, and so on are all powerful means of establishing social priorities in our country. And they all depend on certain value judgments concerning the nature of truth, the importance of the quest for truth, and what makes for the best for human life and human society.

For the Christian who believes that there is an intimate link between his faith in God and the practice of science; who believes that in Christ, God holds all things in being; who by God's grace has come to find a focus for his intellectual inquiries by faith in the One who said, 'I am the truth,' these warnings from Thorson cause him to reflect again on

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<sup>6</sup> W. R. Thorson, 'The Spiritual Dimensions of Science', in C. F. H. Henny, editor, *Horizons of Science*, Harper & Row, 1978, page 217-18

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the purpose and practice of science. What, or who, is it all for?

Christian faith encourages the scientist to see him or herself as a 'midwife' of nature, helping to bring to birth in our minds an understanding of God's world. To see him or herself also as a steward, confronting the disorders of this fallen world in a way that is in line with the will of God—particularly in confronting the hunger and poverty and deprivation of men and women made in God's image.

Christ is not only the Truth: he is the one through whom all things were created, in whom all things hold together, and through whom all things are reconciled to God. So we can thank God that, in Macmurray's words, 'science is a positive and proper element of Christianity'. And we can engage in scientific exploration of God's world in such a way that through our science and its uses, the praises of the Creator may be heard. For from him and through him and to him are all things (Romans 11:35).

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## Green religion and green science

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There are few things so dehumanizing or intellectually distorting as packaging knowledge or thinking into discrete compartments; its dismal consequence is single-minded obsessionalism. It is reminiscent of the man who concluded that the ears of fleas are in their legs, because a legless flea does not obey a command to jump. Or less flippantly, it characterizes the engineers, lawyers, computer scientists, biochemists or clinicians who regularly believe they have discovered a key flaw in Darwinian evolution, not understanding that neo-Darwinian theory is a synthesis of many disciplines and that their apparent insight shows only their ignorance of fields outside their own. I have no doubt that 'green religion' and 'green science' exist, but I am highly suspicious of advocates of either who claim their particular expertise is the key to environmental problems. Put positively, I see my task as drawing on all relevant sources of understanding, testing them as rigorously as possible, and then integrating them into a coherent approach to our world, human and non-human, biological and physical.

It is easy to exaggerate or underplay environmental deterioration and our responsibility for it. In 1908, Gifford Pinchot (Head of the Forestry Division of the US Department of Agriculture) reported to President Theodore Roosevelt that the United States would run out of anthracite in 30 years and timber in 50 years. We can be easily immunized against 'green' issues by too many or too strident cries of 'wolf'. Equally, we can be lulled into false security by the slowness of environmental change, and forget there was a time before photochemical smog, wholesale clearance of species-rich pasture and worries about cancer from anthropogenic activities. The underlying reality is that

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increasing numbers of us are crowding into a non-expandable space with finite resources. We no longer have the luxury of our ancestors of running away from environmental problems, because there is nowhere to run to. In crude terms, we are in danger of running out of world; a fact not affected by whether Armageddon is coming within the next few decades or in the far distant future, or whether we face a gradual reduction of opportunities or acute devastation.

The recognition that we have inescapable environmental problems is recent, and comes from our discovery of the global stresses that are appearing at an apparently increasing rate. For centuries we have battled with local difficulties: China has had nearly 2000 famines within its borders in the last 2000 years; the decline of the Babylonian grain-growing culture was probably due to declining soil fertility as salinity built up in an over-extended irrigation system; Seneca was repeatedly advised by his doctor to leave Rome, and immediately felt better when he at last moved away from the city's fumes and cooking smells. The earliest recorded air pollution incident in Britain was in 1257 when Henry III's queen, Eleanor, evacuated Nottingham Castle because of coal smoke. Three and a half centuries later, James I was 'moved with compassion for the decayed fabric of (old) St Paul's Cathedral near-approaching ruin by the corroding quality of coal smoke to which it had long been subjected', and a few years later John Evelyn wrote a tract on air pollution (*Fumigium or The Inconvenience of the Aer and Smoak of London Dissipated*, 1661) in which he described, 'That Hellish and dismal cloud of SEA-COALE perpetually imminent over London ... which is so universally mixed with the otherwise wholesome and excellent Aer, that her Inhabitants breath nothing but an impure and thick Mist, accompanied with a fuliginous and filthy vapour, which renders them obnoxious to a thousand inconveniences, corrupting the Lungs and disordering the entire habit of their Bodies; so that Catharrs, Phthisicks, Coughs and Consumptions rage more in this City than in the whole Earth besides'.

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Such examples can be continued almost indefinitely: Sicily was once the 'granary of Italy' but less and less corn is grown there as the soil deteriorates under excessive cultivation and the grazing of goats; the Scottish Highlands are a man-made wet desert; the Dust Bowl of the southern central United States arose from the practice of growing crops in an area where the rainfall is low and the soil susceptible to erosion by wind and storm; and so on. But all these are geographically limited disasters. The new situation in which we find ourselves involved calamities outside our own locality and control: persistent pesticides throughout the world's food-chains, ionizing radiation ignorant and intolerant of political boundaries, ozone holes 20 miles above our heads, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur destroying freshwater life and trees far from their source, global warming potentially changing the distribution of animals and plants over whole continents. And all this in a context where the major disturbing factor—the human species—is increasing at a rate of 180 people a minute and will, we are told, double to a total of 11 billion in a century's time.

In his novel *On the Beach* (Heineman, 1957), Neville Shute described the varied reactions of Australians faced with an inexorable rise in radiation following a nuclear war in the Northern Hemisphere. Some carried on as normal; some responded like the Stoics or Epicureans of old, resigning themselves to the inevitable or flinging themselves into hedonistic frenzy; others 'flipped', becoming shrill and unreasonable; a few sought solace in religion. Shute's book is a parable for our times as we face environmental insults. Like Shute's Australians, we cannot escape. Our ancestors could move to the next valley or the next country, or emigrate to underpopulated lands as did the Beaker Folk in the mid-second millennium BC or the Vikings in the seventh and eighth centuries AD, or to the Americas as in the 17th and 18th centuries. We now have nowhere to go. The world is full. The new spectre is millions of environmental refugees fleeing into already crowded countries, their numbers completely overwhelming border controls or

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planned quotas or the like. Whether our image is of Spaceship Earth or a Sinking Ark, the stark fact is that we are running out of world.

***The perceived failures of science and religion***

The idea that we are running out of world is commonly expressed as a vague but compelling worry that 'something is wrong'; that science has failed to deal fairly and adequately with human needs (an angst focused by Bryan Appleyard in *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man*, Picador, 1992, and Mary Midgely, *Science as Salvation*, Routledge, 1992), while religion is perceived as either too personal or too remote to cope with the real complexities of twentieth-century life. This is why 'green science' and 'green religion' have found a niche; they are searches for effective answers to real questions. Unfortunately, they are almost always too limited in their approaches; their ideas satisfy those who preach them, but are potentially dangerous because they tend to distort solutions by omitting relevant data. If we accept their evangelism uncritically, we are liable to find ourselves sharing the tradition of the alchemists or the saltationists (who think that species arise as a result of a single mutation), or young earth creationists (who persist in believing that God finished his creation on 24 October 4004 BC after a week of frenzied activity), or sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses who repeatedly fix the date when the Lord returns to take all things to himself and have to readjust their arithmetic every time the date passes with no obvious change.

What is the way forward? We can agree there is a problem, but there is certainly no generally accepted solution. There is a common belief that the Judaeo-Christian tradition from which Western science and technology sprang has been one of the main problems because (in the words of Ian McHarg, *Design with Nature*, Doubleday, 1969) 'if one seeks licence for those who would increase radioactivity, create canals and harbours with atomic bombs, employ poisons without constraint, or give consent to the bulldozer mentality, there

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could be no better injunction than the text “God blessed them (the newly formed human beings) and said to them, Be fruitful and increase, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish in the sea, the birds of the air, and everything that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28) ... Dominion and subjugation must be expunged as the biblical injunction of man’s relation to nature’ and (in Max Nicholson’s words in *The Environmental Revolution*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), ‘the first step must be plainly to reject and to scrub out the complacent image of Man the Conqueror of Nature, and of Man Licensed by God to conduct himself as the earth’s worst pet’.

The most frequently quoted indictment is that of the American historian Lynn White (1967), who declared in a lecture to the American Association for the Advancement of Science that ‘Christianity ... insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends ... Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt’. White’s thesis was based on the premise that our increasing ability to control and harness natural forces was flawed by the assumption that ‘we are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim ... We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence but to serve man.... Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature that no solutions for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone.’ But, and this is a key inference, ‘since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not’. White went on to conclude that our main hope should be a refocused Christianity, not a wholesale repudiation of it; he suggested that we should return to the ‘alternative Christian view of nature and man’s relation to it’, exemplified by Francis of Assisi’s respect for the living world. He proposed Francis as a patron saint for ecologists; in 1980 Pope John Paul II accepted the idea.

However, the malignant effects of Judaeo-Christianity can be overstressed. Running parallel to the ‘dominance’

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condemnation is an equally strong stewardship theme (Attfield, 1983). Indeed, stewardship has been the key to the Christian attitude to nature for most of the Church's history. It was implicit in the Celtic Church of the Dark Ages and is explicit in the Benedictine Rule which was a major influence shaping society in the Middle Ages. It is doctrinally more correct than unfettered human dominance on two grounds:

- ☒ God's command in Genesis was in the context of human beings created 'in his image', which involves trustworthiness and responsibility;
- ☒ Hebrew kingship was meant to be a servant-kingship, exemplified by the instructions given to David and Solomon, and ideally shown by Jesus Christ; it was not a despotic potentacy.

This is not to deny that the attitudes condemned by McHarg and Nicholson have been uncommon. To some extent they can be attributed to rationalization by farmers of their increasing success over 'nature' as technology developed. But the fact that a biblical text was frequently misinterpreted should not be allowed to usurp its correct interpretation. After all, the words of the Psalmist that 'the world is established immovable' (Psalm 96:10) were taken for many centuries to affirm that the heavens went round the earth. When it was realized that the earth went round the sun, it became clear that the Psalmist was talking about the character of God, not basic astronomy. As Galileo is alleged to have said, 'The Bible tells us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go'.

### ***The development of environmental concern***

The failures of both Western religion and modern technology to prevent environmental deterioration lead us back to the premise that we are 'running out of world', and living beyond our means as far as the environment is concerned. There have been three phases in our awareness of environmental problems:

#### *Early worries*

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In Britain, we have had hunting laws from the beginnings of national legislation. Some of these were to protect the privileges of landowners, although others were concerned with the animals themselves; as early as 1533 Parliament passed an Act declaring a close season for wild-fowling. However, the General Inclosure Act of 1845 is generally regarded as the beginning of modern conservation legislation, formally recognizing that inclosure was the concern of all local inhabitants and not only the lord and the commoners (that is, those who had grazing, fishing or fuel-cutting rights). It laid down that the health, comfort and convenience of local people should be taken into account before any inclosure was sanctioned. The 1845 Act was followed by the setting up in 1865 of the Commons, Open Spaces and Footpaths Preservation Society, formed to resist attempts to inclose common lands around London for building purposes; it is our oldest amenity society and was an important landmark in forming conservation attitudes.

The activities of the Commons Society led in 1893 to the establishment of the National Trust as a land company to buy and accept gifts of land, buildings and common rights for the benefit of the nation. By 1912 the National Trust owned 13 sites of special interest to naturalists, including Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire and Cothill in Berkshire. However, the random way in which potential nature reserves were acquired stimulated Charles Rothschild (second son of the first Lord Rothschild) and his associates to set up a new body, the Society for the Promotion of Nature Reserves (SPNR) 'to preserve for posterity as a national possession some part of our native land, its fauna, flora and geological features'. In fact a key motive was to persuade the National Trust and others to create nature reserves. An early achievement of the SPNR was a schedule of areas of the United Kingdom considered worthy of preservation. This listed the 284 most important potential reserves, with their special interests noted. It was submitted to the Board of Agriculture in 1915, and is remarkably similar to those in the Government White Papers of 1947

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and 1949, which set out the case for a statutory Nature Conservancy.

Meanwhile, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (later the RSPCA) had been founded in 1824, to campaign against cruelty to domesticated animals. This was followed in 1885 by the Selborne Society for the Protection of Birds, Plants and Pleasant Places (later the RSPB), originally a women's organization concerned to stop thousands of egrets, herons and birds of paradise being slaughtered every year solely for their plumes. These bodies promoted legislation and encouraged public participation in nature protection during the first decades of the present century, but progress was slow, despite successes such as statutory protection for grey seals and a range of bird species.

The next initiative came from the recognition of wasted resources, both material and human. In 1931 E. M. Nicholson and G. Barry stimulated the formation of a non-party research organization, Political and Economic Planning, which undertook a series of studies of the more pressing economic and social problems of the 1930s. One of the most urgent of these was the decline of heavy industries based around coalfields and the concentration of new industries in areas remote from the traditional sites, facilitated by the increasing availability of electricity and motor transport. This led to a Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population (1937–40), which recommended the setting up of a central planning board. Following representations from SPNR and RSPB, the Government appointed a Committee under Mr Justice Scott to assess the impact this would have on the well-being and preservation of rural communities. The Scott Report (1942) led to yet another Committee, on National Parks, under Sir Arnold Hobhouse, and this spawned a Wild Life Conservation Special Committee, chaired by Julian Huxley. The conclusions of this last group (published as *Conservation of Nature in England and Wales*, Cmd 7122, 1947) were instrumental in persuading the Government to set up the Nature Conservancy in 1949 as a Research

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Council alongside the Science, Medical and Agricultural Councils.

*The post-war years*

The 1950s and 1960s saw a continuing increase in environmental awareness and education, shown by the growth of such bodies as the RSPB; the development of publishing for naturalists (pioneered by Collins' Field Guides and New Naturalist series); a massive expansion of adult knowledge, particularly as television became widespread and organizations like the Field Studies Council got into their stride; and the science of ecology entered undergraduate and research programmes.

This phase reached its peak in the early 1970s, particularly with the 'Countryside in 1970' conferences under the stimulus of The Duke of Edinburgh, involving the leaders of nearly all the national environmental groups, representatives of farming and landowning interests, and key industrialists and government officials. A major concern at the time was the industrialization of agriculture and the increasing use of the countryside; measures to conserve wildlife populations could no longer be confined to nature reserves.

The conferences raised consciousness of environmental problems to a new level. (One of their results was the establishment of the RSA's own Committee for the Environment). During the same period Rachel Carson had drawn attention in 1962 to the insidious dangers of persistent pesticides in her book *Silent Spring*. (It is worth recording that British research was at least as advanced as that in Rachel Carson's North America; as Norman Moore has elegantly expounded in his book *Bird of Time* (Cambridge University Press, 1987), Monks Wood Experimental Station was opened in 1961 with a remit in part to investigate the ecological effects of pesticides). In 1967 the wreck of the Liberian oil tanker *Torrey Canyon* off Land's End alerted the British public in a vivid way to the ever-present risks of oil pollution. The Church of England made its contribution with a Church Assembly debate on a

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Working Party report *Man in His Living Environment* (1969) which declared that 'despoiling the earth is a blasphemy and not just an error of judgment ... The situation which is created by man's abuse of his power is not God's intention. The deadly sins of avarice, greed, pride destroy the earth. Dust bowls, deserts and a poisoned environment are the consequences'.

In 1972 a computer simulation carried out at Massachusetts Institute of Technology was published under the title *The Limits to Growth*. Its message was that the economic and industrial systems of affluent countries would collapse around the year 2100 unless two correctives were taken: that birth rate should equal death rate, and that capital investment should equal capital depreciation. If these conditions were met, a 'stabilized world model' could result. The authors have recently re-run their model with additional data, and confirmed their earlier prediction (*Beyond the Limits*, Earthscan, 1992), with the ominous addition that, if no constraints are applied, there will be an overshoot in resource misuse, which would exacerbate the subsequent collapse.

The MIT model was taken as the basis for a 'Blueprint for Survival', set out in the magazine *Ecologist* in 1972, and endorsed by a group of leading ecologists. Its argument was that the non-renewable resources which provide the raw materials or energy generation for much of industry are threatened with drastic depletion within a time span that ordinarily commands politicians' attention, as a result of exponential increase in consumption and of population growth; and the waste which accompanies that exploitation threatens the processes which sustain human life. The authors of the Blueprint proposed a radical reordering of priorities, with industrial societies converting themselves into stable societies characterized by minimum disruption of ecological processes, maximum conservation of materials and energy, and static populations. *The Times* headed its first leader on 14 January 1972 'The Prophets May Be Right'.

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But the calculations of the *Limits to Growth* and the 'Blueprint' were rendered void within a few years by the Arab-Israeli wars and the massive increase in the price of fossil fuels. Lord Ashby (who had been first Chairman of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, set up in 1970) took *A Second Look at Doom* in a lecture at Southampton University in 1975, speaking of the ominous instability of man-made ecosystems. He pointed out that 'if we experience a shift in the balance of economic power between nations which own resources and nations which need those resources to keep their economies going, one sure consequence would be an increase in tension in the social systems on both sides ... The tempting way to resolve these tensions is by autocracy and force'. In other words, the period of good-mannered agreement over the use of resources probably was over. Conservation was on the international agenda, but it would be nothing more than a desirable dream unless there was a change of attitudes as well as intellectual assent to impending problems.

### *1980 onwards*

The consensus of the 1970s was destroyed by the disappearance of the myth of cheap energy and the realization that the issues at stake were too fundamental to be dealt with by merely acknowledging that justice was needed in the use of scarce resources. But the problems agonized over in the 'Countryside in 1970' process were (and are) still with us, and in 1980 a World Conservation Strategy (WCS) was produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the World Wildlife Fund (now the Worldwide Fund for Nature) and the United Nations Environmental Programme. It was an unashamedly utilitarian document, stressing that every aspect of human activity benefits from conservation (and conversely, is as likely to be hindered by environmental mismanagement), and therefore that we have a vested interest to look after our environment. Implicit in it was the concept of 'sustainable development', a theme taken up and expanded in *Our Common Future*, the Report of the World

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Commission on Environment and Development (1987), the 'Brundtland Report'.

The aim of the WCS was: to maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems; to preserve genetic diversity; and to ensure the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems. The achievement of this aim was assumed to be inevitable, once the problems and possible solutions were defined. This was a major fallacy; right decisions do not automatically spring from accurate knowledge. This is well illustrated by the history of clean air legislation. The association between air pollution and death rates was established by John Graunt as early as the mid seventeenth century. During the nineteenth century there were repeated attempts to pass clean air laws in the UK Parliament, but it was not until the London smog of 1952 led to the abandonment of *La Traviata* at Sadlers Wells and the collapse of prize cattle at the Smithfield Show that comprehensive smoke control legislation was passed. (An excellent account of the political equivocation on this issue is given by Eric Ashby and Mary Anderson in *The Politics of Clean Air*, Oxford University Press, 1981).

The WCS, being in part a UN document, required responses from member nations of UNEP. The UK response was composed of reports from seven groups, dealing with industry, city, countryside, marine and coastal issues, international policy, education and ethics (*The Conservation and Development Programme for the UK*, Kogan Page, 1983). The originality in this exercise was the setting up of a group on ethics. Ethics is only mentioned once in the WCS, without elaboration or justification: 'A new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people, is required for human societies to live in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being'. This indifference was criticized at a conference held in Ottawa in 1986 to review progress in implementing the WCS, and it was resolved to include ethics in any revision of the WCS. The updated strategy (published as *Caring for the Earth*, IUCN, 1991) does indeed take on board this recommendation.

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The task of the UK ethics group was to put forward practical proposals about the shaping of sensible attitudes towards the environment in the multi-disciplinary no-man's-land where philosophy, psychology, politics, biology and economics meet. The group dealing with education called its report 'Education for Commitment', but something more was needed. I was commissioned to produce the Ethics Report, guided by a Review Group chaired by Lord Ashby and appointed by a national coordinating committee.

The Review Group met only once. It was split, apparently irrevocably, between managers and those who regarded our environmental plights as wholly the fault of human incompetence and arrogance. At the time it seemed pointless to pursue this debate. I developed an aphorism that 'we are both a part of nature and apart from nature'. This formed part of our Report which was written by me with considerable help from Lord Ashby and individual discussion with other members of the group. It would be good to think that this aphorism (or rather, the truth on which it is based) helped to defuse the polarization in environmental attitudes, at least in the UK where environmental debates have been much more rational and non-confrontational than in some countries. The realization that sensible environmental actions do not need full agreement on the underlying premises is now gaining ground (see *Towards Unity Among Environmentalists* by Bryan Norton, Oxford University Press, 1991) but such pragmatic cooperation will always be fragile and liable to failure through challenge of its determining motives.

The Ethics Section of the UK Response to the WCS began with an examination of the factors that produce attitudes, which is where the need for ethics came in; not as a branch of academic philosophy, but in the fundamental sense as an expression of moral understanding 'usually in the form of guidelines or rules of conduct, involving evaluations of value or worth'.

Value was a key concept, but ascertaining value in the environmental sense is confusing, as at least four different

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criteria can be applied: cost in the market-place, quantified as money; usefulness for individuals or society; intrinsic worth, which depends on the objective quality of the object, in contrast to the market-place cost (which is quantifiable only in relation to the price of other things that can be acquired in its place); symbolic or conceptual, such as a national flag or liberty.

These four meanings can change independently for the same object. For example, water in a river in highland Scotland or lowland England will be valued differently by an economist, since its usefulness will depend on if it is drunk, fished, or treated as an amenity, if it is an object of beauty or a stinking sewer, if it acts as a boundary between countries or if it forms a barrier to pest spread, and so on.

Now, our interest in and therefore valuation of the environment includes self, community and future generations, but nature itself also has its own interest in survival and health. The first three of these interests are clearly anthropocentric; they are the basis of the 1980 World Conservation Strategy. Although they may conflict with each other, in principle some accommodation is usually possible. Considerable advance has been made in recent years by economists recognizing that proper accounting involves taking note of both non-material and trans-generational values.

Nature's intrinsic worth is more difficult to justify. The commonest rationalization is explicitly utilitarian: that we should preserve as many species as possible in case they are useful to us humans (for example, as a source of anti-cancer drugs, or the elusive elixir of eternal youth). Ashby has argued that we should learn to value a landscape or biological mechanism in the same way that we are prepared to protect and pay for human artifacts like buildings or paintings. Bryan Norton, an American philosopher, has developed a 'weakly anthropocentric' approach, based on the proposition that we are continually being transformed by our contact with the world around us, which is therefore

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an integral part of our human development (*Why Preserve Natural Variety?* Princeton University Press, 1987).

The difficulty about defining the intrinsic worth of nature led the Church of England to produce *Our Responsibility for the Living Environment* (CIO, 1986), a follow-on to its 1969 Report. This was originally intended as a theological reflection on the ethics in the UK Response to the WCS, although its final form was rather wider. Its core was that we live in a world created, redeemed and sustained by God: since this is God's world, not ours, it has intrinsic worth. Interestingly (and encouragingly) the implication (although perhaps not the theology) of this point was taken up in the Government White Paper on the environment, *This Common Inheritance* (Cm 1200, 1990). Quoting Mrs Thatcher (who in turn, drew upon John Ruskin), the White Paper affirmed 'we do not hold a freehold on our world, but only a full repairing lease. We have a moral duty to look after our planet and to hand it on in good order to future generations'. John Major used very similar words in his speech to the Earth Summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992).

### ***Green religion***

Although it is fashionable to blame our environmental disasters on Christianity, a quick survey shows that environmental degradation is almost universal whenever excessive strain is put on natural systems. Leaving aside the horrors produced in Eastern Europe under specifically anti-religious regimes, in other places over-grazing, deforestations and the like on a scale sufficient to destroy civilizations were committed by Egyptians, Assyrians, Romans, North Africans, Persians, Indians, Aztecs and Buddhists. Japan has pollution problems as bad as anywhere in the world. Jacques Delors has commented, 'I have to say that the Oriental religions have failed to prevent to any marked degree the appropriation of the natural environment ... Despite different traditions, the right to use or exploit nature seems to have found in industrial countries the same economic justification.'

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Perhaps in response to all these failures, there has been a trend in recent years to develop various forms of eco-religion, sometimes based on established faiths, but more often on an eccentric ragbag of beliefs. The problems of uncontrolled eclecticism is illustrated by the fate of the 'Assisi Declarations' produced by some of the major world faiths (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Baha'i) at the 25th anniversary celebration of the Worldwide Fund for Nature in 1986. These innocuous and laudable statements led to the establishment of an international 'Network of Conservation and Religion', a useful initiative. But attempts to further the aims of bringing together conservation and religion have led to some highly contentious activities, such as some Cathedral Creation Celebrations involving wholly incompatible philosophies, with joint worship by people of different faiths, including monotheists and polytheists. For example, the Coventry celebration in 1988 included a prayer, 'Our brothers and sisters of the creation, the mighty trees, the broad oceans, the air, the earth, the creatures of creation, forgive us and reconcile us to you'. Such heterodoxy stimulated in 1991 an 'open letter' signed by over 3000 Church of England clergy, and stating:

*We desire to love and respect people of other faiths. We respect their rights and freedoms. We wholeheartedly support cooperation in appropriate community, social, moral and political issues between Christians and those of other faiths wherever this is possible ... (but) We are deeply concerned about gatherings for interfaith worship and prayer involving Christian people. These include the Interfaith Commonwealth Day Observance in Westminster Abbey and other such events in some of the cathedrals and churches of England ... We believe these events, however motivated, conflict with the Christian duty to proclaim the Gospel. They imply that salvation is offered by God not only through Jesus Christ but by other means and thus deny his uniqueness and finality as the only Saviour.*

More insidious and difficult to confront are the philosophies underlying the so-called New Age movement. 'New Age'

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has no precise meaning but it is claimed to be a sign of the time when the world is moving from Pisces dominated by Christianity, to Aquarius symbolizing unity. Characteristic New Age tenets are that:

- ☒ All is one—invoking subatomic physics as its justification, and ignoring all higher categories of organization;
- ☒ All is God, hence
- ☒ Humanity is God, which leads to
- ☒ Change in consciousness, variously called nirvana, satori, self-realization, God-realization, cosmic consciousness. This means
- ☒ All religions are one, dissolved into a cosmic unity, and implying
- ☒ Cosmic evolutionary optimism.

The two great New Age anathemata are dualism and reductionism (despite the claim of legitimization from subatomic physics, which is an acme of reductionist science).

Such a faith (if that is an appropriate description) is necessarily pantheistic and relativistic (since there are no right/wrong distinctions); salvation is achieved through self-realization, so various human potential movements are claimed by New Agers.

The present manifestation of the New Age derives from sundry utopianisms of the 18th and 19th century (especially the Theosophical Society), but it has its immediate roots in the anti-authoritarianism of the 1960s, with its appeals to romanticism as an antidote to the presumed determinism of science. Whereas mainstream thought accepted the need for environmental management and statutory controls, the emerging green movement sought the removal of constraints, allowing life to be lived in harmony with the earth. Key concepts were balance, stability and peace. A seminal document is E. F. Schumacher's *Small is Beautiful*

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(Blond & Briggs, 1973) with its emphasis on appropriate or intermediate technology. Big business and central government are distrusted. Tradition and authority are suspect, but selectively endorsed in the guise of earth myths and native customs. Green religion is based on a passionate animism.

Some of this is healthy. It is right to examine traditions, test authority, and seek to improve the structures of society. But it is too easy to jettison truth in the course of rethinking, and the situation is complicated by the vast spectrum of beliefs and practices between the extreme greens and the most orthodox establishmentarians. However, three focuses within 'green religion' are worth mentioning:

### *Creation spirituality*

Creation spirituality, as propounded by an American Roman Catholic priest, Matthew Fox. Fox seeks to untie modern cosmology with 'traditional wisdoms', within which Fox includes his own background of Dominican mysticism; he frequently quotes medieval visionaries such as Hildegarde of Bingen (1098–1179), Meister Eckhart (1260–1329), Julian of Norwich (1342–1415) and Thomas Traherne (1636–74). He argues for the replacement of so-called 'fall/redemption' theology by a creation-centred one, which he sees as an optimistic progression, as opposed to an acceptance of disorder and a need for redemption and reconciliation. For Fox the biblical God is a sadistic, 'fascist' deity; in his thinking 'we are we and we are God'. Our divinity is awakened through ecstasy—drugs, sex, yoga, ritual drumming or Transcendental Meditation: 'the experience of ecstasy is the experience of God'. Crucifixion and Resurrection are transferred from the historical Jesus to Mother Earth, a constantly sacrificed paschal lamb. Fox's religion is one in which Christ becomes merely a player on the world's stage. Fox asserts a form of pantheism where everything is holy and therefore to be worshipped, although he insists that God is more than the universe and that his faith is really panentheistic (that is, God is in everything, but is more than everything). But the distinction between

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pantheism and panentheism is slight, and as C. S. Lewis put it in the *Problem of Pain* (Bles, 1962), 'Pantheism is a creed, not so much false as hopelessly behind the times. Once, before creation, it would have been true to say that everything was God. But God created; He caused things to be other than Himself'.

Fox's Cosmic Christianity must be distinguished from a more conventional panentheism urged by the so-called process theologians (such as John Cobb and the biologist Charles Birch); this features in many World Council of Churches publications, and has links with liberation theology (Birch, Eakin & McDaniel, 1990). Process theology begins from the premise that God must be open to influence and therefore change by the world he has made; past and present events become joined into a continuum, and redemption becomes part of this process. Consequently Christ's work is down-played; process theology tends toward a Unitarian faith, not a Trinitarian one.

### *Gaia*

Many green religionists have taken hold of the scientific hypothesis propounded by Lovelock in 1969 (a useful summary appears in *Global Ecology*, Academic, 1989, edited by M. B. Rambler, L. Margulis and R. Fester), that the world and its atmosphere is a self-regulating negative feedback system ('Gaia', after the Greek Goddess of the Earth). They use it as a justification for the incorporation of human life as merely one element in an interacting but unitary organism. This is not the place to discuss the correctness of the science; Gaia has been an excellent hypothesis in stimulating research to validate or disprove it. The problem has been wild extrapolation from the basic concept, so that the world is seen to be a living creature who can be abused or propitiated. Gaia has become a divine entity to some, worshipped as a female God from whose womb we have come. In other words, Gaia science has been used as an intellectual justification for pantheism.

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It is not necessary, of course, to endue Gaia with metaphysical properties. Some Christians see the interconnectedness of organic and inorganic systems as an example of the 'anthropic principle', which is that there are too many 'coincidences' in the properties of natural systems for the world to have arisen by chance. In this sense, the anthropic principle becomes a restatement of the medieval argument from design for the existence of God (see Hugh Montefiore, *The Probability of God*, SPCK, 1985, for an extensive discussion of this position).

### *Deep ecology*

Some of the more important prophets of green religion are the American founders of the cult of wilderness, notably Henry David Thoreau and John Muir. (Muir was born in Dunbar, Scotland, but was taken to Wisconsin in 1849 at the age of eleven). Muir was fond of religious language. For example he wrote (having just lost a battle to preserve a tract of wild land), 'These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar'. The mantle of these early prophets then passed to Aldo Leopold, who turned the notion of respect for nature into a 'land ethic', complementing the ethics of relationships between individuals and with society.<sup>1</sup> Leopold's ideas have in turn been developed by a number of contemporary philosophers, notably the Norwegian Arne Naess and the American Holmes Rolston III. Naess contrasts what he calls shallow ecology (which to him merely deals with symptoms, such as fighting pollution and resource depletion) with deep ecology, based on 'biospheric egalitarianism' (meaning that all things have an equal right to life, although Naess allows self-defence against

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<sup>1</sup> According to Leopold, we must 'quit thinking about decent land use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and aesthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise'. (Leopold, *Sand County Almanac*, Oxford University Press, 1949, pages 224–25).

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organisms threatening health or survival). For Naess, deep ecology should explicitly challenge and confront the superficialities of conventional scientific (shallow) ecology; he converges on the New Age position by seeing 'self-realization' as a core for fully understanding deep concepts. He believes that deep ecology begins to articulate a comprehensive world-view, linking 'people who ask 'ecological questions' in Christianity, Taoism, Buddhism and Native American Rituals'. (An excellent review of philosophical approaches to the environment is *Thinking About Nature* by Andrew Brennan, Routledge, 1988).

### **Green science**

Green science (or science as seen by 'greens') emphasizes the interconnectedness of natural systems. Much is made of the concept of a healthy 'ecosystem' having greater value than its constituent parts; a frequent appeal is made to the 'balance of nature'. Herein lies the appeal of the Gaia hypothesis, because its underlying premise is of a massively interacting machine.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is almost certainly no such thing as a 'balance of nature'. Historically, the idea is based on three concepts, all of which are untrue:

- ☒ A causal parallel between the microcosm of the body and the macrocosm of the living world.
- ☒ The existence of a 'great chain of being' (or 'web of life'), linking all organisms together. (This is not the same as the genetic hierarchies which arise through evolution).
- ☒ A divinely ordained balance, derived from Stoic ideas of the Creator's wisdom and benevolence.

In the early 20th century, the notion of balance received support from observations on the succession of (mainly) plant communities, leading to a 'climax'. But it is now clear that there is no such absolute as a climax community: the

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<sup>2</sup>The irony is that disturbance of the Gaian system is unimportant, since it would return to its original condition when the disturbance ended. This is rather embarrassing for devout Gaians.

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climax at any time and place is a dynamic relationship with the present environment and past history of that community. This is particularly clear from the plants and animals that live on oceanic islands. Every isolated island lacks species present on continental areas, but the island ecosystems are entirely healthy. Furthermore, experimental disturbance of assumedly species-saturated habitats like tropical forests or coral reefs show that even they are not in some ideal biological equilibrium; the whole is a network of local compromises between death and birth, extinction and colonization, success and failure (see Stuart Pimm, *The Balance of Nature*, Chicago University Press, 1992). Refinements like chaos theory do not change this picture. One of the founders of modern ecology, Charles Elton wrote, 'the balance of nature does not exist, and perhaps never has existed. The numbers of wild animals are constantly varying to a greater or less extent, and the variations are usually irregular in period and always irregular in amplitude.'

A rather unexpected corollary of this, is that reasons to protect the 'biodiversity of nature' are hard to find on purely scientific grounds. Biodiversity is easy to justify on utilitarian assumptions (we may 'need' a species assemblage) or religious premises (we have a responsibility to care for God's world, or less strongly, for the 'natural' world); it is difficult to argue scientifically for the maintenance of the status quo.

This conclusion does not give us untrammelled licence to disrupt nature and destroy species, because others besides ourselves have interests in the fate of animal and plant communities. What it does is point to limits in scientific explanation, an emphasis which needs constantly re-emphasizing in an age which is too easily seduced by science. This was clearly argued by Peter Medawar (in *The Limits of Science*, Harper & Row, 1984):

*That there is indeed a limit upon science is made very likely by the existence of questions that science cannot answer*

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*and that no conceivable advances of science would empower it to answer ... I have in mind such questions as:*

*How did everything begin?*

*What are we all here for?*

*What is the point of living?*

*Doctrinaire positivism—now something of a period piece—dismissed all such questions as non-questions or pseudoquestions such as only simpletons ask and only charlatans of one kind or another profess to be able to answer. This peremptory dismissal leaves one empty and dissatisfied because the questions make sense to those who try to give them; but whatever else may be in dispute, it would be universally agreed that it is not to science that we should look for answers. There is then a prima facie case for the existence of a limit to scientific understanding.*

### ***The environmental complaint***

Neither science nor religion by themselves can produce the answer to our environmental problems. The toothlessness of science alone was recognized by the lack of impact of the World Conservation Strategy, which fell into the Enlightenment fallacy that knowledge automatically produces response; it was underlined by the calling forth of the Assisi Declaration by the Worldwide Fund for Nature and its support for a conservation and religion network; it was made explicit by The Duke of Edinburgh when setting up a consultations on Christianity and the Environment, posing the question, 'There must be a moral as well as a practical argument for environmental conservation. What is it?' The confusions of religion are illustrated by uncertainties about whether to preserve or manage, by the role of established faiths or traditions, by the selective misuse of scientific data.

Karl Popper has written 'the fact that science cannot make any pronouncement about ethical principles has been misinterpreted as indicating that there are no such principles, while in fact the search for truth presupposes

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ethics'. Is it possible to produce a generally acceptable environmental ethic? The answer to this must be yes. In 1989, the Economic Summit Nations (the G7) called a conference on Environmental Ethics in Brussels. In the words of its final communique, the participants 'benefited from a high degree of convergence between people of different cultures, East and West, and a wide variety of disciplines'. There was absolute unanimity among those present that the main need for individuals and nations alike was to practise responsible stewardship. On behalf of the conference, I chaired a Working Party over the succeeding year to formulate a 'Code of Environmental Practice' (reprinted in Berry, 1992). The Code went to the G7 Heads of State meeting in Texas in 1990. It is based on a simple ethic: stewardship of the living and non-living systems of the earth in order to maintain their sustainability for present and future, allowing development with forbearance and fairness. In itself, this is an innocuous statement, indeed almost vacuous. However, it entails characteristics common to all good citizens, as well as states and corporations, which involve responsibility, freedom, justice, truthfulness, sensitivity, awareness and integrity. In turn these lead to a series of obligations which are its teeth and may involve real cost (Table 1). The Code is a secular document, produced by a secular group for a secular organization. It was one of the documents submitted as a source paper for the 'Earth Charter' which was intended to preface the work of the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio (but which succumbed to political expediency, and was replaced by an anodyne 'Rio Declaration'). But it was taken almost in its entirety by a Working Party of the General Synod of the Church of England charged with preparing 'a statement of Christian Stewardship in relation to the whole of creation to challenge government, Church and people'<sup>3</sup> (GS Misc. 367, Board for Social Responsibility, 1991). The General Synod paper began with a statement of Christian understanding:

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<sup>3</sup> I must declare an interest; I chaired the General Synod Working Party.

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**Table 1**

Obligations following the acceptance of a simple environmental ethic

- ☒ All environmental impacts should be fully assessed in advance for their probable effect on the community, posterity and nature itself as well as on individual interest.
- ☒ Regular monitoring of the state of the environment should be undertaken and the data made available without restriction.
- ☒ The provision of adequate support for basic environmental research as well as for conservation, resource and pollution studies, to ensure and improve knowledge of environmental processes.
- ☒ The assessment of activities involving environmental impact should incorporate social cultural and environmental costs, as well as commercial considerations.
- ☒ The facilitation of technological transfer, with justice to those who develop new technologies and equitable compassion towards those who need them.
- ☒ Regulatory and mandatory restrictions should be effected wherever possible by cooperation rather than confrontation; minimum environmental standards must be effectively monitored and enforced.
- ☒ Regular review of environmental standards and practices should be undertaken by expert independent bodies.
- ☒ Costs of environmental damage (fully assessed as in [4] above) should be fully borne by their instigator,

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including newly-discovered damages for an agreed period retrospectively.

☒ Existing and future international conventions dealing with trans-frontier pollution or the management of shared natural resources should include

(a) the responsibility of every state not to harm the health and environment of other nations;

(b) liability and compensation for any damage caused by third parties;

(c) equal right of access to remedial measures by all parties concerned.

☒ Industrial and domestic waste should be reduced as much as possible, if appropriate by taxation and penalties on refuse dumping. Waste transport should be minimized by adequate provision of recycling and treatment plants.

☒ Appropriate sanctions should be imposed on the selling or export of technology or equipment that fails to meet the best practicable environmental option for any situation.

☒ International agreements should be sought on the management of extra-national resources (atmosphere, deep-sea, and continued for the regions covered by the Antarctic Treaty system.

*We all share and depend on the same world, with its finite and often non-renewable resources. Christians believe that this world belongs to God by creation, redemption and sustenance, and that he has entrusted it to humankind, made in his image and responsible to him; we are in the position of stewards, tenants, curators, trustees or guardians, whether or not we acknowledge this responsibility.*

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*Stewardship implies caring management, not selfish exploitation; it involves a concern for both present and future as well as self, and a recognition that the world we manage has an interest in its own survival and well-being independent of its value to us.*

It then drew out the implications of such stewardship in the same way (and in almost the same language) as the Brussels Code. Christian doctrine provides an additional theoretical underpinning for the secular conclusions, but the practical outworking of both sacred and secular is identical—as indeed a Christian ought to expect, since he (and she) believes God created, ordained and sustains the world for righteous and unrighteous alike. Orthodox Christian doctrine is that God is both transcendent and immanent: outside and controlling the world, and inside and influencing it (as anyone who prays in faith accepts). Jonathan Porritt has claimed that the Christian error is to believe in a God far away and remote, whereas the discovery of green religionists is that God is within and intimate. Porritt’s version demonstrates only too clearly the Church’s failure to claim and expound sound doctrine, as well as the greens’ acceptance of a half-truth as potentially distorting as was the opposite half-truth, exemplified two centuries ago by Paley’s ‘Divine Watchmaker’.

Nevertheless, the separation of God and creation is important. The clear teaching of the Bible is that the link between Creator and created is the word of God; creation is not divine, it is not God, and it is related to God through us (‘made in God’s image’). The problem ought not to be walking a tightrope between immanence and transcendence, but an unapologetic trinitarianism; the world is redeemed from being merely an object by Christ’s work, and is upheld and ordered by the Spirit. If we see the way forward as a balance between a distant God of absolute power and a confusing pan(en)theism, we will find ourselves repeatedly having to readjust the balance. If, on the other hand, we follow Irenaeus and Tertullian in insisting on a God who alone is self-existent and who created out of nothing, we avoid the dangers of both

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dualism and a self-centred religion knowable only through self-realization. The contemporary New Age debate is really a re-run of the gnostic debate of the early centuries AD.

All this means that there is more to a Christian understanding of the environment than calculating stewardship. If we are not careful, stewardship becomes just one more command to obey; indeed in the industrial world, environmental care is commonly reduced to conformity in meeting statutory requirements, rather than an attitude of respect and moral responsibility. Chris Patten, when Secretary of State for the Environment, described the ideal well (in a lecture given at Godolphin & Latymer School in 1990): 'The relationship between man and his environment depends, and always will depend, on more than just sound science and sound economics. For individuals part of the relationship is metaphysical. Those of us with religious convictions can, if we are lucky, experience the beauties, as well as the utilities, of the world as direct manifestations of the love and creative power of God'.

Can we identify the constituents of this metaphysical relationship? A major part is, of course, experiential. It was awe and wonder that drove Arne Naess to his 'deep ecology'; it was respect for the glories of our world which led such different characters as John Muir, Julian Huxley and Teilhard de Chardin to seek a rationalization for their experiences. It is more than a quest or challenge, or a desire for like-companionship that produces escape to the wilds. But I would urge there is something deeper, towards which wilderness seekers are groping. Whether the symptoms are middle-class involvement in recycling, countryside protection or ecoconsumerism, or more radical New Age commitments to self-discovery, there is a widespread recognition of a missing 'order' in modern society. In primitive societies, the constant battle to survive means this 'disorder' is submerged. This may be the reason for 'return to nature' cults; native societies are perceived to have a wisdom and peace that has disappeared from more advanced cultures. But it is an illusion, as well illustrated by Thor Heyerdahl, who evacuated after a year on an 'unspoilt'

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Pacific island in the Marquesa group where he and his wife had found disease, distrust and misery, wrote: 'There is no Paradise to be found on earth today. There are people living in great cities who are far happier than the majority of those in the South Seas. Happiness comes from within, we realize that now. It is in his mind and way of life that man may find his Paradise—the ability to perceive the true values of life, which are far removed from property and riches, or from power and renown'.

Robin Grove-White, former Director of the CPRE, has come to the same conclusion: 'rather than the environmental agenda being presented to us from on high be science, the actual selection of issues ... arises from human beings responding gropingly to a sense of the ways in which their moral, social and physical identities are being threatened'. Grove-White identifies the way forward as new theological understandings of the human person and its needs. I believe he is right in seeing the key to environmental sense in human nature; Lynne White (1967) said much the same 25 years ago: 'What we do about nature depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship'. But we do not need new understandings; our starting-point is the ancient, universally established, and often-disguised selfishness and pride of the individual. Our greed is at the root of all environmental damage—sometimes expressed as personal wants, sometimes through corporate action, sometimes as a simple desire to demonstrate power. This is common ground to all major religions. The distinguishing trait of the Christian faith is that God has taken action to deal with the problem (for example, Colossians 1:16 20). Christians have a particular responsibility to the environment because of their acknowledgement and worship of God as creator, redeemer and sustainer. For them abuse of the natural world is disobedience to God, not merely an error of judgment. This means that Christians must examine their life-style and work out their attitudes to the natural world as part of their service and stewardship. It also means affirming a God who is neither remote nor powerless. The Church of England Doctrine Commission puts it thus:

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*To accept God as the Creator of all things implies that man's own creative activity should be in cooperation with the purposes of the Creator who has made all things good. To accept man's sinfulness is to recognize the limitation of human goals and the uncertainty of human achievement. To accept God as Saviour is to work out our own salvation in union with him and so to do our part in restoring and recreating what by our folly and frailty we have defaced or destroyed, and in helping to come to birth those good possibilities of creation that have not yet been realized ... To hold that God has created that world for a purpose gives man a worthy goal in life and a hope to lift up his heart and to strengthen his efforts. To believe that man's true citizenship is in heaven and that his true identity lies beyond space and time enables him both to be involved in this world and yet to have a measure of detachment from it that permits radical changes such as would be scarcely possible if all his hopes were centred on this world. To believe that all things will be restored and nothing wasted gives added meaning to all man's efforts and strivings. Only by the inspiration of such a vision is society likely to be able to reorder this world and to find the symbols to interpret man's place within it.*

*Hugh Montefiore, editor,*

*Man and Nature, Collins, 1975*

The tragedy of modern society—even that part which worships God—is that (in J. B. Phillip's words) its God is too small. The God of twentieth-century Westerners is a God of the gaps, squeezed into the ever-shrinking gaps of knowledge. But the Christian God is Lord of all; he is Lord of creation as well as the Church. God so loved the cosmos—not merely the human world—that he sent his only son to die for the cosmos. Scientists who are Christians have singularly failed to convince their contemporaries that a creator God is a reality. The answer to our environmental complaint lies primarily in an adequate doctrine of God, and only secondarily in concerned action to deal with the disasters we have produced. John Polkinghorne in his

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Templeton Lecture at the RSA on 20 October 1992 reminded us of the research scientist's text which James Clerk Maxwell had carved on the entrance of the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge ('Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them', Psalm 111:2); we do well to remember the last verse of the psalm from which the text is taken: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise' (Psalm 111:10).

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# 13

## Power And Powerlessness

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*Dr Nigel Biggar, Fellow and Chaplain of Oriel College, Oxford*

We tend to associate power with its abuse or, to be more precise, with its political abuse. We associate it with oppression, manipulation and exploitation.

When we think of power, we tend to think of the power-hungry with their ruthless ambition to be on top and to stay on top, come what may. We think of Latin American generals in uniforms resplendent with gold-braid, menacing and all-seeing behind their dark, inscrutable sun-shades.

Abusive power, however, is not the only manner of power. In addition to the power to oppress, there is also the power to liberate; and in addition to the power to exploit, there is also the power to enable.

Nor is political power the only kind of power. There are also physical, technical, aesthetic, moral and spiritual varieties of power. Wherever there is an ability to effect something, to bring something about, there is power.

We could say that power is morally neutral, in the sense that in itself it is neither good nor bad. But it does not exist in itself. Power is always power for something; and what it is for determines its moral quality. We can certainly say, however, that power is not necessarily bad.

### ***God, the enemy of human power***

One of the greatest stimulants of modern atheism, whether of the theoretical or practical sort, has been the picture of God as a tyrant who is obsessed with keeping human beings powerless. This understanding sees God and

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<sup>5</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (104). Lynx Communications: London

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humans as rivals: as one grows in power, the other must diminish. Therefore, if human beings are to grow up and grow strong, they must rebel against God, deny his authority, ignore his will.

This vision of God is, of course, not Christian. The Christian God is one who wills to see his creatures mature and flourish, to see them freely exercise and develop their powers to effect what is good. This is implied by one of the more exegetically plausible meanings of the well-known statement in the creation story in the Book of Genesis, that God made humankind 'in his own image' (Genesis 1:27). Among a wide range of interpretations of this phrase is one that links it to the practice of kings in the ancient Near East of erecting images of themselves in outlying provinces as a symbolic representation of their authority. The British used to do the same kind of thing last century: visit any part of the world that used to belong to the British Empire and, sooner or later, you will stumble across a formidable statue of Queen Victoria. The statement that humankind is made in God's image, then, means that we are made to represent God's authority. We are made to be the vice-gerents—or viceroys—of the divine king. We are to govern other creatures 'in his name'. That means two things: first, that we are to rule according to God's will; but second, that we are to use our discretion in ruling. To be a viceroy is not to be a kind of political automaton who does exactly or only what he is told. It means to be given and to exercise responsibility: to use one's discretion accountably; to execute God's will creatively.

Such an interpretation of what is meant by saying that humankind is made in God's image is supported by the fact that, in the very next verse, God commissions his human creatures to manage the earth and its non-human denizens: 'And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" ' (Genesis 1:28).

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The Christian God delegates. He devolves power. But, more than this, he seeks to restore power to the powerless. For this is the God who is committed to rescuing human sinners from the sin into which they have fallen. Note here that sin is not presented simply as something that humans do, but as a state into which they fall. It is not just an act, but a condition. A common Christian metaphor for the condition of sin is 'disorder', a disorder that renders us unfree and impotent, that subjects us to oppressive and destructive forces over which we lack control. Augustine spoke of the failure to love God properly as making the human self prey to uncontrollable desire—concupiscence—and thereby causing him to abuse his fellow creatures. Karl Barth spoke in similar terms of 'the lordless powers'—natural, god-given human powers that turn upon their human owners and overwhelm them when they shut their ears against God's Word. And, of course, St Paul spoke of sin in terms of 'slavery'.

The Christian God, then, is one who liberates sinful creatures from slavery. He gives back power to the powerless.

This vision of God goes all the way back to the ancient Hebrew identification of Yahweh as *Go'el*, the Redeemer, the one who buys back his people out of slavery—indeed, the one who brought his people out of Egypt. According to Christian conviction, this Jewish vision was confirmed in the life and teaching of Jesus. Luke, for example, represents him as applying the prophecy of Isaiah to himself: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke 4:8–9). The vision of God as Redeemer also finds expression in two of the classic metaphors of the Atonement used by the early Fathers of the Church: the liberation of sinners enslaved to the Devil either by the payment of a ransom, or by the winning of a military victory.

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The God of Christian belief, then, is one who has shown himself committed to human salvation, to making humans whole and healthy again, to restoring to them the power to flourish—spiritually, physically, morally, socially, and politically.

Certainly, there are times when God does contradict and oppose human beings, but only, as it were, when they oppose themselves. God is always on our side, but sometimes we are our own worst enemies. Then, and only then, is God at odds with us. He opposes us in our own interest.

The modern vision of God as simply a threat to human power is deeply unchristian: it tells a different story about God than Jesus told.’ But in another, secondary sense it is ‘Christian’; for it is a story about God that some historical forms of Christianity have told, albeit implicitly. Modern atheism was not created out of nothing. It has come into being in reaction against forms of Christianity that gave the appearance of being largely concerned to negate human powers in the name of obedience to God—especially aesthetic, sexual, and intellectual powers. Its origins lie partly in a reaction against ascetic, life-denying forms of Christianity that had forgotten in practice, if not in theory, the basic Christian doctrine of the goodness of creation and of created powers. One striking fictional representation of this can be seen in Ingmar Bergman’s film, *Fanny and Alexander*, in which the vivid colour, easy vitality and sheer human warmth of the pagan world of the theatre stands in stark contrast to the black-and-white severity, the resentful repressiveness and, in the end, the sheer cruelty of the Lutheran bishop’s household.

To some extent, then, Christians should endorse modern atheism as a rightful rebellion against a false ‘God’, and penitently acknowledge the fault of the Christian Church in helping to propagate such theological lies. Then we need to begin any discussion of power by affirming the value, the goodness, of human powers in the name of God the Creator

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who, beholding everything that he had made, saw that it was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31).

### ***The limits of human power***

That human beings have power is, in itself, good; for God made it so. But human powers are the power of creatures. They are, therefore, limited; and they are limited in two ways.

First, they are limited in extent. Human beings do not have the power to do everything absolutely. We only have the power to do some things to some extent. We can (sometimes) heal, but we can never abolish death. We can devote ourselves to helping some, but we do not have either the time or the energy to help everybody. We can predict some of the probable consequences of certain actions, but we cannot predict all of their actual consequences.

Second, human powers are limited by moral, as well as physical and cognitive, constraints. There are many things that we can do, that we have the power to do, but which we should not do. We might have the power to manipulate others, physically or emotionally, but we should not use it. We do have the power to learn all sorts of scientifically interesting and medically useful things by conducting experiments on live, healthy, conscious, and unwilling human persons, but we should not.

It is good that human beings have powers; but it is bad for humans to use those powers without observing their proper limits. It is imprudent for us to imagine that we can do more than we are able. That way leads to disappointment, even despair. And it is wrong for us to try to do more than we should. That way leads to injury.

Indeed, the all-too-common fantasy that we have unlimited powers—that they are not so much those of God's stewards as those of God himself—often leads us to abuse the limited powers we do possess. Naïve attempts to create the perfect human society sooner or later suffer frustration by those who, whether out of ignorance, awkwardness or malice,

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resist change; frustration festers into desperation; and then desperation gives violent birth to ruthlessness. So often in human history, what begins as an idealistic attempt to make the world more just and free ends in cruel repression. So often, the Revolution turns into the Terror.

The biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) may be fairly read in these terms. The purpose of this story is primarily to give an explanation of how the earth came to be populated with diverse peoples, but the nature of the explanation bears on our theme. The narrator attributes the diversity of peoples to God’s punishment of overweening ambition. The undivided human race, driven by the desire for fame (verse 4: ‘let us make a name for ourselves’), had decided to build a city and a tower ‘with its top in the heavens’. God, beholding this assertion of human ambition, feared that ‘nothing they propose to do will now be impossible for them’ (verse 6), and set himself to thwart them by causing them to speak different languages and so become divided.

The story of Babel might seem at first to confirm the modern atheist’s reading of God as one who, jealous of his own power, sees humans as potential rivals and is determined to keep them in their inferior place. But this interpretation neglects the political dimension of the tale, which is implied by the site of the building: the land of Shinar. For Shinar was located in Babylonia, the origin of one of the several empires that oppressed Israel, and one of those that finally dismembered her. In this light, then, the moral element in the story surfaces. God’s decision to thwart the ambitions of the tower-builders was not simply because they aspired to rival him in power, but also because their pursuit of power was associated with the building of empire, and one which for all its civilized and civilizing ideals—note: these people were city builders—would be brutal and oppressive.

It is good for human beings to have powers. God made it so. But it is bad for human beings not to observe the limits of those powers.

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The problem with modern atheism is that its assertion of human power against false, repressive authority tends to degenerate into an assertion of power against any authority. It tends to assert that power is the only reality, and to deny that there are any moral realities to which power is accountable—any goods that power should always be used to maintain or promote. It tends to deny that power is subject to moral constraints. In this respect (and in others), the classic example of the modern atheist is Friedrich Nietzsche, for whom morality is nothing but a tool of the weak to tie down the strong. It is just one more instrument of power.

Christians, however, will want to insist that power is not the only reality. There are also values—given, not invented. That is part of what Christians mean when they affirm that God is good. They mean that there is a coherent moral order to reality, as well as a coherent physical one. Reality, then, is such that human beings flourish, not when they are powerful simply, but when they are powerful in doing good and in being good; that is, when they are realizing values or goods both in the world and therefore in themselves.

### ***The uses of human powers***

What, then, are the goods which humans should use their powers to realize? The first is the good of friendship with God. It might seem improper to say that we should exercise our powers to realize friendship with God, because surely such friendship is graciously given to us, rather than manufactured by us. It is precisely not something that we have within our power to bring about: that is a basic tenet of the Christian belief that salvation comes by grace.

There is an answer to this objection. Certainly, friendship with God comes into being in the first place because, and only because, God offers it to us. And that is true, incidentally, of any friendship. By its very nature it cannot be forced out of anyone: if you do not freely give me your friendship, there is no way that I can wrest it from you.

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In cases where a relationship has suffered rupture because of injury inflicted on one party by another, the quality of friendship as a gift is intensified; for no degree of penitential effort on the part of the wrongdoer will suffice to restore friendship, unless the injured party volunteers to forgive.

So, on two counts friendship between God and human creatures-cum-sinners is only possible if God offers it as a gift. Nevertheless, the gracious offer itself is not enough to bring it about. We human creatures must open and extend our hands to receive it; and, having received it, we must proceed to develop it. In response to God's grace, and inspired and moved by it, we must exercise our power to cultivate friendship with God. In that sense, it is quite proper to describe it as a good that we should make efforts to realize.

Friendship with God is the good that we should realize first, not because it is the only good, but because it is the most basic one. It is basic to our realizing other goods properly. Friendship of any sort involves respect for another person: recognition of who they are, and of the fact that they are different from oneself. Friendship with God, then, involves recognition that God is God and we are not; that we have finite power, but he has infinite power; that we are capable of doing a little good, but that there is another who is capable of doing much more. Friendship with God involves acknowledging the presence in the world of an agent for good more powerful than human beings, and trusting it. Such trust enables the human agent, when faced with a situation where—as far as human sight can see—one good can only be realized or maintained by damaging another, to refrain from doing damage and to entrust the fate of the threatened good to the hands of a benevolent power greater than his own. It enables the human agent to refrain from being unjust in the pursuit of justice. Friendship with God, then, is necessary to enable one to refrain from harming some goods for the sake of others. In this sense, it is basic to proper care for other goods.

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However, friendship with God is no substitute for the proper care of other goods. How could one love God without loving what he loves? As the author of the First Epistle of John put it with regard to the human objects of God's love: 'If anyone says, "I love God", and hates his brother, he is a liar' (1 John 4:23). Love for the good of friendship with God necessarily involves us in love for the other goods created out of divine love.

Among these other goods that we should use our power to realize and maintain are: life and health; knowledge of the truth; appreciation of beauty; play; and friendship with other creatures.

### ***The abuses of human power***

Human beings abuse their powers in different ways. First, they abuse them by using them to maintain and realize some goods to the absolute neglect of others. So, we may devote ourselves to friendship with other humans while neglecting entirely friendship with God. Or we may be so obsessed with the pursuit of, let us say, medical science that we are prepared to treat human subjects as mere means, to the neglect of the good of human friendship.

Second, we abuse our powers by using them directly to destroy certain goods. In order to avoid having to confront uncomfortable practical implications, we may (mis)use our intellectual power to obscure knowledge of the truth. Or in order to preserve our own life, we may make a direct assault on the life of an (innocent) other.

### ***Political power***

Political power is the power to participate in governing a community—whether it be a nation, a business enterprise, a trade union, a university or a school, or a church. Usually, the power to do certain important things—to decide policy, to pass sentence, to hire and fire, to preach or celebrate Holy Communion—will be vested in a certain office; and to hold office one must be authorized by the community as a whole, by its representatives or by other office-holders. Those who hold public office possess unusual political

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power, in order to perform certain tasks that are important for the life and well-being of the community.

Political power is necessary. It is necessary for the actions of members of a community to be coordinated in the pursuit of worthwhile goals. And it is also necessary that some (well-qualified) persons should have more political power than others, if coordination is to be efficient—indeed, if it is to be practicable. At the same time, it is equally necessary that those who hold political power should be accountable for their exercise of it to their community; for it is in the interests of that community that they hold and wield it.

### ***The abuses of political power***

The abuse of political power is specifically an offence against the good of friendship with other members of our community. We abuse political power either when we monopolize it or when we misuse it. We monopolize it when we seek to be the sole possessors of a certain power or set of powers—whether to maintain or increase our sheer enjoyment of being powerful, our being in control, our being at the centre or our being needed. And we misuse political power when we exercise it for private, selfish purposes—to increase the comfort or security only of ourselves, our family, our class, our faction or our nation. We misuse political power when we employ it exclusively in the interest of ourselves or our own kind, rather than in the interests of the community as a whole.

### ***Political equality and social hierarchy***

We should not monopolize or misuse political power, because to do so is to offend against the good of friendship. Friendship is a relationship characterized by a certain harmony. But not only by harmony, for a master and a slave, a manager and an employee, a priest and a layperson may relate harmoniously, and yet not be friends. The harmony of friendship is harmony between equals of a certain kind. Friendship is characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, a giving and receiving on both sides. A friend

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does not patronize. He does not love or give or help from on high to below. He gives from alongside. And he is not always the one who gives; he is willing to receive as well. A friend is ready at one moment to play the powerful role of the giver, but at the next to exchange it for the powerless role of the needy. There is, then, this kind of equality about friendship.

That this is normative for human relationships is confirmed by the nature of God's love toward us, as displayed by Jesus: a love characterized, above all, by compassion—by fellow-feeling for the poor and the weak. This regard for others as fellows rather than inferiors is expressed in the story in the Gospel of John where Jesus deliberately 'equalizes' his relationship with his disciples by exchanging the role of master for that of servant through insisting upon washing their feet (John 13:1–9). Likewise, in the same Gospel, he 'equalizes' the same relationship by treating his disciples not as servants, but as friends: 'No longer do I call you servants ... but I have called you friends' (John 15:15). In still another part of the Johannine corpus, this regard for others as equals is expressed in the reciprocal quality of the relationship between the Ascendant Jesus and those who heed him: 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, *and he with me*' (Revelation 3:20).

The claim that all human relationships should be characterized by this kind of equality and mutuality is not incompatible with social hierarchy, provided that the rationale for such hierarchy is in purely functional terms. That is to say, hierarchy, may be justified only in terms of the efficient, coordinated functioning of the institution or community. One person is 'superior' to another only in the purely formal sense that they have official responsibility for managing or directing or supervising what their 'inferior' does. But this is not at all to say that what the 'superior' does is more valuable than what his 'inferior' does, because the healthy functioning of the whole depends equally on the contributions of each of its parts. What use are chiefs without indians? Moreover, if those higher up the social

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ladder recognize that their 'superiority' is purely functional, they will be careful to treat those below them as fellow members of the common enterprise. This does not mean that they will cease to manage or direct or supervise, but that in their managing they will be careful to listen and consider what those whom they manage have to say that is relevant to the task in hand and, indeed, to the life and organization of the institution or society as a whole.

This is exactly the model of social or institutional structure that Paul expounds in his famous passage on the Christian community as the body of Christ: 'For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?... If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you", nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you". On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honourable we invest with the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together' (1 Corinthians 12:12–26).

***The uses of political power***

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At the political level, therefore, due care for the good of friendship requires those who hold power to use it in such a way that respects this kind of equality. This means, first of all, that the powerful should remember what their power is for. True masters are those who use their power to serve. As Jesus told the sons of Zebedee: 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be saved but to save and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Matthew 20:25–8).

The powerful are to serve those under their authority. But note: they are to serve by becoming servants. In other words, they are not to 'serve' by distributing charity from on high, keeping those whom they 'serve' in a state of permanent dependence. On the contrary, they are to serve by themselves stooping down and, by stooping down, correlatively exalting those whom they serve. The powerful are to use their power to build up, to dignify the powerless. When, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he was not merely doing them a hospitable favour; he was also deliberately raising their status (John 13:1–16).

The powerful are to use their power to empower the powerless. They are to use their power to bring the needy into a state where they are no longer compelled to rely on the beneficence of the powerful. In other words, the powerful are to serve in such a way that their own power decreases as that of those whom they serve increases.

In this regard the story told in the book of Acts, chapter 6 (verses 1–7), is instructive. There it appears that a mixture of religious and cultural prejudice had resulted in a practice that was economically unjust: the 'Hellenist' (that is, culturally Greek) widows had been neglected in the daily distribution from the common fund (see Acts 4:32, 34–35). It is implied that 'Hebrew' (that is, culturally Aramaic)

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Christians were in charge of administering the distribution. In response to complaints from the Hellenists the community, led by the apostles, transferred administrative power and responsibility entirely from the Hebrews to the Hellenists (the seven men chosen for the job all had Greek names). In other words, the powerful voluntarily relinquished power to the powerless.

The notion that the point of political power is to empower the relatively impotent is reflected in the principle of 'subsidiarity'. This principle, espoused in much modern Roman Catholic political thought, holds that it is the proper function of the state to offer help (Latin: *subsidiūm*) to 'inferior' social institutions, whether public (for example, local government institutions, state schools or hospitals) or private (for example, churches, charities, economic enterprises, and families), to exercise as much responsibility and concomitant power as they can manage with efficiency and in justice. The presumption is that power rightly belongs at the 'lowest' social stratum at which it can be used well. It is the primary duty of those in political office to devolve power as far as is reasonable.

History bears witness to the perennial tendency of the powerful to concentrate power in their own hands and then to use it for private or sectional purposes. Although the original reasons for wanting a preponderance or monopoly of power might well be laudable—for example, in order to secure a just economic and social organization—and the motives initially *bona fide*, long experience has taught us (to slightly amend Lord Acton's famous dictum) that power tends to corrupt, and absolute power tends to corrupt absolutely. In the Old Testament, there is a notable tradition of prophetic criticism of the over-concentration of power in the hands of the king. This finds expression in the story recounted in the first book of Samuel about the origins of Israel's monarchy. Here God is presented as reluctantly acceding to the mistaken wishes of his people for a king and as instructing Samuel to warn them of the consequences of their choice: 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to

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his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take your menservants and maidservants, and the best of your cattle and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves ...' (1 Samuel 8:11–18).

In addition to ensuring that they themselves do not accumulate more power than is necessary, rulers also have a duty to ensure that all members of a community have access to the full range of those basic goods by participation in which human beings flourish. This does not mean that everyone should have exactly the same quantity of material goods, but it does mean that those who have more than they need should give to those who have less: the superabundance of some should make up the deficiency of others. Paul argued as much when trying to persuade the Corinthian church to come to the aid of their Christian brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. Appealing to the example of Jesus who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich' (2 Corinthians 8:9), he urges upon the Corinthians that 'your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality' (8:14).

Implicit here is the notion that the right to own private property is not absolute. To use biblical language, our right to ownership is the right to be stewards—the right to manage according to the will of God. Or, to put it in terms used by Thomas Aquinas, we have the right to acquire, use and dispose of property, but always subject to the requirements of the common good. Aquinas takes this point as far as to say that, in a case where someone who has

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more than enough refuses to supply the needs of another person who is in dire need, the latter may take what he needs from the former without being guilty of theft.

Aquinas' case reminds us of one reason why care of the poor is mainly the responsibility of the rulers of a community; namely, because the individual consciences of rich people are not always effective in moving them to fulfil the obligations of charity. There is also a second reason: because, even if all rich individuals were sufficiently charitable, their charity would not be efficiently distributed unless through a body with sufficient information about the identities of all the poor and the extent of the poverty of each, and with a community-wide administration. For these two reasons it is a prime duty of those authorized to exercise political power to use it to enable those who cannot participate in basic goods to do so. Political power should have what Liberation theologians call 'a bias to the poor'. The 'poor' here, as in the Bible, are not just the economically destitute, but anyone who is powerless to realize certain basic goods because of an unjust distribution or concentration of power in the hands of other members of the same community.

This understanding of the office of political authority is supported by the tradition in the Old Testament which sees the primary function of the king as to defend the weak against the strong. This undoubtedly has roots in the Hebrews' conviction that their divine King was responsible for liberating them from Egyptian slavery. In the New Testament this Jewish understanding of God as champion of the poor is affirmed in the Gospel of Luke in connexion with Jesus' birth, when in the 'Magnificat' Mary exclaims, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour ... He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty' (Luke 1:46–7, 51–3). A little further on in the same Gospel the identification of Jesus with this model of kingship is made stronger in a

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passage, already quoted, where he applies to himself the prophecy of Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.' (4:18–19).

This reference to 'the acceptable year of the Lord' associates with Jesus' programme the policy for limiting the growth of inequalities in economic and political power that was enjoined upon post—exilic Israel by Leviticus, chapter 25.

Among other things, this policy provided for a Year of Jubilee every fifty years, in which property and economic freedom lost through indebtedness would be restored to their original owners or their descendants. Thus the economic—and, with it, the political—independence of each member or household in the community would be maintained and gross concentrations of power avoided.

Access to sufficient material goods as are necessary to support physical and social life is one of the things that political rulers should strive to provide all members of a community. They should also seek to ensure that the means of access do not render some members vulnerable to economic exploitation by others—or to political manipulation. Every member should be able to participate effectively in the making of political decisions. They should be able to make their voice heard and have it seriously considered, for the individual contribution of each is equally essential to the health and efficiency of the common enterprise. At very least, it is vitally important that those with political authority should be made aware of the grievances and aspirations of those whom they rule and, in ruling, should serve. And, at most, unless one supposes that rulers have a monopoly of wisdom, it is quite conceivable that the ruled might have something sensible and important to contribute to the formation of policy.

If those at the lower echelons of a community or institution are to be able to participate effectively in political affairs,

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then, given the sinful propensity of the powerful to forget their duty to the common good, structures must be established that check their power and render them accountable (for example, some kind of democratic constitution).

More than this, there must be some constraints imposed upon the capacity of economic power to translate itself into political power. This is because preponderant (economic) wealth does tend to buy preponderant political influence; if not through simple bribery then through other means (for example, through preponderant ownership of a society's media).

### ***Political power in the church***

A Christian church is a political entity, and so the exercise of political authority is necessary in it. It is a society whose members' actions need to be coordinated toward the achievement of common goals and in which the distribution of power will tend to become unjust, by default or by design, unless corrected.

In a Christian church, as elsewhere, it is the duty of those who hold authority whether bishops, priests, deacons, ministers or elders, to use their power to serve the community as a whole; to serve the community by enabling ordinary members to grow in power, to become capable of carrying greater responsibility and making a greater contribution; to empower the weaker so that they are no longer in permanent, structural dependence on the stronger. The task of an ecclesiastical leader is not to try to become a one-man or one-woman church, perfectly combining in themselves the roles of pastor, teacher, evangelist and administrator. That way leads to megalomania or nervous (and marital) breakdown on the part of the leader, and to alienation or infantilization on the part of the led. No, the task of leaders in the Church is to help the congregation become the People of God by becoming disciples of Christ. One of the most effective ways of doing this is by presenting in themselves a living model of Him who, though he was omnipotent, yet for our sakes

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became impotent, so that by his powerlessness we might become powerful.



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## The world of business

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There are many deeply committed Christians who hold influential positions in the Western business world. Yet it is also true, as Brian Griffiths writes, that 'The Christian Church has never found it easy to come to terms with the marketplace'.<sup>1</sup> While many of those who attend church are as diligent in making money and furthering their careers as their colleagues, the tenor of contemporary church statements often gives the impression of questioning what they are about. 'You cannot serve God and Mammon,' said Jesus (Matthew 6:24). The business world falls under suspicion not only because its style is seen as ruthless and its ethic as pragmatic, but because the service of Mammon appears to be its very *raison d'être*.

It would be a mistake to think that Christians in business are so thick-skinned that they are immune to such questionings. A Christian I know in a very senior position in one of Britain's largest companies once asked a number of counterparts what they thought was the most distinctive aspect about the Christian's approach to business. The answer he received from many of them was 'a sense of guilt'. This is a disturbing and in some ways a disappointing finding, but it needs to be taken seriously. A significant number of Christians in business do seem saddled with the feeling that they are involved in something slightly improper, but with that a sense that their hands are tied and there is not much they can do to change things.

This unease is expressed in a variety of concerns. Is Western society becoming unpardonably materialistic and selfish? Does the often intense competition between firms create a

<sup>1</sup> Brian Griffiths, *The Creation of Wealth*, Hodder & Stoughton, page 9

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jungle mentality where the end of winning contracts or making acquisitions is held to justify any means, however shady? How can one justify the large discrepancies in levels of pay which appear to bear no relation to the intrinsic worth of the job? Don't companies demand a quite unreasonable measure of time, effort and commitment from their senior employees, often with damaging effects on personal wellbeing and family life? Most fundamental of all, is not the business endeavour crucially flawed by the fact that it is fuelled by the motive of profit?

My own view is that, notwithstanding the legitimacy of these questions, business is a perfectly legitimate area for Christian participation and involvement. Business concerns the basic stuff of human existence. It is about the baking of bread, the building of houses, the banking of money, the booking of journeys and much more besides. It concerns clothes to wear and shops to buy them in, cars to drive and mechanics to mend them, coal to mine and power stations to utilize it. The general public takes advantage of the services which business provides all the time, but those of us employed in other areas of life can easily take these services for granted. To run a successful business which provides a reliable service to its customers demands a high degree of skill, flair and organizational ability. It also requires the capacity to withstand considerable levels of stress, pressure and temptation. In churches up and down the land we are used to hearing intercessory prayers for those in the 'caring' professions: clergy, doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers. Why do we not hear more petitions for those in different types of business? They both deserve prayerful support from other Christians and they need it.

In this chapter I wish, briefly, to ask such questions as these: What is the place of business within the purposes of God? How does our understanding of the revealed character of God affect the way we look at it? How does business appear in the light of the great themes of salvation history: creation, fall, redemption and eschatology? And what are the ethical implications of all this?

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**God the Trinity**

Let us begin with our understanding of God. Christians believe in God the Trinity, and this means first and foremost a God who relates well within himself. Father, Son and Holy Spirit operate together as an immaculate unit, working together for our human good. The idea of persons in community is there right at the heart of the godhead. And that immediately poses a challenge. Is there a similar unity acting in love at the head of our organizations?

The different persons of the Trinity are united, but they also have distinct characteristics. Although it is possible to exaggerate the distinctions, we can even talk about the three members of the Trinity playing different roles. Christian Schumacher has helpfully pointed out how the different roles played by the three members of the Trinity actually reflect a basic pattern common to most human activity, including business.<sup>2</sup> Every business operation needs planning—careful, imaginative, creative planning. God the Father shows this *par excellence*. Every business operation needs executing someone prepared to roll up his sleeves and go out to do what needs to be done, effecting transformation of the situation, Jesus the Son. Every business operation needs good communication—someone who will coordinate the efforts of planner and executive, explain what is going on in the maelstrom of the marketplace, and help evaluate what has been achieved. This is a more diversified brief, but the Holy Spirit is certainly equal to it!

Analogies of this sort can become strained. We should not push this one too far, but it is potentially a very exciting thought that in our normal sphere of business operations, we are in some sense mirroring the life of God. As we partake in the regular cycle of planning, executing and evaluating, we reveal ourselves to be creatures made in the image of God—not just any God, but a Trinitarian one.

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<sup>2</sup>Christian Schumacher, *To Live and Work*, Marc Europe, chapter 9

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There is a pattern present in the world because it was there in God first.

Schumacher takes his Trinitarian analogy a stage further. It is important not to romanticize people's experience of work, but to recognize that many find work frustrating and unfulfilling, even soul-destroying. This can be traced to the fact that, since the Industrial Revolution, much of our work has been organized in such a way that it has a deformed character. For work to be satisfying, it needs to partake of all three elements of planning, doing and reviewing. Individuals and groups are too often treated as mere functionaries, instead of being given responsibility for applying creative and critical thought to their activities. Schumacher advocates the organization of companies into small work-groups so that all may experience the satisfaction of 'whole' work.

In addition, the nature of each group's activity needs attention. Job satisfaction is likely to be less when employees are performing merely cosmetic or peripheral functions, like storing things. Jesus did not simply perform a function; he transformed a situation. The memorable moments at work are when a situation is transformed: when oil is found, a new garment designed or a crucial contract secured. These of course are the initial stages, but there is satisfaction too in seeing the desired process of transformation through to its conclusion. While no organization can do without its sphere of ancillary operations, there is often scope for streamlining an organization so that every individual and group partakes less of tedious, trivial activities, and is more involved with the fundamental process which gives meaning and purpose to the whole enterprise.

### ***Creation***

Let us move on to look at business from the perspective of some of the key events described in the Bible. We start by going back to creation. God created the world and all that is in it and, as the climax of his creation, human beings, who are themselves creative and called to be responsible

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managers of his creation. Psalm 8:6 says that God has made man ruler of creation (he has 'put all things under his feet') though it is a rule which needs to be exercised humbly, carefully and compassionately, and in a sense of being accountable to God. As another Psalm 24, begins, 'The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; we are vice-regents, not absolute rulers. The earth is God's gracious provision to us as a dwelling-place, and should be treated with respect.'

Nevertheless, and this is where industry comes in, there is a major task to be performed by men and women in terms of the wise use of the world's resources. In Genesis, God tells the first humans to fill the earth and subdue it (1:28), to till the garden and keep it (2:15). God has so constructed the earth that most of its resources require some process of extraction, conversion, refinement and development before they can be of benefit. This is true both of resources which are above the earth's surface (cotton to make shirts, sugar to make sweets) and those which come from below (coal and gas to provide warmth and energy). Here lies the essence of manufacturing industry: adding value to original resource. The more sophisticated the industry, of course, the more processed is the nature of the primary materials, such as the microchip in the construction of computers.

Many of the heavy manufacturing industries have now passed their heyday, and we have moved towards a much greater emphasis on service industries, such as financial services which (at their best) provide the venture capital and help to manage the element of risk. But it is mistaken to think that we will ever change to a wholly service economy. As long as human beings survive on planet earth, they will be endeavouring to develop material resources in ever more efficient and ingenious ways.

Despite the controversy which surrounds the phrase, there is a very proper theology of *wealth creation* which corresponds to the task we have of adding value to God-given resources in creation. This way of understanding it is crucial. Wealth creation is, partly, about making money; a

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company that markets a product successfully will do that. But it is also about providing benefit to the community, about adding to the quality of people's lives; a company that turns out a really useful product will do that also. Companies which make trash products, endanger employees or customers, or seriously damage the environment are not creating wealth in any meaningful sense; they are destroying value more than adding to it. So as well as providing an affirmation for the basic rationale of business, the doctrine of creation, properly understood, also raises challenging ecological questions for business.

### ***Fall***

We move on from creation to the second great stage in salvation history, the episode known as the fall. In using the word 'fall' this does not mean I am committing myself to the literal nature of the Genesis story about Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit. I am using it as a piece of theological shorthand to refer to the fact that human beings have fallen a long way short of their high calling, and that they deviate from God's purposes for them and his world in a great variety of ways. They do this of course in every area of life, in the most intimate of relationships as well as the more impersonal, but it has to be said that business provides many unattractive examples of our fallenness. Here are a few of them:

- ☒ The fact that increased profit, rapidly and incessantly increasing profit, can become an idol that threatens to subvert all else.
- ☒ The fact that asset strippers can become so blind to the human cost involved in their buying and selling of companies.
- ☒ The fact that financial institutions can sometimes become parasitic on industry, exploiting the companies that actually make things more than they help them.
- ☒ The fact that managers can sometimes bury themselves behind a desk and make themselves thoroughly insensitive to the needs of those around them.

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☒ The fact that pockets of corporate life can develop where people become constitutionally dishonest, hiding true thoughts and feelings in the interest of 'getting on' where you manipulate the situation to try to ensure you get the credit when things go well, and to avoid the blame when they don't.

☒ The fact that this same level of distrust, operating in relations between companies, can produce a vicious circle of behaviour in which bills are paid late, responsibility for delays is always blamed on another party, bribes are paid to secure contracts, and a whole sector of industry suffers in consequence.

☒ The fact that people can develop a highly schizophrenic attitude to life, where they participate in patterns of behaviour at work which they would never tolerate outside it, like the accountant who teaches his children impeccable standards of honesty at home, but may be routinely involved in massaging company accounts.

Yet the fall is not just reflected in human deviousness and deliberate perversity. It is also evident in the imbalances and distortions seen in the world of work, in what is sometimes called structural sin where it's much harder to pinpoint individual blame. It is a mark of the world's fallenness that societies struggle to get a good balance between the numbers of people able and willing to work and the number of jobs available; or the fact that most people seem to be either over-worked or under-worked, with few enjoying the happy balance between the two. A sad irony of the present situation, where there is heavy pressure on companies to cut costs by carrying out large-scale redundancies, is that those left in work (especially in management positions) are often working shockingly long hours to compensate for colleagues who have departed. This is a failing of our society, not just of individual organizations, to which I shall return later.

Perhaps it is because of the less congenial features described above that many Christians both outside and within the business world feel uncomfortable. Those who

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are outside carp and criticize (often, in my view, hypocritically); those who are inside feel guilty and powerless. They gloomily acknowledge that business practice manifests the marks of the fallen world all too easily but feel that there is little which can be done about it. At the same time, I have also come across Christians who go to the opposite extreme. Taking their stand on an unnuanced theology of wealth creation, they end up with a bland affirmation of nearly everything industry gets up to, reassuring each other that everything they do is thoroughly honourable. Where both groups go astray, in my view, is this: neither actually operates from a Christian (as distinct simply from an Old Testament) understanding. They have an imbalanced theological perspective. Whether our theology is dominated by creation or fall, or even if it contains elements of both, we also need the New Testament perspectives of redemption and our future hope in order to possess a truly Christian understanding.

### ***Redemption***

For this reason we move on to the Christian doctrine of salvation or redemption. It may well be asked what on earth this has to do with the tough world of business. The answer is: if we think carefully, a great deal.

First, the redeemer is somebody who is content to play a servant role. The focus of his actions is the well-being of others. Jesus Christ is one who 'was in the form of God' but 'emptied himself, taking the form of a servant' and 'humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross' (Philippians 2:7-8). Christians are called to be emulators of a Master who said 'I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:27).

The dimension of serving others is implicitly present in all types of work. It may appear to be most obvious in the case of the 'caring professions', but it is not a concept alien to the commercial world: the phrase 'serving the customer' is one which passes a businessman's lips often enough. Indeed, some management theorists go further and talk now of delighting the customer, which sounds very exciting. These

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are empty words, however, when the customer becomes an object of scorn, manipulation or indifference, as can happen all too easily. The Christian businessperson should have a solid commitment to a genuine ideal of service.

Second, taking the life and ministry of Christ seriously sets before us the possibilities of a new start. Redemption means deliverance from the power of evil, passing from darkness into light, a new beginning: all the metaphors used in the New Testament about the salvation God has wrought in Christ have a stark, radical quality. Life on earth will always partake of the character of the fall, but redemption gives us hope that some at least of the unsatisfactory aspects of the workplace can be changed.

The effects of change within a Christian should be felt on the place where he or she works. Christians are not meant to hide their lights under a bushel; they are meant to be salt and light, enhancing their surroundings and pointing the way towards something better. They have a crucial role to play in influencing companies and organizations for good. But there is no room for being naively triumphalistic about this. Such influence is not automatically welcomed or accepted.

So we are faced, third, by the sobering fact that, for the world to be saved, Christ had to die. Radical improvement is rarely possible without cost. Individuals and groups have to be ready for change, including self-sacrificial change, if business is to be run like God's business. And radical change is likely to be resisted by all who stand to gain from maintenance of the status quo, the way things are run at present.

What this points to is there are actions in business which have a quasi-redemptive character. They show the marks of costly Christlikeness. What sort of actions might these be? Here again are some possible examples.

Every organization, however fine its record of service, is bound to come under critical fire from time to time. The nature of some people's jobs is such that some are much

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more in the public eye than others. They may have to steel themselves to take the blame on behalf of the organization as a whole. Consider the technical service engineer who in the course of carrying out routine maintenance work receives a mouthful from a customer complaining of faulty goods or a late delivery. He could easily say, with a jerk of the thumb, 'it wasn't me, it was them back at the works', because others in his company are responsible for mistakes which have been made. But it is actually much more constructive, and he is much more likely to reconcile the customer, if he finds the grace to say 'I'm sorry' on behalf of the organization. In a sense, the engineer who does that redeems the situation by taking the blame vicariously.

Being caught in this situation can involve very real suffering, especially if it happens repeatedly. If the individuals concerned have a living relationship with Christ and can look to his example, they are more likely to find the resources to be sustained in this uncomfortable scapegoat role.

Sometimes there is a major self-sacrifice involved when we realize we have actually outlived our usefulness in a particular sphere of work. The situation now calls for someone with rather different skills; it is time we moved on. A company which initially required the dynamic and innovatory gifts of the entrepreneur may in time require a less flamboyant period of consolidation calling for a different style of management. How hard it usually is for the founder-owner to let go. Nevertheless, I have recently met a number of different individuals who have knowingly consented to a process of restructuring, for the corporate good, which involved the loss of their own job.

On a less dramatic level, there can be a self-sacrificial element of letting go in daily acts of conscious delegation. It is often difficult to delegate, especially when we know a job will be done much better if we, rather than an employee who is attempting it for the first or second time, undertake it. But we ourselves, the staff to whom tasks are delegated and the organization as a whole may all be served much

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better in the long run if we are prepared to pass certain responsibilities on to others. The more kudos is put on individual achievement in a company, of course, the stronger will be the temptation not to delegate.

Then there is the situation where an individual makes a protest which prejudices their future employment with a company because he or she has moral objections to what is going on. The issue at stake may be one of the lengths (or depths) to which employees are being asked to go in order to win an important contract. It may be the morally dubious nature of the company or customer with which one is required to do business. It may be the pressure to reduce the quality of a product in order to reduce costs. It may be a trend towards taking short cuts with matters affecting employee and public safety.

The person who speaks up about such issues will probably not be very popular. There is often resistance to those who work for moral improvement by people who do not like being shaken out of established patterns of behaviour. But sometimes Christians in business are pleasantly surprised to discover that when they stand up for their convictions, others actually respect them for it. Colleagues may even be grateful for someone willing to take a moral lead and then be prepared to follow.

Where the response is not a positive one, what should Christians do? When is it or isn't it appropriate to resign? Clearly, it is a decision which requires the most careful thought. For most people, if they do it at all, resigning on a matter of principle will be a once-in-a-lifetime decision; those who make a habit of it are in danger of making themselves unemployable! In the majority of situations, the appropriate response for a Christian faced by dubious demands at work will be to stick it out, argue the case for a different way of proceeding and be patient.

The circumstances in which resignation becomes a serious prospect are when the company seems irreversibly set on a downward moral trend. As long as the organization offers hope that changes can be made for the better the morally

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sensitive person has a crucial role to play in reinforcing and bolstering forces in that direction. But a company which hounds and isolates employees who represent its own better self (essentially, its conscience) is one where it is difficult to keep such hope alive. So there are moments in some Christians' careers when, like Jesus, they take a costly stand in going it alone.

The idea of self-sacrifice implicit in the doctrine of redemption is also relevant to apparently intractable social problems like large-scale unemployment. Even if there is a sustained recovery from the present recession, advances in technology and the emerging strength of developing, particularly far Eastern, countries mean that there is little prospect of a significant reduction in unemployment, unless present patterns of work change. As a society we could surely make a better fist of sharing the privilege of work and the burden of unemployment than we are doing at present. For this to happen, those in work will need to make some sacrifice. We must take seriously the relevance of the cross, not just for the exceptional, heroic individual, but implicitly for all of us. Are we prepared to accept some loss for the sake of those without work?

One proposal which has been made is that people in employment should work an eighth fewer hours, and take home an eighth less pay. The existing amount of work could then be shared round so that the number of people in work increases by one eighth—sufficient, in theory, to wipe out the problem of unemployment at a stroke. In practice, of course, it would not be that easy: certain types of professional could not so easily be replaced, and some unemployed have been without work so long (or have never worked at all) that they are in danger of being unemployable. Administering a larger workforce is more costly, and pension schemes which require individuals to go on working 'full-time' would need adjusting. In principle, however, the scheme is an attractive one, and it is hard to argue with the principles of love and justice which lie behind it. The major problem remains: how can we create a sustained national sense of discipline and solidarity among

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those who have jobs towards those who do not. Should that not be a major item in the church's agenda for the next decade?

### ***Eschatology***

It may well be thought that this is the most difficult aspect of Christian belief to apply to the world of work. Doesn't the doctrine of our future hope lead a particularly barren existence at the end of Christian dogmatics, a loosely attached appendix wandering off into obscure irrelevancies? Even so, I believe it is highly relevant.

In particular, I wish to explore the concept which appears in the book of Revelation 21, that of 'a new heaven and a new earth'. The phrase also occurs in the last two chapters of the prophet Isaiah (65:17; 66:22). The first of these passages, Isaiah 65:17–25, is well worth considering in detail.

What we have here is future hope, but the prophet's expectation of a Golden Age lies squarely within the confines of earthly history. He sees Jerusalem as the focus of this transformed existence. He is still thinking in terms of human mortality, even though everyone is now guaranteed of living to a good old age. But the extent of the transformation is so great, the vision of life so Utopian, that it is difficult from our perspective to believe that this will ever be realized within history. An end to all conflict in the animal kingdom? No more expropriation of people's property (one is tempted to substitute the phrase 'hostile takeovers')? We do not seem to be any closer to such idealized conditions than the Jews were at the time of the prophet's writing.

A similarly blissful state of affairs is evoked in Psalm 85. The psalmist begins by giving thanks for a great deliverance (verses 1–3). This probably refers to the Jews' return from exile in Babylon. He then pleads to God to revive and restore his people again (verses 4–7). This may reflect the fact that conditions when they returned were much harsher than the Jews expected. But then the psalmist strikes a note of unbounded confidence. He paints a picture of heaven and earth in perfect partnership ('*shalom*'). Probably he

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sees love and righteousness as divine attributes, with faithfulness and peace as appropriate human attributes in response. When God and human beings act together in harmony, a rich harvest of material provision will be the result. So sure is the psalmist that this state of concord and prosperity will take place that he writes as if it is already happening. The vision is breathtaking, but we are still left wondering when to expect its fulfilment.

The fact is that we live in an age when snakes still bite, young people are tragically cut short in their prime and the little guy easily gets trampled by the corporation with industrial muscle. Hope is often at odds with current experience. Repeatedly at work we feel the pressure of inexorable forces. We have to settle for something less than the ideal; we are obliged to compromise.

For many people 'compromise' is a rather pejorative word. It suggests settling on a course of action which is morally tainted: an abandonment of principle for the sake of expediency. Clearly there are many compromises made at work which do bear that character and are open to criticism because of it.

But there is a much more positive way of viewing compromise. Some compromises are an attempt to do justice to different moral claims, both or all of which are valid. The social market economies which have been generally favoured in the West represent something of a compromise between the claims of freedom and equality. Their proponents are committed to the market system but believe that the government should buttress and to some extent modify this with a social infrastructure which provides a number of services not provided by the market. The balance of the equation varies from country to country, but supporters of the social market are all seeking some sort of mix between the maximization of efficiency in wealth creation and the redistribution of wealth towards those in greatest need. Few regard that as a compromise in any negative sense of the word.

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In a similar way, companies owe and generally acknowledge responsibilities to a range of different groups: shareholders, employees, customers, business partners and 'stakeholders', the word increasingly being used to describe all who may be affected in some way by the activities of the company. Much of the time there is no serious conflict between the interests and expectations felt by these different groups in relation to the company. Sometimes, especially when times are hard, there will be a clash. Faced with the necessity to cut costs, the company may have to choose between reducing the shareholders' dividend, making some staff redundant, raising prices or reducing product ranges for its customers, or delaying payment to its suppliers. Often it will be appropriate to spread the burden of cost. Compromise here will have the character of seeking to balance the interests (and maintain the confidence) of different groups, rather than completely abandoning one group in favour of another.

There are other compromises which are more clearly a case of making some concession to the fallen realities of this world. Because we are constrained by the forces and the standards which are operative in the world around us, our freedom of action is limited. We have to accept some things which are not satisfactory, which we would like to change but it is outside our power to do so. We are obliged to temper our idealism. Yet it is neither logical nor helpful to feel terribly guilty about this.

How should we understand compromise theologically? The fact is that as Christians we stand in a field of tension between two overlapping ages, the present world which is one day to pass away and the coming world which will replace it and already makes inroads upon it. Christians are called out of their old lives into a new existence, but still have to live in a far from perfect world with all the circumscriptions upon action which that brings. They therefore stand in a relationship both of continuity and discontinuity with the conventions and practices of the present world. The German theologian Helmut Thielicke

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has spelt out the dynamics of Christian existence in this way:

*The theme of ethics is this 'walking between two worlds'. It is in the strict sense the theme of a 'wayfarer's theology', a 'theologia viatorum'. It lives under the law of the 'not yet' but within the peace of the 'I am coming soon' (Revelation 22:20). Theological ethics is eschatological or it is nothing.<sup>3</sup>*

If compromise is to be understood in this way, it is important to affirm the element of tension. Where this is lacking, compromise easily degenerates into uncritical conformity, a complacent acceptance of the status quo. The best compromises are those which take the 'promise' part of the word seriously. In other words, they are creative, and hold out hope for something better in the future.

When Jesus sent his disciples out on a missionary journey, he did so with this intriguing message: 'Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves' (Matthew 10:16). These are not words which are only applicable to Christian missionaries. They are very relevant to Christians operating in business because they combine that mixture of idealism tempered by realism, principle laced by shrewdness, which are the very attitudes he or she needs. Christians help nobody, least of all themselves, by being naive, but they are called at the same time to maintain a purity of thought, speech and action.

I do not think it right, however, to end on the note of compromise. Yes, we need to be patient and realistic about what can be achieved, but the quality of patience should not be confused with passivity. The hope for a better world we have as Christians ought to excite us so much, we should be embracing it with so eager a desire, that we do in fact allow it to revolutionize and transform our present existence. Although we may not realize it, this is essentially what we are asking every time we pray the Lord's Prayer. What does it mean to request that God's kingdom will

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<sup>3</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, Volume I, A & C Black, 1966, page 47

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come? The very next phrase in the prayer supplies the answer: that God's will should be done on earth, as perfectly as it already is done in heaven. In making this request, we open ourselves up to the possibility that it may indeed be granted. We are in the business of doing God's will. By simple acts of obedient discipleship, we can play a part in bringing the present world more into conformity with that glorious future age of which the biblical passages speak.

In the world of work we may only get glimpses of this, but there are moments worth savouring. Just as there are episodes of depressing futility in our work, there can also be moments of exciting transformation. Examples might include:

- ☒ The glow of satisfaction over a finished product, one which has taken a lot of money, time and effort to achieve, but produces a sense of exhilaration because of the benefits we know it will bring to those who buy it.
- ☒ The unravelling of manipulative accounting practice, so that confusion and corruption are brushed away and the true state of financial affairs is clearly revealed.
- ☒ The clicking together of individuals in a close-knit team, with every member being respected for the particular gifts they have to offer on a project assignment.
- ☒ The breakdown of hierarchical structures which have impeded progress, and the establishment of confidence and goodwill between those previously dubbed blue- and white-collar workers.
- ☒ Building up long-term partnerships with suppliers operating in disadvantaged parts of the country, or indeed the wider world, thereby helping to bring much-needed income and employment to those who need it most.

All these and other things are well worth striving for. They are not irrelevant to the fulfilment of the psalmist's delightful image of justice and peace locked in embrace. It is right to

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be excited when substantial progress is made in the direction of any one of them.

### ***Postscript***

Finally, I would like to draw attention to one of the great passages in the New Testament, Colossians 1:15–20. On the surface this has nothing to do with business, and yet I know Christians in business for whom it has been a source of great inspiration.

Paul here presents the lordship and supremacy of Christ in a way which is awesome in its language and horizon-stretching in its scope. Jesus Christ is not just lord of the church; he is lord of the whole world. ‘By him all things were created; all things were created by him and for him ... through Jesus Christ [God] was pleased to reconcile to himself all things’. Here is a timely reminder that Jesus Christ is not just in the business of reconciling people, but also things, structures, power systems, economic systems. It is a vision of everything brought under the authority of Christ, and significantly changed thereby.

A particularly interesting phrase is that in Christ “all things hold together” (verse 17). Paul pictures him as the one who, having created everything, then sustains it. Christ does this both on the level of physics (upholding the constancy of laws of nature, which makes possible the development of science and the application of technology) and on the level of metaphysics (providing life with its ultimate meaning and rationale). Christ is the world’s unifying principle. But crucially, he is more than that: he is a living person who helps us to hold our bit of the world together.

This is a very reassuring notion for the Christian in business. He or she often feels pulled in many different directions. The managing director of a manufacturing company has to balance the complicated demands of shareholders, staff, production engineering, design standards, safety requirements, cash flow, the customer who wanted an order yesterday and the wife who is unlikely to see much of him today. It is easy to feel like a juggler struggling to keep

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all the balls in the air, or a master welder striving to forge effective links between the disparate parts of his organization. The person who has just been made redundant yearns for the meaning, structure, dignity, solidarity, status, conviviality and variety which are threatened by the loss of a job. But if all things hold together in Christ on a cosmic level, there is hope for us yet on a personal and corporate level. Colossians 1, like many other parts of the Bible, contains unsuspected riches for our daily encouragement and nourishment.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>The themes of this chapter are developed by the author in much more detail in: Richard Higginson, *Called to Account*, Eagle, Guildford, 1993

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## Part Three

### *Pastoral Ethics And Questions Of Life And Death*

#### 15

### **Towards A Theology Of Health**

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Within and outside the Christian church, there is considerable variation in the understanding of concepts of disease, illness and sickness on the one hand, and of health and healing on the other.

Some writers distinguish 'disease', taken to be an objective pathological condition, from 'illness' (which describes a person's subjective perception of disorder within themselves) and from 'sickness' (which is defined socially in terms of a deviation from what society accepts as normal). These distinctions lead to different understandings of healing. Some writers view healing in terms of a medical model of disease, and others in terms of psychological perceptions of illness, or of social definitions of sickness.

More fundamental, however, than these concepts of healing is the concept of health. Healing, however defined, is, at its most basic, movement towards health. But what is health? At a time when the National Health Service in Britain is undergoing its most radical review and reformation since its inception more than forty years ago, it is vital that priorities are re-evaluated and the purpose of the Health Service clarified. We cannot approach such issues without some answer to the question 'What is health?'

This chapter attempts to offer a biblical theological perspective on this question. Before we enter that

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<sup>6</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (140). Lynx Communications: London

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discussion, however, some further preliminary issues need to be clarified.

### ***Definitions of health***

The question 'What is health?' lends itself to almost as many answers as there are questioners. It is hard to achieve a wide consensus on the definition of 'health', and answers range from what we may call a 'minimal' definition, through a whole range of intermediate views, to a 'maximal' definition.

At the 'minimal' end of the spectrum, health is defined in relation to disease, this being understood in strictly physical terms. Health, then, is the absence of physical disease or illness.

Towards the centre of the spectrum are concepts of health which are related to statistical norms for health in a given society. If disease is understood less in physical terms, and more in terms of sickness—deviation from a social norm—health is then understood as conformity to that social norm. For example, certain forms of obsessional behaviour are seen as socially unacceptable, and so 'unhealthy'.

Further along the spectrum still, we find the definition of health advocated by Freud, and others, that to be healthy means to be able to function well in society. Health, for Freud, is the capacity for work and enjoyment. If a person's capacity for work is diminished, and his or her capacity for pleasure impaired, that person is counted as ill.

The 'maximal' end of the spectrum of definitions is exemplified by the now notorious definition of the World Health Organization (WHO): 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, not simply the absence of illness and disease.'

The lack of clarity in definitions of health can be illustrated further by the different ways in which the concept of health is often used, in relation both to physical and to mental life.

In physical terms, 'health' might refer to longevity. It might mean agility, or strength, or resistance to disease. What is

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the relationship between these? Is a person more healthy when one aspect of his or her being is exceptionally well developed? Or does health require all parts to be working in harmony?

In mental terms, the problems are even more marked. In *The Religious Experience*,<sup>1</sup> C. D. Batson and W. L. Ventis document at least seven working definitions of mental health from a survey of over fifty research papers:

- ☒ Absence of mental illness, defined by identifiable symptoms of psychopathology.
- ☒ Appropriate social behaviour, defined by the social group to which one belongs.
- ☒ Freedom from worry and guilt (building on Freud's specification of the ability to love and to work as the hallmark of mental health, or Karen Horney's suggestion that self-hate, arising from a conception of an unattainable 'ideal self, is the root of neurotic conflict').
- ☒ Personal competence and control, deriving from the psychologies of motivation.
- ☒ Self-acceptance and self-actualization (humanistic psychology's interest in the ability freely to express one's true nature).
- ☒ Personality unification, based on Allport's concept of the healthy, mature personality in terms of a unified and hierarchically organized personality structure.
- ☒ Open-mindedness and flexibility—the capacity for change and adaptation.

Clearly, the definition of health is not a straightforward matter.

***What do we need a definition of health for?***

The confusion in defining health arises because of the failure to ask the prior question: What do we need a definition of

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<sup>1</sup> C.D. Batson and W. L. Ventis, *The Religious Experience*, Oxford University Press, 1982, pages 21ff

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health for? If our purpose in defining health is to advocate an ideal pattern of life for individuals or for society, which will make for the greatest happiness and sense of fulfilment of the greatest number, we will tend towards the maximal definition of the WHO. This is a goal, perhaps, towards which individuals and societies can aspire. If, however, we need a definition of health which can be applied in the allocation of limited healthcare resources, and our concern is to restrict our provision of medical resources to the basic essentials of what may be considered each person's right, or need, we will favour a minimal definition: medicine will be seen in terms of combating physical disabilities and disease.

We tend to work with a close association in our minds between 'health' and 'medical care'. This makes it all the more important to be clear what we are seeking a definition of health for. Too wide a definition will tend to 'medicalize' every aspect of life, and, because medical resources are necessarily limited, will inevitably lead to the sense that 'health' for all is some unattainable Utopia. Too narrow a definition will lead to the restriction of medical care merely to physical bodily needs, whereas we are sure that 'health' involves more than the body. R. A. McCormick quotes the New York Times report of the surgeon whose kidney-transplanted recipient was undergoing anxiety and depression after his transplant: 'Well, I gave him a good kidney; I can't help what's wrong with his brain.'<sup>2</sup>

Our definition of health will depend on what we want a definition for.

### ***Assumptions about human values***

Our definition of health will also depend on the basic values which we assume, and our understanding of the purpose of human life. For underlying any of these above definitions are certain beliefs about what makes for the best in human life, certain value assumptions about what is good. And

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<sup>2</sup>R. A. McCormick, *How Brave a New World?*, SCM Press Press, 1981, page 43

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behind these are fundamental guiding metaphors about the significance of human life in this world. The understanding of what counts as healthy reflects a particular society's values, and the way human beings fit in with the demands of that society.

Freud worked with a mechanistic model of human life, in which pleasure was the greatest good. His definition of health naturally focused on the capacity for satisfaction in love and in work. It fits in with an industrial society whose central values are towards production and consumption. Jung's fundamental metaphor was of the union of opposites in a person's life: health for him was found in the individuation of the personal self. Maslow's hierarchy of human needs was related to his concept of 'self-actualization' as a human being's highest good. These reflect the common emphasis on the individual in post-Enlightenment society.

It is important to raise the question of the relationship between the value of health and other human goods. Some of the 'cults of health' seem to treat health as an absolute value. We need to ask, however, whether health is in fact to be seen as an absolute. At the point of fundamental assumptions about human goods and human needs is where a theology of health needs to begin. So a theology of health is integrally related to a theological anthropology.

### ***A theological anthropology***

Theological anthropology, or a theological understanding of what it is to be human, begins with Jesus Christ. He is the Normal Human Being, though of course in this fallen world is abnormal in being so. He is the one human being of whom it is said, 'He is the image of the invisible God' (Colossians 1:15), and is presented in the pages of the New Testament as the one in whom all God's purposes for humanity are summed up and find their fulfilment. Jesus Christ is depicted as the one Genuinely Human Being, by reference to whom all other human life is seen as falling short of God's glory. If he is the Human Being, we are all Human Becomings, on the way to our true humanity, as

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that is found in relation to Jesus Christ. Such is the witness of the Bible.

Jesus Christ, however, does not easily fit into our definitions of normality. He does not belong to any clear social group. He was on occasion described as mad. In fact, some of his experiences may in our social terms be regarded as either pathological or at least socially unacceptable. From a Christian theological perspective, however, this should lead us to evaluate our contemporary culture in his light, rather than the other way round.

Let us enumerate some of the features of Jesus Christ's human life.

He recognized spiritual realities, and that eternal life is a gift to be received in relationship to God. He demonstrated the fulfilment of a life lived in communion with and dependence on God the Father, and not in the assertion of an individual human autonomy. He recognized the reality of sin, and that this present world is disordered and fallen, in need of redemption, resurrection and re-creation. Jesus expressed his anger at the unnaturalness of death (as seen in his reaction at the grave of Lazarus) as an alien intrusion into God's world, and yet he accepted the sting of death on behalf of humankind in his own death on the cross. Jesus Christ experienced the depression and abandonment of alienation in his cry of dereliction from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' By so doing he demonstrated unmistakably that wholeness is not always to be associated with happiness. Indeed, it is through suffering, pain and abandonment that salvation is achieved. His resurrection from the dead is a pointer towards the 'new creation': that God is making this disordered world new, and so this present world, and our human lives within it, are only 'on the way'.

Jesus Christ's life also illustrates the fact that human life encompasses many different dimensions and levels, all of which are important.

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His incarnation as the Word made flesh sets a value on the importance of the body. Human life is embodied life. In contrast to some Greek understandings of human life, the body is not an evil part of our humanity to be subdued, not merely the prison house of the soul. No, the body is to be affirmed: anatomy, physiology and genetic make-up are all to be taken seriously as part of the goodness of God's creation.

Jesus Christ illustrates, too, the full range of human emotions, appropriately managed and used. He weeps, he rages, he snorts in indignation, he rejoices with those who rejoice, he celebrates at a wedding, he gets tired. The emotional life of our Lord indicates that emotions are to be taken seriously.

Jesus Christ based much of his self-understanding on the concept of the will of God. His will was to do the Father's will. The area of responsible moral choice is also part of the meaning of our humanity.

The relational dimension to human life is also vital in the life of Jesus. He made relationships of love with men and women. The affective dimensions of his sexuality are given appropriate expression in him. To be in relationship with another human person is to reflect something of the meaning of the image of the God who is a trinity of Persons in love and communication. Our well-being as human bearers of the divine image is found in personal communion, fellowship, mutual interdependence with other persons and with God.

Jesus also shows himself again and again on the side of the poor, the outcast, the prostitute, the taxgatherer, the sinner. He has come to save the lost. One aspect of true humanity is seen in attitudes and actions of compassion to the hungry who have no food, the thirsty who need drink, the person who needs shelter or clothing, the prisoner who needs to be visited. Wholeness and social justice belong together. The redemption which Jesus Christ has come to offer to the world, and to secure through his self-giving love, is a redemptive justice which is concerned with social

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conditions of human living as much as with individual personal needs.

The basic Hebraic conception of humanness, however, is not a plurality of 'body, plus mind, plus will', but a psycho-physical unity. We are embodied souls and ensouled bodies, without distinction.

Having taken our bearings from the life of Jesus Christ, whom Luther called the 'Proper Man', we can now fill out ten further aspects of a theological anthropology.

☒ According to the creation story at the beginning of the Bible, human life is intended to be lived in a satisfying physical environment and a fulfilling social context. In Genesis 2, God put the man in a garden to cultivate and protect it. The garden had trees which were 'pleasing to the eye and good for food'. The physical environment for human life is important, and it is part of God's commission to humankind to cultivate and protect that environment so that life can flourish. Health is enhanced through an appropriately facilitating environment and diminished through an unsatisfying one.

☒ It was not good that man should be alone, so God gave *Ishshah* (woman) to match *Ish* (man) in his eminence and his need, a helper 'like-opposite' him as his equal and his complement. Neither man nor woman is thereafter complete without the other.

☒ The image of God in us is distorted and marred by sin, which causes alienation between ourselves and God, between ourselves and one another, between ourselves and the rest of the natural order, and within our own beings. This world is a fallen world, still 'in Adam', but not back in Eden. The story of Cain and Abel illustrates the destructiveness of competitive jealousy within social division (Genesis 4). The story of the Tower of Babel illustrates the fracture of human communities when social structures are set up without reference to God (Genesis 11). The eighth-century prophets, particularly Amos and Micah, forcefully underline the inhumanity of unjust social

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structures, the powerlessness of poverty and God's will for social as well as individual 'righteousness'. God has shown us what is good: 'To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8).

☒ As a gift of grace, Christ offers us a renewed humanity in which the image of God is being restored. In him there is a reversal of the effects of the Fall, spiritually, socially, personally and psychologically. We can be 'new creations' in Christ. We are given the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and are baptized into the communion of the Christian church. Even for those who do not acknowledge God, his 'common grace' is at work in the world, restraining the full effects of sin and disorder. We may regard medical care as part of the common grace of God.

☒ Full, total, human well-being, indeed, the renewal of the whole creation is God's purpose and promise. 'Salvation' is a wide-ranging word, often meaning 'healing'. It is used of healing disease (Mark 10:52), curing leprosy (Luke 17:19), and restoring the withered hand (Mark 3:4–5). It is used of deliverance from evil spirits: the demoniac is 'saved' (Luke 8:36). It is used of the disciples in trouble on the boat (Matthew 8:25). It is used of Zaccheus when Jesus put right his business priorities (Tyndale for Luke 19:9 reads: 'Today "health" has come to this house.')

☒ Salvation/healing at all levels of life is God's work, sometimes through intermediaries. 'Yahweh who [gives] you healing' (Exodus 15:26, JB); and 'Yahweh-Peace' (Judges 6:24, JB) is made known in Christ (Ephesians 2:14), and is at work in grace, in Christ, through the Spirit. 'By his wounds you have been healed' (1 Peter 2:24). God's healing work is to restore communion between men and women and God (2 Corinthians. 5:19), between men and women with each other (Ephesians 2:11ff), and between men and women and their natural environment (Romans 8:19ff). His work is also to restore communion in the social contexts of life (the Household Codes of the epistles illustrate the significance of the gospel for the ordering of social life), and within individual people (Paul prays that 'the

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God of peace [may] himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless' (1 Thessalonians 5:23, RSV).

Wholeness of life is synonymous with 'the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ' (Ephesians 4:13, RSV).

☒ The social structures within which human life is lived contribute to peoples' sense of well-being. Not only so, but the social structures which we employ are intended to reflect the nature of the new society which God is building as the kingdom of his Son. The community of creation is being restored. The New Testament shows how the patterns of social life among Christian people are intended to reflect the nature of what God is doing by his gospel. Thus when the truth dawns that Jew and Gentile are no longer at enmity, but that through Christ they are made one, the pattern of their social relationships (Galatians 2) has to reflect this change. Justice is the social expression of neighbour-love. Just as the eighth-century prophets of the Old Testament, like Amos and Micah, proclaimed the need for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream (Amos 5:24, RSV), even so the New Testament concentration on neighbour-love assumes that social structures will need to be rethought in the light of the gospel.

☒ In Christian experience, individually and corporately, there is always a distinction between Now and Not Yet. Salvation has a past reference (Ephesians 2:8), is a present experience (1 Corinthians 1:18) and is a future hope (Romans 5:9). God's work of renewal, resurrection and recreation, begins now, but is not promised in its fullness until the new heaven and the new earth. We are only ever 'on the way'. If Christ is the Human Being, we are all still Human Becomings, on the way towards wholeness. To be made whole is a dynamic process of growth and change. We must not treat life in this world as an absolute.

☒ The writers in the New Testament indicate that it is appropriate to pray for, and therefore to work for, physical health (for example, 3 John 2; James 5:14; 2 Corinthians

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12:8), although there is no evidence for universal physical health in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> In this prayer and work, the New Testament authors are reflecting the importance which healing played in the life of Jesus. His works of healing are evidences of the presence of the kingdom of God, signs of God's power, and a summons to the life of faith.

☒ We need to note the point made by R. A. Lambourne, in *Community, Church and Healing*,<sup>4</sup> that the healings of Jesus are depicted in the gospels as community events. The occasions of healing are primarily seen as signs of the kingdom, and are acted parables which were intended to provoke a response from those who witnessed them. Some saw in Jesus' healings only the work of Beelzebul; others saw the work of the Holy Spirit. Each event provoked a response from the witnesses. As S. Pattison comments: 'The healing functioned as concrete judgment of the Kingdom on actual earthly communities.'<sup>5</sup> The healing work of Jesus thus has a challenging, judging and social dimension. A theology of health needs to be set in the context of a theology of the demands of the kingdom of God.

### ***Health and shalom***

We can attempt to summarize where the above discussion of basic theological parameters is taking us, with the proposition that in theological terms, 'health' is part of what the Bible means by *shalom*.

Often translated 'peace' in the Old Testament, *shalom* means much more than the absence of conflict. *Shalom* means wholeness, well-being, vigour and vitality in all the dimensions of human life. 'Health' is clearly part of *shalom*, as can be illustrated by the numerous times in the Old Testament when *shalom* is bracketed together with a

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<sup>3</sup> Compare Timothy: 1 Timothy 5:23; Trophimus: 2 Timothy 4:20; Epaphroditus: Philippians 2:27; and Paul: 2 Corinthians 12:7-8

<sup>4</sup> R. A. Lambourne, *Community, Church and Healing* Darton Longman and Todd, 1963 reprint, Arthur James, 1987

<sup>5</sup> S. Pattison, *Alive and Kicking*, SCM Press Press, 1989), page 80

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Hebrew word translated 'health' or 'healing'.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the vision of peace in Isaiah 2:1–5 (which could almost stand as a definition of *shalom*) is set in contrast to the sickness of the nation (1:5–6), its idolatry (2:20–22) and social injustice (3:13–15), which bring the judgment that the Lord will not be a healer (3:7b).

Jeremiah writes, 'We hoped for peace, but no good has come, for a time of healing, but there was only terror' (8:15).

The suffering Servant brings justice to the nations (Isaiah 42:1–7), and suffers for the healing and atonement of the people: 'Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole' (*shalom*), and with his stripes we are healed' (Isaiah 53:5b).

The concepts of *shalom* and health are linked in some of the Psalms, and also in the New Testament.<sup>7</sup>

In the synoptic gospels, the coming of the kingdom of Christ is depicted as a conflict with the 'Prince of this world', and the exorcisms and healings of Jesus demonstrate that he is the Messiah, anointed to 'preach good news to the poor', ... 'to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed' (Luke 4:1–19).

Jesus Christ, in other words, is the bringer of peace, *shalom*, wholeness, health. In biblical terms, health, therefore, is a holistic concept. It is not only the absence of disorder at all levels of life and relationship, it is also all that God gives for human well-being in all levels of human life. When the Lord brings *shalom*, there is prosperity (Psalm 72:1–7); there is a healthy relationship with God (Isaiah 57:19); there is conciliation between people (Genesis 26:29); there is contentedness (Genesis 15:15; Psalm 4:8). When the peace of the Lord is present, there are good relationships among nations and between men and women (1 Chronicles 12:17–18). There is a personal and social dimension to

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<sup>6</sup> Compare W. M. Swartley, 'Shalom and Healing', unpublished paper

<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:5–9; Acts 10:36–38; Mark 5:24–34; Hebrews 12:13–14; 1 Peter 2:13–12

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*shalom*: 'Seek the welfare (*shalom*) of the city where I have sent you into exile', writes Jeremiah, 'Pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare' (Jeremiah 29:7, RSV).

In summary so far, the Bible points us to a holistic and dynamic concept of health, which covers individual and social, physical and mental, temporal and spiritual life. It reminds us, however, that wholeness, in this sense, is only ever partially enjoyed now. It is a process of change which comes to its fullness only in the new heaven and the new earth (compare 2 Peter 3–13).

### ***Sickness, sin and death***

We need to take note at this point of Stephen Pattison's stringent comment:

*I am tempted to suggest that wholeness is a concept which is only really used by those of us who are so far removed from the real fight for health and healing in daily life that we can claim to see the world in terms of ideal universal patterns rather than in terms of the very unsatisfactory specifics provided by the 'worm's-eye view'. He asks where talk of wholeness fits into the daily reality confronted by patients and staff in an underfunded National Health Service?*

What is the real value of the term for the dispossessed peoples of the world who suffer most from the diseases and disorders of the present time?<sup>8</sup> Of course we need to hold the biblical vision of *shalom* in tension with the harsh realities of struggle in this world. And the biblical theme which covers this is 'sin', which is expressed in alienation between human beings and God, between themselves, and between them and their environment. Integral to a biblical view of health is also its insistence on the reality of sin and the power of death.

Sometimes a person's physical ill-health is caused by that person's sin. Miriam (Numbers 12) and Uzziah (2

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<sup>8</sup> S. Pattison, [note 5] page 77

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Chronicles 26:19) come in that category. This is the assumption of Job's counsellors and the assumption held by many people in the New Testament times (see John 9:2). However, the book of Job and Jesus' reply to his disciples (John 9:3–4; compare also Luke 13:2) make clear that we may not make too direct an equation of specific sin with specific sickness.

Sometimes ill-health is caused by others' sins. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation (Exodus 20:5). Sometimes the cause is unclear within the terms of this physical world (Job).

The cleansing from sin and the restoration of well-being in a person's relationship to God may alleviate depression (Psalm 77), and may have physical benefits also (Proverbs 3:7, 8), the healing of the paralysed man, Mark 2:10).

Sometimes sickness comes through lack of care for the body (compare 1 Timothy. 5:23), sometimes through improper or inadequate use of the means of grace (1 Corinthians 11:2–30).

Sickness functions as a messenger of death. It reminds us of the frailty and mortality of life this side of heaven. It points us to the fact of death, that we will all die, and that our concepts of salvation, wholeness and health have to reckon with the inevitability of death. Sickness can also function as a messenger of the gospel, pointing us beyond the rule of death to the necessity and gift of eternal life in Christ. God then can be understood as 'allowing' illness (see Job 1), even 'sending' sickness (Exodus 15:23–26). Sickness can point back to things that need to be put right in a person's past (as in Psalm 38:3–8); it can lead to meditation and care for the future (see Elihu's word to Job: Job 33:19ff). Suffering, pain and conflict can themselves bring healing. In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the Lord of sickness and of healing, (Exodus 15:26); all aspects of human life find their health in him. To seek other healers in place of Yahweh is futile (2 Chronicles 16:12), though God does work through medicine.

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In the Wisdom literature from the second century BC, the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (38:1–15, RSV) outlines what may well have been a common view then: that medical skill is God's gift.

*Honour the physician with the honour due him for healing comes from the Most High,*

*... and he will receive a gift from the king. The skill of the physician lifts up his head,*

*and in the presence of great men he is admired. The Lord created medicines from the earth,*

*and a sensible man will not despise them ... By them he heals and takes away pain;*

*the pharmacist makes of them a compound ...*

*My son, when you are sick do not be negligent, but pray to the Lord, and he will heal you.*

*Give up your faults and direct your hands aright,*

*and cleanse your heart from all sin ... And give the physician his place ... for the Lord created him;*

*let him not leave you, for there is need of him. There is a time when success lies in the hands of physicians, for they too will pray to the Lord that he should grant them success in diagnosis*

*and in healing, for the sake of preserving life. He who sins before his Maker,*

*may he fall into the hands of a physician.*

Commenting on this passage, H. W. Wolff remarks:

*Here the medical profession is viewed with sober realism. The doctor has his wisdom and skill from God, just as medicines are gifts of the Creator from the earth. He can arrive at the right diagnosis, can relieve pain, and perhaps preserve life. But his gifts have their limitations and he does not always have them at his disposal. So he himself, like the sick person, is dependent on prayer. Moreover, it can*

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*be a punishment to fall into the hands of a doctor. God and the physician are therefore seen in conjunction with one another in curious and multifarious ways.*<sup>9</sup>

Because of sin, and the ever-present rule of death, we need an approach to health which is consistent with a theology of frailty, suffering, disease and mortality. Health, like life in general, is not eternal but is limited. Like life, it is entrusted to human beings by God, but does not belong to us. Health is to be affirmed and willed by us, but not absolutely: health, like life, is on loan from God.

### ***Wholeness and holiness***

Health is not the greatest value. Although a person who fears the Lord and turns away from evil will find it 'healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones' (Proverbs 3:8), it is the pursuit of wisdom herself that is to be prized highly (Proverbs 4:1, 8, and so on). The Wisdom of God is that knowledge of God and his ways which tunes a person in to the ways of God in the world, and enables fellowship with him. Wisdom enables us to live and to cope. Throughout the Bible, the fundamental command of the covenant is that we should 'be holy, as God is holy' (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15), and that involves ordering each aspect of life into line with God's character (Leviticus 19). This ordering normally will include care for health (as Leviticus also makes clear), but health is to serve the quest for holiness.

No doubt in the new heaven and the new earth, wholeness of personal life and holiness of character will be one and the same. But in this life, there can be holiness without wholeness, and 'wholeness' in some aspects of life, without holiness. Both are important tasks in the journey of faith, but holiness takes priority in the biblical mind.

### ***The dynamic of faith***

'Wisdom', as we understand the term from the Wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes) is 'helping people to

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<sup>9</sup> H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, SCM Press Press, 1974, page 147

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cope'. It gives an outlook on the world within which the uncertainties and frailties of ordinary human living can be managed and lived with. This is part of the meaning of faith. Faith is frequently not concerned with certainties, with successes, with achievement, but rather is the strength given by God for us to cope with uncertainties, disappointments and apparent failure.

If Jesus Christ is not only God for us, but Man for us, he is, in T. F. Torrance's phrase, the True Believer. He is the faithful one, and faith, for him, led him to Gethsemane, to Calvary, to the cry of dereliction ('My God, why ...?'). As we noted before, it is only through suffering, pain and abandonment that salvation is achieved. The fullness of resurrection-life comes by way of the vulnerability of the crucified God.

It is because of this that the New Testament sometimes places an unexpectedly high value on suffering ('Consider it pure joy ...': James 1:2; suffering produces endurance, character, hope: Romans 5:3-4). Our sufferings can be a share in the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10). They can be part of our journey to wholeness.

This approach to faith is dynamic, loving, concerned with growth, development and change. Faith is a journey of discovery, and movement towards the fullness of Christ. Our understanding of wholeness, of *shalom*, and therefore of health, must likewise be dynamic. It is more concerned with attitude, and with the development of character, than with a state of being or well-being.

In summary, the biblical picture of health is a holistic one in which all aspects of life are involved, a dynamic one which acknowledges that we are part of a salvation-history process in God's dealings with the world, yet a limited one which acknowledges that perfect *shalom*, perfect health, is not possible this side of heaven.

***A look back at the WHO definition of health***

The above approach stands in contrast to contemporary definitions of health which concentrate on the individual to

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the exclusion of his or her social or environmental context. It stands in contrast to contemporary definitions of health which are concerned only with the physical and bodily, which regard the mental and emotional aspects of life as of secondary importance. It stands in contrast to contemporary definitions of health which ignore the significance of a person's relationship and a society's relationship with God. It takes very seriously the importance of health as part of the work of God in people and in societies, but it does not make physical well-being into an absolute. Health is not the supreme value. The above approach stands in contrast to static definitions of health which concentrate on a 'state of well-being', rather than with the dynamic and changing character of the whole person.

In the light of this, the World Health Organization definition is both too limited and too broad. It is too limited, because it makes no reference to a person's spiritual progress as part of the meaning of health. It is also too limited by concentrating on a 'state of well-being', which tends to equate the human person with human health, and fails to see human health as a constantly changing part of, but not the whole of, human life. Health becomes not only a human right to which everyone is entitled, but also a 'state' of well-being which does not allow for the changing dynamics of the strength to be human itself.

On the other hand, the WHO definition is too broad because in failing to recognize the inevitability of death, and the ambiguity of the fallen world, it ends in an idealistic Utopian vision which is not attainable in this life. It offers 'the Utopia of a life without suffering, happiness without pain, and a community without conflicts ...'<sup>10</sup> Yet, as we have said, suffering can be redemptive, suffering can be part of the strength to live healthily.

### ***A working definition of health***

We need to narrow this discussion down towards a working definition of health for the purposes of medicine and

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<sup>10</sup> J. Moltmann, *God in Creation*, SCM Press Press, 1985, page 272

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healthcare delivery in this world. It needs to be narrow enough to depict medical responsibility realistically, and not to be Utopian; it needs to be broad enough to recognize that health and sickness are aspects of the whole person.

The Catholic theologian Bernard Haring has made one approach:

*A comprehensive understanding of human health includes the greatest possible harmony of all man's forces and energies, the highest possible spiritualization of man's bodily reality and the finest embodiment of the spiritual. True health is revealed in the self-actualization of persons who have attained the freedom that marshals all their talents and energies for the fulfilment of their total human vocation.*<sup>11</sup>

More simply, Karl Barth regards health as 'the power to be as man.'<sup>12</sup> Following him, Moltmann puts it even more clearly: 'health ... *is the strength to be human*' (my italics).<sup>13</sup>

Moltmann's definition needs some clarification. Taken on its own and out of a theological context of the meaning of humanness, the definition would not be enough. It would suggest that to be lacking in health is to be lacking in the strength to be fully human, and that could suggest that only healthy people are fully human. We would need to ensure that this definition is seen in the context of our discussion of humanness. This, as we have indicated, is understood in terms of our relationship to Christ who is the image of God, and of ourselves as beings 'on the way' to full humanness as our lives are growing into maturity in him. Furthermore, we would need to recognize that there is some ambiguity in the meaning of 'strength'. Does 'strength' refer to some capacity we have within ourselves, something that is subject to our will and our choice, or is 'strength' something that is given to us, by God, or by others? Is the responsibility for finding this strength the responsibility for health ours, or

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<sup>11</sup> B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, St Paul Publications, 1981, volume 3, page 48; see also Haring, *Medical Ethics*, St Paul Publications, 1974, page 154

<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, T. & T. Clark, 1961, volume III/4, p. 357

<sup>13</sup> J. Moltmann, [note 10] page 273

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God's, or society's? These questions are part of the current debate about responsibility for health within our society. With these caveats, however, Moltmann's definition seems a good pointer to the meaning of health: the strength to be human.

In these terms, sickness, then, is the impairment of this strength, crippling and weakening a person. It may be an impairment which is physical (bacterial infection), emotional (stress), relational (deep-seated hurts from the past, or inherited patterns of belief or behaviour), social (certain social and economic structures may maintain ill-health through, for example, the poverty trap), or environmental (air, water or noise pollution, high-rise housing). It may be to do with lifestyle, habits or lack of personal care (diet, smoking, recreation, substance abuse, alcohol, sleep patterns, commuting, factory conditions, and the like).

If health is 'the strength to be human', a person can have healthy or morbid attitudes to his states of health or sickness. It can be displayed in a person's capacity for happiness and suffering in his or her acceptance of life's joys and the grief of death.<sup>14</sup>

Moltmann's conclusion is worth quoting in full:

*If health as a state of general well-being is declared to be the supreme value in a human life and in a society, this really implies a morbid attitude to health. Being human is equated with being healthy. This leads to the suppression of illness in the individual life, and means that the sick are pushed out of the life of society and kept out of the public eye. To turn the idea of health into an idol in this way is to rob the human being of the true strength of his humanity. Every serious illness which he has to suffer plunges him into a catastrophe, robs him of his confidence in life, and destroys his sense of his own value.*

*But if we understand health as the strength to be human [my italics], then we make being human more important*

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<sup>14</sup> the same

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*than the state of being healthy. Health is not the meaning of human life. On the contrary, a person has to prove the meaning he has found in his own life in conditions of health and sickness. Only what can stand up to both health and sickness, and ultimately to living and dying, can count as a valid definition of what it means to be human.<sup>15</sup>*

Many of the contemporary 'cults of health' are forms of idolatry which actually produce what they set out to remove: fear of illness. An approach which, while positively encouraging the importance of seeking the strength to be human, also faces the reality of frailty and death, liberates us to see health as a servant to our humanity. To be set free from the idolatry of health opens us to the possibility of a more fully human life a life which includes the creativity of vulnerability and the possibilities of a faith which holds us in life's uncertainties, and also the gift of life through death in the presence of God.

### ***Responsibility for health***

If human life is God's gift, and health is the strength to be human, then a person's right to health is a basic human right, which lays on each person for him or herself and for others the duty of respecting and facilitating health as well as life. Just as God may withhold life, so he may withhold health or at least withhold health in a physical sense so that a person may grow in other senses (for example, Paul's thorn in the flesh). But we cannot make that judgment for one another. It is not for one human being to withhold, or to damage, the health of another. Rather, there is laid on us an obligation to ensure, as far as possible that we and others are able to live healthy lives. The following will need to be borne in mind:

☒ Our theology of the body, as the temple of the Holy Spirit, requires us to take responsibility for bodily care (nourishment, clothing, hygiene, housing, recreation, sports, sleep, and appropriate use of medication while

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<sup>15</sup> the same



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avoiding what Haring calls the 'seduction of the drug industry').

☒ Our theology of persons in relation requires us to take responsibility for the fact that 'it is not good to be alone', either emotionally or physically. In our individualized post-Enlightenment culture, we need to emphasize very clearly the importance of community, fellowship, friendship and relational growth. A gospel of grace, forgiveness, a truth which sets free and a love which casts out fear oblige us to ensure that our fellow human beings are given resources for personal relational well-being. They require us to take seriously and to combat the social structures which may impede health.

☒ Our theology of the environment derives in part from the mandate given to mankind in creation. It is reinforced in the 'protest' of the thorns and thistles to the sin of mankind (Genesis 3) asserting the significance of the natural order, and that humankind must still cultivate and protect it, though now with struggle and pain. This theology obliges us to take seriously the implications for health of environmental pollution, ecological devastation, and climatic changes. There is need for popular understanding of the need for clean drinking water, the avoidance of toxic gases in the air, the enforcement of speed limits, and the like.

☒ Our theology of government sees it as a limited and temporary provision of God for the ordering of human society in justice and righteousness, as far as possible, within the ambiguity and compromise of a fallen world. This view will require us to take seriously the task of sharing health-care resources, so that each may benefit according to need. This is at once a global question, related to economic structures and international cooperation (the sharing of the rich North with the poor South); a national question (in the allocation of priorities in national budgets between health-care and other social priorities); a local question (shall money be spent on geriatric care or kidney machines? Who may benefit when not all can?); and a

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medical and social question (are resources to be allocated on the basis of quality-of-life judgments, medical indications, random distribution, or what?).

Clearly, the spectrum of political opinion stretches from those who see government as a minimal provision for the needs only of personal freedoms (enforcement of law and order), to those who see government as a maximal provision for benefits as well as freedoms (equality of opportunity, and an equitable share of available resources). From the concern of Amos for social justice, the constant insistence that God is on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the widow and the orphan, and the way *shalom* is so often linked with justice in society, many Christians believe that it is part of government responsibility to ensure that available resources are equitably distributed in society.

☒ Our theology of sanctification reminds us that 'the road to holiness is paved with genuine prudent concern for health ... and a humble readiness to accept the human predicament of illness'.<sup>16</sup> We are called, for ourselves and for one another, to ensure as far as is possible that the personal, social, economic and environmental conditions are such that each has the opportunity to grow in health towards maturity in Christ. We do so recognizing that God may purpose differing priorities for different people, and differing priorities for one person at varying stages of his or her life journey. We shall remember that God sometimes withholds physical healing in order to heal us in other ways first, and that perfect health is not promised us this side of heaven. So we shall have an eye to that day when 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away' (Revelation 21:4). The leaves of the tree of life, the prophet tells us, are 'for the healing of the nations' (Revelation 22:2).

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<sup>16</sup> B. Haring, [note 11], page 157

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## The Christian church and the ministry of healing

This chapter follows from the previous chapter. It offers a historical sketch of the Church's concern with healing and explores various current approaches. It attempts to uncover some underlying theological questions, and concludes with a biblical theological perspective.

### *Health and healing*

What is health? As we saw in the previous chapter, health is a complex concept. We did, however, explore the way the term is often used, in relation to what we called disease, illness and sickness.

To use these headings again, we can begin to move from concepts of health towards concepts of healing.

If we focus on disease, we mean an objective pathological condition focusing on those aspects of the human organism which are not functioning appropriately according to medical criteria for that stage of the human person's life. 'Healing' then becomes the restoration of appropriate functional wholeness to the organism.

If we focus on illness, we mean a person's subjective perception of disorder within themselves. When a person 'feels ill', this feeling may result from disease within their body, or from external factors in their social or physical environment, causing stress or some other sense of lack of well-being. The focus is on the whole person. 'Healing' then becomes the restoration of a person's sense of their own well-being.

If our concentration is on what we called sickness, we mean a socially defined deviation from what is socially acceptable or tolerable. A person is 'sick' in this sense if they cannot function according to society's standards. This may, for

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example, be because of their sexual orientation, the shape of their nose, teeth or breasts, some mental or physical handicap, or even the processes of ageing. (The question sometimes has to be asked: who is sick here, the individual or the society?) 'Healing' from sickness would then involve, for example, a change in sexual orientation, the straightening of the teeth, the removal of the handicap or an attempt to delay the processes of ageing.

Thus 'healing' is a broad term, with fuzzy edges. Its range of meanings includes the restoration of bodily, emotional or mental functioning appropriate to a person's age, the restoration of a subjective sense of well-being in a person, the enabling of a person to handle their relationships constructively and to fit in acceptably to their society, and the historical, social, physical and political environments in which these processes can occur.

This broad perspective is consistent with our discussion in the previous chapter of *shalom*. As we saw, when the Lord gives *shalom*, there is prosperity, a wholesome relationship with God, conciliation between people, physical, relational and social well-being. In this sense, Yahweh is 'the Lord who heals'.<sup>1</sup> In the New Testament, the New Age of the Kingdom of God is proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ who is the bringer of *shalom*. Much of the Gospel narrative is taken up with the healing ministry of Jesus which is part of his proclamation of the Kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> We will need to explore this further.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Christian approaches to healing: a historical sketch***

Ministry to the diseased, the ill and the sick has been part of Christian ministry from the very start of the Christian Church. In the post-Pentecost church, the apostles did many signs and wonders among the people (the 'signs of a true apostle', 2 Corinthians 12:12; compare Romans 15:19), and the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits

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<sup>1</sup> See Exodus 15:26

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 4:23

<sup>3</sup> D. Atkinson, 'Towards a Theology of Health' in *Health, the Strength to be Human*, IVP, 1993

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were healed (compare Acts 2:43; 3:6ff; 5:12–16; 6:8; 8:6; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12; 19:11; 28:9).

Christians are said to minister to Christ himself by ‘visiting those who are ill’ (Matthew 25:39). Christians prayed for one another ‘that you may be in health’ (3 John 2). There were recognizable ‘gifts of healings’ in the early church (1 Corinthians 12:9), and the practice of anointing with oil and prayer for ill people who called for the elders is referred to in James 5:13ff.

There is very little other reference to healing ministry in the Epistles. There are four particular references to people who are ill: Paul (2 Corinthians 12:7); Timothy (1 Timothy 5:23); Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:27); Trophimus (2 Timothy 4:20). Inappropriate use of the Lord’s Supper was seen by Paul as the cause of some illness in Corinth (1 Corinthians 11:30). The Book of Revelation looks forward to the Day when ‘God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.’ (Revelation 21:3–4).

During the first three centuries of the church, as Evelyn Frost has documented,<sup>4</sup> there is considerable evidence of a continuing charismatic healing ministry and records of healing miracles. There is also (in Basil, for example, who founded a hospital) evidence of close links between the church and the practice of medicine.

Gradually, healing ministry became increasingly sacramental, combined with anointing and exorcisms. There is evidence of prayer for healing and anointing with oil in Tertullian, Origen, Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine. After the fourth century a growing split between body and spirit in the understanding of human life became so emphasized that less value was placed on bodily health.

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<sup>4</sup>E. Frost, *Christian Healing, a Consideration of the Place of Spiritual Healing in the Church Today in the Light of the Doctrine and Practice of the Ante-Nicene Church*, London, 1940. See also M. Wilson, *Health is for People*, DLT, 1975, page 117

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Eventually, anointing for healing was in many ways overshadowed by anointing for death, at least in the Western church.

During the Middle Ages, with the growth of monastic orders, there is a phase of records of miraculous healings, often through contact with the relics of the saints. Despite caution from some Church leaders, at the level of popular devotion much of the healing ministry of the church was associated with magic.<sup>5</sup> At this time also, the split between body and spirit led to growing division between the Church and medical practice.

Many Christians at the Reformation continued this split, attempting to take the magic out of religion. Many believed that illness was sent from God, and that suffering was to be endured patiently. Neither Luther nor Calvin believed in miraculous physical healings, but concentrated on the miracle of the spiritual healing of the soul through the grace of God. Archbishop Cranmer's first Prayer Book of 1549 provided an Order for the Visitation of the Sick, drawn from the Sarum Rite. It included a long exhortation reminding the sick person that sickness is 'God's Visitation' and that they should 'take in good worthe the chastement of the Lord: for whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth.' It concluded with a form for anointing with oil, making the sign of the cross. The anointing was omitted in the Second Prayer Book of 1552, presumably because of the Reformers' unease with such sacramental practice.<sup>6</sup> The Council of Trent (1551) refused to recognize a rite of healing in the Roman Church, though it did promote the sacramental practice of extreme unction.

Since the Reformation, the split between the Church and medical practice, fed by a dualistic view of human nature, has gone through various phases. Through the influence of the Cartesian/Newtonian model, in which nature was

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<sup>5</sup> K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1971

<sup>6</sup> Martin Bucer, for example, in *Censura*, speaks in decidedly hostile terms about this particular practice (E. C. Whitaker, *Martin Bucer and The Book of Common Prayer*, Alcuin Club/Mayhew McCrimmon, 1974, pages 124ff)

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thought to work according to mechanical laws, there arose a new emphasis in the medical profession on the health of the body and on physical healing. This laid the foundation for the secular 'medical model' of healing which has had such an influence in the current century, although widely questioned in recent years. For Newton, God was deistically detached from the world of nature, so that any divine involvement in the healing process had to be seen as part of the divine ordering of nature or as supernatural intervention into the world of nature. Such an interventionist model was criticized by philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Hume. There were certain times (the revival of evangelical piety with the Wesleys, for example), when miracles of healing were recorded. Pilgrimages have been made to Lourdes since visions of the Virgin Mary were claimed by fourteen-year-old Bernadette Soubirous in 1858, and healing properties claimed for the stream of water Bernadette discovered. Catholic teaching about Lourdes is very cautious, however, and the percentage of possible cures very low.

The medical missions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to some extent repaired the breach between the church and medicine, and a renewed emphasis on the particular healing ministry of the church was strengthened in the founding of guilds such as The Guild of Health (1904) and The Guild of St Raphael (1915). These reestablished the healing ministry as part of the sacramental life of the church (though it was not until the 1960s that the Roman Church recognized anointing with oil as a sacrament for healing). The Church's Council for Health and Healing was formed under Archbishop Temple in 1944, and the Lambeth Conferences in 1908, 1920, 1930 and 1958 illustrate the growing awareness within the Church of England of the significance of the Church's healing ministry.

The 1958 *Report of the Archbishop's Commission on the Church's Ministry of Healing* was a major Church of England survey recognizing that doctors and priests both minister in their different ways to the whole person. It suggested that healing should be understood as 'the enabling of a person

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to function as a whole in accordance with God's will for them'. It rejected the terms 'faith healing', 'spiritual healing', 'divine healing', preferring to speak of 'the Church's Ministry of Healing' as 'an integral part of the Church's total work by which men and women are to become true sons and daughters of God's Kingdom'. This ministry is of word, sacrament, pastoral care and the use of gifts—including medical gifts—which God has given.

The Pentecostal churches, from their beginnings at the turn of the century in the Holiness movements and the Welsh Revival of 1904, have always included the ministry of 'Divine Healing' as part of their teaching. This came to particular prominence in the great Evangelistic Campaigns of the 1920s (the Albert Hall was filled each Easter Monday from 1926 to 1939 for such an event), in which divine healing was closely linked to evangelism. The Pentecostal doctrine that there is healing in the Atonement (that is to say, that Christ bore our sicknesses as well as our sins on the Cross) is central to this practice. It is worth questioning why it is that on the whole Pentecostal churches have grown more quickly than other churches in areas of poverty and social deprivation.

Some of the Pentecostal emphasis has been transposed into the mainline churches in a fresh way through the Charismatic Renewal Movement of the past 25 years. It has developed the emphasis on particular gifts of healing as one of the signs of the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'. The Charismatic Movement, through its ecumenical concerns, has also been instrumental in bringing together the charismatic and sacramental dimensions to the healing ministry.

Until fairly recently, there has been less emphasis in the Christian church on the community and political dimensions of healing and health care than on ministry to individuals. However, this imbalance is being counteracted. R. A. Lambourne, in *Community, Church and Healing*<sup>7</sup> in 1963, studied some of the corporate and social aspects of

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<sup>7</sup> R. A. Lambourne, *Community, Church and Healing*, DLT, 1963

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the Church's ministry to the sick; Peter Selby's book, *Liberating God* (1983),<sup>8</sup> sought to do the same for the world of counselling and spirituality; the Centre for Theology and Public Issues, in New College, Edinburgh, has produced some occasional Christian papers on health care issues in recent years, and a number of Christian ethicists have been writing on the social context of health and healing.<sup>9</sup>

At the popular level, there is at present considerable interest in Christian healing though almost all concerned with individual illness (as a glance at the shelves of any Christian bookshop will illustrate).

***The current scene: a variety of approaches***

It will become apparent that much of the current confusion concerning the ministry of healing in the Church arises from differing theological convictions. Most Christians involved in the worlds of healing and medicine wish to link their practices to biblical theology, and especially to the significance of the healing ministry of Jesus. How those links are made, however, and what significance the earthly ministry of Jesus has for today's church are at the root of much current dispute.

We will begin by trying to separate out the various strands in the current confusion. It is difficult to speak in general of 'models' of healing ministry, or even 'approaches' to healing ministry, for many involved in these ministries do not fit neatly into categories, and many would draw on insights from many different sources. To identify the following strands in the fabric may be helpful, however, and various writers are cited to illustrate each 'strand' (though it would not be correct to identify each writer exclusively with that 'strand').

There seem to be at least the following strands in current Christian literature:

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<sup>8</sup> P. Selby, *Liberating God*, SPCK, 1983

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, S. E. Lammers, and A. Verhey, editors, *On Moral Medicine*, Eerdmans, 1987

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- ☒ Medical approaches
  - ☒ Psychotherapy/pastoral counselling
  - ☒ Inner healing/prayer counselling
  - ☒ Pentecostal/healing/evangelism
  - ☒ Charismatic/corporate ministry
  - ☒ Deliverance ministry
  - ☒ Holistic approaches
  - ☒ Community care
  - ☒ Public health

We will outline these in turn.

### *Medical approaches*

Some Christians, particularly within the medical profession, would endorse the perspective of Peter May<sup>10</sup> that the restoration of the image of God through the work of Christ is in this world spiritual and not physical, as death is inevitable. The priorities of Gospel evangelism are concerned with eternal salvation, not temporary respite for ailing bodies. This is not to say that partial healing through medical aid is not to be sought, but that 'health' ultimately belongs to another world, and neither Scripture nor medical experience encourage us to believe in miraculous healing as normative for the church. Indeed, such a view detracts from the positive value of suffering, neurotically focuses on the outward, the visible and the temporal, and raises false expectations.

Dr May denies that miraculous healings which closely resemble those of Christ occur more than extremely rarely today, and argues that though God could give supernatural healing today, it is not part of his normal provision.

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<sup>10</sup> J. Goldingay, editor, *Signs, Wonders and Healing*, IVP, 1989

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There are echoes here of the stance of Reformed theology given classic expression by B. B. Warfield in 1918,<sup>11</sup> who argued that the special divine healing gifts present in the ministry of Christ and the apostles ceased with the Apostolic Age. This is a view that many find very hard to sustain. Some who do take this view tend to work with the sort of 'medical model' of the human person, based largely on the dualism of a Newtonian world view, which understands the body as a machine, and illness as a failure in bodily function, and in which mental and spiritual life and health are either unrelated to physical processes, or are understood to be reducible to physical processes.

### *Psychotherapy/pastoral counselling*

Counselling and psychotherapy in Christian settings seek to provide relational contexts in which people in pain can be helped to live more creatively and more hopefully, by focusing on the emotional, relational, moral or cognitive aspects of their lives. Roger Hurding<sup>12</sup> speaks of counselling as sharing in the process by which 'we and those we try to help can move towards balance, maturity and a sense of identity, a sense of "being me" in Christ. This can only be effected by the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.' Laurence Crabb<sup>13</sup> describes the goal of change which counselling seeks in terms of 'health'. 'Healthy people' enjoy God, are liberated to be involved with others, know that they are as yet only on the way to maturity. Their lives have a quiet power. They experience a 'marred joy', groaning as they wait for eternity. They are not afraid of confusion, they struggle, they fail, but they have a growing ability to be touched by God and to touch others, becoming freer from painful memories and repressed emotions. Michael Jacobs says that 'Each new encounter in pastoral care provides a pastor with the chance of helping people to develop and grow as whole persons ... By "whole person" I mean a man or woman as an individual as well as part of a family and

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<sup>11</sup> B. B. Warfield, *Miracles, Yesterday and Today*, 1918; compare the discussion in C. Brown, *That You May Believe*, Eerdmans, 1985

<sup>12</sup> R. Hurding, *Restoring the Image*, Paternoster, 1980, page 12

<sup>13</sup> L. J. Crabb, *Understanding People*, Marshall, 1987, pages 125–26

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social unit ... body, mind and spirit ... with ... psychological, ethical and theological frames of reference.’<sup>14</sup>

### *Inner healing/prayer counselling*

Counselling merges into prayer for inner healing in books such as those by David Seamands.<sup>15</sup> By ‘inner healing’ is meant the approach to counselling which looks for an experience of the Holy Spirit to restore a person’s health in the deep areas of personal pain, by dealing with the root causes of hurt. Ruth Carter Stapleton uses a process of guided meditation, ‘faith-imagination’, in which Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever, is invited in prayer to go back into a person’s past life to heal traumatic episodes.<sup>16</sup> Building on the work of Agnes Sandford,<sup>17</sup> MacNutt writes: ‘The basic idea of inner healing is that Jesus can take the memories of our past and (i) heal them from wounds that still remain and affect our present lives; and (ii) fill with his love all those places in us that have been empty for so long, once they have been healed and drained of the poison of past hurts and resentment ... At times the healing is progressive and takes several sessions, but I believe that it is always God’s desire to heal us of those psychological hurts that are unredemptive and that prevent us from living with the inner freedom that belongs to the children of God.’<sup>18</sup>

### *Pentecostal healing/evangelism*

Since the major evangelistic campaigns of the 1920s, Pentecostal doctrine has linked together a public ministry of healing with public proclamation of the Gospel. Indeed, Christ is Saviour and Healer, and healing is an essential part of evangelism. There were frequent testimonies to Divine Healing at these campaigns, although it is worth noting

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<sup>14</sup> M. Jacobs, *Towards the Fullness of Christ*, DLT, 1988, page 2

<sup>15</sup> D. Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions*, Scripture Press, 1981

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Carter Stapleton, *The Gift of Inner Healing*, Hodder, 1977; compare *The Experience of Inner Healing*, Word Books, 1977, Hodder 1978

<sup>17</sup> A. Sandford, *Healing Gifts of the Spirit*, Arthur James, 1966. See also her *Healing Light*

<sup>18</sup> F. MacNutt, *Healing*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame 1974; *The Power to Heal*, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame 1977

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Donald Gee's comment on 'the small number of definite miracles of healing compared to the great numbers who were prayed for.'<sup>19</sup> In his sociological study *Sects and Society*,<sup>20</sup> B. R. Wilson concludes: 'Many Elim members whom the writer has met have claimed to have experienced divine healing, but almost always of an obscure and self-diagnosed complaint such as 'pains in the back'... others, often with better defined illnesses, ascribed their cure to divine intervention, even though they had received medical treatment ... My own very limited enquiries have not brought to light any satisfactory example of divine healing.'<sup>21</sup>

Much of the charismatic movement's emphasis on prayer for physical healing, as well as emotional and spiritual healing, was influenced by Pentecostalism. Although some of the more recent emphasis on charismatic healing has focused on the benefit of the ministry to the ill person, others have also held on to the link between public healing ministry and public proclamation (just as 'many signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the apostles' Acts 5:12). Though hard to put into a category, one aspect of John Wimber's approach to 'Signs and Wonders' links together 'Power Healing' with 'Power Evangelism'. Wimber believes that to pray for the sick is part of the commission to do the will of God on earth, illustrated by the life and ministry of Jesus. He bases this on Jesus' commission to the twelve, and to the seventy, and on the description of this ministry in the longer and disputed ending of (Mark 16:18). His goal in praying for the sick is that they should be healed and that the kingdom of God is advanced. Wimber understands healing in a sense broad enough to say that David Watson was healed through his death, though he usually means (quoting Linda Coleman) 'cases in which God intervenes directly, bypassing the natural processes of the body and the skills of doctors and

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<sup>19</sup> D. Gee, *Wind and Flame*, incorporating *The Pentecostal Movement*, Assemblies of God, 1967

<sup>20</sup> B. R. Wilson, *Sects and Society*, Heinemann, 1961

<sup>21</sup> as above, page 96

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nurses.<sup>22</sup> Roger Cowley, following John Wimber's teaching, writes: 'I believe that God acted through Jesus Christ to bring healing, and that he gives power and authority to his disciples today to heal; such healing may be termed "miraculous" in the sense of being a wonderful sign of God's activity.'<sup>23</sup>

### *Charismatic/corporate ministry*

There is a further strand to be added to this picture: the experience of some churches within the Charismatic movement that 'healing gifts' are given within the context of corporate worship. Tom Walker writes of St John's Harborne, Birmingham:

*'People have been healed through services at which the elders have ministered according to James 5:14 ... Some have been healed during the quiet worship singing in Sunday services of Holy Communion, or through participation in worship dance, even though both these activities have at times been questioned by some in the church. Following prayer for healing a young mother miraculously gave birth to a child when she was told that it was medically impossible. During a Communion service another woman felt a tingling sensation in her breast. She had not asked for specific prayer ministry, though she knew that breast cancer had been diagnosed. But God had moved to heal her, because when she was admitted to hospital the next day, she was sent straight home after X-rays since no trace of cancer could be found. All these examples illustrate the importance of acknowledging God's authority in the church.'*<sup>24</sup>

### *Sacramental/liturgical approaches*

Much of the traditional ministry of healing in the church has been more formal, liturgical and sacramental than the informal, spontaneous and often unstructured prayer of pentecostalism, or the 'deep therapy of the Spirit' style of

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<sup>22</sup> J. Wimber and K. Springer, *Power Healing*, Hodder, 1986

<sup>23</sup> Goldingay [note 11] page 104

<sup>24</sup> T. O. Walker, *Renew Us by Your Spirit*, Hodder, 1982

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prayer counselling found in some approaches to inner healing. In Morris Maddocks' classic study *The Christian Healing Ministry*<sup>25</sup> he writes that Jesus 'alone is whole, the perfect pattern for our health', and he comments on Luke 2:52 that 'Jesus grew mentally (in wisdom) and physically (in stature), and also spiritually (in favour with God) and socially (in favour with man). These are the four areas of growth that need to be cultivated for perfect health.'<sup>26</sup> Later, Maddocks writes that 'the Eucharist is the healing sacrament, for it is a making present of Christ and his grace ... word and deed come together as they did in the life of Jesus and the early church ... the offering of the fruits of creation [makes the Eucharist] ... the anticipatory celebration of a healed creation.'<sup>27</sup> The sacramental use of laying on of hands, anointing with oil and absolution can be associated with forgiveness, blessing and prayer. The Church of England Service of Ministry to the Sick, authorized in 1983, includes these prayers: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ who laid his hands on the sick that they might be healed I lay my hands on you, And may almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit make you whole in body, mind and spirit, give you light and peace, and keep you in life eternal.' 'N. I anoint you with oil in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. May our heavenly Father make you whole in body and mind, and grant you the inward anointing of his Holy Spirit, the Spirit of strength and joy and peace.'

Sometimes sacramental and liturgical ministry takes place in the context of public worship, sometimes as special healing services and sometimes in private celebrations of the Holy Communion with a small group of praying friends.

### *Deliverance ministry/exorcism*

Just as there are charismatic and sacramental approaches to healing ministry, so there are differing approaches to the ministry of deliverance from evil. In response in particular to the 'occult explosion' of the past two decades, the

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<sup>25</sup> M. Maddocks, *The Christian Healing Ministry*, SPCK, new edition 1990

<sup>26</sup> as above, page 16

<sup>27</sup> as above, pages 113–14

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ministry of deliverance has grown. John Richards' major study, *But Deliver Us from Evil* (1974),<sup>28</sup> together with the Report from the Bishop of Exeter's Commission (1972), outline appropriate liturgical responses to those oppressed by evil. The existence of the demonic has been a cause of controversy within the church (a whole issue of *The Churchman* was devoted to it in 1980), as has the existence of the appropriate ministry. Some charismatic pastors, acting without medical or ecclesiastical support, have found themselves in serious difficulties. The major denominations have formal procedures to be followed in cases needing exorcism, though a less formal 'prayer for deliverance' is often sufficient, and is usually understood as an elaboration of the petition in the Lord's Prayer: 'deliver us from evil'. The writings of Kurt Koch<sup>29</sup> distinguish between disease and the demonic, and give guidelines for pastoral ministry.

An extension of the deliverance ministry is found in R. K. McAll's controversial work<sup>30</sup> in which he describes how the spirits of earth-bound departed ancestors are commended to God (usually in a requiem), praying for the release of people in the present from certain psychological and spiritual disorders.

### *Holistic approaches*

Many Christian pastors and doctors work today with a holistic view of the human person, and accordingly try to treat the whole person whether their primary approach is through medical, psychological or spiritual means. Many of the above approaches are held together in different ways in different authors. Some writers, for example, Leslie Weatherhead,<sup>31</sup> Paul Tournier,<sup>32</sup> Frank Lake,<sup>33</sup> combine aspects of medical, therapeutic and prayer approaches.

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<sup>28</sup> J. Richards, *But Deliver Us from Evil*, DLT, 1974

<sup>29</sup> K. Koch, *Between Christ and Satan*, Evangelization Publishers, W. Germany 1972, also *Christian Counselling and Occultism*

<sup>30</sup> R. K. McAll, *Healing the Family Tree*, Sheldon Press, 1982

<sup>31</sup> L. Weatherhead, *Psychology, Religion and Healing*, Hodder, 1951.

<sup>32</sup> P. Tournier, *A Doctor's Casebook in the Light of the Bible* SCM Press, 1954; *The Healing of Persons*, Collins, 1966, *Creative Suffering*, SCM Press, 1981

<sup>33</sup> F. Lake, *Clinical Theology*, DLT, 1966

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Leanne Payne's work<sup>34</sup> brings spirituality and psychological insights into conjunction in her prayer ministry. Many within the pastoral counselling movement operate with a holistic view; for example, Seward Hiltner's discussion of the healing aspect of the shepherding perspective.<sup>35</sup> He defines healing as 'the restoration of functional wholeness that has been impaired as to direction and/or schedule', and suggests that the efficient causes of impairment are defect (for example, birth handicap), invasion (such as bacteria, virus, poison, the invasion of one person by another's need to control), distortion (for example, bad diet, false goals for living), and decision (such as certain life choices). In the broad, but not specific, sense impairment is related to sin the ultimate condition from which healing is needed. Hiltner comments on the recovery of the view that body and mind are two basic perspectives of the one organism, and he develops a holistic approach to the ministry of the whole person.

In a few instances, of which Christopher Hamel Cooke's work at St Marylebone Parish Church is perhaps best known, the holistic approach is set within a 'Healing and Counselling Centre'. At St Marylebone, the church crypt has been adapted to include an NHS GP surgery, counselling rooms, music therapy room and library, providing in one building worship, therapy, medicine, spiritual direction and sacramental ministry, as well as 'befrienders' available to offer frontline care. The vision described in *Health is for God*<sup>36</sup> looked forward also to the inclusion of those involved in 'holistic medicine', osteopathy and acupuncture. The work is based on the doctrine of God's continuing Creation, and the restoration of peoples' relationship with their Creator.

A number of other Christian Healing Centres have been established, some directly in the wake of the Charismatic Movement, others more on the model of Burrswood Christian Healing Centre in Kent, which was established by

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<sup>34</sup> L. Payne, *The Healing Presence*, Kingsway, 1989

<sup>35</sup> S. Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology*, Abingdon, 1958

<sup>36</sup> C. Hamel Cooke, *Health is for God*, Arthur James, 1986

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Dorothy Kerin in 1929 to provide a partnership between the Church and Medicine. Kerin's vision was to 'heal the sick, comfort the sorrowing and give faith to the faithless.'<sup>37</sup>

Some Christians involved in holistic medicine and in various approaches to inner healing (particularly visualization techniques) and to Jungian psychotherapy have been criticized for selling out the Gospel to New Age thinking,<sup>38</sup> that blend of humanistic psychology, occult practice and fringe medicine which has become a major influence in the popular mind in some areas. Such critics believe that there is quite inadequate theological evaluation of some aspects of holistic medicine, and argue that some may be open to demonic influence.<sup>39</sup>

### *Community care*

R. A. Lambourne, a medical practitioner and theologian, wrote *Community, Church and Healing* in 1963, in which he argued that the healing ministry of Jesus should be seen primarily not as instances of individually orientated compassion, but as community events. They were signs of a socio-political entity (the Kingdom of God); they were sorts of acted parables, and they functioned as disclosures of the judgment of God on the earthly communities of the time. 'The healing miracles of Jesus are ... corporate effective signs. They are done 'in you', and they both heal and confront the community. They are signs of the Kingdom, ushering in the Kingdom, the rule of God and demonstrating its nature. As the Kingdom comes upon the community, the power of the blessings of the mercy of God burst upon them and the wrath of the holiness of God judges them. When God visits his people, healing their sickness as manifested in the sick one amongst them, this

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<sup>37</sup> The story is told in M. Maddocks, *The Vision of Dorothy Kerin*, Hodder, 1991

<sup>38</sup> T. A. MacMahon and D. Hunt, *The Seduction of Christianity*, Harvest House, 1985

<sup>39</sup> Compare L. Wilkinson, 'New Age Consciousness and the New Creation' in W. Granberg-Michaelson, editor, *Tending the Garden*, Eerdmans, 1987

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divine healing is the time of their judgment, the moment of decision.<sup>40</sup>

The needs of both individual and community together are thus part of the story. The challenge of the sick person to the community, and the needs of the community itself, must both be taken into account.

In his provocative *Alive and Kicking*<sup>41</sup>, Stephen Pattison seeks to root Christian discussion of sickness in the complexities and ambiguities of modern technological society. How does Christian healing relate to wider concepts of justice in such a society? Pattison picks up for particular comment the way technological, medical and social changes in the West have disguised human vulnerability to disease, making us ill-prepared to cope with, for example, Aids. 'Doubtless contemporary Christians can argue doctrinal niceties until the Second Coming. It is their response and attitude to the fear, suffering and death brought about by Aids, amongst other diseases, which will prove the truth and relevance of the gospel for this generation. There are great opportunities for witnessing to the power of love, compassion and solidarity here. Equally, there is the possibility of isolation, moralistic indifference and complacency ...'<sup>42</sup>

### *Public health*

There has been extensive Christian discussion of the ethical problems concerning allocation of scarce health care resources.<sup>43</sup> There has been comparatively little Christian writing on such public health issues as preventative medicine, long-term support for the chronic sick, health factors in the debates on environmental pollution, epidemiology, geriatric care, and so on, though Stephen

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<sup>40</sup> R. A. Lambourne, *Community, Church and Healing*, DLT, 1963; see also *Explorations in Health and Salvation*, a selection of papers edited by Michael Wilson, University of Birmingham, 1983

<sup>41</sup> S. Pattison, *Alive and Kicking*, SCM Press, 1989

<sup>42</sup> as above, page 141

<sup>43</sup> Compare Lammers and Verhey [note 9]; and see B. Haring, *Free and Faithful in Christ*, volume 3, St Paul Publications, 1981.

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Pattison's *Alive and Kicking* does address some of these questions from a Christian theological perspective.

***Some underlying questions***

The dispute between Christians of different persuasions concerning the Church's ministry of healing, to some extent reflected in the diversity of approaches indicated above, has a long history. It is seen in the antagonism of the mainline churches to the development of Christian Science since the publication of *Science and Health* by Mary Baker Eddy in 1875. It is seen in the disputes engendered by the development of Pentecostalism. It has surfaced in recent decades through the Charismatic Movement's effectiveness within the mainline denominations. It is evident in the development of the phenomenon of the Healing Evangelist, especially in the USA (although Morris Cerullo's visit to the UK in 1992 provoked controversy here). Some of these movements are linked also to the more recent 'prosperity cults', which link spiritual and material well-being as part of the blessing of God. It is worth asking sociological questions about such developments, and their relation to the income levels of the recipients. Is it the case, for example, as has sometimes been suggested, that the quest for supernatural healings flourished as the cost of traditional medicine became prohibitive for the poor in the Mid-West? Much of this approach to healing is episodic, and dramatic. This contrasts with that other steadier and more formal approach to Christian healing ministry: the sacramental.

The following is a selection of the theological questions which are often raised in such disputes, all in their different ways questions about the Christian Gospel. What is the Good News for a suffering world, and for diseased, ill and sick people? Each question could, of course, lead to further extensive theological, sociological and pastoral discussions, but these are beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> For some of these questions, I am grateful to an unpublished paper by Dr Stephen Pattison

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☒ There are questions concerning the ministry of Jesus. What is the continuing significance for today's church of the healing ministry of Jesus? Has he given us an example or a command to imitate him in this regard (and to raise the dead?) or is his ministry distinctive, and if so how? How do we understand the ministry of the early church in the light of the ministry of Jesus?

☒ There are questions concerning creation and the physical world. What is the relation of body and soul? Christian Science of course opposes 'spirit' to 'matter', but believes that the Truth of Christ heals both sickness and sin. Do some Christians work with a similar dualism?

☒ There are questions about God's purposes in the world. How do we think God acts in the world—through supernatural intervention (and what model of space and time does that assume?) or through continuing creative engagement, or through some other means? What does our conception of God's action mean for our understanding of healing? And of prayer and sacraments?

Is it God's purpose that we should all be in good health—for everyone, all the time? What does that mean for theodicy? What does that mean in the face of cholera epidemics in the Third World? Should Christians in such settings spend their time laying hands on the sick? How far is what we call 'Christian healing ministry' a Western phenomenon? Is there an imperative on us to seek health? Can health become idolatrous? Does all healing come from God, or only some? Is the healing provided by shamans, spiritualists, magicians from God? How do we discern what is from God?

☒ There are questions about suffering and death. What is our theology of suffering, frailty, disease, decay and death? How does our theology deal with the seven-year-old haemophiliac child dying of Aids? What is the relation between the suffering of Christ and his ministry of healing? What is the relation between sickness, sin and the demonic? What does the Pentecostalist doctrine that 'there is healing in the Atonement', mean, and do we accept it? What is the

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relation between healing and death? Is there a 'pain that heals'?<sup>45</sup>

☒ There are questions about the church's ministry. How much of the testimony to healing is an interpretation of the person's own constructed self-understanding, and how much is objectively verifiable? Does it matter? What is the relation between healing and evangelism? Do testimonies of healing reassure the faithful rather than the sceptic? What do we think we are doing when we pray that an ill/sick person may be restored to health? What is the role and meaning of faith/prayer/expectancy in such a ministry? Does preventative medicine, public health and community care qualify as 'Christian healing'? Why has Christian healing ministry concentrated on the individual and his/her illness and its cure? Does it matter that there is a variety of approaches to Christian healing ministry? Is it all right for us to discover our own style?

Perhaps at this point we do well to recall Stephen Pattison's caution concerning definitions. By 'healing', some Christians mean 'instantaneous and miraculous removal of disease without medical intervention'; others mean 'progress back to health using medical and/or psychological and/or spiritual means—God uses all of these'; others reserve 'health' for the life to come, and speak of the 'healing' of dying in Christ; for others Christian healing is generally 'Jesus Christ meeting you at the point of your need.'<sup>46</sup>

### ***A theological perspective: resurrection and healing***

In this final section, I do not propose to address each of the above questions directly. Instead, I offer a possible theological framework in which discussion—in relation to healing—of such themes as the ministry of Jesus, creation, the purposes for God, suffering and death, and the church's ministry, can be set. It covers our physical life, and so our response to disease; it addresses our personal and relational life, and so our response to illness; it is an

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<sup>45</sup> See M. Israel, *The Pain that Heals*, Hodder, 1981

<sup>46</sup> The sentence is, I think, from Morris Maddocks

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inescapably corporate approach from which we can address our social and community life, and so our response to sickness. This framework begins with the affirmation at the heart of the apostolic gospel: that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. (Acts 2:31; 4:2; 4:33; 1 Corinthians 15, and so on). All Christian life and ministry begins here.

Here are five major propositions (which broadly cover the scope of our earlier questions).

☒ The resurrection demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah of Jewish expectation (Acts 2:36) and the Son of God (Romans 1:4). The Messianic hope of the Old Testament was for a royal priest/deliverer to come, who would bring *shalom*, peace in righteousness, with justice for the poor, freedom for the oppressed and healing for the sick. When Jesus replied to John the Baptist's disciples 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them' (Luke 7:22), he was saying that indeed he is the expected Messiah.

Jesus began his ministry, which included from the start expulsion of demons and healing the sick, by announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand. The Kingdom means both the present rule of God and also the future new restored creation. The 'Kingdom of God' refers both to the 'Age to Come' of Messianic expectation, at present prefigured in Jesus' Messianic signs, and also to the future kingdom of Christ's glory when all life will share in a transformed world. In the Synoptic Gospels, the theology of the Kingdom of God is essentially one of conflict and conquest over the kingdom of Satan and the powers of evil abroad in this world which contradict the rule of God. When the Kingdom of God comes close in Jesus, its light exposes the powers of darkness. This world is shown up to be what it is: disordered, diseased and alienated from its Creator. The Gospels picture Jesus as God's Messianic King, demonizing the world, and through the 'powers of the age

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to come' (Hebrews 6:5) making the whole world free and reordered. (Matthew 19:28)

So Jesus' healings both cure the sick and confront the watching world. The lordship of God in Jesus brings salvation, with its healing power, to all sorts of people and all sorts of needs. Healing is the gift of health. Salvation is the conquest of the power of death. As Moltmann puts it: 'Healings and salvation are related to one another in such a way that the healings are signs, this side of death, of God's power of resurrection ...; while salvation is the fulfilment of these prefigured real promises in the raising of the dead to eternal life.'<sup>47</sup> Salvation has both a personal and a cosmic side: the personal, which the healings prefigure, is the resurrection of the dead; the cosmic, which the exorcisms prefigure, is the annihilation of death. There will be a 'transfiguration of the body.' (Philippians 3:21), and there will be a 'new earth' (Revelation 21:4).

In this eschatological framework, the healings of Jesus are thus seen as pointing forward to the new creation of all things. As Hans Kung puts it 'God's kingdom is creation healed.'<sup>48</sup> In the context of the coming new creation, the healings of Jesus are not supernatural miracles, breaking into the natural order; they are the 'outcrops' of the true natural order, within this as yet ambiguous fallen world.

Sickness, then, is a manifestation of abnormality resulting, in a very general sense, from sin in the world, and from the binding power of Satan (see Luke 13:16). The resurrection of Jesus is the 'first fruits' of the new creation in which the power of sin is broken and the principalities and powers are disarmed. (Colossians 1:15–16, 2:15; 1 Corinthians 15:20).

☒ The resurrection of Jesus is an affirmation of creation which is to be transformed into the kingdom of Christ's glory. It also shows us that God's creative engagement with his world continues. ('My Father is working still', John 5:17). God is not deistically detached in a 'supernature' from which

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<sup>47</sup> J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, SCM Press, 1990, page 108

<sup>48</sup> H. Küng, *On Being a Christian*, Collins, 1977, page 231

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he occasionally intervenes into a 'nature' which is like some closed receptacle of natural causes. God's action in the world is one of constant creative engagement and relationship with what he has made. However, much of that creation is at present groaning under a bondage to decay (Romans 8:21), a groaning which is the labour pains of the kingdom of God's glory, which he is bringing to birth. We now live between the times: not yet in the new heaven and new earth.

The resurrection of Jesus is the resurrection of the body. 'The body' is the whole person viewed from the perspective of our physical nature. So we must reject the secular 'medical model' of physical determinism and reductionism, and work with a holistic model. Yet our physical natures are fragile. Our 'outer nature' is wasting away (2 Corinthians 4:16); but as we share in the power of Christ's resurrection, and the Gospel which 'brings immortality to light' (2 Timothy 1:10), this 'perishable nature' will put on the 'imperishable' (1 Corinthians 15:53), and we shall be 'further clothed' (2 Corinthians 5:4) with 'spiritual bodies'. Before the Kingdom of God's glory fully comes, there is sickness, frailty, decay. Sickness serves as a messenger that we are still affected by the rule of death. It can also serve as a messenger of salvation, by waking us up to dimensions of reality which were hitherto hidden. There can be, as Martin Israel says a 'pain that heals'. This does not mean that the body is unimportant. On the contrary, we should care for the bodies God has given; we should will to live in our bodies, and so will and work to be healthy.

☒ The resurrection is the work of the Holy Trinity. The Father raised the Son in the power of the Spirit. The heart of the universe is persons in a communion of freedom and love. The personal wholeness and the social wholeness described by the Messianic gift of *shalom*, is found in fellowship with the Holy Trinity, in freedom and love. This is the holiness which underlies all true wholeness. The coming kingdom of God's glory is a new Community of righteousness, justice and *shalom*. This calls into question

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the over-individualized emphasis of much contemporary Christian ministry.

☒ The resurrection of Jesus established the victory of the Cross. God's Being and God's Action are one and the same. God's Being reaches out in vulnerable self-sacrificing love to embrace our frail and sinful humanity, to share in the injustice of innocent suffering, and to put to death on the Cross the power of all that holds us in the grip of Satan, sin and death. The principalities and powers have been conquered (Colossians 2:15), and we are now waiting for all things to become subject to Christ (1 Corinthians 15:28). The power of Christ's salvation is that of weakness, suffering and pain. Part of Christian ministry may begin here: in providing a ministry in the name of the Crucified God to a suffering humanity. We may not be able to receive the Gospel of resurrection until we see the depths of God's love for us in the suffering of Calvary and that 'nothing more stands between God and me, because [Jesus Christ] has become my brother. At the bottom of every abyss he stands beside me.'<sup>49</sup> Although theologically we make sense of the Cross only by beginning with the resurrection, the order of ministry and the order of healing may be the order of history: suffering and death precede life and glory.

In one sense we have been saved (Ephesians 2:5), and in the same sense we have been healed (1 Peter 2:24); in another sense, we are being saved (1 Corinthians 1:18), and are being healed; in a third sense we shall be saved (Romans 5:9), and shall be healed. There is 'healing in the Atonement'; but this is not a statement of present experience, but of eschatological hope. And living and waiting in that hope may involve us sharing now in the sufferings of Christ, until the kingdom of justice and peace is fully established.

☒ The resurrection is the power of the church's ministry (Ephesians 1:19–20; 3:20) in this present age, while we wait for the full liberation of creation. It is through the church that the purpose of God to unite all things in Christ is now

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<sup>49</sup> H. Thieliicke, *I Believe*, Collins, 1969

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made known. (Ephesians 1:10; 3:10). The church lives in the power of the resurrection as the Body of Christ, with each member gifted for the good of all (Ephesians 4:7ff). The goal of Christian ministry within the church is that we should all attain maturity: the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13; compare Colossians 1:28). In this context we struggle in faith, we love our neighbours, we work for justice, we say our prayers. We wait in hope (1 Peter 1:21); we will to live the life God has given to us; we will to be in health, the strength for life, and we work for the health of one another and of the communities in which we live. 'Seek the *shalom* of the city' (Jeremiah 29:7). We are concerned with what enables health (political and environmental concerns, justice in use of resources); we thank God for medical skill (see Ecclesiasticus 38:2ff), we recognize the work of God in every pushing back of the power of evil and in every movement towards wholeness in holiness. And to this end we pray. We pray for health and for healing for one another, just as we pray for our neighbours and their salvation, meaning by this that we 'cast our cares onto him' (1 Peter 5:7); we tell God our needs, our hopes, our fears. And we place ourselves and those we pray for in the hands of the risen Lord.

Sometimes the result of prayer is immediate visible release of some part of our life which is still under the power of the ruler of this age (physical change; forgiveness of sin; removal of guilt; motivation towards justice; restoration of relationship; change in business priorities for example, Zacchaeus). All such small healings are pointers to the ultimate healing of creation. Sometimes this is part of a process of maturing. Sometimes, however, God leaves us with things which we would like changed in order to help us change in other ways first.

The ministry of healing is not merely or mainly an episodic response to particular sicknesses in order to proclaim God's miraculous power; nor should signs and wonders be sought for their own sake ('a wicked and adulterous generation seeks for a sign', Matthew 12:39). The ministry of healing,

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rather, is a 'sacrament of God's grace leading mankind to its proper place in the world',<sup>50</sup> led on by the vision of a restored creation within which the healing of individuals and society are to be understood, and in which disease and suffering may sometimes be necessary for wholeness to be attained. This ministry is to be an ongoing part of the life of prayer and the sacramental life of the Christian worshipping community, in which we try to bring every part of life into touch with the resurrection power of the risen lord, that we may be transformed from one degree of glory to another, as we are in the process of being changed into his likeness (2 Corinthians 3:18), to become the community of his kingdom.<sup>51</sup>

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### **Problems Of Human Embryo Research**

In July 1978 a little girl was born in the North of England—much to the great delight of her parents who had been hoping to have a child for a very long while. What made the birth noteworthy was that she started life in the laboratory: she was the first so-called test-tube baby. There are now several hundred children worldwide who trace their origins back to in-vitro (in a glass) fertilization. This IVF procedure is now well established. A ripe human egg is taken from the woman's ovary, shortly before it would have been released naturally. It is mixed in a petridish with sperm from the husband or partner so that fertilization can occur. Once the fertilized egg has started to divide it is transferred to the mother's womb with the hope that it will implant and develop normally. Nine months later, if all goes well, a healthy baby is born. This technique has given hope to infertile couples, many of whom are willing to pay several thousand pounds for this treatment. They are often rewarded with the joy of a healthy child.

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<sup>50</sup> M. Israel, *Healing as Sacrament*, DLT, 1984, page 1

<sup>7</sup> Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (166). Lynx Communications: London

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Of course, artificial insemination has been practised for some while. The mother is inseminated by the sperm either of the husband (AIH), or of an anonymous donor (AID).

But *in vitro* human fertilization is new—and with it have come a host of new possibilities. Now it would be possible to use an egg donated by from an anonymous woman donor. It would be possible for the transfer of an embryo derived *in vitro* from one couple's egg and sperm to the womb of another woman. The possibilities of a woman loaning her womb—or hiring her womb—as a surrogate mother to bring to birth someone else's baby, are now made easier and more anonymous. One could envisage the situation arising in which a child could have five parents: the mother who provided the egg, the father who provided the sperm, the mother in whose womb the child grew, and the two adoptive parents who brought up the child.

Clearly, the ethical, social and legal questions surrounding these new possibilities are complex—and rapidly changing. There are legal questions concerned with rights of inheritance; genetic questions concerned with the possibilities of inadvertent incest; psychological questions concerning the future well-being of children, and so on. When the first IVF birth was announced in 1978, one professor of moral theology—to the disbelief and amazement of his medical colleagues—described the event as being 'as apocalyptic as the Hiroshima bomb'. Increasingly now, however, people are worried.

Here is another area of pastoral ethics in which many people are struggling with personal pain. There is the pain of infertility for many couples, made harder in some ways by the apparent disposability of human life in the ease with which our society allows abortion. It is often made harder too by the common view that parenthood is a right to be enjoyed, rather than a gift to be received. There is the pain of conscience for some within the medical profession—some with choices to make concerning priorities in the allocation of medical time and resources; some with

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uncertainties of using medical technology which depends on research on human embryos.

It was to seek to clarify some of the legal and social complexities—and to allay some public worries—that in 1982 the British government established a committee of Enquiry into Human Fertilization and Embryology, chaired by the now Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, philosopher Dame Mary Warnock. Their report, usually called *The Warnock Report*, was published in July 1984. This report surveys the whole scene of human embryology and these new techniques, and made sixty-four recommendations, including the following:

- ☒ A statutory licensing body should be established to regulate research and infertility services, which has since been done.
- ☒ AID, IVF and egg donation should be available under licence in the treatment of infertility.
- ☒ Primarily because of the possibilities of commercial exploitation, it should be a criminal offence to create or operate in the UK agencies for surrogate motherhood.

All of this is, of course, highly controversial—and there has been public debate in Britain since the publication of *The Warnock Report*. But there is yet another issue, also covered in detail by this report, which is fundamental to much of the rest, namely the use of human embryos for research. The techniques of IVF were established by and continue to depend on medical research on human embryos. Some of this research is mostly observation: much involves the death of the human embryo.

Part of the problem is this: in order to ensure that there is at least one healthy and viable embryo to return from the dish to the womb, the most efficient practice is for the woman to be given a drug to stimulate ovulation; then several eggs are taken and fertilized. No more than two—or at the most three—eggs are replaced at one time (couples do not want to cope with multiple births)—so that leaves the problem of spare embryos. What is to be done with them? They can be

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frozen and used later, perhaps for a subsequent pregnancy. They can be destroyed. Or they could be used for research.

And of course the fundamental question is: what sort of an entity is the human embryo? Is it an embryonic person with the rights of a person? In which case the sort of research on it which would cause its death should be out of the question. Or is it merely a collection of living cells which could appropriately be used for research? This latter view is often taken by those in the medical profession who wish to do research on living human embryos.

*When is a person? The Warnock Report fails to answer this critical question.*

It says that:

*Although the questions of when life or personhood begin appear to be questions of fact susceptible of straightforward answers, we hold that the answers to such questions in fact are complex amalgams of factual and moral judgments. Instead of trying to answer these questions directly we have therefore gone straight to the question of how it is right to treat the human embryo.*

They then recommend that 'the embryo of the human species should be afforded some protection in law'. But on a majority vote, they also recommend that 'research may be carried out on any embryo resulting from *in vitro* fertilization, up to the end of the fourteenth day—but it is a criminal offence to research on an embryo after that limit. After fourteen days such research embryos must be disposed of.

A minority of the Warnock Committee published an expression of dissent. The dissenters recommended that experimentation on live embryos should not be permitted. Another minority dissented from the view that research should be permitted on 'embryos brought into existence specifically for that purpose or coming into existence as a result of other research'.

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The rest of this chapter tries to do two things: first, to offer a broad sweep over a few of the ethical issues which 'Warnock' has raised, and which Christians and others have debated; and secondly, to focus specifically on some biblical, theological perspectives relevant to the question 'what status should we accord to the human embryo?'

***Some general ethical issues raised by the Warnock Report***

It is a most interesting fact that by and large it is the medical scientists, the practitioners, who find little problem with IVF techniques, and it is the theologians who sound notes of alarm.

This may be related to the temperamental differences which lead certain people into the sciences in the first place, and others into theology. In Jungian terms, scientists tend to be 'sensory'—concerned primarily to gather information at the level of discrete facts; theologians tend to be 'intuitives'—trying to see the 'big picture' of concepts and possibilities. This is not unimportant. The theologians are trying to argue that there is more going on in IVF than simply the alleviation of infertility, praiseworthy though that concern may be. And it is that 'more' that is disturbing them. They are trying to interpret the significance of this medical advance in the context of a Christian theological understanding of the way the world is, and the sort of people and community God calls us to be.

We may or may not judge their alarm to be misplaced. But it is not simply a matter of the medical people knowing the 'practical details of the real world' and theologians being 'out of touch in their ivory towers'. That may sometimes be true. But the issue is much deeper. It is about the broader understanding of the purposes and limits of science, medicine and parenthood, and the character of interpersonal interactions. It is about these that the theologians sometimes want to pick their quarrel.

There are several areas of discussion, of which I have selected five.

*The question of parenting*

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The assumption underlying much IVF work is that couples have a right to their own biological children, that wives have a right to experience pregnancy. There are surely good reasons to endorse the positive concerns of those working in these areas to alleviate, or circumvent, infertility, and to welcome the desire to minimize pain. There is no reason to doubt that the motives of the medical teams are wholly honourable and compassionate. Yet this way of thinking about children is not necessarily Christian.

IVF brings to the fore our deepest assumptions about parenting. Why should people have children? Is it not bizarre that a culture which approves of the abortion of all unwanted children—about one-fifth of all pregnancies—can at the same time sponsor techniques to allow some women to experience pregnancy? Have we lost hold of any way of answering the question: what are we doing when we have, or do not have, children?

Traditionally, Christians have understood children as God's gift. Marriage is not an obligation—it is a vocation. And within that vocation God gives many the opportunity to have children. They are a sign of life and hope in a decaying world. They are a reminder that personal being is fostered in community and in communion. They are part of the history of God's dealings with the world. They are new human beings to be welcomed into the human community. But traditionally Christian thinking says: parents do not own their children; they have no *right* to have children. Conception is God's gift, not merely human choice. And biological parenthood is by no means a necessary part of being family.

We will need to come back to the question 'when does parenthood begin?', but we will need to keep in mind that one of the theological issues involved in the debates on the Warnock Report is the tacit assumption that conception is no longer a gift, parenthood no longer a vocation, but a right.

*The power of technological thinking*

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There is much to thank God for in the progress of science and technology. But we need to hear the warnings—from the story of the Tower of Babel onwards—against the dangers of ‘technological man’ building up power structures of his own only to find that technology has ceased to be our servant and instead has become our master. One of the problems, as Jacques Ellul, Oliver O’Donovan and others have noted, is that what marks a culture much more than what it does is what it thinks. And a technological culture begins to think of everything in terms of technical intervention and instrumental making. Such a society can easily lose the capacity to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate technical interventions. To regard ourselves as ‘technicians’, ‘interveners’, ‘constructionists’, ‘makers’ is to cast ourselves in a relationship to that which is not ourselves, in terms of what Martin Buber calls ‘I-It’. This can so easily imperil other more personal ways of being ‘I-Thou’.

The tendency of technological thinking also contributes to the view that I have a right to choose whatever technology makes possible. Medicine becomes ‘want-meeting’ as well as health promotion and disease control. In the area we are considering, as O’Donovan’s book *Begotten or Made?* indicates so clearly, there is a shift taking place in our understanding of procreation as a personal begetting, with the spontaneity and contingency that involves—and from which that which is begotten is ‘one of us’, a partner in the human family. The shift is towards seeing procreation as merely a human ‘making’—a technical procedure—as we make any artifact. What we merely ‘make’ is not ‘one of us’—it is a product not a partner and so it is subject to human will and therefore human disposability.

Under all this, the belief is fostered that technology is morally neutral and all that matters is that we use it responsibly. But the Christian surely wishes to preserve a liberty of thought and moral judgment which can stand apart from such technological thinking and judge the appropriateness or otherwise of interventions on other than

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technical criteria. Technology is *not neutral*. As O'Donovan wrote:

*Technique itself represents a cultural commitment. It embodies ways of thinking about God, the world and mankind in which certain value decisions have already been made, and certain possibilities for human action and attitude are already closed off.*

*The Warnock Report* seems uncritically to endorse the technologization of our culture—and at this point many Christians express concern.

#### *The separation of facts and values*

As Michael Polanyi and others have taught us, and as we saw in chapter 9, even in the most impersonal of the physical sciences we cannot make a total separation between fact and values. And from the perspective of a Christian doctrine of creation, we need to affirm that every fact comes to us laden with value, because it comes to us from the hands of the Creator.

The doctrine of creation implies that we cannot simply read off the true nature of an entity by concentrating our attention on empirical criteria alone. We can observe genes in an embryo, but genetics cannot tell us anything one way or the other about its moral or personal significance.

Now Warnock does not consider the issues of embryology from the perspective of a Christian doctrine of creation in which the subject matter of investigation embodies a moral claim on the investigator. Rather it presents medical facts in terms of what is empirically observable—and the moral significance of those facts is kept in a separate category of either private personal preference, or social majority decision. This illustrates another sharp divide between secular and Judaeo-Christian ethics.

#### *Ethical method*

One of the pioneers of *in vitro* fertilization, Dr Robert Edwards, was quoted on television as saying that the ethics of embryo research is very simple: 'The end justifies the

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means.’ Though *The Warnock Report* does not say it quite as starkly, and indeed does at one point seem to reject a thoroughgoing utilitarianism, its whole tendency nonetheless is towards measuring the rightness of an action only in terms of its good consequences.

Now of course a Christian ethic of allegiance to God and of love and justice towards our neighbours, is also concerned with good consequences—but a good end cannot justify any means. It is still important to ask, ‘Whatever the good consequences, is this right?’

And of course it is hard to know what all the consequences of an action will be, and even harder to know how to measure them as good.

We need an ethic that is complex enough, and personal enough, to deal with the complexity of being human, with motives and intentions as well as actions and effects. We need principles of rightness to guide us as well as good consequences to aim at. And we need a community of relationships within which to build habits of moral character.

Christian ethics may not be reduced to the simple statement: ‘The end justifies the means.’

#### *The concept of the human person*

*The Warnock Report* operates with what we may call a ‘socially defined concept of the human person’—and with a gradualist view of personal beginnings. It accords some status to the human embryo, but refuses to say that the embryo is an embryonic human person who should be protected. Personhood, the authors imply, is something that the embryo gradually grows into. Just as an acorn is not yet an oak tree, so an embryo is not as yet a person. Now, a human embryo is without doubt a ‘living human being’. It is certainly provable whether or not a foetus is living; it is certainly provable from its genes that a foetus is human; and a living human foetus is certainly a ‘being’, genetically distinct from its mother.

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However, what many—and it seems *The Warnock Report*—want to do is to say that it is possible to be ‘a living human being’ without yet having the status of a ‘person’. But once we accept that there can be living human beings which are not protectable persons then someone has to decide when that protection is appropriate.

Warnock gives protection to the embryo at fourteen days. The English Abortion Act of 1967 protects the foetus beyond twenty-eight weeks. But if protectable personhood is only socially defined, society could of course decide to define as non-protectable persons anyone that it found inconvenient: severely handicapped babies or senile old people for example. There are difficulties with a socially defined concept of the human person.

Even without a Christian base it would be hard to regard the human embryo as merely disposable tissue—its potential to develop into a full human person was regarded by the Warnock dissenting minority as important enough to say: ‘It is in our view wrong to create something with the potential for becoming a human person and then deliberately to destroy it.’ Many Christians, as the rest of this chapter indicates, wish to accord the human embryo an even more sacred status than this.

### ***Some theological perspectives on the human embryo***

Let us begin a long way back, in the Flood story of the Old Testament. The writer of Genesis 9 pictures God making a covenant with Noah and with every living creature. The author is concerned here with the disordered state of the present world, and then with how God places certain restrictions on human behaviour to give fallen post-Flood man some direction. There is a conscious echo of the creation story: ‘be fruitful and multiply,’ but the tone is different: ‘fear and dread’. It is as if the author is saying, ‘God has not abandoned his purposes for his world, but the world you now live in is abnormal and disordered. You are no longer in the Garden of Eden—you live in a tension of knowing God’s will, but that will comes to you as a law for a fallen world.’

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This is our world, too. Our lives and our decision-making share the abnormality of the fallen world. We are not in the Garden of Eden. Nor are we yet in the new heaven and new earth in which Christ's kingdom has fully come. We live and make our choices in a fallen and ambiguous context. We must beware of making morally normative whatever happens empirically to be the case.

And it should be no surprise that some of the ethical dilemmas which press upon us may require of us actions we would not take 'in the Garden'. The very existence of conflicting moral claims is a symptom of the fallen world.

Yet within this world God gives certain principles to guide our moral priorities. Let's look again at the ancient story of Noah.

Part of the author's concerns in Genesis 9 is to give certain principles to guide moral priorities. We need to note the nature of the restrictions imposed on human beings by God if they are to enjoy the divine blessing. There is first a blessing on all creation (Genesis 9:9–10) as God establishes his covenant. This indicates that all life, animal and human, is significant to God. Even animal blood may not be needlessly shed. The affirmation that animal life is significant to God is illustrated by the restriction against the tendency to bloodthirstiness implicit in the command 'You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood' (Genesis 9:4). Animal blood may only be shed within restricted bounds. 'Even when man slaughters and kills, he is to know that he is touching something which, because it is life, is in a special manner God's property; and as a sign of this he is to keep his hands off the blood' (von Rad).

But more than this; the blood of human beings is not to be shed at all. One human being may not decide to take the life of another. God's Lordship over all human life is here asserted. There is a blessing on all saved from the Flood yet there is a distinction between the restricted killing of animals, and the strong prohibition against killing fellow human beings. It is only the utterly serious occasion of murder among fallen humankind which, in the Genesis

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author's mind, can ever require one human being by divine command to take the life of another. The death penalty in this passage only belongs within an overriding respect for the inviolability of innocent human life. And that is a principle which is elaborated elsewhere throughout the Bible—a prohibition against shedding innocent human blood (compare Isaiah 59:7).

In summary, the Flood story points us to these themes:

- ☒ We cannot simply read off the full nature of the way things are or ought to be by scientific criteria alone. We need rather to place our understanding of scientific data within the context of a created order, in which facts come to us laden with value from the Creator's hands.
- ☒ There is a value on all life as such, human and animal: there are restrictions on the taking of any life.
- ☒ There is a distinction between the human species and other animals with respect to the degree of protection appropriate to them.
- ☒ There is an absolute prohibition against the shedding of innocent human blood, namely the principle that innocent human beings have an inviolable right not to be deliberately killed.

The reason for the particular respect accorded to the human species is given in Genesis 9:6—'For God made man in his own image.'

### ***The divine image***

In the light of what we have said above, the question presses, 'What counts as an innocent human being in the sense that such a being has a right not to be deliberately killed?' Let us explore this by taking further the concept of the divine image.

The first point to note is that there is a range of interpretations of the meaning of the *imago Dei* (image of God). Man's upright stature, his moral nature, his capacity to know God, his rationality, his status of dominion over the

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rest of creation, his sexuality as male and female in interpersonal communion—all have been candidates. And in a sense, all of these are aspects of the expression of the divine image. However, most of these concentrate on some capacity in human beings to do or to be certain things. By contrast, many interpreters would agree with Westermann's view:

*The image is not a question of a quality in people, but of the fact that God has created people as his counterpart and that human beings can have a history with God. The image of God is only there in the relationship of God and the individual.<sup>1</sup>*

This relational aspect to the 'image' also underlies Paul's use of the analogy of the mirror: 'We all beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being changed into his likeness' (2 Corinthians 3:18); 'The glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God' (2 Corinthians 4:4).

The true image of God is seen in Christ who, as a mirror reflects an image if in a right relationship to its object, reflects God's glory.

To be 'in the image of God', then, is not primarily a matter of our capacity to do anything. Yet that is how many of us understand 'person'. It is a matter of the relationship to himself which God confers on us. It is not our addressability; it is to be addressed as 'thou' by the divine 'I'. If we want to see God's image in its perfection we see it, St Paul tells us, in Christ. What we see in one another is a bad reflection which, however, by a process of regeneration and resurrection, can gradually be transformed. The image of God is thus both a status and a goal, a gift and a task. In their relationship to God, human beings are also 'human becomings'. We are all 'persons-on-the-way' to becoming what we were created to be.

Of course there are certain ontological features, certain capacities and abilities, which are involved in the full expression of the image of God within this world. But the

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<sup>1</sup>C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, SPCK, 1981

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point is that we are all called to engage in the process of becoming more fully and truly human. We are all called to grow and mature nearer to the image of God we see in Christ. And we are all at a certain stage in that process of change.

It is entirely consistent, therefore, to believe that there is already a faint reflection, that God has already started on his work of creating a replica, at the earliest beginnings of embryonic life. Of course, the early embryo cannot be anything like a full manifestation of the divine image, but then neither can the foetus, the newborn, nor most of us sinful adults. There is nothing inconsistent in agreeing with Richard Higginson's statement: 'Early embryos do not differ qualitatively from the rest of us; they are simply at an earlier stage of the developmental process. God has a history and a relationship with them too.' The human embryo, too, is a person-on-the-way'.

The second point arising from the doctrine of the *imago Dei* strengthens this view of the status of the human embryo. What discriminates between the relationship God has with trees and giraffes and the relationship he has with us, seems to be related to species identity. Out of the whole range of creatureliness, God said, 'Let us make man—male and female—in our image.' God says that it is the members of *this* species, and not another, that bear his image, described most fully in the mystery of the incarnation where divine word took on human flesh.

There is, therefore, a moral significance attached to being a member of the human species which is not shared by other species. Some secular philosophers dub this 'speciesism', and find it as reprehensible as sexism or racism. But the Christian is obliged to make this fundamental discrimination. We have been addressed by God—commanded as it were to come forth from the whole range of creatures to be distinct in the sense that our whole identity, what it means to be human, is bound up with our calling before God; and with the joy and responsibility of reflecting his glory. This is not something necessarily

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empirically observable; it is a status that is conferred on us, a responsibility that is required of us.

Now, if it is species membership rather than any capacity or ability inherent in individual members of the species that is the significant theological feature of our humanness; if, in other words, all living human beings, whatever their stage of development, are 'in the divine image' in the sense of being set in a relationship with God and having a history and destiny under God, then every living human being confronts us with a moral claim. In New Testament terms, every living human being is our neighbour with a claim on us for neighbour love. A human being does not become a nearer neighbour because she or he can do certain things, or because she or he has reached a higher stage of biological development, nor less of a neighbour because she or he lacks certain capacities. Every living human being comes under the protection of God's blessing to Noah, the covenant made with every living creature, and thus has a *prima facie* right not to be deliberately killed.

At this point we should take notice of the argument sometimes heard that God is not really concerned with biological life at all, but rather with our 'souls', and that it is by no means clear that the 'soul' is 'added' at fertilization. In fact there was considerable discussion in the early church about the time and manner of 'ensoulment'—some believing that an embryo receives a soul at a certain point in time; others that the beginnings of biological life are also the beginnings of the life of the soul.

Much of this sort of language fails to do justice to the Hebraic way of speaking of human beings. To the Hebrew mind, we do not 'have' souls—we 'are' souls. Likewise, we do not 'have' bodies—in a different sense, we 'are' bodies. The various aspects of our human make-up to which the Bible refers (heart, soul, body, flesh, spirit), are ways of speaking of the *whole* of us from different perspectives. Essentially, we are psychophysical unities, embodied souls and ensouled bodies. There is no living human being without a body (whether the physical body, or the 'spiritual'

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body of the resurrection to which St Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15). When we are in the presence of a living human body, we are in the presence of a living human being.

These general theological reflections can be supported by other references in the Old Testament. Psalm 139, with its indication of the continuity of personal life from the 'I' which God knit together in the womb with the 'I' of the mature poet; Job 10:8–11, with its strange reference to insemination with the words 'didst thou pour me out like milk'? Both seem to indicate that these Old Testament authors understood embryonic life to involve a personal existence.

The New Testament has stronger evidence still. The most convincing biblical indication of the importance of conception in the life of a human person, and therefore of the significance of personal life from conception onwards, is the faith—evidenced in the infancy narratives of the Gospels—of the virginal conception of Jesus. That faith was expressed in the Apostles' Creed in the words: 'He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary.'

As T. F. Torrance has argued, it is of supreme significance for our understanding the status of the human embryo that the divine Son of God has joined himself with human flesh precisely at the point of conception. The Word has become flesh, so to speak, right down to the level of our genes. In his role as mediator, Christ has taken our humanness into relationship with God in a decisively new way, and that humanness means human flesh from conception onwards.

The life story of Jesus, the True Human Being in the image of God, thus begins in the earliest stages of biological life at conception. In Jesus, man in embryo bears the image of God.

Many earlier theologians have seen in the story of the visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39ff) a greeting full of significance: Elizabeth calls Mary 'the Mother of my Lord'.

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The foetal Messiah is recognized by the six-month-old foetus in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist) who jumps with joy! These are further pointers, if any were needed, that personal life is understood by these authors to be present in the earliest stages of embryonic life.

### ***Parenthood***

We can take our cue from Elizabeth's greeting to Mary to suggest that the question 'When does human life begin?' may be helpfully transposed into the question 'When does parenthood begin?' What is the significance of parenthood under God?

The creation story implies that procreation is a divine command—'Be fruitful and multiply.' The Psalmist tells us that children are a blessing (see Psalm 127:5). Now let us put these themes alongside two other biblical paragraphs. At the opening of the Gospel of John, we read of God's creative Word, and that 'all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made'. And in Ephesians 5, the love relationship between husband and wife is to be patterned on the love relationship which that same God in Christ has with his church. Because of our view of the unity of God, we can thus see that within the Godhead love and creativity belong together, and so in the human procreative process love and creativity normatively (although, of course, not always in practice) belong together. And that union of love and creativity is a sharing in the loving creativity of God through whom all things were made.

The child conceived is thus begotten through the human relationship, though brought into being by God. As such he or she is to be welcomed as a neighbour within the human family. His or her life is a gift of God's love. Parents do not then, 'make' children as products; they share in God's creativity by begetting. As another psalmist has put it: 'It is he that has made us, and not we ourselves' (Psalm 100:3).

This view is supported by the notion that conception is a 'gift'. (See Ruth 4:13—'The Lord gave her conception.'

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Compare also Genesis 1:25; 21:1–2; 25:21; 29:31–35; 30:17–24; 33:5; Deuteronomy 7:13; Judges 13:2–7; 1 Samuel 1:1–20; Psalm 113:9; 127:3–5; 128:1–6; Isaiah 54:1; Luke 1:24.) It is supported also by the view of some biblical writers that an ‘untimely birth’ expresses something unnatural and inappropriate, and sometimes under divine displeasure (Psalm 58:8; Job 3:10–16; Ecclesiastes 6:3; compare 1 Corinthians 15:8).

To be a parent, then (we are talking normatively, not descriptively), is to have a calling under God to share in his creative love. This must count against any view which sees the conceptus merely as a product. The conceptus, rather, must be seen and welcomed as a neighbour. A ‘product’ is subject to human will and human disposal; a ‘neighbour’ exercises a moral claim. If the ‘product of conception’ is in any sense a sign of God’s loving creativity, then the claim it exercises on me is a claim not to be treated as a product, and so as a means only, but as a neighbour, and so as an end also I do not believe that to insist that the loving and procreative aspects of human sexual relationship belong normatively together rules out all contraception. But it is an altogether different question, when faced with the fact that one has become a parent, whether the rejection of that life can be compatible with the nature of God in whom love and creativity are joined and before whom parenthood has the status of a calling.

### ***Conclusion***

In brief conclusion, where does this discussion lead us in terms of the various practical issues raised by the Warnock Report?

### ***AID and egg donation***

There are complex social, financial, and legal issues which we have not discussed, and a history of considerable debate within the Christian church. But one factor of relevance to the discussion is the way AID separates in principle and in practice the procreative aspects of human sexuality from the

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context of personal relationship by the intervention of an anonymous third party.

### *In vitro fertilization*

Again, there are financial and legal considerations, together with the whole question of priorities in the allocation of medical resources. But *in vitro* fertilization as a technique to facilitate the procreative capacity of husband and wife seems morally unobjectionable. However, the technique was only developed by and is sustained and improved through the use of human embryos for research in a way which often does harm to the embryos. And this, as the above discussion indicates, gives cause for considerable caution.

### *Embryo research which damages the embryos*

The direction of our earlier theological discussion points unequivocally towards considerable caution in the use of human embryos for research, and towards a rejection of any research which causes damage to the embryos. Such research treats the human embryo as a disposable product and not a personal neighbour. Furthermore, in the light of the conclusions we came to concerning the personal status of the human embryo, such research flies in the face of traditional codes of medical ethics which since the Nuremberg Code of 1947, require that no experiment shall be conducted where there is an *a priori* reason to believe that death or disabling injury will occur.

The Declaration of Helsinki (1964, revised 1975) concurs with another statement of the Nuremberg Code that the voluntary consent of the subject is absolutely essential, and goes on to say that where the subject is a minor, or where physical or mental incapacity make voluntary consent impossible, permission from the responsible relatives may suffice. Concern for the interests of the subject must always prevail over the interests of science and society. The Warnock Report suggested that the consent of the parents should be obtained before research on their embryos be undertaken, thereby indicating that some protection in law

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be accorded to the human embryo. However that protection was, in their minds, consistent with allowing embryos to be destroyed in the course of the research.

This seems incompatible with a Christian theological understanding of the status of the human embryo. There are scientific grounds for affirming that the human embryo is a living human being. There are theological grounds for saying that human beings reflect the image of God, that innocent human beings are not to be deliberately killed, and that neighbour love towards human beings requires that they are not to be used merely as means to another end, however good. And that includes the youngest members of the species as well as the rest of us.

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## 'Every child a wanted child'

Early in 1988, David Alton MP attempted through a Private Member's Bill to persuade Parliament to change the 1967 Abortion Act. It was a one-clause measure setting a new upper-age limit which would prevent abortions in Britain on foetuses over eighteen weeks. The Bill did not succeed, though the discussion of the issues raised the public consciousness of the abortion question once more, and further attempts to change the current legislation will doubtless be made.

Why is it thought that a change is needed? To answer that we need to go back to the 1967 debates.

The Abortion Act of 1967 includes this statement:

*'A person shall not be guilty of an offence under the law relating to abortion when a pregnancy is terminated by a registered medical practitioner if two registered medical practitioners are of the opinion formed in good faith:*

*(a) that the continuance of the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or of injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing children of her family, greater than if the pregnancy were terminated; or*

*(b) that there is a substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.*

In reaching their decision the two doctors may take account of all the factors about a woman's life and health at the time or in the foreseeable future that they think are relevant.

Nothing in the Act affected the provisions of the Infant Life (Preservation) Act of 1929, which protected the life of a viable foetus. The intention was to prevent abortions after the child in the womb had reached the age at which it could

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be born alive. According to the definition of viability in the 1929 Act, this means that abortions are not permitted after twenty-eight weeks from conception at the latest.

Much of the debate of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill as it was called, which was introduced in 1966 as a Private Member's Bill by David Steel MP, concerned the horror of back-street abortions carried out by people with no medical knowledge, or by terrified mothers trying to induce their own miscarriages. Somewhere between 40,000 and 200,000 illegal abortions were carried out each year, it was claimed, and on average twenty-five to thirty women a year died as a result of medical complications following illegal abortions. Many others needed hospital treatment because of the damage they had caused to themselves. Often these women were afraid to talk to their own doctors because they were not sure of the law.

In England and Wales the law had not been changed for over a century. The 'Offences against the Person Act' of 1861 had made it illegal to administer any 'poisonous or noxious thing' or unlawfully use any 'instrument' with 'intent to procure a miscarriage'. The meaning of 'unlawful' was gradually clarified in practice through the development of case law, the most significant example of which was the case of the consultant Dr Aleck Bourne in 1938. He decided to terminate the pregnancy of a fourteen-year-old girl who had been subjected to multiple rape. In due course he was charged under the 1861 law, but was acquitted. The judge ruled that a doctor did not commit an offence under this law if he tried to preserve the life of the mother. In this case, he judged, the pregnancy had been terminated to prevent the girl from becoming a 'physical and mental wreck'. From 1938 until the Steel Bill of 1967, every therapeutic abortion was carried out in the light of the Bourne judgment. There was, however, much uncertainty about the bounds of legality, and Mr Steel wanted the law clarified.

The debate on Mr Steel's Bill took many sittings in the House of Commons between July 1966 and October 1967.

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There was also considerable discussion in the medical profession and more widely. One of the most interesting discussions took place at the Annual Representative Meeting of the British Medical Association in July 1967. A proposal was made, in the light of an earlier BMA debate in 1965, requesting 'all Members in both Houses of Parliament not to approve legislation of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Bill until all relevant facts have been collected, scrutinized and reported on by an independent tribunal, such as a Royal Commission.' One doctor said that Mr Steel's Bill had been given unprecedented support by Government in defiance of the medical profession's opposition to some of its fundamental aspects. He argued that the Bill was being pushed through Parliament without adequate independent review of the medical considerations.

Others were concerned that the Bill would in fact lead to abortion on demand (as has in fact proved to be the case), although David Steel himself said in the House of Commons, 'It is not the intention of the Promoters of this Bill to leave a wide open door for abortion on request.' One gynaecologist said that he frequently performed therapeutic abortions on medical grounds under the protection of the then existing case law. He told the meeting about a thirteen-week abortion in his unit where the foetus had not been sectioned for several hours. When it was sectioned the following morning, the heart was still beating. Was the baby to be registered or incinerated, he asked. In the near future, he continued, it would be possible to hook up that sort of baby to an artificial placenta. The decision would then have to be made whether to drown it like a kitten or preserve its life. To applause, he concluded that until that and many allied matters had been discussed by an independent tribunal consisting of lay, legal church and medical members, the law should not be ossified in its present form. Other doctors thought that David Steel's proposals were probably the best that could be achieved.

Clearly in 1967 the doctors were not of one mind. At the end of the debate the Chairman of the BMA meeting guided

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the doctors to a rejection of the proposal for an independent tribunal and in favour of supporting David Steel's Bill, commenting that it would look as though the BMA were not a responsible body if they changed their minds at that stage.

Interestingly, David Steel then used the BMA decision as further backing for his Bill. Now that the doctors have agreed, why should Parliament demur?

At the end of the day, David Steel's Bill did become the Abortion Act of 1967. Back-street abortions are very largely a thing of the past. We now, in effect, have abortion on demand, and substantially more than 100,000 abortions are performed each year in this country

Members of the National Abortion Campaign do not believe that this has gone far enough. Their campaign expresses the pain and anger of many women who perceive the present laws as restrictive and discriminatory. Under the slogans 'Our bodies, our lives, our right to decide', and 'Free abortion on demand: women must decide', they seek to fight for all women's rights to determine for themselves whether or not to continue with a pregnancy, and press for laws which will eliminate all medical and legal restrictions on women's ability to control their own fertility. They argue that for most black and immigrant women in this country, the right to control their own fertility has never been respected. They oppose pressure being put on people to accept contraceptives they do not want, they oppose the giving of contraceptives without the woman's knowledge, they object to the requirement sometimes apparently made that some women must agree to be sterilized before an abortion is performed. They believe that some women are pressurized into having abortions or being sterilized against their will. They object that only 50 per cent of abortions are performed on the NHS, the remaining 50 per cent having to use expensive private abortion clinics. They believe that the difficult choice to terminate a pregnancy can only be decided by the person most involved—the woman; and that free abortion facilities should be available throughout the NHS to every woman who needs them.

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Clearly to supporters of the NAC, abortion is a sort of long-stop contraceptive. They seem unwilling to see responsibility in sexual relationships as implying the possibility of pregnancy. And they firmly reject the view that many Christians, as well as others, hold that contraceptive choices may be very different from the choice to end pregnancy once it (and therefore parenthood) has already begun.

Other sections of the community do not share all the demands of the National Abortion Campaign, but there is widespread concern for the needs of women who find themselves pregnant against their choice. Gynaecologists write of the anguish of many who see abortion as a desperate but inevitable lesser evil choice rather than face coping with a—sometimes yet another—unwanted child. The provisions of the present law are to them a framework within which compassionate medical decisions to terminate pregnancies can be made.

But for David Alton MP and his supporters, the 1967 legislation had already gone too far. Not only was the law being interpreted much more liberally than its proposers had suggested, leading virtually to abortion on demand, but by keeping the upper-age limit at twenty-eight weeks, increasing numbers of viable foetuses are now being aborted. In 1986, 8,276 abortions were carried out in England and Wales at eighteen weeks gestation and after. Nearly 90 per cent of these were done in private clinics, many of them on foreign women who came to London especially because late abortions were illegal in their own countries. Late abortions are much more traumatic for everyone involved, particularly those using vacuum aspiration or dilatation and curettage, which suction out the child's body or pull it out of the womb in pieces by hand.

David Alton's hope had been to bring the upper-age limit down to eighteen weeks, thus reducing the number of late abortions. No doubt other attempts will be made to change the law, now that the Alton Bill has failed. But what sort of

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law should we have? What moral values are at stake? What Christian perspectives are relevant to these discussions?

The three central issues are: what sort of an entity is the human foetus? How are we to decide between conflicting moral claims? What sort of society do we want to be, and what sort of abortion law would then be appropriate?

### ***Christian perspectives***

Clearly, there is no one agreed Christian viewpoint on abortion. The debate is complex, and different Christians in conscience put different weight on different issues. The following questions, it would seem, should be addressed in any discussion of the central issues as we have just outlined them. (Our work in the previous chapter is assumed in what follows.)

#### *The status of the human foetus*

First, what is the significance of parenthood before God? As we saw in the previous chapter, there are those who believe that the product of conception' is just that: a product, subject to human will and therefore to human disposal, rather than a partner in the human family who has a claim on us for neighbour love. For the Christian the central issue in the abortion debate is the status of the human foetus and, as we saw earlier, there are strong grounds for arguing that the human foetus is a person-on-the-way, someone who should be accorded the full protection of the law. If the foetus is a human person-on-the-way, we need to recover the sense that parenthood—whether deliberately chosen or not—shares in the creativity of God. The child's life is given, to be received and cared for; it is not merely a product to be disposed of if unwanted.

Secondly, Christian morality has always held to the principle that innocent human beings have a right not to be deliberately killed. (The shedding of innocent blood is condemned in many places in the Bible, compare Isaiah 59:7; Jeremiah 22:3; Matthew 27:4). This principle is enshrined in the Just War theory in terms of the doctrine of non-combatant immunity. Human life has a sanctity which

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means that it is precious and normally to be protected. If the foetus is a person-on-the-way, then any particular abortion needs to be justified as an exception to the general rule that abortion is wrong.

Thirdly, since God shows himself again and again in the Bible to be 'on the side of the poor', the voiceless, the innocent, there is a strong presumption in favour of protecting that most voiceless, innocent and vulnerable of human beings, the human foetus.

### *Conflicting moral claims*

In this debate we also need to recognize that there are often conflicts of principle in this fallen world. To elaborate this we need to pause to look at two other issues which are relevant to the abortion debate: 'rights' and 'justice'.

#### ☒ **Human rights**

Much of the discussion in the media centres on the question of rights. Opponents of abortion claim that the foetus has a right to life. Those in favour of abortion usually speak of a woman's 'right to choose'. But what are human rights? The word 'right' implies that something is due to people, something which ought properly to be theirs. If we have a right to something, it is morally wrong for someone else to take it

Since the days of classical Greek culture, people have claimed fundamental rights of life and liberty. Now people also speak of rights to happiness, property, social benefits and so on. Where do our rights come from? Many would argue that society grants people their rights. But Christian belief grounds all discussion of rights on the fact that persons should be treated properly just because they are made in the image of God.

#### ☒ **Justice**

Justice is, in part, about making sure that people actually get the rights that are their due. Justice has to do with so ordering human society that individuals and groups respect and protect each others' fundamental rights, in other words,

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respect and protect the fact that others are human persons. One of the ways in which we can show neighbour love to other persons is to seek justice for them.

The search for justice is difficult, however, when certain rights conflict. Sometimes one person has to give up his or her rights, or have them taken away, when they interfere with another person's rights. A murderer, for example, is required to go without his freedom so that others may enjoy theirs in safety.

Justice also requires that some people be treated unequally in order that their rights are equally respected. A severely handicapped person, for example, may need more money spent on them than someone not so handicapped.

Part of the difficulty of the discussions about abortion is that there is often a conflict between what different people see as their or other people's rights. Justice is concerned, some would argue, to protect the right of the foetus for life, especially so because it is a powerless and defenceless person. Justice, it is also argued, is concerned with the rights of the mother for life, health, well-being, sufficient support to enable her to look after other children she may have, and so on. Justice is relevant to the view we take about the rights and responsibilities of the father, of the doctors who share the decision, of the medical team of nurses and doctors who perform abortions, and their consciences. Justice comes into the question of whether, if the present law were now reversed, there would be a return to back-street abortions again. Justice is concerned with allocating limited healthcare resources, and asking questions about the relative costs of performing an abortion compared with those of looking after a mother with an unwanted pregnancy or a severely handicapped child. Does Christian faith give us any help in setting this conflict of rights, or conflict of values, in any priority?

### ☒ **Priorities**

The assumption of the pentateuchal laws in the Old Testament is always that personal values takes precedence

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over matters to do with property. One law which seems to place the foetus more in the category of 'property' than 'person' is the law in Exodus 21:22–25. This is part of the code of laws regulating the life of the desert community relating to bodily injuries. Some people read this to say: if there is a brawl and a pregnant woman finds that as a result she has a miscarriage but is otherwise not harmed, then a fine shall be paid, but if she is hurt, then a more severe punishment is needed. It looks from this as though the life of the mother is more valuable than the life of the foetus.

Even if this were the case, it is hard to see the direct relevance to questions of abortion, since the Exodus law refers to accidental injuries, whereas abortion is intended. However, as Cassuto and some other commentators indicate, there are reasons for reading the text another way. If the woman is hurt and so gives birth prematurely, but neither the woman or the child/children die, then a fine is appropriate. But if death follows (that is, if either the mother or the child or children die), then you shall give life for life.

From such a reading, it is argued that foetal life is accorded as much significance as the mother's.

Some Christians would then want to argue that an 'equal protection policy' is the only appropriate course: actions should be taken to protect equally the life of the mother and the life of the foetus wherever possible.

### ☒ **Life versus life**

We need here to make use of an ethical principle called 'double effect'. Christian ethicists and moral philosophers have argued that when an action can achieve a good result only at the risk of causing unintended but unavoidable harm, that action may still be regarded as permissible. If a pregnancy is 'ectopic', for example (the foetus growing in the fallopian tube rather than the womb), a doctor may terminate the pregnancy in order to save the life of the mother with the unintended but unavoidable effect of destroying the foetus.

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Others would argue that because the mother is already in a network of developed relationships with her husband and others in her family, her life should be weighed as more significant than that of an unborn foetus if a decision has to be made between the two.

Such choices of life versus life are relatively rare.

☒ **Life versus some other value**

By far the more usual are choices of the life of the foetus versus the health or well-being, or wishes, or even convenience of the mother. Different people draw lines in different places.

The philosopher Judith Thomson invented a story to argue the case that even if the foetus is regarded as a person with the rights to full protection in law alongside all other persons, that does not mean that abortion is always wrong.

Imagine that you wake up one morning in a hospital bed. You have been connected up to an unconscious man in the next bed. He, you are told, is a famous violinist with a kidney disease, and the only way he can survive is for his circulatory system to be connected to that of someone with the same blood type—and only yours will do. So a society of music lovers kidnapped you and had you connected up to this man in this way. You could, if you choose, ask to be disconnected, and then the violinist would certainly die. On the other hand, if you remain connected up for nine months, he will have recovered and you can then be disconnected for he will be able to live on his own.

Judith Thomson argues that you have no obligation at all to stay connected up. You didn't choose the arrangement. Your body is your business and if you do not wish to share it with someone else you do not have to. You could, of course, be very generous and stay connected up for nine months, but that would be going much further than anyone could require of you. You would not be wrong to refuse.

It is the same, argues Thomson, with an unexpected pregnancy. Of course a mother can choose to keep her

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baby, but she is not morally obliged to. She is being extra generous if she does.

Thomson's conclusion does not depend on denying that the violinist is an innocent human being with a right to life. It is just that his right to life does not, Thomson says, entail a right to use someone else's body.

What are we to make of this?

Clearly, there is some parallel with pregnancy after rape. In such cases, the pregnancy follows an unchosen, unwanted and unexpected attack on the woman's body, emotions, integrity and liberty. A pregnancy, it could be argued, would only add a second forced experience to the first. Indeed, it might well be thought that the growing foetus could in some sense be thought of as a continuation of the rapist's attack, and a termination could then be seen as part of the woman's right of self-defence.

But is there the same parallel with any other pregnancy? Judith Thomson's story seems to assume that pregnancy can be compared with illness on the one hand, and with being kidnapped on the other, both of which might seem possibly appropriate in the case of rape, but not otherwise. She also seems to assume that there is no connection between pregnancy and the sexual intercourse that led to it. It assumes a total separation between sexual relationships and procreation, which the Christian tradition has always, as we have seen, held together. Furthermore, on what grounds can we argue that pregnancy is being exceptionally generous?

Instead of waking up attached to a violinist, suppose you wake up to find a newborn baby on your doorstep? Do you have any obligation to care for this unexpected arrival? To answer yes is surely not to be particularly generous, but is simply part of the natural care which each normal human being is obliged to show to another in need. Suppose, now, it is your baby on the doorstep—is not your obligation towards it even stronger?

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The question which Judith Thomson's story raises is this: do not the pregnant mother—and indeed the father—have some obligation towards the foetus in the womb, which exists as a result of their action? Christian understanding of parenthood would certainly say yes.

This is not to say that all abortions in situations where the mother's life is not threatened are always wrong. It is, though, to say that very serious reasons would be needed to decide that in a particular case an exception was justifiable to the general rule that abortion is wrong. Situations of rape might well be considered such cases, although in practice of course medical care after rape usually ensures that no pregnancy can proceed, and there is no knowledge whether a person has become pregnant or not.

Situations of very severe abnormality in a growing foetus might also be thought of as exceptional, in that many such foetuses would most likely have miscarried in any case in the days when medical care was less sophisticated.

There may well be some extreme situations in which pregnancy can seriously damage a mother's well-being or the welfare of her existing family such that a termination might be thought of as a lesser evil choice. However, four comments need to be made about this. First, many abortions are carried out for 'psychological' reasons which are very far from severe and really border on 'convenience'. Secondly, there are other ways of easing psychological stress in some pregnancies than termination, and the church needs constantly to explore ways of contributing to such support. Thirdly, some psychological needs are created by terminations: post-abortive trauma can sometimes be very severe. Fourthly, using the doctrine of double effect, we need to distinguish between 'terminating the pregnancy' and 'killing a foetus'. (There may be occasions on which the life of a premature foetus could be preserved, even though the pregnancy is terminated.)

*What sort of society should we be?*

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The question is raised in this form to focus on the basic assumptions underlying our present abortion practice. It seems clear that most people do not regard the human foetus as a human person with the same rights of protection in law as any other person. We have argued against that view on the Christian grounds that a foetus is a human person on the way towards the full image of God.

It is also clear that many people believe that the overriding claim in the difficult decisions surrounding abortion is the woman's right to choose what happens to her own body. We have argued that this acknowledged right needs to be evaluated in a context of competing moral claims, and that more often than not the right of the foetus to life should override a woman's right to choose.

We need in this last section to suggest the implications for the sort of society we have become which are present in these two basic assumptions. Are we the sort of society in which life is valued, in which persons are protected whatever their age, capacity or usefulness, and in which the voiceless, innocent and vulnerable are especially cared for? Or are we the sort of society which prefers to see the foetus as a disposable product rather than a protectable person, in which hidden life (in the womb) is regarded as relatively unimportant, and in which a stand on rights is seen as more important than the sanctity of embryonic life? The tenor of our previous discussion indicates that many in our society incline to the second, whereas our Christian perspectives direct us to the first. It is not only Christians, of course, who are opposed to abortion of convenience, or abortion on demand. In an anonymous pamphlet produced during the debates before the Abortion Act of 1967, called *To Be or Not To Be*, the writer said:

*You don't need to believe in God to believe in the sanctity of human life ... If the Abortion Bill goes through, Herod will laugh in Hell. There will be perpetrated in our name a Massacre of the Innocents more dreadful in its scope than any Herod could have imagined.*

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This writer understood the way in which what was once universally condemned could so easily be accepted by society more clearly than many proponents of the legislation. Many Christians have come to agree with him.

The church, however, needs to do more than protest against too easy abortion. We need to take seriously the moral and sexual climate in which sexual relationships and the possibility of parenthood are too easily split apart. We need to take seriously the shock and trauma which an unexpected pregnancy can cause, and the psychological, relational and financial difficulties which may be provoked. And we need to find ways of providing material and social support to women with unwanted pregnancies, like the counselling, housing and adoption advice which some pro-life agencies sensitively offer. It does not serve the gospel of grace if the church's only word to those who are suffering the pain of an unexpected pregnancy is to condemn abortion. Compassion needs to be seen alongside banners, love alongside lobbies, and realistic material support and understanding instead of empty rhetoric.

Furthermore, the Christian church needs to find avenues of spiritual ministry towards those who need to receive the gospel of forgiveness, sometimes a structure for appropriate mourning for the child that never was, and often the grace to build creatively for the future, following what for many can only be called the tragedy of abortion.

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## **Thou most kind and gentle death?**

Euthanasia is often in the headlines. Some years ago EXIT, a society which later reverted to its original name 'The Voluntary Euthanasia Society', decided to compile a booklet giving members advice on how to kill themselves. Its reported membership rapidly rose from 2,000 to about 9,000 members. Although the booklet was withdrawn, the response did indicate that there are a number of people in whom the deep natural instinct for survival which characterizes all living beings is less strong than the desire to avoid a painful death—or perhaps, for some, less strong than the refusal to go on living a stressful life.

Some people want the know-how if ever they decide that life is no longer worth living. Our television screens are often filled with discussion programmes on euthanasia, perhaps illustrated by the practice in Holland, although it is illegal, where some doctors are quite open about their willingness in some circumstances to terminate the life of a patient who asks for this to be done. Clearly the questions about suicide and voluntary euthanasia have much in common. This chapter is mostly concerned with what is often called 'active voluntary euthanasia' and those who are seeking for it to be made legal in Britain.

First, however, we need to be clear about our terms. 'Euthanasia' technically means 'dying well'. The word is now most usually restricted to what is effectively 'medically assisted suicide'. We will define it (using a definition suggested at a consultation organized by the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity in 1988) as 'the deliberate bringing about of the death of a human being as part of the medical care being given him or her'.

The Voluntary Euthanasia Society wants it to become legal for someone specially qualified (such as a doctor) to end the life of a seriously ill patient who requests it.

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We need to make some careful distinctions which are not always made by The Voluntary Euthanasia Society. It is important to distinguish euthanasia as defined above from other aspects of medical care. Euthanasia does not include the administration of drugs whose purpose is to control symptoms and relieve distress, but which may incidentally shorten life. Nor does it include the withdrawal of life-support treatment from a patient when there is no prospect of recovery. It does not include the decision to withhold medical intervention whose only effect would be to prolong the processes of dying. These are questions we will look at in more detail below.

We must also underline two other aspects of our definition. It speaks of 'the deliberate bringing about of death' and so includes both action and intention. Some people distinguish between 'active' euthanasia and so-called 'passive' euthanasia in which no action is taken and a patient is allowed to die. As we shall see more fully in the next chapter, there are some situations of 'inaction' which are morally equivalent to 'actions', and so the distinction between 'active' and 'passive' euthanasia is not as helpful as it might seem. Our definition includes any action or inaction which has the deliberate intention of bringing about death. We have also defined euthanasia in terms of 'medical care'. As we shall see, the law recognizes the category of 'assisted suicide', which is a criminal offence. We understand euthanasia to be a form of medically assisted suicide—and the question must then be addressed about the appropriateness of including this within the criminal law. The point of the reference to medical care within the definition is to distinguish euthanasia from any other form of assisted suicide, for example by a spouse.

There are a number of strands to this issue which we shall try to unravel. 'Euthanasia' has become an umbrella for a range of issues some which a Christian can readily endorse others which seem incompatible with Christian values.

### ***The legal context***

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We will begin by setting out the legal context of our discussion. At present in Britain, euthanasia is murder. However, there is no statutory definition: murder is understood in common law as 'unlawful killing with malice aforethought'. Even with the request of the patient, a deliberate bringing about of another's death is illegal: the consent of the victim is no defence. There is a statutory law concerning suicide. The Suicide Act, which decriminalized suicide in 1961 also requires that those who 'aid and abet' a suicide are liable to imprisonment for up to a maximum of fourteen years. The application of these laws to the practice of euthanasia is relatively untested—there is no decided case law, and in the few cases which have been brought to court there has been acquittal, so there has been no appeal court judgment. There is thus no reliable legal precedent for dealing with 'medically assisted suicide', or euthanasia.

There have been a number of attempts to bring legislation before Parliament to legalize voluntary euthanasia. In 1936, a bill assumed a situation in which a patient's pain in terminal illness could no longer be controlled, and sought to allow doctors to terminate life in such circumstances. In 1969 Lord Raglan introduced another bill which proposed that a patient could sign in advance a declaration asking for his life to be terminated if he was believed to be suffering from 'a serious physical illness or impairment reasonably thought in the patient's case to be incurable and expected to cause him severe distress and render him incapable of rational existence'. In 1976, the Incurable Patients' Bill sought to establish the right of a patient to be delivered from incurable suffering, to remove the stigma of suicide should such a patient decide to end his life, and to recognize a person's written wish not to have life-sustaining treatment should he suffer from irreversible brain damage. Commenting on this, the physician Robert Twycross, who has worked for many years with terminally ill patients in hospice care, has written:

*The bill, which was defeated by 85 votes to 23, appeared to be based on two misconceptions, firstly that terminal*

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*pain cannot be relieved, and secondly that doctors must preserve life 'at all costs'. That such misconceptions are sufficiently widespread to form the basis of suggested legislation is disturbing, and underlines the need for continuing education in the area, not only of the general public but also of the medical and nursing professions.<sup>1</sup>*

We must now try to unravel some of the strands which easily get tangled together in discussions of euthanasia. We will do so by discussing the following propositions.

***Dying should not be prolonged artificially***

I once visited a hospital patient who was linked up to tubes and electrodes and was expected to live only a very short time. At one point visitors were asked to leave while the nurse quickly administered some treatment. She said afterwards, 'I nearly lost her then.' We wondered why the patient was not simply allowed to die peacefully; in fact she lived one more day.

Each step forward in medical technology may bring with it new possibilities for prolonging life. But sometimes, as in this case, technology can be used to prolong what is in fact the terminal stage of the patient's last illness, and in so doing may hinder rather than help them in their dying. Some of the advocates of euthanasia are right, in my view, in their opposition to this 'artificial prolonging of dying'. We distinguished euthanasia from both withdrawing and withholding inappropriate medical treatment which would only serve to prolong the processes of dying. And it is very misleading and confusing for The Voluntary Euthanasia Society to call such withholding of life-sustaining treatment in such cases 'euthanasia'. All doctors know that beyond a certain point further treatment in some illnesses can no longer be curative. Medical responsibility then shifts from sustaining life and making it as comfortable as possible, to allowing a person to die, and making their dying as comfortable as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Twycross, *Dictionary of Medical Ethics*, Darton Longman and Todd, 1981, page 166

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There is no Christian justification for a doctor to sustain life for as long as possible at whatever cost. His or her responsibility is to relieve suffering, which is not always the same thing. For the Christian, death is not simply 'the last enemy' the strongest and most inescapable pointer to the abnormality of a fallen world. It has, through Christ's death and resurrection, become transformed into the gateway to glory: a welcome home', the ending of earthly life and the start of a new life with a body fitted for closer communion with God.

The Christian faith takes the sting out of death; there need be no fear of the grave for those who know the Christ of the empty tomb. The process of dying is highly significant in a person's relationship with God. It is therefore vital to protect both the Christian understanding that death is bestowed by God, and the Christian understanding of life before and after death, against a solely technological view which could abuse them both.

As we said earlier, it is misleading to describe the withholding of life-sustaining treatment in some cases of terminal illness as 'euthanasia'. Decisions to stop curative treatment when appropriate have always been part of responsible medical care. Some people say that there is no difference between omitting to give treatment when death is the likely result of such omission, and acting to cause death. And, of course, if you only measure the results, there may seem little difference. But Christian morality is concerned with intentions as well as with consequences. Although sometimes treatment could be withheld with the intention of causing death (which would be equivalent to active euthanasia), there are many times when treatment could be withheld for other reasons and without intending to cause death (though knowing that death would be likely)—and that is a very different thing.

Some of these 'other reasons' may include the burdensomeness of the treatment itself, and unwelcome side-effects which are likely to be more harmful than helpful. They may also take account of the patient's own

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wishes (in the context of his or her obligations to family and others) about acceptance or refusal of such treatment. It also seems important, in some cases at least, to make some distinction between 'ordinary' sorts of treatment (such as well-tried medication which offers reasonable hope of benefit) which it would be right to give, and 'extraordinary' measures (which could not be used without excessive hardship, pain or expense, or which did not offer reasonable hope of benefit), which it may be right not to use. But such decisions can be made without 'intending death'.

The decision whether or not to withhold or withdraw treatment must be made on the basis of medical indications about the patient's condition and of the character of the treatment itself, rather than on the basis of the person's 'usefulness' to society, or to his (or anyone else's) judgment about the 'worthwhileness' of his 'quality of life'.

### ***Pain can be relieved***

Many people support the campaign for voluntary euthanasia because they believe that the suffering and physical pain some people face as they approach death demands, in the name of compassion, the use of pain-relieving drugs, even if their side-effect is to shorten the patient's life.

I agree with this belief, but again think that it is misleading to regard this as 'euthanasia'. Every doctor knows whether he is controlling pain or intending to give a fatal dose.

I once knew someone who was suffering from inoperable cancer and who, without drugs, would have been in great pain. As his condition deteriorated, his heavy dose of analgesics had to be increased. These drugs may well have shortened his life—who is to tell? But he died in peace, and without his wife having to carry the extra burden of seeing him in acute pain. This was surely right. In this case, the intention to control pain in a terminally ill patient by using analgesics may only be achieved at the risk of shortening the patient's life.

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While a Christian knows that life often includes suffering, indeed, that some Christians have been called even to suffer martyrdom in great pain for the sake of Christ, he never welcomes suffering for its own sake. Jesus, when faced with suffering in others, expressed that mixture of indignation and loving action captured by the word 'compassion', and sought to heal sickness and to relieve distress.

For many of us there is a real fear of long-drawn-out and painful illness, and a Christian will therefore want to join with all those who seek to remove this fear. In fact, knowledge is available to ensure that no one need die in pain. The medical chapter in the Anglican Report On Dying Well (1975) makes this point clearly. The special hospices for the dying demonstrate love active in terminal care. They are equipped to deal with most sorts of pain. Pain-relieving drugs *are* available.

Sadly, however, there is still far too wide a gap between that knowledge and its practical availability to all who need help. Sometimes general practitioners do not have available to them all the knowledge that over the past few years has been developed within the hospice movement. There is an educational task to be undertaken within the health service itself. And the question of allocation of health care resources is itself a matter of much debate. The demand for euthanasia often arises because of this gap.

But there is an alternative to actively terminating painful life, and that is an increase in the provision of such medical care, drugs and hospices. And, indeed, in the further development of terminal care within the local communities, enabling people (as most wish) to die without fear and without great pain at home. We need to ensure that the terminally ill may benefit from the knowledge that is available for the relief of pain.

Of course this is expensive. The care of the elderly is all too often towards the top of the list for economic cut-backs. But this is a question of national priorities and human values. It is a question of changing public and, to some extent, medical opinion. Of course there are difficult decisions in

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the allocation of health care resources, but Christians cannot agree with those who wish to make life and death decisions a matter merely of cost benefit. The care of the elderly and especially those in the terminal stages of their last illness should have considerably higher priority in our national budget than they do. Higher, many would argue, than the funding of ever more sophisticated weapons of mass-destruction.

It is, of course, not only pain which motivates some people to wish to end their lives. In many ways, with the rapid growth of the hospice movement, the battle against a painful death has—at least in principle—been largely won. But there are others who suffer from prolonged non-terminal illnesses in which there is slow but progressive deterioration, some who suffer from dementia, increasing numbers who face an uncertain struggle towards death because of Aids, and so on. Where there is no Christian hope, it is not difficult to understand the fear and sense of worthlessness which such patients may experience—and Christian faith is by no means a guarantee against many of the stressful and depressive feelings which often accompany long-term illness. Neither the Christian church nor society at large has got very far in providing appropriate structures of support for such patients or their relatives. We need the development of the social equivalent of the hospice movement to provide support structures for patients in these sorts of need.

Having tried to disentangle two of the threads of the discussion, we must now evaluate the Christian tradition which is opposed to euthanasia in the way we have defined it. Quite apart from medical considerations (and the growth of the hospice movement is a massive medical argument against much of the case of The Voluntary Euthanasia Society) we need to explore theological, social and spiritual issues.

***Why choosing death is not a Christian option***

*Theological perspectives*

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The crucial question for the supporters of voluntary euthanasia, however, is the claimed 'right' of a person to choose death. Our present laws are flexible enough in their application to cover what we have earlier said concerning withholding treatment and the relief of pain, and what may seem to be borderline cases under these headings. But the Voluntary Euthanasia Society's remedy for the person in severe distress, or who has lost the desire to live, may not be the provision of better medical or nursing care to enable them to live while dying. It may rather be 'kill them painlessly if they ask you to'—and that, of course, comes under the present law of murder.

The reason why it is very misleading to use the term 'euthanasia' for the withholding of life-sustaining treatment or of the use of pain-relieving drugs which may also shorten life, is that these are both life choices. They seek to enable a person to live as fully as possible even while dying. But euthanasia is to choose death as an end, and that is a very different thing.

A Christian's attitude is determined by his or her understanding of life as God's *gift*—to be received as a gift (Psalm 139:13ff). Human beings are 'made in the image of God' (Genesis 1:27), capable of fellowship with God, and this confers on human life a sacredness which means that it can never be right to choose death as an end. This is the faith which underlies the biblical prohibitions of murder (Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21) and of other actions which result in the loss of innocent life (Genesis 9:6; Matthew 27:4). It underlies the careful distinctions in the Mosaic law between deliberate and accidental homicide (Exodus 21:12–13) and the concern with preventing accidental death.

But more than a gift, life is a *trust*. We are not the owners of our lives: they are on trust from the Lord, and we are the stewards of his gifts (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 116:12ff). To choose death, therefore, is a denial that the Lord is trustworthy in trusting us with life, and it is to side with the 'last enemy' rather than with the Lord of life. To choose

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death as an end, whether in rational or irrational suicide, or in euthanasia, is not an option for Christian morality.

There are three caveats to be made, however. There are, of course, some rare situations of extreme suffering, such as the soldier in the burning gun turret who cannot be rescued, and whose agonizing death is unavoidable, for whom it may be judged that a merciful bullet is a gesture of care. There are those whose distress—say, in prolonged illness—leads them to the view that they simply cannot tolerate more, whose request for death is not so much rebellion against God as resignation in the struggle to go on living. And there is the suicidally depressed person whose decision to end her own life is a despairing response to one of the worst mental pains a human being can face. None of these examples, however, could justify a change in the law. The wartime situation is one of the hard cases, to be judged on its own merits, which could not helpfully be translated into routine medical practice. And the distress and despair of the other cases *can* be met by appropriate care and support.

This is not to blame a suicidally depressed person who, in the darkness of the pit, attempts or succeeds at killing herself. Such an act may be seen in some cases as a despairing cry for help and acceptance, in others as a desperate escape from a situation which, from the depressed person's point of view, has no other way out. But rational as the suicidal action may be from their framework of thought, it must be judged a wrong act, an omnipotent grasping at a freedom which is not given to us, and which cries out not for assistance in doing the deed, but for understanding, care medication, therapy, spiritual healing, or whatever will help lift the depression and make available to the person again the freedom to choose life.

But, it may be replied, did not Jesus 'choose death' when he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem? Did not Captain Oates 'choose death' when he walked from Scott's tent into the Antarctic blizzard. Yes, in a sense they did, but not as an end. They chose to act in the way they did—knowing that it involved death, and accepting their death as

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a means when there was no alternative—to an end which was deemed of more value than their own life: in Jesus' case the glory of God and the salvation of the world; in Oates' the safety of his fellow human beings. 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (John 15:13). The distinction here is between intention and foresight. Jesus and Oates foresaw their deaths: death was not their choice.

However, some terminally ill people, some deeply depressed, do believe that their choice of death is for the good of others. 'They will be better off without me; I am such a burden to them.' There may be many reasons behind such statements. They are most often the words of someone in whom the sense of the worthwhileness of living has drained away, leaving misjudged feelings of low self-worth. But they may reflect a real fear—increased by the way our society has all too often forgotten what personal care for others means—that those who should be offering care will not do so.

But even for such people there is an alternative to choosing death, and this includes not only what we have said about therapeutic help for the depressed, but also the provision of a context of supportive love. This, too, is expensive, not only financially, but also emotionally and socially. But it is part of our Christian duty and calling to work for such a supportive community if we are to give backing to our view that choosing death is not a choice open to us.

### *Social questions*

#### ☒ **Won't one person's 'right' to die infringe the liberties of others?**

What of the supposed 'autonomy' which individual supporters of euthanasia rely on? What of the claimed 'right' to choose death? It is sometimes said that since suicide is no longer a crime, there is a liberty in law to commit suicide. But even if this were the case, a liberty is very different from a 'right'—for the language of rights is closely associated with the language of duties and obligations. If someone claims it

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as a 'right' to choose death, this would place an 'obligation' on others, if not actively to assist you, at least to ensure that no obstacle is put in your way in your exercising of your 'right'. And if you have a 'right' to die, and cannot manage on your own, does this mean that someone has a 'duty' to kill you? As the law stands at present, this is certainly not the case. Assisted suicide (of which active voluntary euthanasia is one aspect) is a crime. And if ever assisted suicide became legally permissible, let alone obligatory, this would give public sanction to a private individual to act against another's life in a way which would inevitably promote injustice.

To live in a society is to accept certain limits to autonomy, and to accept the need in shared justice for some legal constraints on individual freedoms. Nowhere is this more clearly needed than in questions of euthanasia. For once active voluntary euthanasia is regulated by law, as it would have to be to protect those who do not wish to be killed in this way from becoming unwilling victims, the government would be involved in killing to the extent that institutions and personnel ultimately under their direction would be used for this purpose. Such government involvement would unjustly infringe the liberty of those who do not consent to euthanasia and would not wish to be party in any way to carrying it out.

Most supporters of active voluntary euthanasia believe that a doctor should be the specially authorized person for this purpose. This assumes that a sufficient proportion of doctors would be willing to cooperate, which is by no means clear. Doubtless a conscience clause would be included to protect those doctors who would not be party to active euthanasia, but if the working of the conscience clause in the 1967 Abortion Act is any indicator (effectively providing a barrier to promotion for many doctors who have conscientious objections to abortion), there would still be problems.

Is it possible to draw up legislation for euthanasia which does not infringe the liberty both of those who need

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protection against being killed contrary to their will, and of those who are unwilling to be involved in the killing? Several bills have been presented to Parliament over the last few decades, all of which have foundered on this practical question. But there are other practical difficulties which are no less important than the legal ones.

☒ **What does euthanasia do to the doctor-patient relationship?**

For the vast majority of patients, the nurse's presence at the bedside, the drug-trolley and the syringe all symbolize care and life support. What would legalized voluntary euthanasia do to these symbols—and to the whole doctor-patient relationship? Professor Gordon Dunstan observes:

*Once legislation has created the possibility that these were instruments of death, confidence would have gone: rationality alone would not protect us from groundless fear. There are exceptions, calm, steady men. But life cannot be organized on the supposition that every man is a Socrates. We need, as we now have, a complex of expectations, conventions, rituals, sanctions professional and legal, to maintain our interest in a basic social confidence that life is precious and is normally to be protected. We are not without the instinct with which birds and animals defend life; but those instincts are weakened in us. We support them in these other, rational, typically human ways. They protect, not simply the lives of men, but also the humanity of man. This is why we should not ask our doctors to put us or our kind to death.<sup>2</sup>*

There is another aspect to the effect euthanasia would have on patients, particularly those who are struggling through a time of illness, determined as far as possible to live, even while dying, the life that is given on trust from God. If it is ever let known to them that some other sufferers from the same disease have, so to speak, 'qualified for euthanasia', this would deprive them of what to the Christian is one of life's richest healing resources—hope.

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Dunstan, *The Artifice of Ethics*, SCM Press, 1974, page 92

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☒ **What does euthanasia do to the carers?**

It is not easy to answer this question from experience in this country, though the difficulty some in the nursing and medical professions have experienced in carrying out abortions may give some indication that the administration of euthanasia will have its own burdens. The experience of a doctor in Holland is worth quoting, however.

Dr Herbert Cohen works in Rotterdam. *The Sunday Times Magazine* June 1987 included these paragraphs:

*Dr Cohen uses barbiturates, but, as he tells his students, 'always have some curare in the hip pocket'. The point is that barbiturates can produce an excessively prolonged death, or can lead to vomiting. A large, dose of barbiturates injected intravenously will produce unconsciousness within 10 seconds and death some hours later. Curare will produce certain death within 15 minutes. Insulin, a method occasionally used, he does not favour as it can take up to two days and may lead to cramps. His average time of death from initial administration is around six to eight hours. He will always stay until the patient is deeply unconscious and thereafter will keep in hourly touch with the home.*

*Like hospital doctors he is obliged to seek a second opinion before complying with a euthanasia request. But he adds that another doctor has an equally important role to play.*

*'You should never drive yourself to and from such an appointment—always make sure there is someone else, perhaps the other doctor to drive you. It is too emotional, that chances are you will crash. You are upset about losing the patient and you are constantly worried about whether you have gone through all the right procedures.'*

☒ **What does it do to the patient's other relationships?**

If voluntary euthanasia were to be legalized, a patient's other relationships, especially those with his closest relatives would be affected as well. As Lady Summerskill is reported to have said: 'Undoubtedly there would be somebody to remind the invalid of his newly acquired

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powers over his own disposal.’ This would add, for some at least, a burden of guilt at still being alive to the host of other feelings to be coped with at the end of life. ‘Every granny a wanted granny’ might become the unspoken motivation behind some requests for euthanasia.

☒ **How voluntary is ‘voluntary’?**

There is increasing speculation about the provision of what is sometimes called a ‘living will’: a declaration signed in advance by a healthy patient, requesting euthanasia if his or her medical condition became intolerable

But let us suppose that a person in his right mind signed a declaration against the wishes of his relatives requesting euthanasia if at a certain subsequent time he was believed to be suffering from a serious physical illness which was thought to be incurable and likely to cause him severe distress or render him incapable of rational existence. The difficulty arises in determining when, and by whose crucial decision, that ‘certain time’ has come. After the onset of such an illness, the patient may become very variable in mood; his wishes may change.

Let us suppose that in an ‘up’ phase, or under pressure from his family, he says that he has changed his mind. Is the doctor, or whoever is authorized to carry out euthanasia, still expected to act in line with the signed declaration, or to regard it as revoked? And if in a later irrational ‘low’ mood the patient tells the doctor that he wishes to reinstate the declaration, what then? Must the crucial decision be left to the discretion of the doctor? Whose is the choice? Whose are the ‘rights’? And to what extent is such euthanasia ‘voluntary’?

*Spiritual concerns*

Euthanasia is neither the only nor the best way to relieve or to care for the dying. Attempts to legalize it seem bound to open the door to injustice, and to place on doctors responsibilities for life choices which are not theirs. For the Christian, it is seen as the abandonment of trust in the Lord of life, and as a cheap way for society to evade its

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responsibilities of care for people made in God's image. The fact that people still matter as people even—perhaps especially—at the end of the earthly stage of life, is a fact we must never let go.

But the spiritual dimensions to the choice of euthanasia probe deeper still. At one level a request for euthanasia is a rejection of created reality. We are made physical beings. Our physicality is part of our humanity under God. Our physical nature decays and dies, and suffering is sometimes part of that process. We have seen that the Christian faith does not seek to exalt suffering for its own sake, and that it is a Christian duty to confront pain and ease distress. But that is not to say that personal happiness or well-being is the highest human good. There can be a depth of experience of God and his grace through the struggles and pains of living and dying, and this needs to be acknowledged and affirmed, and not—as in requests for euthanasia—simply denied.

At another level, a person's experience of the process of dying or preparing for death, of the commitment of their life and their spirit into the hands of God, can be of great significance in his or her life.

To seek to eliminate such experience by too high a dose of medication which only serves to render the patient less than fully conscious, or by terminating his life by human choice, is to move in the direction of denying an important part of our humanness. The Christian assumptions of the sanctity of human life still rightly underpin many of our social values including the practice of medicine. The legalization of euthanasia would not only contradict those assumptions, but would move society further away from respect for human dignity.

In the light of all the above we do not believe that the deliberate bringing about of the death of a human being as part of the medical care that is given him or her should be legalized in this country. There seems to be no way in which such legislation could guard against further injustices in society. The hospice movement shines as one glorious

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alternative to some requests for euthanasia. The need is for the church and society to work creatively to provide equivalent support and care for others suffering from long-term illness, dementia, Aids, and so on. There is also a need to inform both the general public, and some parts of the medical profession, that alternatives are available to enable people not to need to consider death by choice.

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<sup>8</sup>Atkinson, D. J. 1994. *Pastoral ethics* (196). Lynx Communications: London



## Causing death and allowing to die

The question of euthanasia comes to its sharpest focus in the agonizing decisions presented to some doctors by the birth of severely handicapped children.

A baby girl with Downs Syndrome was born in 1981 with a stomach obstruction. To survive, the baby needed an operation. However, the parents believed that it would be best for the child to be allowed to die. One of the doctors agreed, but others did not and brought a court action. The case eventually went to the appeal court, which decided that an operation should be carried out to clear the child's stomach obstruction and so preserve her life.

Public opinion was divided on the question. Some believed that the child's right to life was the overriding consideration. Others took a very different view. Ms Barbara Smoker, the President of the National Secular Society wrote to *The Guardian* on 11 August 1981:

*The inhumane decision of two Appeal Court judges in the case of a newborn mongol baby girl shows lack of understanding of the very basis of human rights ... What makes us complete human persons is the development of human relationships; what gives us a stake in life is life-experience. A newborn baby, even a perfectly normal one, cannot therefore have a right to life ... [although she adds:] newborn babies in common with all sentient animals have a natural right to be protected from unnecessary suffering.*

Should the child have been allowed to die? Would that have been the same, in moral terms, as killing her?

These questions became headline news again later in 1981 at Leicester Crown Court, with the trial of a paediatrician on a charge of murder (changed during the course of the trial to attempted murder). The judge's summing up of this case provides a clear example of the sorts of issues to be clarified

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in these painful questions. We will use this case as the basis for our discussion.

The doctor was on duty when a baby was born in Derby in June 1980. The birth was normal, but the midwife immediately recognized Downs Syndrome. The mother was distraught on hearing this and was definite in saying that she did not want the child to survive. The doctor saw the baby and, after discussion with the mother, noted: 'Parents do not want the child to survive. Nursing care only.' He then prescribed regular doses of the drug dihydrocodeine which in his later statement to the police he indicated was used by him as a sedative 'which stops the child seeking sustenance'.

There was some dispute in court about the meaning of 'nursing care only'. In this baby's case it was interpreted to mean that the child should be kept comfortable, warm and cherished and fed with water but given no milk. The baby developed bronchopneumonia and died aged sixty-nine hours old.

The organization LIFE gave some evidence to the police, and in February 1981 the paediatrician was charged with murder. In the course of the trial it transpired that death might have been caused by a congenital heart condition. The charge of murder was dropped in favour of the charge of attempted murder.

The jury decided that the doctor had not attempted to murder the child, and the doctor was acquitted.

The judge drew the jury's attention to a number of issues in his summing up which directed them to the verdict they gave. We draw out the following points from what was said during the trial.

☒ **A firm distinction was drawn between 'causing death' and 'allowing to die'.**

The judge rightly said that, however serious a handicap may be in a child, no doctor has the right to kill it. But then he made a distinction between 'doing a positive act' and

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‘allowing a course of events or set of circumstances to ensue’. He made much of the suggestion that the doctor was offering a ‘holding operation’ allowing ‘nature to take its course’.

This distinction was made by some of the eminent defence witnesses. Sir Douglas Black, President of the Royal College of Physicians, was quoted by the judge as saying, ‘I distinguish between allowing to die and killing. It is a distinction that is somewhat difficult to defend in logic, but I agree that it is good medical practice not to take positive steps to end life.’

Is there any difference between ‘causing death’ and ‘allowing to die’? This is a question to which we shall return.

☒ **In some medical judgments there is a trend towards deciding what is right only in terms of weighing up consequences.**

The judge put much stress on ‘the interests of the child’, the ‘wishes of the parents’, the horror of the likely future quality of the child’s life in an institution, and so on. All this, of course, assumes that it is possible to measure what will be best for the future, and to weigh the value of a child’s life against other values (such as the family burden of care, the cost to society, the child’s sense of the burdensomeness of the handicap, and so on). It failed to take seriously the other question with which the judge began his summing up, but then curiously seemed to forget: what is the duty of a doctor when prescribing treatment for a severely handicapped child suffering from a handicap of an irreversible nature, whose parents do not want that child to survive?

There are two other points to raise in connection with this ‘consequentialist’ ethic. One is that it really cuts the ground from under the distinction that the judge made earlier between ‘causing death’ and ‘allowing to die’. That distinction rests on the *intention* of the doctor. The *consequences* of both, of course, are the same: death.

The other point is that medical ethics, at least in this case, seem to be caught in the tension of wanting to hold on to

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certain principles which the Christian tradition has enshrined (the 'sanctity of human life', the law against killing), while at the same time moving away from the Christian basis on which they stand, by working only with a utilitarian (consequentialist) ethic. There would have been a different slant to the whole case if the question had not been: 'What is in the interests of the child and his parents?' but: 'What do the obligations of neighbour love require?'

☒ **Who has the right to decide who may live and who should die?**

The law of murder is clear: no doctor has the right to kill a patient. However, the judge seemed at times to imply that the right of decision as to whether an irreversibly handicapped baby lives or dies lies with the parents—or perhaps with parents and doctor together. But the capacity to decide who shall live does not carry with it the right to decide who shall live.

☒ **The criteria which were used in this case are also instructive.**

Doctor and parents decided to sedate the child, offer no food, and 'allow nature to take its course' because the child was severely and irreversibly handicapped and was rejected by his parents.

This leaves us with the question: does an irreversibly handicapped child have any *right* to live, or at least to try? Or are we free, on the basis of our views about the child's likely quality of life, to decide that he would be better off dead?

How should such medical decisions be made? Should they ever be made on the basis of expected 'quality of life'? Or on the basis of a patient's expected usefulness as a member of society? We can immediately see this as the top of a very slippery slope.

***Christian perspectives***

What theological markers can we put down as a framework within which to discuss these questions?

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*A theology of life*

God our Creator has given us life—or as the theologian Karl Barth puts it: life is ‘on loan’ to us—and with it comes the command that we shall live. Our life is not our own; nor is life merely physical. Each individual person (body and soul) is unique to God and his or her life is on loan from God. As our previous chapter argued, no one may choose death or seek to cause his or her death or that of another human being.

*A theology of health, handicap and suffering*

Health is the strength for human living, and even those who are seriously ill can still will to be healthy, in the sense of using what strength remains to them in spite of all the obstacles. This is why all people honour the courage and determination of physically handicapped people, many of whom overcome great obstacles to live as normal a life as possible. Suffering and sickness remind us, however, that this is a fallen world still under the rule of death. Suffering is never something to be sought for its own sake: it is part of our task to alleviate suffering. But we need to remember that the resurrection of Christ points us to life beyond this physical life. The absence of suffering is not this life’s most important goal. And human suffering is not always wholly bad: it may be part of the labour pains of the new creation. There can be a pain which heals.

In medical terms, therefore, a doctor faces decisions which involve confronting and resisting disease and disability, while never holding on to life and health as absolutes to be protected for as long as possible at whatever cost. The art of medicine includes assessing at which points lines are to be drawn. We will look at some possible guidelines shortly.

***‘Allowing to die’—what does it mean?***

Unless we are going to take a wholly consequentialist view of ethics, we need to make some distinction between actions and omissions. Sometimes if a person fails to act, it would be quite unreasonable to blame them. Other omissions are morally blameworthy. What is the difference?

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An omission might be said to be morally wrong if I have the ability, opportunity and duty to act in a certain situation and I do not.

Is 'allowing to die' morally wrong? Sometimes no, and sometimes yes.

Some people are 'allowed to die' because of scarce medical resources. Because of the greediness of the rich North, many of the poorer Southern countries of the world have millions of people who are being allowed to die. Some people in this country are allowed to die because of insufficient equipment. If two people need a kidney machine and only one is available, difficult choices have to be made. But no one person can be held responsible for such choices: they reflect social and national priorities in budgets and planning.

Some people are 'allowed to die' because they are already dying. As we argued in the last chapter, there is no obligation to try to keep a dying person alive for as long as possible at whatever cost. It is right to allow a dying person to die, with all care and support, rather than artificially prolonging dying. But in the case of the baby we were considering, resources were available and the baby was not known to be dying. The decision was made on the basis of human choice about what was thought to be best for him and everyone else. In this case, therefore, 'allowing to die' was really 'allowing to die by deliberate intention' which is morally equivalent to 'intending to cause death'. The baby was not given any milk; he was prevented from wanting food. It is hard to see how the distinction which the judge made between 'causing death' and 'allowing nature to take its course' adds up to anything in moral terms in this case.

### ***Possible medical guidelines***

In some cases it is much clearer than in others whether or not a person is dying. A case of advanced cancer may be in a different category from that of a severely handicapped infant with spina bifida. Various sets of guidelines have been proposed to assist medical decisions. The question a

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Christian needs to keep in mind is: 'what would the obligations of neighbour love require?'

*'Indicators of personhood'*

The ethicist Joseph Fletcher suggests a list of fifteen possible 'indicators' to decide whether the human being the doctor is treating qualifies as a 'person'. These include minimum intelligence, a degree of self-awareness, conscious recall of the past, capacity to relate to others, responsible control, and so on.

As we argued before, however, this is to measure the presence of a human being made in God's image in terms of their capacity to do certain things. It means that when someone becomes old and senile, we no longer need to regard them as a protectable person.

Fletcher's criteria for determining whether or not to treat patients as persons would depend on their satisfying certain criteria. But this seems wholly unchristian. Not only is life an 'alien dignity' conferred by God, but the doctrine of justification by grace reminds us that personal worth does not depend on our works, abilities or capacities.

*A 'worthwhile quality of life'*

Other writers suggest that there is such a thing as a life not worth living, and measure the 'worthwhileness' of life in terms of such criteria as the degree of hardship and suffering expected for the patient, or the cost to his family or to society in keeping him alive. Is the future quality of life, it is asked, consistent with self-respect?

Some children born with severe spina bifida raise questions like these in some doctors' minds. It has been the case that some such children are selected for non-treatment on the basis of questions such as: will he be able to grow to earn his own living and play a part in society? If the answer is no, then the medical decision has sometimes been to use a programme of nursing and management with the expectancy and intention that the child will not survive for very long.

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It seems difficult to base any approach to other people on the basis of whether I judge their quality of life to be worthwhile. God's care for us is not based on any criterion of worthwhileness. Should ours? 'It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you ... for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the Lord loves you' (Deuteronomy 7:7).

*'Relational potential'*

The Roman Catholic theologian, Richard McCormick, while not suggesting any scale on which a person's value or worthwhileness may be judged, nevertheless believes that the question may be: 'Is there a point at which the life that can be saved is not 'meaningful life'? He believes that the sophistication of modern medicine is forcing that question on us: granted that we can easily now save life, what kind of life are we saving? He sensitively comments: 'This is a quality of life judgment. And we fear it. And certainly we should. But with increased power goes increased responsibility. Since we have the power, we should face the responsibility.'

McCormick indicates that one criterion for helping to take that responsibility could be based on the Christian view that the meaning of life is found in relationships. If a point is reached at which a person is no longer capable of human relationships, the best treatment at that stage may be no treatment.

McCormick thus wants to make a distinction between biological life and relational potential. Some severely handicapped babies, he believes, may have realized their potential before God in their earliest days.

More satisfactory though this approach is to the previous one, there are still problems. As Paul Ramsey comments:

*Persons are not reducible to their potential. Patients are to be loved and cared for no matter who they are, and no matter what their potential for higher values is, and certainly not on account of their responsiveness. Who they are in*

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*Christian ethical perspective, is our neighbours. They do not become nearer neighbours because of any capacity they own, nor lesser neighbours because they lack some ability to prevail in their struggle for human fulfilment.<sup>1</sup>*

*A 'medical indications' approach*

Paul Ramsey himself proposes what he calls a 'medical indications' policy. He regards it as essential to decide what treatment should be given a patient not by trying to evaluate quality of life or relational potential, but simply by medical criteria. It is simply: can I offer treatment that in medical terms will improve the patient's condition or not? There are, of course, margins of medical disagreement and wide areas of medical discretion—but that is part of the art of medicine. The important point in this approach, however, is that it doesn't seek to decide between *people* and their 'worth', but between treatments and their likely effectiveness. The medical question is: can I help (by operating on a spina bifida baby, for example) or only care? To base medical care on anything other than medical criteria, as seems to have been done in the case of the baby we mentioned at the start, then makes medical care a function of the inequities that exist at birth and as Paul Ramsey remarks, adds 'injustice to injury and fate'.

In a medical indications policy there may well be room for consideration of what some people call the difference between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' medical interventions. There should certainly be room for consideration of the expected burdensomeness of the treatment to the patient. But to keep the medical decision in the medical domain, rather than making social judgments on the supposed quality of other people's lives seems to be an essential way of affirming that handicapped people, Downs Syndrome and spina bifida babies, are our neighbours, with a moral claim on us to neighbour love. Despite all deformity, they, with all others made in the image of God, are 'a little lower than the angels', and come

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Ramsey, *Ethics at the Edge of Life*, Yale University Press, 1978, pages 226–27

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in the category of those of whom our Lord spoke: the hungry who need food, the thirsty who need drink, the stranger who needs a welcome, and the naked who needs shelter and care (Matthew 25:40).

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## Epilogue

We have tried to explore some of what is involved in expressing our allegiance to Christ in selected areas of personal, social and medical ethics. Throughout, we have tried to allow the word of God as recorded in the Scriptures to illuminate our minds, give us criteria for selecting relevant empirical facts, guide our choice of moral priorities and tune our pastoral responses to the themes of the gospel.

There is, in other words, a theology behind our ethics, as there is an ethic behind our pastoral care. In fact, the Bible itself indicates that ethics, spirituality, doctrine and ministry are really all faces of the same diamond—different colours in which the pure light of God's love is refracted in our loving responses to him. All four are aspects of loving God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

So there is no Christian ethics apart from Christian theology, and no Christian theology apart from Christian spirituality. As H. H. Rowley commented with reference to the Old Testament:

*The good life ... as it is presented to us in the Old Testament is the life that is lived in harmony with God's will and that expresses itself in daily life in the reflection of the character of God translated into the terms of human experience, that draws its inspiration and its strength from communion with God in the fellowship of his people and in private experience, and that knows how to worship and praise him both in public and in the solitude of the heart.<sup>1</sup>*

So also in the Gospels, we find the good life as outlined in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount integrally related to the whole context of Jesus' person, message and mission. To try to understand the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount apart from the fact that God in Christ is

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<sup>1</sup> H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, SCM Press, 1956, page 149

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establishing his kingly rule in this world, is to leave us with unrealizable idealism.

Furthermore, the ethical teaching of the Epistles typically comes as part two of the epistle, after the discussion of the doctrines of the grace of the gospel, with which many of the Epistles begin. It is after his magisterial exposition of God's grace in Romans 1–11 that Paul begins chapter 12: 'I appeal to you therefore ... to present your bodies as a living sacrifice ... Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.' He then continues with chapters of moral and pastoral exhortation. Likewise, Ephesians 4:1 follows three chapters on the doctrine of grace with 'I therefore ... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.' Colossians 3:1 reads: 'If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above ... Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience ... Put on love.' In both Ephesians and Colossians these exhortations are followed by teaching on the outworking of the new life in marriage, family, employment and the church.

There is no biblical 'book of Christian ethics': doctrine, ethics, spirituality and ministry belong together.

So, in summary, let us try to clarify what is distinctive about Christian ethics. In a world of pluralism in moral values, of lords many and gods many, what distinguishes a Christian pastoral ethic from other approaches to moral decision-making?

First, the theological frame of reference in which the ethical questions arise. There is a Christian approach to the nature of humanity and the nature of the world; of creation and sin; of the work of grace which brings new vision, evaluation and moral power, and of the reality of evil.

Secondly, the acceptance that the good life is inseparably linked with the will of God as this is revealed to us in Christ and in the Scriptures. In answer to the dilemma made

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famous by Plato: whether something is good because God wills it, or whether God wills something because it is good, Christian faith believes that what God wills for us both corresponds to God's own character of perfect goodness and to what makes for the best for human well-being, because God loves and cares for us. The source of our moral obligation is the heart of God's personal love.

Thirdly, Christian ethics takes the form not merely of obedience to moral principles (an ethic of duty), nor of a quest for the best outcome (an ethic of consequences), but is a personal response of loving allegiance to the personal God who is love. This allegiance is concerned both with inner motivation and attitude, as well as external behaviour. In both there is a liberty of heart and conscience, constrained by obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Christian freedom is a freedom to love. At its heart there is a liberty of Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17) which sets the Christian free from bondage to other conventions.

Fourthly, Christian ethics operate, therefore, both with certain moral rules which give guidance in loving (and help us to distinguish love from selfishness), and with a forward-looking hope in a final moral goal in the purposes of God, which motivates our conduct. Our ethic is both principled and situational, both correspondence with certain given facts about the created world, and a journey of pilgrimage towards maturity in Christ.

Fifthly, Christian ethics operates with a sense that there are moral facts. There is an objectivity to our morality: we do not 'invent' right and wrong; we understand right and wrong in relation to the character and will of God.

Sixthly, Christian ethical behaviour is directed towards the neighbour. As Paul Ramsey once put it, the primary question is not 'What is the good?', but 'Whose good shall it be—mine or my neighbours?' Jesus said that the second commandment is: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Matthew 22:39).

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Seventhly, there is a charismatic dimension to our ethics in the sense that the 'charisma', the gifts of the Holy Spirit's grace, are promised to us as a moral resource. As the Spirit teaches us, all our thinking, all our choosing, our hopes, goals and resources are centred in Jesus Christ our Lord. Christian pastoral ethics are summed up in him.

What God asks of us, that in Christ by his Spirit he also gives to us. Usually this is a gradual process of appropriating his work—'drinking' in the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). It is a journey of growth to maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:13ff). But the task and the promise, the gift and the calling, come together as we are 'in Christ'.

As St Paul teaches us: 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ' (Romans 13:14); 'Put off your old nature ... put on the new' (Ephesians 4:22ff). '[Christ] we proclaim, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man mature in Christ. For this I toil, striving with all the energy which he mightily inspires within me' (Colossians 1:29).

It is as we 'follow' Christ (John 21:19), 'imitating' God in Christ, walking in the way of love, light and wisdom (Ephesians 5:1–2, 8, 15), and learn from him the way of obedience to the Father, feeding on the solid food of God's word, that our faculties can be 'trained by practice to distinguish good from evil' (Hebrews 5:8, 14). That is part of the task of Christian discipleship within the fellowship of the church. Christian ethics, as with doctrine, spirituality and ministry, is the calling of the whole church. It is with 'all the saints' that we learn the love of God (Ephesians 3:18). It is in the context of the church that Paul writes: 'Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen' (Ephesians 3:20–21).

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