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OLIVER DAVIES

# THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

Faith, Freedom, & the Christian Act



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And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.  
καὶ γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς.  
John 8.32

# Theology of Transformation

*Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act*

OLIVER DAVIES

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*For Fiona, Isaac, and Rory,  
Claire, Chris, Alice, and Tom*



## Preface

This book has been seven years in the writing. The reason why it took so long is just that its chosen theme is a very simple one: the Christian act, when someone does something good in the name of Christ which, but for that association, they would not have done. It is a book about the Christian capacity to 'make a difference.' But the temptation throughout has been to make the book complex. After all, the 'loving act' is central to the life of Christians, at least as an ideal to be pursued and against which what we do needs to be measured, and so seeking to think theologically about the act in a new way has many implications for many different fields of theological enquiry. The challenge of simplicity will have been met if the reader feels throughout the range of this book that the immediacy of the Christian act is never far away, but is just below the surface as the life of this theology of transformation.

But it would be foolish not to acknowledge that this book is, in a sense, an overture and in that sense is necessarily provisional. The nature of a new 'orientation' of theology is that it becomes legible only in its depth and range. There is nothing wholly compelling about a theological reorientation in the way that can be true of a new paradigm of theology, which addresses a particular problem or is for a certain group of people. A reorientation is like a new tonality in music; it asks us to *listen* differently. This means that the themes introduced here will need to be absorbed and developed by readers over time, if the overall effect is to be what it needs to be, which is the recognition that there is now the possibility of doing theology in a new way. This possibility cannot be described as a new insight or set of insights. It results rather from recognizing the profound change that is underway in our society and which has to do with the current scientific redescription of the world, as well as the rapidly developing interconnectedness and diversity of the world as a result of our new technologies. To be a self-aware human being in a material universe is beginning to mean something different from what it meant when I was growing up. The change is subtle but significant.

If Transformation Theology can bring new insights, then first and foremost these concern a better understanding of what that change is and how it now sets new parameters for theological knowledge. This is the attempt not to do what we did last time a scientific revolution was in the air as Christians, namely stick our heads in the sand. It is rather the attempt to understand this change and to build upon it theologically, gratefully recognizing perhaps that this new science potentially gives us renewed access to the fertile roots of our embodied life as Christians, and to our most ancient traditions, from which 'modern theology', with its dualistic presuppositions, has generally served to



distance us. In this sense, the book is obliged to earlier years of research on compassion, cosmology/creation, and tradition, which sensitized me to the extent to which theology is unavoidably shaped by science, both positively and negatively. It has gradually become clear that a time of real scientific change such as ours must also be a time of enormous theological possibility, when we can return creatively to the very roots of our respective traditions.

It is for this reason too that the book is addressed to all those concerned with understanding and fostering the Christian life as active discipleship, no matter the denomination. I hope the reader will understand how difficult it can be to write for Catholic and Protestant alike, even about something such as the Christian act, which, as many would agree, is central to both traditions. I must admit to a sense of failure in this communicative challenge, and yet the need to convey the fundamental character of this Christology of commissioning, and so its potential to foster a deeper ecumenism involving not just Protestant and Catholic, but also Pentecostalism and the Salvation Army, has seemed to be the overriding priority. My hope is that this failure will simply encourage others to do a better job.

There are many to be thanked for contributing in innumerable ways to this project, from those dedicated doctoral and Masters students who have helped build the Transformation Theology seminar and network ('Theology in Act') so wonderfully at King's and further afield, to friends and colleagues who have advised and supported. I would mention in particular Paul Janz, Gavin Flood, Paul Fiddes, Clemens Sedmak, and Adam Zeman. I need also to thank those many 'practitioners', theological and non-theological, known and unknown, great and small, who have inspired this theology from the outset and from whom I have learned over time the fundamental principle that Christian theology, however elevated and academic, must nevertheless finally converge with and reflect the meaningfulness of the Christian life itself, in its lived vision of hope, resilience, courage, and love. In this way, the life lived becomes the criterion of the faith thought.

I am grateful too to the four OUP readers whose careful and helpful analysis have made this text much better than it would otherwise have been! All infelicities are entirely my own. Finally, I would like to thank Elizabeth Robottom and Tom Perridge of OUP most warmly. First Tom and then Lizzie tracked the fortunes of this ambitious and protean book with a tenacity beyond the call of duty. That it now appears is in no small degree due to them.

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# Part I

## Foundations

### Theological Reorientation



## Where Is Jesus Christ?

The theology presented in this book, which goes by the name of Transformation Theology, is not intended to be another theological paradigm to be compared competitively with other paradigms. It sets out rather to be more fundamentally a reorientation of theology, into the world of space and time. As a reorientation, this theology can have all kinds of continuities with other theologies or theological schools, ranging from those that are overtly metaphysical to those that are based on empirical research and ethnographic methods. There is no doubt also that Transformation Theology has much in common with other theologies in its concern with the world, since this has been a constant theme throughout the modern period: *extra mundum nulla salus* (Edward Schillebeeckx). Where Transformation Theology is distinctive, however, and becomes a reorientation, is in its commitment to think such a theological concern with the world both *critically* and *historically*.

Critique and a sense of history belong together in theological insight. Christianity is a historical religion, and the Church a community that endures over time. Indeed, the experience of time is central to most forms of Christian identity, if only through the antiquity of the Bible as our sacred text. But we also have the historical experience in the modern period of learning not to trust too easily the given points of departure for our thinking. It may be, after all, that we are already in subtle ways alienated, or at an incalculable distance from the world, at the very point at which our concern for the world arises. This has been a central insight of modern hermeneutics: language and habits of thought already shape us and our world in ways that may predetermine our responses. Deeply set historical processes, which can indeed be wholly concealed from us, may already set the limits of our horizon. We can still usefully use Marx's term 'ideology' for the realization that we may live to some extent in the propagation of historically determined, false understandings of our relation to the world, or more exactly of how we are in the world as embodied persons who are both matter and mind. Furthermore, such 'ideologies' can indeed be the vehicle for forms of personal and social power that appear unquestioned, and which can in one way or another alienate us from our own deepest freedom.

This holds true for all human beings, but for the Christian theologian, the understanding of who we truly are in the world, in every historical period, must be tested against the person of Christ himself as *historical*, which means to say as sharing our own space and time, through the continuing humanity of his risen life. Therefore, we have to locate our point of departure for theological thinking as close to him as possible. In other words, we have to *orientate* our thinking to him, as he comes to meet us as fully human and fully divine in the reality of our everyday lives. We have to learn to calibrate our theology to the ways in which he calls us, in the Spirit, and calls others around us, to the life of discipleship, in the formation and re-formation of his Church. Our theology, as thought, has to be as proximate as possible to the distinctive intensity of the life that flows from him, in and through the Holy Spirit, as the ground of our Christian life and witness.

But how can we take that first step, towards what we hope will be a theological reorientation, if we cannot know and understand the historical processes that have brought us to this place and time? Perhaps such a point of departure will be a paradigm after all and not a reorientation? Perhaps it will be yet another way of making sense of things, another twist in the tale that is modern theology, and not what it really needs to be, which is the articulate and critical expression of the sense that many feel in this day that the time of modern theology is coming to an end, indeed perhaps already has come to an end? How can this theology, which is grounded in this *now*, be filled with the future rather than the past?

This moment of hesitation and self-doubt in the face of the consciousness of history is to be welcomed. It is at least the harbinger of the question that we must learn to ask, if our questioning is not to become ceaseless, since it alone contains within itself—even as a question—the possibility of the end of our questioning. We do not mean here the end in a straightforwardly temporal sense as if we could ever run out of questions. It is rather the end of our questioning in a different sense, more like a limit, in which we finally recognize and receive the shape of the reality that comes to meet us and which prompts the form of our questioning. This is end as fullness. It is finally the recognition that when we question, we do so as embodied human beings who are alive in a world that changes all the time around us. We question as living human beings. And Life itself can come to meet us, in this question, if we learn to ask it in the right way.

## THE FIRST QUESTION

We must begin then with the most ancient question of all, which is surely the very first question of the Christian Church. It may be that it was in asking this

question, in the light of the empty tomb, that the community around Jesus became what we would today call the Church. Where is Jesus Christ? In the period after his resurrection, he appeared in ways that allowed those who had seen him to report back to the community that had grown up around him that the risen Jesus had been in such and such a place at such and such a time. The 'where' of Christ was finally answered at his exaltation when the Church believed that he was now and forever in heaven. That this was an answer is clear enough, but with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and with the increasingly eschatological sense of Christ's presence in the poor and disadvantaged, and among the community who professed his name, it became clear too that this was a question which would still have to be asked and answered in different ways. In the early Christian world, to say that Jesus Christ was in heaven, was to affirm his universal Lordship and so was to say that he could also be present on earth. It was a question indeed that shaped human life as Christian life.

It is perhaps disconcerting, therefore, that we seem as a Christian community to have lost the imperative of this question and capacity to ask it in all seriousness: where is Jesus Christ? It may be, however, that this is nobody's 'fault'. It is simply part of who we are. After all, it is not at all clear that to say that Jesus Christ is in heaven means for us what it meant for the early or pre-modern Church. And if we cannot say that Jesus is in heaven in the same superlative way they meant it, then it is probably also the case that we cannot mean quite what they meant when they spoke of his parallel presence among the poor. Perhaps it is in fact the case that this most ancient of Christian questions is less meaningful for us today because, whatever our experience of encounter with the commissioning Christ may be and whatever we may see happening around us in terms of the active and transformative Christian life, we cannot today really understand *how* Christ can still share our space and time, in the living fullness of his humanity and divinity. Theology and faith seem to diverge at this point. This is not an argument against asking the 'where' question however, but a reminder that we should ask it with integrity and honesty, even if we have to recognize that we come to this question today in a way that is different from the early Church, and that we do so with a certain poverty.

In fact there are pressing reasons to think that it is a question we should learn to ask once again. At the heart of the profession of faith in any age, for instance, is the claim that the Christ we encounter is both real and universal. To say that he is real is to say that he transcends any cultural construction or image of him we may have and that he exists outside the parameters of those communities who confess his name. He is real in the sense that he transcends the experience we have of him, and indeed all possible experiences that we might have of him. To say that he is universal is simply to say that Christ is alive in a way that means he is unlimited by space and time. He is present of course in his particularity, or in what we shall call his identifiability, but is not



constrained by space and time. As Lord of space and time, Christ is in space and time, but is not himself subject to it. This is what we mean by the universality of Christ.

Belief in a universal Christ is already implicit in our profession of faith. But it seems particularly important that we should be able to give clear, explicit and theological expression to ourselves and to others of what we mean when we profess the reality and the universality of Christ today. In our own global age, we are surrounded on all sides by cultural difference and by a pluralism that inevitably fosters relativism. Why is witnessing to the 'universal' Christ not just a way of speaking? Why is it not just the product of one culture among many, for instance? Why does 'real' not just mean 'real for us'? Faith argues against this, but where is the developed theological account today of what it means to profess Christ as universal which can support this faith? And how can we profess something of which we can make little explicit sense even to ourselves? The problems multiply. Why should we think, for instance, that we all worship the same Christ, in our different Christian communities, given the rise of new vibrant forms of Christian life, in China and the Far East as well as Africa and India, and indeed the rise of new forms of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity across the globe? How can we build unity and common purpose with others both within and beyond Christianity if we cannot make sense to ourselves of what must be the ultimate hospitality and radical inclusivity of Christ's body, namely Christ according to his universality?

It seems right, therefore, that at such a moment of rapid pluralization and contact between cultures, we should step back and look again at what it means to proclaim the universality of the living Jesus: how can he really share our space and time? We need in fact to ask: where might such a universal Christ be? The evident answer to this question would seem to be 'everywhere', but given the nature of the human body, for someone to be 'everywhere' would seem to mean in fact that they are only metaphorically present, and so would be more accurately described as being 'nowhere'. A universal Christ who is everywhere cannot be in any particular place and so cannot be the Christ we encounter in the situational reality of our own life as one who commissions and calls.<sup>1</sup>

We shall have to approach this question differently then. Perhaps we shall have to think of his 'universality' as meaning that he is present at the point of the world's becoming: where it becomes *this* world and not another. This in turn would imply that he is present at the place of our most radical creaturely freedom: precisely at the point where our free human agency is most realized in the flow of time and causation. This would further imply that these are times—moments of *kairos*—when the divine agency in him can shape the

<sup>1</sup> For Luther's understanding of this, see Chapter 2, note 11.

human agency in us, through the advent of the Holy Spirit: bringing our human freedom into a perfecting convergence with divine freedom, or the loving sovereignty of God.

But let us return to the loss of the 'where' question in the modern period. Are we saying, for instance, that the modern Christian does not know Christ as real and that there is a deep fault with faith as such in our times? Emphatically not. The first principle of this book is that the problem we are identifying here is not a problem within faith as such but rather a problem within the articulation of that faith. It is a *theological* problem. It is a problem that arises in the conceptualization of faith. We can be more specific and say that this is a problem within *academic* theology (which we can call 'second-order' theology in order to distinguish it from the 'first-order' doxological language of faith). Our problem is not that we don't experience Christ as real then, but rather that the theological language which our culture provides us with, in order to articulate our faith, fails at the point of the expression of Christ's present reality and, indeed, of his universality as the living incarnate Word of God.

But why should this be? Is it because our theologians themselves have no faith? Once again, the answer to this is an emphatic 'no!' The reason why academic theology cannot support faith in this respect has nothing to do with the personal faith of the individual theologian, any more than it has to do with his or her denominational background, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Pentecostal, for instance. It is not even a matter of whether he or she is a conservative or liberal. The reasons lie even more deeply in our history and culture and are to do with the profound changes in the way we came to understand and experience the world which followed the great scientific changes from the mid sixteenth century onwards. These changes brought about the interconnected, highly technologized, complex world we live in today. Such radical, cosmological change over centuries may be so foundational and so extended that it scarcely ever comes into view as a specific change at all. Indeed, it may be that what we can see in the period from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century was a change so immense and also so closely associated with Christianity itself, as a cosmological religion, that almost imperceptibly Christianity as a whole underwent a significant internal shift. We can observe that shift today in the simple fact that what was arguably the key scriptural doctrine of the early Church, which is to say the exaltation of Christ (understood in terms of the fact that he had 'ascended to the right hand of the Father in heaven'), has become almost wholly redundant in the modern Church.

But in the first place we may ask: does this really matter? The nature of the 'ascended' Christ was a critical question for the early Reformers (Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin), all of whom held strongly to the doctrine, even when the science seemed to argue against it. But thereafter there seems to have

been remarkably little interest in reviving or renewing the doctrine of Christ's 'ascension' or exaltation.<sup>2</sup> Even such a conservative doctrinal theologian as Karl Barth tends to conflate the ascended with the resurrected Christ.<sup>3</sup> Nor do we find any notable interest in this doctrine among leading modern Catholic theologians. We could be forgiven for thinking that the lapse of the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ, which we find referred to implicitly or explicitly on thirty-five occasions in New Testament texts<sup>4</sup> (and which is intimately associated, for instance, with the mediatorship of Christ,<sup>5</sup> the coming of the Spirit of Pentecost,<sup>6</sup> and the mission of the Church on earth<sup>7</sup>) was simply a non-event. The Church has got on perfectly well without it.

And in the second place we may say: but if the presence of the living Christ is in itself a profound *mystery*, then surely it is something that we should not attempt to understand at all? It belongs to life and not to thought. This would be an invitation for second-order theology to give way at this point (at the point of our encounter with the living Christ who commissions us) to the first-order theology of direct Christian life and experience. But two points need to be raised here. The first is that the early Church did have just such a strong, second-order theology, which set out how Christ could be present on earth as well as heaven. The fact that this was a cosmological account, based

<sup>2</sup> There has arisen a more lively discussion of 'ascension theology' recently, however. See, for instance, Gerrit Scott Dawson, *Jesus Ascended: The Meaning of Christ's Continuing Ascension* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), and Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2011). See also Anthony J. Kelly, "'The Body of Christ: Amen!': The Expanding Incarnation", *Theological Studies* 71 (2010), 792–816.

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew Burgess's analysis of the implicit importance of the ascension in Barth in so far as resurrection and ascension are combined (Andrew Burgess, *The Ascension in Karl Barth*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 23–52). Barth certainly sees the importance of the ascension and Session as 'the decisive element in the conclusion of the Easter story' (CD IV.2, 153–4). And it is indeed the case that Barth notes that the resurrection and ascension represent 'two definite points in space or time' and that there is 'a movement from one to the other which effects their unity' (*Church Dogmatics* [hereafter denoted by CD] IV.2, 150). But Barth does not understand revelation itself to be historical as an unfolding in space and time. While he recognizes the sequential character of these two occurrences therefore, he does not offer a theological account of what this historicity means in the sense of placing the Lordship of the exalted Christ—even as irreversible or 'eternal'—specifically *within* space and time: as the Creator transformatively at work in the creation. The exaltation of Christ as a discrete event is conflated in theological terms with Christ exalted (Burgess, *Ascension*, 17), and the non-inclusion of the historicity of the incarnation in favour of a paradigm of divine transcendence makes it impossible to pose the 'where' question, in all its spatio-temporal fullness, theologically. At this point the exalted Christ in power recedes from us theologically, for Barth, rather than coming closer to us—according to the transformed humanity which remains integral to identity as Lord—in the time and space of our own concrete situational reality. The tension at this point is that a certain philosophical transcendentalism in Barth's thinking leads to the identification of divine sovereignty with a freedom *from* the world rather than the freedom *in* the world, which it should be according to an incarnational, transformational logic.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 275–80.

<sup>5</sup> Heb 1.1–4; 4.14–5.10.

<sup>6</sup> John 14.7.

<sup>7</sup> Mark 16.19; Acts 2.33.

on the pre-modern understanding of heaven as being the ‘summit’ of the closed universe, from where divine glory could penetrate the whole universe, should not disguise the point that this was an explanation that made good sense of how the living Christ could be present in particular ways (through sacraments and in the poor, for instance) in our own space and time.<sup>8</sup> It would be wrong to surmise that the widespread presence of this account in the life of the Church undermined the mystery of Christ’s presence. On the contrary, the ‘classical’ Church seemed to have a very strong sense of the mystery of Christ, which it brought to expression in its art, architecture, and sacramentality. It could in fact be said that since heaven was a place everyone believed existed, in continuity with our own space and time on earth, but no one expected to be able to see for themselves *pre mortem*, the pre-modern belief that Christ is physically (i.e. ‘locally’) in heaven was a way not of resolving the mystery of the glorified Christ but rather of making that mystery present in our own space and time.<sup>9</sup>

The further point that needs to be raised is that it has been the historical role of second-order, or more ‘academic,’ theology to clarify the meaning of first-order theology within Christian experience at points of crisis or change in Christian life. The intense Patristic debates on the nature of Christ’s personhood, his role in the sacraments, or the equally intense Reformation debates on the nature of our salvation in him are a case in point. In developing a new, Reformed theology of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, following the collapse of the traditional, scriptural account of the universe, Calvin pointed to the first-order theology of a faith-based experience of real encounter with Christ in the Eucharist but showed no sign of believing that this first-order theology could simply be allowed to take the place of a now compromised second-order theology of Eucharistic presence based on the traditional cosmology.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, Calvin argued for a new second-order theology which could appropriately reflect first-order experience in a changing world in

<sup>8</sup> Paula Gooder offers a helpful overview of the Hebrew heaven in her study *Heaven* (London: SPCK, 2011). In her words, what was originally a ‘spatial’ reality became in later times a ‘spiritual’ one (8). For more on our reception of ‘heaven’ in the modern period, see Jerry L. Walls, *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Paradise Misaid: How We Lost Heaven and How We Can Regain It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). For more on the structure of pre-modern cosmology, see Chapter 2, note 17.

<sup>9</sup> It can be difficult for us to grasp that this was a literal belief in Christ’s presence in heaven in his human embodiment. But this belief, from within faith, was in fact perfectly consistent with the structure of the pre-modern universe, which was extensively based on scriptural as well as Greek sources. See Augustine’s reflection on how his physical eyes will see the exalted Christ (*City of God*, XXII, 29). W. G. L. Randles gathers many of the texts and discussions among theologians in his study *The Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos, 1500–1760* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), showing a strongly literalist inclination, but even Thomas Aquinas is careful to argue that in his exaltation in heaven, the body of Jesus, though material, must be located at a higher point than the angels themselves (*Summa Theologiae* [hereafter denoted by ST] 3a, q. 57, art. 4 and 5).

<sup>10</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, 4.17.32.

which the old cosmological arguments would no longer work. Calvin's highly original and powerful theology of Eucharistic presence seemed to achieve just that.<sup>11</sup>

We need to be concerned then that in terms of our reception of Christ's presence for us on earth, as sharing our space and time, our second-order theology may have failed us. Instead of placing the mystery of Christ more firmly within our own space and time, or within the reality of our own ongoing lives, the failure to replace a traditional *cosmological* understanding of Christ's presence may have left us with a lacuna in our theological thinking precisely at the point where our second-order theology needs to be closest to the normative Christian experience of our encounter with the commissioning Christ, as real, in the flow of life. Indeed, this failure may be linked with particular tensions that we can see in the theological life of the Churches today: the seemingly insuperable gap between practical and systematic theology, for instance, or the 'broad river' between University and Church. It may also be at the root of what seems to be a general problem in modern Church life that theology is frequently used as a tool of division within communions. Theology has not always served a properly communitarian and irenic function in either the life of the Roman Catholic communion or that of the Anglican communion, for instance, and there are many comparable divisions also within contemporary evangelicalism. Second-order theology as abstract thinking can easily be collectivist and divisive rather than open, heuristic, and communitarian. We might also consider the extent to which two of the principal, new, global forms of Christian life, Pentecostalism and the Salvation Army, which belong in their foundation distinctively to the modern age, have both struggled to find their place in contemporary theological debates. It is not easy in the case either of the Salvationist 'Christ in us' or the Pentecostalist experience of the presence in power of the Spirit in the here and now to find the connections between this first-order theology and our modern second-order theology of the person of the living Christ. The evident link is again cosmologically framed and it is the heavenly Christ who 'has poured out' the Spirit upon the world (Acts 2.33). This is Christ according to his Lordship, and as present among the poor, therefore. It may be that in each case, we can see the failure of modern second-order theology to integrate and to support the intrinsic and 'felt' meanings of the first-order theology in powerful new experiences of Christian encounter, in times of crisis and change.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, 4.17.18.

## A SECOND SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION

But what kind of crisis and change? Here we have to step back and recall that the question of where Christ is is a central question of Christianity and one that has been posed throughout Christian history. But it is not in fact a question that can be innocent of all the different kinds of presuppositions we make at varying points in our history about what space and time themselves are. Such is the long history of Christianity that we can identify three very different ways in which human beings have conceived of space and time, and so can identify three very different contexts for the belief that Christ lives in such a way that we can still and indeed must ask: where is he?

In light of its central concern with this question, this book has to include an account of the changing scientific narrative across the centuries. After all, the question was originally posed at a time when a traditional, scriptural cosmology obtained in the Christian world. This presupposed that the universe was finite and enclosed. This was Peter Berger's 'enchanted' universe, filled with invisible spiritual presences. The cosmic spaces were likewise filled with light, music, and the 'dance of the spheres'. Dante very exactly described this world for us in his 'Divine Comedy' in which 'physical height' coincided with spiritual exaltation. Within such a cosmology, the structure of Christ's descent from heaven to earth and then returning ascent, in human form, made exact sense. It gave literal expression to what the Christian faith needed spiritually to affirm: the saving life and death of Jesus of Nazareth and his continuing presence 'to the right hand of the Father in heaven', at the very top of the universe from where his glory could spread throughout the creation.

By the time we come to the early modern period, from the early sixteenth century, a new scientific model is evolving. This has a very different understanding of matter. Early science discovered that matter is not what it seemed to be, but could be probed for its smaller physical constituents. Matter could be grasped as forces and then replicated. One commentator has called this 'ergetic' knowledge or knowledge that 'works' in the sense that it produces things.<sup>12</sup> And the technology it developed brought ever faster change at the level of our most basic sense of embodiment and self-awareness in a spatio-temporal world. In a heliocentric universe, the scriptural heaven was not as, or where, people had thought it was. In contrast with the earlier, pre-modern paradigm, this new paradigm was markedly at odds with key elements in the Christian faith, and particularly the reality of heaven within the universe and the 'miraculous' nature of the resurrection of Christ.

This model has dominated until very recently. Early versions of quantum mechanics emerged in scientific circles around 100 years ago, but its findings

<sup>12</sup> Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 12, 290–327.

were so strange and counterintuitive, and so *fundamental*, that there has been little cultural response to it. Advances in both cosmology and neurology, the large and the small scale, are now bringing quantum effects to the forefront, however, as technological applications of this contemporary science come ever closer. Contemporary science seems to rule out the dualism which was so characteristic of the 'modern' period, and it points to degrees of integration of mind and body within the world which—*mutatis mutandis*—are more reminiscent of the pre-modern universe than they are of the modern one.

We know today that we are as human beings both body and mind, complex materiality and pure subjectivity, at the same time. This means that we are intrinsically and constitutively *historical* beings, for what we believe matter to be dictates also what we believe ourselves to be as matter. Since we are ourselves matter, what we think matter *is* will be part of who we are. The history of science is key to our own history therefore, and never more so than when it concerns the fundamental question of our incarnational faith, namely how does Christ still live, in his space and time (as one who is still fully human), in a way that involves or intersects with our space and time. How does his life intersect with mine in ways that go beyond simply what I think or believe? In other words, what is the meaning value of the question 'where is he?', by which we seek, as Church, to give articulate expression to the sense that we encounter a living Christ at the point of our calling or commissioning in faith?

In this book we are concerned with the history within its changing scientific contexts of one doctrine in particular, namely the exaltation or 'ascension' of Christ. Perhaps more than any other doctrine, the meaning of Christ's exaltation is specifically cosmological in its association with New Creation. But it is cosmological too in its own framing or context, since traditionally for Christ to be exalted is also for him to be 'ascended' or to have 'gone up' to the Father in heaven. It is precisely the rejection of this particular cosmological framework that defined us as 'modern'. Not even the most enthusiastically biblical Christian has suggested that we should return to a geocentric view of the solar system or to the 'closed' cosmos which underlies the imagery of the scriptural authors. While we can still read the classical theologians with passion, both Catholic and Reformed, we are in fact separated from our forebears in the classical Church (down to and including the early Reformation) by a cultural and scientific gulf of immense, quite unbridgeable proportions. While we can hold the same content of belief in a heavenly Christ that they had, for instance, we cannot do so in the same way. The manner of their believing and the manner of ours, are separated by whatever it is that makes us who we are as modern, scientific human beings who can, after all, now see for ourselves online the sun at the centre of the solar system and, through the Hubble or Kepler telescopes, can even see the ancient signatures of an open, rapidly expanding and infinite universe.

The real question for us today is perhaps not: what was it that caused this significant and indeed quite fundamental change in Christian doctrine with respect to the exaltation or ontology of the living Christ? It is rather, what is it that is happening in our own present world which means that the cosmological question is on the table again? How are we changing in such a way that the first-order theology of Christian experience of faith as encounter with the commissioning Christ of St Paul, which is to say with Christ according to his Lordship, is pressing to return again to our second-order or academic theology? Why are we beginning to become so painfully aware of the fact that there is here such a gulf between faith and theology, academy and Church? What other kinds of change are causing that?

The uncontentious thesis presented here is that we are today in the midst of a second scientific revolution, or that the scientific revolution which defines modernity is entering a second phase. Inevitably this revolution is affecting who we are, not only through new understandings of matter and the material and through new advanced technologies, but also *anthropologically* in terms of how mind and matter relate in us, which is to say in terms of who we most fundamentally are. It is this reformulation of our self-understanding, not only in terms of ideas as these may be presented in books or in the media, but also in terms of the technologies that increasingly inform our own embodied spaces, which is the reason why what has been a consensus and a norm within theology for over 200 years is entering a period of unparalleled self-interrogation and crisis. As with any such fundamental change, its advent can be erratic and sudden. This is the case because of the way in which new scientific paradigms make themselves felt only gradually in society and do so also trans-generationally. Technology is experienced differently across the generations. We live today with elderly scholars, who embody our traditions, and yet who may have no or little familiarity with digital communications, preferring face-to-face or handwritten communications. Young scholars may type on their tablets more quickly than they can speak, and communicate 'globally' (if selectively!) through social networks in the present moment. And there is a pervasive sense in our society that the many breakthroughs in genetics and neuroscience, in chemistry and biochemistry, as well as cosmology and physics, are likely to change both ourselves and our environment in radical though also unpredictable ways over the coming decades.

If the effects of the 'first scientific revolution' were to separate mind from matter, then the effects of the 'second scientific revolution' are to bring them back together again. For Newtonianism, matter was the domain of determinism and so a lack of freedom, while our subjectivity as mind was the privileged place of our freedom. We were free of the world by being in the deterministic world as self-aware subject who could exercise power over the world and its materiality through technology. According to this model, materiality as the field of determinism was either to be left behind by our spirit—through



transcendence—or to be overcome by our spirit—through technology—in order that we (who are most properly spirit) should be free. Here there is a separation between who I am as spirit (or mind) and who I am as matter (or body). From a historical point of view, we can note also the extent to which the language of human spirit and divine Spirit have merged here, when each is defined as being in opposition to matter and the material.<sup>13</sup>

But the effects of the scientific self-understanding which is emerging today are quite different. Here it is presupposed that we are materiality ‘all the way down’. Neuroscience, genetics, and evolutionary biology show that mind and matter in us form a thoroughgoing continuity, each presupposing the other and each having causal effects upon the other within a continuum of human life as ‘intelligent embodiment’ in a material world. Quantum physics does so even more radically. Consequently, there is no point at which the mind can be ‘outside’ matter. We are free ‘within’ materiality and not beyond it. Science is teaching us that we are both pure subjectivity and complex materiality at the same time. And, in fact, there are no grounds for reducing the one to the other (despite the best attempts of some).<sup>14</sup> Our human truth, as ‘intelligent embodiment’, is a paradoxical one and involves a simultaneity of matter and mind in us.<sup>15</sup> We are not only *in* the world as subject but we are also far more *of* the world than we had thought. Indeed, we may need to think of ourselves even, first and foremost, as *being* world.

### Theology and Apologetics

Such a scientific redescription of the human as a unity of mind and body clearly has the potential to change the parameters of Christian witness, and indeed of our own theological self-understanding in significant ways. As we will see, so much of our present theological inheritance was formed in the face of the rise of a deterministic science and therefore presupposes the worldview that emerged following the advances of the first scientific revolution. This fostered a theological rationale based principally upon the imperatives of apologetics. We can identify two kinds of apologetics here: one that is ‘collaborative’

<sup>13</sup> See 36–7.

<sup>14</sup> The reduction from the perspective of materiality has recently been stated in Nicholas Humphrey’s book *Soul Dust* (London: Quercus, 2011), while a refusal of reduction in favour of paradox can be found in Adam Zeman, *A Portrait of the Brain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008). See also note 42.

<sup>15</sup> We shall use the term ‘intelligent embodiment’ in preference to e.g. ‘rational animal’, although the Aristotelian trajectory is the same. ‘Rational animal’ appears to set *homo sapiens* apart from other higher primates, for instance, in a way that either neglects current accounts of the continuities between ourselves and other advanced mammals, or indeed can lead to a reduction of the human (as when our humanity is identified with our capacity to formulate rational propositions).

and another that is 'dependent'. The former arises when we recognize affinities in the intellectual and cultural worlds around us and choose to link with and learn from them in the articulation of new theology. This is appropriate and right, and it creates the possibility of reciprocal learning. The emphasis in the modern period, however, has been upon an apologetics of the 'dependent' type, where we simply wrap ourselves in a secular thought form or 'rationale' in the hope that this will support our claim to being 'relevant' in the academy. This is an entirely understandable response, especially on the part of the Churches who might look to university theology for this kind of relevance, as well as to the world of Christian social action. The risk here, however, is that 'dependent apologetics' will only serve to deepen the disassociation between Church and academy, between theology as the articulation of faith and the meaning of the Christian life as instantiated in the unity of belief and practice, through calling, of discipleship.

The modern age has been the age of human meaning-making and of theological anthropologies in which the human person has been principally defined by secular intellectual culture. The current return to the world, driven by advances in scientific self-understanding, offers different theological possibilities since, as an orientation to the world, it can allow theological rationalities to be receptive to the meanings that are *discovered* in our encounter with the commissioning Christ. Discovery is also a mode of learning, and a theology whose rationale reflects the constant rediscovery of the person of Christ and of Christian meaning in the encounters of everyday life is in a position to do more than apologetics. It becomes possible to make theology an 'export' as well as 'import' economy in intellectual terms. A theology that makes its own the 'where' question is also likely to have its own method, since the theologian will now need to engage more dynamically with the life of the Church: with what we can call those 'crowded spaces' of power and powerlessness where grace is given, and freedom is in play (both human and divine). It may well develop a more ecclesial aspect methodologically for instance through its far-reaching and fundamental commitment to collaboration, especially collaboration between theoreticians and practitioners within specific contexts of calling in the Christian life. It may show an adaptability to new methods of enquiry, including the ethnographic.<sup>16</sup> What is clear, however, is that if our contemporary scientific self-understanding affirms that in us there is a thoroughgoing unity of mind and matter, and if this actually points more towards an ancient 'integrated' configuration of the human more than it does to the dualistic 'modern' one, then there must be here immense opportunities for Christian theology.<sup>17</sup> We have to reverse the emphasis on apologetics and so show that we can not only learn from secular society and thought, but can also

<sup>16</sup> See Chapter 2, 55–7.

<sup>17</sup> See notes 41 and 42. See also Chapter 2, note 32.

now positively contribute to human society more generally, since Christianity, with its long incarnational and cosmological traditions, is in fact remarkably well positioned to embrace in the present the challenge of the future.

## REORIENTATING THEOLOGY

Since the theology presented in this book is a reorientation, we need to divide its presentation into two distinct sections. The justification for the view that we need a reorientation of theology today is primarily a *critical* exercise, whereas the development of an answer to the theological ‘where’ question is broadly a *constructive* one. These two separate tasks are drawn out as ‘Theology in the World’, to be discussed in Chapter 2, and as ‘Transformation Theology’, to be discussed from Chapter 3. We can think of ‘Theology in the World’ as being like a new tonality in the history of music therefore, while ‘Transformation Theology’ is a piece of music that is composed within the new tonality, but is not to be identified with it as such (since a new tonality can support a range of different compositions). The argument in Chapter 2 is that we need to undertake a reorientation of theology in order to ground it in both our contemporary anthropological and a methodological authenticity. We are presupposing here that the period of modern theology, which has dominated over the last 200 years, is now coming to an end and that, in this period, theology has sought to base itself on the ‘turn to the subject’, in common with other humanities disciplines. This means to say that it has preferred rationalities of meaning-making that arise from our own subjectivity rather than the more world-centred rationalities of theology in the pre-modern period. These tended to be based on the doctrine of the creation, therefore, while those of modern theology have characteristically looked to theological anthropologies as their rationale. The rational styles of theology in the modern period have been as diverse, of course, as the paradigms of the meaning-making subject they have borrowed, ranging from consciousness and interpretation to experience and language (reflecting the influence of idealism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, and linguistics), as well as the liberationist capacities of the human. All of these point back to the human subject as the primary focus of meaning. Modern theology has been overwhelmingly a period of ‘dependent apologetics’ therefore, or the pursuit of relevance, with a focus upon the self and our current ways of subjective meaning-making.

But the turn away from theological rationalities based primarily on the subject’s own powers of meaning-making does not mean that we have to neglect or omit the subject. Our criticism here is not that there should be no place for the human subject but that theological anthropology, being driven by ‘dependent apologetics’, has been allowed effectively to *replace* the doctrine

of the creation in the modern period. In this way we have lost our sense of the self as embedded in the world of shared space and time, which is the place of our encounter with a present or living Christ and which must, therefore, hold an unparalleled authority for Christian thought and reflection. This is neither to confine Christian enquiry to such 'liberal/scientific' questions as 'where does the world come from?' or 'who created the world', nor is it to invoke a 'post-liberal' scriptural account of the real (in a way that would subvert the conviction that in the real we exist in a *shared* space and time). It is rather to return to the more ancient position, which is that theology of the creation engages with the meaning of what it is to live in God's world as God's embodied creature.<sup>18</sup> This is again not 'where does the world come from?' but how does the fact that the world is God's creation shape my life as his creature, in terms not only of what I think, feel, believe, and do, but in terms also of *where* I am. The Christian experience of encounter with the commissioning Christ in history does not dissolve our sense of the real as something we have in common with all living things. It points rather to what the final meaning of that reality may be, as disclosed to us in Jesus Christ. This disclosure is not something imparted to cognitive intellect alone. Although cognitive intellect always has a vital role in second-order theology, the meaning of revelation is not learned first in that sense. It is rather learned in the first place through a life lived, where that life is grounded in encounter with Jesus Christ and a repeated return to him, in openness and desire, through the Holy Spirit. And so the reception of this disclosure becomes itself a human life, the meaning of which becomes over time, through repeated fall, effort, and the indwelling of grace, the meaning of Jesus' own life. And since he is raised and lives among us, it becomes over time also a life whose meaning is the risen Christ himself: its meaning *is* his life.

### Theology and Transformation

It is from this life and this meaning that we need to build our second-order theology. In doing that we will find that the axis of Christian meaning has moved from 'transcendence', which suggests a distinctively modern account of escape from (deterministic) materialism, to 'transformation'. 'Transcendence' is a term that already presupposes its opposite 'materialism'. 'Materialism' presupposes that it is not God but an impersonal material causation which governs the universe except where moderated by free human mind or agency. For 'transcendence' theologians, God has to be thought in some space 'outside' the deterministic material. For this theology, the power of God is already

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–12.

vanquished at the level of the material. Since it presupposes a dualistic opposition between human spirit and matter, the only possible space there can be for us to think God is within ourselves as ‘spirit’, which is to say within our own subjectivity or ‘subjective community’. Here the historical elision between human spirit and divine Spirit is significant.<sup>19</sup> In such a ‘transcendence’-based metaphysics and anthropology, it becomes inevitable that there will be no space for the eschatological within history, as evidencing divine power within the material and within history as the flow of material causation, except—of course—perilously as the destruction of history through human agency rather than its transformation through divine agency.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, a ‘transformational’ hermeneutic within theology acknowledges God in Jesus Christ precisely as the Lord of history. Once again, the emphasis may lie upon the human subject. I am *changed* in my life by the power of God, and it is to this change that I bear witness in who I am or who I have become in him. But there is implicitly here the claim too that Christ is raised and that it is this raised and exalted Christ who we encounter in history or in our own situational reality. We cannot say simply that Christ is only subjectively real. We cannot deny him the fullness of his humanity if we assert that he lives. Here we are very close to the deficit in second-order theology that obtains. The key point is that Transformation Theology seeks to make explicit here what is already implicit in faith: namely that Christ is real, that he genuinely shares our space and time, and that he is known in power as the one who effects change, through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, this is a kind of change in which I too am taken up. In my being changed, others too are changed; just as I am changed by the transformations in them brought about in Jesus Christ in the power of the Father and Spirit. Nothing is more personal than this kind of reorientation of life. But it is precisely where my life becomes most personal in this sense of undergoing real change, that I find myself positioned, in unity with others, before God the Triune Creator in Jesus Christ. At the point where I am most me, I find that I am most him, or he is most in me, as I am in him. Where I am most in my space and time, I find, in the encounter of faith, that I am most in Easter space and time, and so most in Church. This is an inclusive, life-giving Trinitarian space. I know that others too are with me there, in whom he is and who are also in him, and I know too that it is the world—as it is transformed in him—that is the true source of the change in me.<sup>21</sup> In the same sense, the world too is now in him, just as he is in the world, and to be encountered there. It is here, in the encounter of faith, that theology must seek the proper ground of its own meaning, at the point where the meaning of the world as God’s world

<sup>19</sup> See note 13, this chapter.

<sup>20</sup> See Duncan Forrester, *Apocalypse Now: Reflections on Faith in a Time of Terror* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 5.

which is made flesh in the incarnate Word, intersects with my own life as the shape and form of my own meaning.

## Theology and Freedom

To speak of 'me' here is already to speak of freedom. It is the condition of the creature to be free. But freedom can often be a burden. Do we really want to be free when freedom is simply the consumerist freedom of having lots of choice? Consumerism quickly becomes a form of bondage. If freedom is defined as something that I take for myself (as it commonly is), then the way that we think about freedom will never approach how we actually experience it. After all, the deepest freedom we have is the freedom of life. All human beings have a right to life, and this is the first and most fundamental right cited in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). But let us consider for a moment what that freedom is. We can point to nutrition and housing, but what it is in effect is the freedom to have pulse and breath. If these fail, then we will have no freedom at all. But neither our breathing nor our heartbeat is something that we do for ourselves. Both are automatic bodily processes which are the result of brain activity over which we have no possible control (except marginally, or disruptively, as when someone brings their life to an end). Our deepest freedom of all then (without which we have no other) resides paradoxically in the *involuntary* movement of heart and lung.

This places the view that in faith we become free in Christ in a different light. If our most basic freedom of life is one that is in fact dependent upon processes of the autonomic nervous system, then it doesn't seem so strange that we should receive our deepest spiritual freedom, from another, rather than take it for ourselves. But at the same time there has to be an element of our own will, if we are to be genuinely free in faith. We can be free dependently, but not passively. Our dependent freedom must also be active. This is the paradox of faith: in him we are set free, and so are free in Christ's own sovereign freedom, but precisely as myself: one who acts at this time and place in his name and, through the Holy Spirit, by his power.

The lesson we learn from faith then is that Christ's freedom is inscribed as enacted love. He is present to us, in and through the Holy Spirit, as one who gives his life for us, in accordance with the love of Father and Spirit for the Son and for the world. Therefore we can only receive his sovereign freedom with a reciprocating love. He is not present in our lives as a force from outside, any more than he is what Paul Ricoeur called 'heteronomy' or incomprehensible law.<sup>22</sup> He is present rather in the warmth and vitality of the divine life

<sup>22</sup> Paul Ricoeur, 'Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation', *The Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 1/2 (Jan-April 1977), 1-37.

communicated by the Spirit, as this informs and enlivens us in our concrete acts. We receive him as gift in the actuality and intimacy of our own everyday existence, as the universal Christ who summons and calls, but who nevertheless shares with us our own space and time.

In the face of a divine imperative of love then, the only possible free response for us is equally one of enacted love. This is a possibility of freedom that is grounded in Christ's own freedom, as universal and dominical. It makes sense to understand faith, therefore, as the free response to him which takes the form of the active love for our neighbour. This is the nature of our freedom in him as gift. The presence of the Spirit in us, and in our own situational reality, perfects us in our freedom and makes us free to act for and with others in his name.<sup>23</sup>

### Theology and Enacted Love

It is a little salutary, therefore, to think that academic theology in the modern period has had relatively little to say about the structure and form of the loving act, as a point of departure for theology (though it has frequently been its ending).<sup>24</sup> This seems to be the case even though there is a widespread consensus that this is central to what we mean by discipleship and certainly has a critical place in what we have in mind when we point to the meaningfulness of the Christian life. It may be here too that we find the communicative power of Christianity as a form of social transformation at its most dynamic. Loving acts are infectious: they challenge our experience and our imagination. They unbalance the shallow conventions of society with their radical spontaneity. Moreover, if we recall our 'where' question, then it is reasonable to think that it is in the free response of enacted love in Christ's name, which is always situationally located, that we find our faith is most *real*, and that we are closest to Christ himself as living reality in our lives. If this is so, then it must also be here that we experience him most as a truth that extends beyond my own subjective apprehension of him. I know him as *historical* and as sharing my own space and time, but as being, at the same time, infinitely beyond me. In this way we can say also that it is in enacted love, when I am most 'in' Christ as he is 'in' me, through the Holy Spirit, that I know him most according to his universality.

<sup>23</sup> On the role of the Spirit in the loving act, see Chapter 3, 9–10, Chapter 4, 106–7 and Chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup> See, of course, Vincent Brümmer's, *The Model of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and more recently Werner Jeanrond's, *A Theology of Love* (London: T&T Clark International, 2010). Both Rahner and Barth come to focus on the practice of Christian love towards the end of their theological careers. See Shannon Craigo-Snell, *Silence, Love and Death: Saying 'Yes' to God in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2008), and Karl Barth, *The Christian Life*, CD IV/4, especially on 'prayer' at 49–110.

I encounter him in my everyday world, but I do so as the ultimate meaning of the world: at once personal (identifiable) and cosmic (universal).

But before we look more closely at the loving act, in the context of our 'where' question, we need to observe that the word 'love' can in fact be as obstructive as it is helpful. It is very inexact. It is one of those 'big' words we use every day without ever quite being able to define it. In theological usage, for instance, we have two quite different terms for love (*agape* and *eros*), the first of which suggests 'altruistic love' and 'self-giving', while the latter suggests 'attraction' and 'yearning'.<sup>25</sup> We are likely to feel the former for our fellow human beings and the latter for God. Inevitably these words can be used in different ways, sometimes contrasting with each other, and sometimes complementing each other, but inevitably tending to divide our love for God from our love for our neighbour. We have to consider also the tendency of the terminology of love to bring us back to a particular kind of relationship between persons who know each other, whereas the notion of 'charity' in modern English suggests a positive intervention for people we do not know but for whom nevertheless we feel compassion. Even though the idea of 'love' used in this book is actually a very commonsensical one (we always attach it to the 'act', for instance, so love is 'something done'), it may be the case that 'compassion' is a better word than 'love' for what we mean here in many contexts. 'Talking about love', as Ricoeur remarks, 'may be either too easy or too difficult'.<sup>26</sup> The ordinariness of love comes through in Martha Nussbaum's description of compassion as the 'basic social emotion', or the glue that holds society together.<sup>27</sup> Paul Ricoeur, on the other hand, speaks of 'the paradox of the exchange at the very place of the irreplaceable' in quite ordinary compassion,<sup>28</sup> and research has shown that it is those individuals who already practise 'compassion' in their everyday lives who are most likely to respond heroically to the acute needs of others in moments of crisis.<sup>29</sup> The heroic is already hidden in the ordinary.

A theology of 'love', therefore, has always to be also a theology of the ordinary. And yet this is the ordinary as construed theologically as the site of our potential encounter with Christ. Here we use the term 'transformation' and

<sup>25</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1954). There were also important debates during the Middle Ages which concerned the link between 'love' and 'knowledge' and how it is that the saints can in a sense 'possess' God without distance from him in their vision of God at the end of life. This stressed both the 'appetitive' and 'assimilative' dimensions of love, adding further complex and contrary elements. See Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*, transl. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 315. See also Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: The Renewal of Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2000, and Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 16–23.

<sup>27</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Compassion: the Basic Social Emotion', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 27–58.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 193.

<sup>29</sup> Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).



‘transformative’ to do the work of the word ‘love’. We do this not only in order to avoid the ambiguities which may otherwise be in play (everyone knows what love is but we struggle to define it), but also to draw out from the moment of faith that what we call ‘love’ is fundamentally mysterious within the everyday and is, for the Christian, fundamentally bound up with what we mean by ‘God’.

## THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION

But what are the consequences of the fact that Transformation Theology is a reorientation of theology rather than a new theological paradigm from the perspective of how it can be placed within modern theology? There is a significant difference between the two. If it were a new paradigm, then it would be competitively placed with respect to other paradigms. But as a reorientation (as what we are also calling ‘Theology in the World’), it has in fact a critical relation to theologies that presuppose a different orientation. We can summarize this critical relation in the more technical terms by describing Transformation Theology as being based in the rediscovery of Christ as *present* material as well as formal object of theology. This contrasts with the structure we find more generally in second-order theology in the modern period, which tends to presuppose a *past* Christ as its material object and a formal Christ (or the idea of Christ) as its present formal object. Subjectivity intervenes in the gap left in second-order theology between a past Christ, who is remembered, or recalled to mind by Bible and sacraments, and the idea of Christ as one who still lives. But in the calling of faith, subjectivity—while present, of course—cannot be said to intervene. There is at that point no absence of the real: no gap which needs to be filled by an industrious subjectivity motivated to create something by its own powers of reasoning or imagining. What this is rather, in the moment of faith, is an attentive and receptive human subject awaiting formation and realization as *creature* through the disclosure of the Creator in the person of Jesus Christ, whom we encounter in the gratuity of the moment (where he wills and not where we will). That is a quite different ontological and epistemological structure. The principal critical interaction between Transformation Theology and modern theology in the round lies in the critique, therefore, that what is implicitly present in faith—notably this whole-person receptivity—is not made explicit in the second-order theology of faith. Something essential is left out. Something indeed which concerns our humanity as this comes into view in faith and which is intimately bound up with the sense we have in faith that we have come into a new, deep and enlivening sense of *being free*.

To what then does such a critical reorientation lead? In the first place, it might mean that theology can come back into a positive and constructive relation with the experience of faith, which is precisely the encounter with Christ as the imperative of love and as the meaning of the world. Theology needs to capture again the sense of the reality of Christ in his divinity as well as humanity: as incarnate Creator in the midst of his world. We need to set aside our single-minded focus upon apologetics and rearticulating Christian faith in the languages of the contemporary world, re-grounding theology first of all in the very distinctive meaning of the Christian life itself. This points to an overcoming of the division between academic theology and the Church but also of the methodological and institutional barrier between systematic and practical theology. Typically, systematic theology has concerned itself with the fundamental areas of anthropology, epistemology, and ecclesiology. It engages with the coherent relations between these things, and tends to reflect the philosophical presuppositions of the broader society. On the other hand, practical theology typically asks questions about specific social and ethical issues and often reflects social and ethical thinking in these areas. Although it arises from within systematics, Transformation Theology can be reduced neither to systematic theology as it currently is, nor to practical theology. Its goal rather is to be a new kind of theology, predicated upon a new theological method, which is the overcoming of these kinds of barriers and distinctions. To this extent it looks back to theology as a 'practical science' of the medieval Franciscan tradition, which flourished particularly with the work of John Duns Scotus,<sup>30</sup> but also to the 'practical' and 'pastoral theology' of the early and principal Reformers, much of whose theological work was embedded in the ecclesial life of their new communities. It looks back in fact to the pre-modern period before the rise of modern theology with the foundation of the University of Berlin (1810), but it does not do so with nostalgia, but rather with hope that this return to our roots will paradoxically make possible a new theology that points more to our future than our past.

### Affirmations

In terms of the implied method of Transformation Theology, we can see a good deal in common with the ethnographic approach to theology and ecclesiology. The difference lies, however, in how the ethnographic movement is practised and understood. We have to understand firstly the methodological implications of the reflexive character of the Christological 'where' question. If I am asking as a theologian where is Jesus Christ and seeking to orientate myself to where I find that I discover him to be, then does this 'where is he?' not also

<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 8, 202–5.

have methodological implications for theological self-reflexivity or ‘where am I as a theologian?’ Am I doing theology in the right place? If my theology needs to be orientated to the living Christ, what does this say for the ‘where,’ ‘when,’ and ‘with whom’ of my own theology?

But just as it was the case that the need to integrate theology within faith could not simply be reduced to the question of whether the theologian is a person of active faith or not (it is more complex than that), so too it is impossible to reduce this question of where theology is done to institutional issues only. It does not so much matter whether the theologian works in the environment of a modern research university (the so-called ‘Berlin’ model of specialization and withdrawal), or in the denominational context of a Bible college, for instance. The question is rather *how* theology is being done. Is it being done, for instance, in partnership with those who work directly and creatively in the ‘crowded spaces’ of conflicting social interests, of power and powerlessness? If the Spirit of Pentecost, whom we can associate with the exalted Christ, is at work transformatively in the world, then is the theologian in his or her work in touch with that Spirit through the transformed lives of others? Another way of putting this is to ask how ecclesial is this theology, in the sense not just of intention but also of belonging: how is it in service of the Spirit in the Church?

These kinds of questions and openness to Christ suggest that the ethnographic method which involves movement towards groups of people, with whom we reflect together, itself needs to have a Christological grounding, and so also an ecclesial one. We are close here, on the one hand, perhaps to Robert Orsi and his bold experiments in ethnographic theology, in which the prior movement of the theologian into an ecclesial community is a condition of reflection upon it.<sup>31</sup> But it lies close too to what Maurice Blondel called the ‘Tradition’ of the Church, whereby he meant the unity between doctrine and thought, practice and action.<sup>32</sup> There has to be a sense then that if this method is properly applied, *systematic theology cannot fail to emerge as something distinctively new*.

Underlying these questions of method are further theoretical questions, which we can recognize from debates within Liberation Theology which concern the relation between theory and practice. An important interlocutor in this book will be Clodovis Boff, whose *Theology and Praxis* was the fullest expression of reflexive or theoretical thinking arising from ‘the option for the poor’.<sup>33</sup> Identifying the points of similarity and difference between Transformation Theology and Liberation Theology is a key task in this book.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and The Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Maurice Blondel, ‘History and Dogma’, *The Letter on Apologetics and History and Dogma* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), especially 264–87.

<sup>33</sup> Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter 3, 86–8.

More generally, among modern theologians who share this concern with the relation between how we think and how we act in this world, and how we are to understand theology as a thinking that is orientated towards Christian action, we can point to the work of Nicholas Healy, for instance, on ecclesiology. We can point too to Reinhard Hütter in his grounding of theology on Church practices and his understanding of agency of the Spirit in them. Kevin Vanhoozer is right to critique static, grammar-based theologies, while David Ford, with his turn to Wisdom, or Paul Fiddes, with his world-centred theology, are clearly fellow-travellers.<sup>35</sup> We can point also to a writer such as Ivan Petrella who, with Gustavo Gutiérrez, understands Liberation Theology to be a renunciation of the apologetic attempt to woo the sceptic and to ground theology in the recognition of the oppressed.<sup>36</sup> With respect to its philosophical inheritance, the work 'Towards a Philosophy of the Act' by Mikhail Bakhtin is important, as well as the thought of Hannah Arendt and Maurice Blondel.<sup>37</sup> More recently, we can point also to the early philosophical work of Karol Wojtyła (especially 'The Acting Person'<sup>38</sup>) and his extensive thinking as Pope John Paul II on the 'Theology of the Body'.<sup>39</sup> In terms of contemporary work, we find parallels with Darlene Fozard Weaver's turn from a person-centred approach to Catholic moral theology to one that is more act-centred.<sup>40</sup> With respect to engagements with science, theology of transformation resonates positively with the work of Philip Clayton and Nancey Murphy who, in a philosophical theological register, have defined a 'non-reductive physicalism' through an influential development of 'emergence theory'. Most recently, Philip Clayton has brought these perspectives into a more

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000); David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Ivan Petrella, *Beyond Liberation Theology: A Polemic* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 134–5. See also Gustavo Gutiérrez, 'Two Theological Perspectives: Liberation Theology and Progressivist Theology', in Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella (eds), *The Emergent Gospel: Theology from the Underside of History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1978), 227–58.

<sup>37</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, transl. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> Wojtyła, Karol, *The Acting Person*, *Analecta Husserliana* 10, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979). A close comparison of Pope John Paul's view of the acting person and the phenomenology of the moral act presented here in Chapter 7 would be a very interesting exercise which falls outside the scope of this book.

<sup>39</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Theology of the Body Human: Love in the Divine Plan* (New York: Alba House, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Darlene Fozard Weaver, *The Acting Person and Christian Moral Life* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011).

doctrinal and ecclesiological format.<sup>41</sup> A very recent study by Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn begins specifically to ask pertinent questions about the Christian life and the Church in the light of advances in neuroscience that undermine our accustomed 'dualism'.<sup>42</sup>

Among the major authors of Catholic tradition in the modern period, it resonates in particular with the work of Edward Schillebeeckx and his extensive interweaving of theological theory with practice as a relation of learning, as it does with his critique of hermeneutics on the grounds of deeper Christian values.<sup>43</sup> There are also parallels, of course, with Rahner and von Balthasar, but here the differences are more marked. Rahner's transcendentalism is implicit in human cognition itself according to its openness to the infinite. This openness grounds our human freedom and makes us 'hearers of the Word'. For Transformation Theology on the other hand, our 'transcendence' lies in the self-reflexivity which is constituted within our free acts. In our acts, we are confronted with the objective reality of who we are becoming when we act in such and such a way. This prompts a moment in which we can repent and withdraw from what we have done, or we can affirm and embrace it. The reflection which is integral to our acts brings with it the potential for the highest realization of our human freedom *as self-determination* therefore, but self-determination in Christ. This is not a moment that is outside community and culture however. For the Christian, self-reflexivity in the act is always informed by the person of Christ himself, as imaginatively and spiritually mediated by the culture of the Church. It is the Holy Spirit who, through grace, draws us before our own freedom to choose ourselves, in the presence of Christ, who chooses us.

In parallel with the work of von Balthasar, Transformation Theology places a strong emphasis upon the role of aesthetics within faith. But, in contrast with von Balthasar, it places the encounter with Christ in enacted faith as loving act, in specific space and time, at the centre of theological reflection. Transformation Theology follows Scotus in underlining the aesthetical dimensions of faith, which concern our own integration through the loving act into the ground of the world order as divine creation. As Paul Janz argues, aesthetics plays a role here in the nature of the reasoning which motivates these acts.<sup>44</sup> These always occur in situations of unpredictable complexity, and in

<sup>41</sup> See Chapter 2, note 56. See also Philip Clayton, *Transforming Christian Theology: For Church and Society* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010) and *Adventures in the Spirit: God, World and Divine Action: New Forays in Philosophical Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), especially, 244–55.

<sup>42</sup> Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology and the Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). See also the earlier work of Nancey Murphy on 'non-reductive physicalism', of course (e.g. *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006)).

<sup>43</sup> See especially 'The Understanding of Faith', in *Edward Schillebeeckx, Collected Works*, Vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2012).

<sup>44</sup> Paul Janz on the aesthetics of the Christian act is in preparation.

circumstances of grace. The reasoning which informs them, however, is not *ad hoc* but rather principled. Its principledness is not primarily deductive or inferential, however, but aesthetic, and so akin to the judgments of rightness and appropriateness which we make about what constitutes the beautiful in concrete works of art. The beauty of Christ is not something we primarily behold therefore, within epistemology, with implications for life (as von Balthasar has it), but is something we primarily encounter and enter into in life, through acts, with implications for epistemology. Since this is Christ *in us*, it is the *practical* reasoning of our loving acts that is always simultaneously the disciple's discernment of his 'form': the active presence of Christ as divine Word or Wisdom, transforming us and transforming the world.

The 'Christ in us' theme brings Transformation Theology into alignment with important motifs in both Martin Luther and John Calvin, around their Christocentric theologies or participatory grace.<sup>45</sup> The three closest interlocutors in the Protestant world are Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Stanley Hauerwas, but also Karl Barth. Bonhoeffer sought to ground his radically Christological ethics on a present Christ to whom he orientated theology through the 'who' question (into which he assimilates the 'where'<sup>46</sup>). In contrast with this, Transformation Theology recognizes that in today's globalized and pluralistic world, the 'where' can no longer be taken into the 'who', since this itself is now inevitably assimilated into our collective cultural identity and so becomes indistinguishable from it. The identification of the 'where' breaks the hegemony of culture in modern theological thought. But we share with Bonhoeffer the sense that theology has to take its orientation from Christ as encountered in the midst of life and not from its cultural milieu. The difference lies in the perception of Transformation Theology that the world, in which we can pose the 'who' question, has itself undergone rapid and significant change, in a way that now traps the Christian 'who' question within the particularity of a Christian culture, against the background of a highly diverse and pluralistic landscape of global interactions.

The continuity with Hauerwas lies also in his powerful and articulate convictions about the primacy of ethics in contemporary Christian witness and the ultimate unity of ethics with theology. The distinction lies in the identification of the *exalted* Christ as the ground of a theological ethics. This allows a Christological critique of the dominant narrativism by testing narrative against our human freedom of judgment: in the ethical challenges that confront us, in the particularity of our situational reality.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, *Union with Christ: the New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Cambridge and Grand Rapids, MI: W. M. Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 3, 67–8.

<sup>47</sup> See Chapter 3, 74–5.

Although Transformation Theology has a quite different trajectory from the theology of Karl Barth in many ways, it is impossible not to acknowledge what is nevertheless a significant and clear symmetry. Barth contests the primacy of apologetics and insists on a reorientation of theology to Christ according to his Lordship. He understands this Lordship to be a Lordship over space and time. Where his thinking is very different from the theology developed here is in his account of revelation. For Transformation Theology, God does not stand as self-contained, untouched, and transcendent with respect to the created order. Rather, he is *hidden* within it, and so can be recognized by the creature. He is, of course, not recognizable in himself as divinity (Barth is right to contest the complacency and controlling impulses of a liberal theology in this respect), but he is known rather in his transformational effects. In brief, the theology developed here differs from that of Barth to the extent that it is a transformation-based rather than a transcendence-based paradigm. This does not point towards process theology, however, despite the apparent ‘change’ in God which follows from a transformation model in its development through Christology and Trinitarian theology. In fact, the conviction is that the presence of God within the creation is *maximally* transformative. As God freely enters the world more deeply, through incarnation and Pentecost, the world itself is changed in such a way as to become more transparent to him. What seems to be a change in God is a change in the world therefore, brought about by ‘compassionate’ divine action.

It is in the calibration or renewal of anthropology against the background of doctrine that Transformation Theology shows an affinity also with the work of the Orthodox theologian Metropolitan John Zizioulas. In his *Being as Communion*, Zizioulas argues that the concept of the person as a relational entity derives originally from Cappadocian Trinitarianism.<sup>48</sup> Transformation Theology offers a Trinitarian reading of incarnation, according to which the loving human act itself becomes the primary form of the realization of Trinitarian revelation in history. This places theological anthropology in our capacity to ‘go beyond ourselves,’ and to become free in the loving act in the name of Christ, by grace, as the way in which the Triune God freely elects the world.

## Critique

As is evident from the above, Transformation Theology has a great deal in common with a host of act or practice-orientated theologies from both the

<sup>48</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997).

past and the present. Its nature as a 'reorientation' of theology rather than a new 'paradigm' allows it to relate non-competitively with many other theologies. But at the same time, there is a consistent undertow of critique. Transformation Theology cannot be *assimilated* into any one theological trajectory or school, past or present (though perhaps it sits closest of all to John Duns Scotus). It is important, however, that we understand exactly what the nature of this critique is. This will be important too for understanding the shape of the present book: why its chapters come in a specific order and how they form a whole. It is not possible to communicate a reorientation straightforwardly, since—like a new musical tonality—it has to be communicated also as a new theology which is the realization of the tonality. To extend the musical analogy, the practised musical ear would have recognized in Arnold Schoenberg's second quartet, Opus 10, not only a new piece of music but also a new musical language, indeed a new way of being musical. But in the case of theology, the notion of this 'new tonality' also needs to be made explicit (as 'Theology in the World') at the same time as it is performed (as 'Transformation Theology').

But in what does this newness of Transformation Theology reside? As the reader will see in Chapter 3, where there is a more detailed discussion of modern theologians, the focus of difference, and so of critique, lies repeatedly in the area of the human self. But this is not simply a question of anthropology, still less a new exploration of our subjectivity and the way in which we can 'make meaning'. Rather the underlying shift in the human, which leads to a prioritization of the themes of judgment, agency, freedom, and the act (and to the self-reflexivity—or potential for choice—which inheres in the act), is itself based in a new understanding of the world in which we live and of which we are a part. It is in fact a consequence of allowing once again the 'exalted' Christ to shape our theology.

Science and its reception (sometimes assimilative and sometimes reactive) have shaped the foundations of our Western culture in which modern theology was born. That science is now changing, indeed very substantially has already changed, and its new genetic, neurological, and quantum technologies are just beginning to penetrate not only our medical but also our economic and social world. Inevitably such a change in science will have far-reaching consequences for the ways in which we understand ourselves as human beings. The argument throughout this book is that theology cannot escape this change. Indeed, it must be at the forefront of its reception. Theology is, after all, a human thought form which is deeply embedded in materiality and embodiment, as it is in cosmology. These are precisely the areas that are most undergoing change, and they cannot but set up deep resonances with Christianity. If the last scientific revolution had its most immediate impact upon the Christian Church, through its re-evaluation of materiality and cosmos, it follows that the Church should be particularly



equipped to understand the nature of the cosmological change which is affecting us all and should be at the forefront of managing the change that is now once again coming upon us. If the first scientific revolution led to dualism, as a response to a materialist reduction of the body and world through Newtonianism, then the second will lead to a new paradigm of the mind and body and of body and world as far more deeply *integrated* than we ever supposed.

Neurology, genetics, and biology, as well as quantum physics (which is now engaging profoundly with brain science), all point to the human person as being embedded in the material universe in quite remarkable ways, and to a degree that makes dualism untenable. Dualism is the assumption that consciousness is 'outside' the world and is inalienably an observer of it, and so not in fact a feature of the world at all. As we shall see in Chapter 7, this has its most concrete expression in the neurobiology of our fundamental social cognition (the extent to which we are hard-wired to 'discover' the embodied other as potential collaborator), but it has its most radical expression in quantum physics with its understanding that even the 'observer' or scientific consciousness is in fact so deeply one with the world that to be an observer is already to be a participant and even agent in the world. Being within the world, as conscious life, we are never so far apart from the world as not to be 'co-creators' of it.

The critical posture of Transformation Theology towards modern theology resides in its conviction that our new scientific self-understanding, which through its technology will surely soon come to shape us as deeply as did Newtonianism, has deep implications both for Christology and for our own self-understanding as agent in the world. It leads us to the view that it is when we act that we are most human (or created, as we would say theologically) and so, from a theological perspective, to act deliberately and freely in the name of Christ, through personal judgment in loving engagement, is the point too at which we are most in the world, or even *most world*. Quantum physics in particular allows us to understand mind and matter as being part of the same deep structural principles of time and world. Our freedom, and our freedom in love, implicitly becomes the possibility of a cosmic event. This theology then opens up the possibility of a retrieval of a cosmic or universal Christ, not as a new Christ to be thought but as a way of recognizing the commissioning Christ we encounter and receive in the situational reality of our everyday lives. The extent to which Transformation Theology is a 'new' theology is the extent to which it learns to recognize the features of the 'exalted' Christ of tradition in the commissioning Christ who we encounter in the situational reality of our everyday lives. This is a Christ who we approach through the most basic human functions of reasoning, willing, and feeling, in moments of choice and decision, when we feel called to act in ways that will 'make a difference'.

## A ROAD MAP

But the centrality of the Christian act for this theology also poses a particular set of problems for the presentation of this theology. How do we write and think about the act in ways that are adequate to the human unity and density of meaning which it brings about? By and large, what we write must be an account of the unparalleled meaningfulness of the Christian act of lived discipleship that the disciple remains a disciple. But how do we capture that?

The present book offers a linear series of chapters which begin with foundational questions of theology, before proceeding to the themes of Church and then social transformation (or Church in the world). This broadly follows the pattern of fundamental theology. The first section ('Foundations: Theological Reorientation': Chapters 1, 2, and 3) sets out the principles of this reorientation of theology towards the encounter with Christ in the act. It is here that we have included a more detailed engagement with the work of other theologians in order, primarily, to highlight the differences between a subject-focused theological base and an act-based account. Chapter 3 includes a section on the work of Clodovis Boff, in order to highlight continuities and differences between a theology of transformation and a theology of liberation.

The second section ('Church and Life: Christ in us': Chapters 4, 5, and 6) shows the nature of Transformation Theology in greater detail, beginning with a Trinitarian, doctrinal analysis of the Christian act in Chapter 4, and an incarnational–anthropological one in Chapter 5 ('Christ in Us'). Chapter 6 focuses upon hermeneutics and Scripture in the light of an act-orientated Christianity.

The third section ('Social Transformation: Newness of World': Chapters 7, 8, and 9) explores the points of intersection between Church and World. Chapter 7 focuses on the new understanding of the anthropology of faith which becomes possible in the light of contemporary neuroscience and philosophy (phenomenology), followed in Chapter 8 by an examination of the implications of a new orientation to the act in modern philosophical theological debates. Finally, in Chapter 9, we make an assessment of contemporary debates in political philosophy, focusing in particular on those discussions which centre on an engagement with the person and inheritance of St Paul.

But, in addition to the linear development of this book, we must also take note of the attempt throughout to allow this development to be also a circling around the Christian act, as its central focus and its own proper object. We have marked this in the text by repeated reference to the 'where' question (i.e. 'where is Jesus Christ in the world today?'). This question constitutes the needful openness before the reality of the Christian act, in which human, Christological and so also theological truth can converge. In this way it is hoped that a linear development can also be a development of depth.

All theoreticians of the act, from Blondel, to Lukács and Clodovis Boff, have had to confront the problem that there is something originary about the act, while discourse is ‘after the event.’<sup>49</sup> But act and thought also seem to inhabit a different timescale. The act is fixed in time and, though originary, has to be reflected upon in life as something in the past. Discourse on the other hand seems linear and extended. Discourse is notoriously never-ending, while the act seems to us so immediate that we cannot grasp it even in the doing of it. Act and discourse are opposite poles of the human. It cannot be easy, therefore, to write a discourse *of* the act, through memory and reflection, which does not automatically distance itself from the act. This intractable problem is addressed here by the attempt to place the discourse of this book as far as possible within a linguistic and intentional space marked out by the ‘where’ question (though of course this is to draw upon a uniquely theological resource). In this way there is a better chance that Transformation Theology in its critical and constructive phases can—as an academic or second-order theology—remain nevertheless in contact with the first-order theology of living Christian communities, and so can prepare itself for what must finally be its application as ‘theology in act’ in the ‘crowded spaces’ of our contemporary reality.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 2, note 53.

<sup>50</sup> See the following website: <<http://www.theologyinact.com>>.

## Theology in the World

### *A Reorientation of Theology*

We have argued in the previous chapter for the essential *historicality* of the human, to the extent that we are shaped both internally and externally by the age in which we live. As ‘intelligent embodiment’, we are both matter and mind. It follows, therefore, that what we, as mind, think matter is is not just important to the way we see the world, but is important also to *who* we are and to *how* we are in the world, as creatures who are both matter and mind. Since we are matter, what we believe matter to be makes a difference as to how we are in the world, as both matter and mind. It is worth recalling how very different must have been the experience of being in the world for the tribes who made their way out of Africa some 70,000 years ago, despite the fact that they were biologically identical to ourselves.

It is not difficult to see that Christianity is a religion that has a particular concern with materiality, and with questions of self, body, and world. It has to be concerned where science is taking us therefore. What the first scientific revolution teaches us is that changes in our scientific self-understanding can undermine our ancient assumptions about the ultimate integration of self, body, and world. It can seem to divide them in the construction of a dualistic account of mind and body, self and world. But in principle, science can also reinforce their unity, and this is what seems to be happening in the second scientific revolution with its focus on genetics, neurobiology, and quantum physics. If Christ is the Word of God made flesh, and if he calls his Church into union with him, through the Holy Spirit, then the Christian community has to be concerned with how we understand the nature of the world in which we live, in any historical period. This will be the case even if it is also this Christ of flesh, raised from the dead, who is the final criterion of all human knowing. But it makes sense to be on the front foot in the reassimilation of science into culture, on new terms, when those terms promise to be hospitable to the basic precepts of Christian faith and life.

## THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

In fact, each period of theology seems to be significantly shaped by the basic premises of their self-understanding. Patristic theology was shot through with the kinds of insights about our human nature and knowledge of the cosmos which belonged to the Platonizing principles of classical culture. These emphasized intelligence as transcendence and matter as mediatory.<sup>1</sup> This was the fabric in which Christianity first wove its own image. A new kind of scholastic, problem-centred, and more systematized theology became identifiable from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when Aristotelian principles of understanding were in the ascendancy. These laid more stress on intelligence as immanence and on matter as that which was dynamically shaped by the form within it. But for all their differences, Aristotelianism and Platonism shared the same basic 'scientific' worldview: the same unquestioned belief in a three-tiered cosmos in which physical height and spiritual exaltation combined. This is what we think of today as the 'enchanted' universe of pre-modernity. According to Charles Taylor's analysis, we were at home in that world as the 'porous' self rather than the 'buffered' self of modernity.<sup>2</sup>

Scriptural Christology presupposed the background of this ancient cosmology. Against such a setting it was possible for the Church to affirm the saving work of God in Jesus Christ through his resurrection and glorification within the created order. We often fail to understand today the extent to which heaven itself was understood to be within the created order and to be intrinsically part of it. Heaven, like earth, was created (Gen 1.2) but it was also the very farthest limit of the material order, where space and time were closest to the presence of the Creator and so most directly shaped by his power. It was the point of intersection between what was visible and what was invisible.<sup>3</sup> Heaven was far 'above' the earth in terms of its sublimity, but it was also far above the earth in terms of its physical location. It is this spatio-temporal dimension of the pre-modern heaven which set it decisively apart from anything we can imagine today. The medieval maps which showed heaven as a final ring surrounding the earth at a distance from it were accurate pictorial representations of how the pre-modern world understood the universe to be, with heaven as its 'crown.' Just how fundamental and unquestioned this was can be seen in the section of the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas where Thomas asks the question of where exactly the body of Christ now is? He understands that body to be at the very highest point of heaven 'by place and dignity'. It is,

<sup>1</sup> A. N. Williams, *The Divine Sense: The Intellect in Patristic Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Gregory of Nyssa suggests that heaven is the meeting place of material and noetic or intelligible realities (*Hexaemeron*, Migne, PG, 44, col., 81C). See also note 17.

therefore, 'above the angels', even though Christ's body is material whereas the angels are pure substance.<sup>4</sup> Here Thomas is articulating the ancient view that the material order of the universe itself is shaped by the divine imperium, as Scripture said it was, and so he understood heaven to be 'exalted' in the sense of combining both sublimity and physical height. Luther defended this same view in his debate with Zwingli, who was beginning to move away from the scriptural account of the exalted Christ to one which was more influenced by what Luther called 'reason, philosophy and mathematics'.<sup>5</sup>

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the religious cosmology which held that worldview together began to become unstable and finally collapsed, from the mid sixteenth century onwards, human self-understanding began to undergo a far-reaching change. At the heart of this scientific revolution was the development of a wholly new understanding of how human reason and the external material world are ordered to one another, with implications also for our understanding of what it is for knowledge to be 'true'.<sup>6</sup> A fundamental shift in scientific conceptions of the nature of matter was central here, in the movement from essences to 'quanta' or measurable forces. This produced a new kind of human knowing, which Amos Funkenstein has dubbed 'ergetic knowledge'.<sup>7</sup> This is productive or reproductive knowledge which allows the application of new insights about the material world to produce new forms of technology, and so to reshape the embodied self in its self-awareness as intelligent and material. This changed world-image has over the years redefined our self-understanding and our self-imagining. It is perhaps technology more than anything else which turned the theoretical insights of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries into a scientific *revolution* by bringing them effectively into the domain of our own embodiment and embodied reality. Through technology, a highly theoretical and, in fact, esoteric or elitist form of knowledge came to shape us indirectly, though profoundly, in the embodied social practices of our everyday lives.

At the centre of that 'first' scientific revolution was a new deterministic understanding of matter, which came to describe the external world, in which we live as subject, in terms of a far-reaching materialism. This had profound implications for our own understanding of who we are, in terms above all of the redescription of our own bodies. First and foremost, of course, it had immense

<sup>4</sup> ST 3a, q. 57, art. 4, 5, and 6.

<sup>5</sup> See Gerhard May (ed.), *Marburger Religionsgespräch 1529* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1970), 54. Calvin, in contrast, seems much more determined to maintain doctrinal integrity in the face of what he recognizes as scientific change. See Brian Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), especially 124–90.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander Koyré, *The Astronomical Revolution*, transl. R. E. W. Maddison (Paris: Hermann, 1973), 13–116. See also Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Chapter 1, note 12.

implications for Christianity as a cosmological and incarnational religion. We are very fortunate in having a body of work that dates from a very early period when the new science was just on the horizon but when the issues that were emerging were discussed by leading theologians. The Eucharistic debate marked a key phase in the evolution of the early Reformation.<sup>8</sup> It occurred at a point in history at which the Reformers had rejected the Aristotelian metaphysics of analogy of being, but still retained a traditional view of the cosmos (to which Augustine had appealed in his original development of a Catholic theology of the sacraments whereby, he had argued, it was the exalted Christ in heaven who was the true minister of the sacrament<sup>9</sup>). In the earlier phase, between Luther and Zwingli, the early circulation of Copernican ideas, through the *Commentariolus*, was very restricted indeed and there is no evidence that either man was influenced by them, though Zwingli was clearly familiar with early humanistic accounts of matter. In the later stage of the debate, between Calvin and the Zwinglians, Copernican ideas were already more influential and they found a reflection in Calvin's thought.<sup>10</sup>

At both stages of the debate, the point at issue was whether the new Protestantism should follow Catholic tradition in its belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist or not. In Catholic sacramental tradition (to which in fact Luther firmly held on the grounds of a Reformed theology of divine promise rather than an Aristotelian metaphysics), Christ could only be present in the Eucharist because he was already present in heaven, in the continuing fullness of his divinity and humanity. He had, quite literally, a 'place' in heaven 'up above', and so still shared with us our space and time. But since he was at the very highest point of the universe, he could be present anywhere in the earthly realms stretched out below. And so he could choose to be really present in the Eucharist.<sup>11</sup> Luther's opponent Zwingli vigorously denied this.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver Davies, 'The Interrupted Body' and 'Lost Heaven', in Oliver Davies, Paul Janz, and Clemens Sedmak, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London: Continuum, 2007), 11–36, 37–59.

<sup>9</sup> When making his argument for the objectivity of the sacrament in *Answer to Petilian*, Augustine stresses that he is speaking of Christ who 'is alive, sitting at the right hand of the Father' (*Answer to Petilian*, Book 2, Chapter 7, §15–16; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, *St Augustine*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, repr, 1989), 532). He states that 'Christ also Himself washes, Himself purifies with the selfsame washing of water by the word, wherein the ministers are seen to do their work in the body' (*Answer to Petilian*, Book 3, Chapter 49, §59; *St Augustine*, 621).

<sup>10</sup> Copernicus's *De revolutionibus* was published in 1543, although an earlier version may have been in circulation by 1530 and a preliminary account had appeared in the *Commentariolus* in the first decade of the century. Calvin seems to acknowledge the influence of Copernican ideas in his affirmation that heaven is not to be identified with the stars (*Calvin's Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, transl. Rev. William Pringle (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), 275–6, Eph. 4.10). He nevertheless holds to a strongly realist account of the ascended Christ (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1559, 4.17.29).

<sup>11</sup> Martin Luther expressed this very well when he said that Christ could be present in our hearts spiritually, in the Eucharist substantially and in heaven according to his humanity (*Luther's Works, Word and Sacrament 2* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 340).

He did not do so because he had doubts as to whether Christ really was in his embodied state in heaven ‘up above,’ but because he believed that since Christ was in heaven in his human body and, since that body is material, Christ could not be in heaven in a transformed or ‘glorified’ state. The traditional Christian belief in the transformability of matter was no longer tenable, for Zwingli the humanist. Indeed, so keen was Zwingli to affirm that Christ has a truly human, material body which, in terms of the new science, must, therefore, be ‘circumscribed, limited and particular’,<sup>12</sup> that he strangely insisted that the body of Christ as he now exists in heaven must itself be in an ‘untransformed’ state.<sup>13</sup>

### The First Scientific Revolution

What we can see in the debate between Luther and Zwingli are the first signs of what was to become a theological reorientation which inaugurated a new theological period. Modern theology was conceived in the response to the first scientific revolution: a response which developed over several centuries and which has extensively shaped theology over the last 200 years. Zwingli was the first theologian to understand the power of science to redescribe the nature of Christ’s risen body. Since Zwingli was neither a sceptic nor a liberal in the modern sense, he had no alternative but to understand Christ’s presence in the Eucharist in a different way, on account of his need to accommodate or integrate this early scientific description. In place of the real, substantial presence of Christ in the Eucharist, Zwingli, therefore, placed a new emphasis on the Holy Spirit as illumining and bringing us back in the Eucharist to the Church’s *memory* of Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. But while the Holy Spirit took on a Reformed prominence in his work, it also appeared to have a special affinity with our own subjectivity. Zwingli established a particular connection between the Holy Spirit (German: *Heiliger Geist*) and the human mind (German: *Geist*),<sup>14</sup> and he understood both to be at odds with matter and as offering liberation from the material order.<sup>15</sup> Zwingli contested Luther’s

<sup>12</sup> ‘[e]in lyb, ein umbzyleter, umbfasserter, umpryßner lyb’, in ‘Über D. Martin Luthers Buch, Bekenntnis gennant’, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 8, *Corpus Reformatorum* Vol. 93 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1982), 167.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Antwort über Straussens Büchlein, das Nachtmahl Christi betreffend’, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 4, 834–41, especially 841: ‘so man offentlich sicht, das wir den verstand des essens sines fleischs zum teil dahar messend, daß er an der grechten götlicher maiestet *unverwandelt* sitzt biß an’n jungsten tag, und demnach ewklich’. My italics.

<sup>14</sup> In Paul Althaus’s phrase, it is now the case that ‘Spirit has an effect only on spirit’ (Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 395).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Ad Mattheum Alberum de coena dominica epistola’, *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 3, 336–7. See also his view that Christ ‘leads us away from sensible realities to internal and spiritual ones’ (337).



presupposition that in the *ordo salutis*, Christ the Word comes to us first from within the material order.<sup>16</sup> In sum, therefore, we can say that we already begin to see in Zwingli the belief that theology could no longer base its own rationality on the material order of the cosmos itself, despite the fact that he continued to believe in the geocentrism and finite universe of tradition. Rather, theology had to begin to look to human subjectivity, with a new conjunction of divine Spirit and human spirit, for the basis of that rationality. What we see in Zwingli, therefore, are the very beginnings of the turn to the subject in theology, which was to become so central to the modern theological project.

It can often be difficult for us to understand today that it was self-evident for the pre-modern Church that the first and deepest rationalization of revealed faith could be given on the grounds of the nature of spatio-temporal reality itself (or what we can call simply 'the material universe'). We see this most clearly in Thomas Aquinas, with his 'five ways', but it is characteristic more generally of pre-modern theologies (the modern Catholic affirmation of 'natural law' is perhaps a surviving element from this pre-modern Christian cosmology). Nor was this simply 'natural theology' but it had its deepest ground rather in a theology of revelation and creation, and in fundamental Christology, with its structure of the descent and incarnation of Christ as the Creator Word of God, followed by his 'ascension' or return back to the Father in heaven. That view of the universe was shaped in the early centuries of Christianity by the scriptural account of cosmology as set out in Genesis, where this was convergent with the received classical Greek cosmologies of the day.<sup>17</sup> It was within this scriptural cosmological structure that the belief of the early Church in Christ as the incarnate Word was set, through whom all things were made and in whom all things were sustained in being.<sup>18</sup> This fundamental, cosmological Christology of the incipient Church (which came to identify Jesus with the Creator Yahweh) was itself received in the form, and against the background, of

<sup>16</sup> See Luther's 'That These Words of Christ, "This is my Body", etc., Still Stand Firm against the Fanatics of 1527' (*Luther's Works*, 37, Word and Sacrament 3 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), 13–155), and 'Confession Concerning Christ's Supper of 1528' (*Luther's Works*, 37, see for instance 96–100 and 287–8).

<sup>17</sup> See in particular *Die Pseudoklementinen, II. Rekognitionen in Rufins Übersetzung*, ed. Bernhard Rehm (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag), 1965, and Basil's *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*. These texts are discussed in W. G. L. Randles, *The Unmaking of the Medieval Christian Cosmos, 1500–1760* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 1–8. For a comprehensive survey of the pre-modern cosmos, see Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). I have summarized some of this material in Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 16–21. See Chapter 1, note 8.

<sup>18</sup> The Word was one 'through whom all things were made' (John 1.3), in whom 'all things hold together' and through whom 'God was able to reconcile all things, on earth or in heaven' (Col 1.16–20). For the cosmological functions of the pre-existent Christ, see also 1 Cor 8.6; 2 Cor 5.17; Heb 1.2–4. For the earlier role of the divine 'wisdom' in the creation, which is an important model at this point, see Ps 136.5; Prov 3.19; Jer 10.12.

*precisely this three-tiered universe of tradition.*<sup>19</sup> What we can see here in fact, in line with Jesus' prayer that the Father's 'will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' is that Christian revelation in its classical, scriptural form entailed a belief in a new integration of heaven and earth as a form of cosmological change which St Paul understood to be New Creation brought about through the incarnation of Christ.

We should not wonder, therefore, that the Church and her theologians were so shaken by the experience of such a radical change in how we understand the universe of which we are a part. This went far beyond a crisis in biblical authority (Protestant) or the authority of the Church (Catholic), though there undoubtedly were such crises.<sup>20</sup> What we can see here is actually the reordering of the mind–body–world configuration in such a way as to mark what is better described as a significant shift in human self-awareness in the world, with the new social prioritization of 'theoretical' or 'observer' reason, leading to a new emphasis on 'technology' and 'transcendence'. This was a long-term change, but it is what separates us today from the culture and thought of the pre-modern world, which for all its fascination can also seem to be so deeply alien to us. Unsurprisingly, the shift between pre-modern and modern cosmologies led also to deep changes in our understanding of what Christian theology is and so also to change in the nature of our theological reasoning.

## MODERN THEOLOGY

The new science did not in fact immediately seem opposed to faith but led to a range of forceful deist accounts of the existence of God on the grounds of what was now understood about the known universe. The material order still needed a Creator, and Descartes, Leibniz, and the rationalist tradition argued for a Creator God on the grounds of the new science.<sup>21</sup> A watershed was reached in the work of Immanuel Kant towards the end of the eighteenth century, responding to the scientific 'empiricism' of David Hume. In his 'second

<sup>19</sup> The Israelites believed in a three-part cosmos, of heaven or heavens above the earth and *sheol* (or the underworld) below it. This is the 'world' of all that is, in the sense of 'the heavens and the earth' described at Genesis 1.1 (cf. also Jer 23.24 and Acts 17.24).

<sup>20</sup> The implications for biblical scholarship in this critical period of the Western tradition are well explored by Klaus Scholder in his *The Birth of Modern Critical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1990). See also Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161–265. For the Catholic Church's conflict with Galileo, see also note 47.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to recall the bold attempts in the early modern period, from Descartes to Francis Bacon, to reconcile reason with biblical traditions through evolving, though often attenuated, forms of natural theology. See Amos Funkenstein, *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986) and Stephen Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Copernican revolution' developed in the First Critique, Kant drew a powerful series of logical deductions with respect to how human beings can know the world, in the light of the scientific advances. His critique of reason brought philosophy up to date with natural science in a new way. He redescribed the questions of mind–body–world in a way which acknowledged the tensions between what is 'outside' us and what is 'inside' us: between mind and reality. And in the main, he dealt with these questions *descriptively*, giving definition to the tensions between mind and reality. He did not as such seek to resolve them. But one of the characteristics of later readers of Kant would be their determination to understand Kant's philosophy as calling for just such a resolution. In other words, they interpreted Kant's description dynamically and *dualistically*, as demanding that we choose between mind and matter, freedom and determinism.<sup>22</sup> Theologians, for their part, believed that Kant's own view that he was in effect creating 'room for faith', simply risked banishing theology from the sciences altogether, with the possibility that it would be socially and intellectually marginalized. They decisively rejected this and positioned themselves centrally in the current of the day, which held that something fundamental about the human was now at stake. They understood the tension between mind and matter in Kant to be the struggle between freedom and determinism. This resonated strongly with some idealist and other philosophers, with whom they shared the conviction that there was some faculty of the human mind which retained the capacity to function beyond the material and which showed the possibility of 'transcendence'.<sup>23</sup>

At its point of origin then, modern theology can be read as being either directly or indirectly caught up in the response to the challenge posed by Kant's critical philosophy. Idealism was the most important current of response initially, in its retrieval and expansion of human freedom at the very point where we cognize the material world. With the formation of the University of Berlin in 1810, which became the model of the university of the future, idealism took centre stage. The place of theology in the new university was initially contested but, through the influence of Friedrich Schleiermacher, it was finally included in the syllabus and became the home of a new kind of 'scientific' (in the sense of rigorous) and 'systematic' theology.<sup>24</sup> The multi-volume products of this theology became identified with the exceptionally skilled academic 'systematic theologian' who could recast the Christian tradition in up-to-date ways, proceeding to discuss and integrate its different thematic strands in linear order. In the early period, this new theology was called *Vermittlungstheologie*

<sup>22</sup> J. G. Fichte in particular develops this thematic in the First Introduction to his *Science of Knowledge* (J. G. Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, ed. and transl. by Peter Heath and John Lachs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1–28).

<sup>23</sup> Davies, *The Creativity of God*, 50–72.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially 130–211.

or 'mediating theology', in the recognition that its task was to bring the new rigorous forms of human self-understanding that were emerging in this modern professionalized research environment together with the ancient traditions of doctrine and faith.<sup>25</sup> Berlin offered both a distinctive set of intellectual principles, reflecting those of idealism itself, and, in its professionalism and research-orientation, a distinctive set of social *mores*. It offered the modern theologian a new way of thinking and living, and a new kind of corporate and institutional social identity in the academic *collegium*, which was the intellectual centre of a reinvigorated and increasingly pre-eminent Protestant Germany.

The rise of scientific determinism in the material realm led over time, therefore, to the rationalization of faith on the grounds principally of the 'turn to the subject' or of our own human capacity to be 'meaning-maker', based on new understandings of our own subjectivity. This led in turn to a strongly 'dependent' apologetic trajectory in modern theology, as theologians sought to adapt and respond to prevailing currents in contemporary self-understanding, which would allow them to ground theology in contemporary intellectual life. In this way they could establish its continuing social relevance. The picture is not monochrome, of course. The Hegelian dialectic was everywhere present as a way of making subjectivity a universal condition of existence. But the response of a thinker such as Kierkegaard was to include within his understanding of subjectivity the irreducible experience of the Cross as resistance and paradox (Kierkegaard and existentialism). Another trajectory, following Kant, based the rationalization of faith around our capacity to act morally and rationally in the world as Christians (Ritschl, Von Harnack, and liberalism). Later accounts of human subjectivity developed which were based, as was idealism, on the transcendent capacities of the self at the point of cognizing the world, though now doing so in a way which recognized the proper place of materiality in that freedom (leading to Rahner and transcendental Thomism).<sup>26</sup> Other secular epistemologies were deployed, which sought to integrate rather than oppose mind and matter, in the interests of a more outrightly Christological focus of faith (von Balthasar and theological aesthetics).<sup>27</sup> And, from another perspective, even such a conservative and doctrinal modern theologian as Karl Barth, who presented a keen critique of liberal accommodations with philosophy,

<sup>25</sup> 'Vermittlungstheologie', in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. 34 (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 730.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Sheehan traces these influences, particularly in Rousselot and Maréchal, in his study *Karl Rahner* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987).

<sup>27</sup> In his prioritization of aesthetics as epistemology, and in his emphasis on beauty as a transcendental, though one that is particularly embedded within materiality, Von Balthasar seems to parallel Gadamer's work (H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975, German original 1960) and *The Relevance of the Beautiful in The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1986, 3–53).

actually shows a considerable debt in his theology of the Word to philosophical traditions of consciousness and language (including Descartes, Hegel, and, arguably, Husserl), transposing them into a theology of God as divine subject.<sup>28</sup> Nor should we forget the influence of the Marxian critical analytic of consciousness and embodiment in the 'liberationist' trend in theology, both as Liberation and Feminist Theology.

Furthermore, if Schleiermacher and the early Romantics had noted that Kant had omitted a serious discussion of language in his three critiques, and so had failed to take account of the transcendent possibilities of language itself in our experience of the world, then later theologies would themselves become part of the 'turn to the sign.'<sup>29</sup> These were based, however, upon a scriptural or doctrinal subjectivity as 'grammar' and were shaped by our reception of biblical texts, or by the Church itself as an extended 'social text' (Frei, Lindbeck, and structuralism). Here the influence of the Yale School of New Criticism was felt, and of a Geertzian cultural anthropology, on what is primarily a biblical Christianity. And it was at this point that another movement came to the fore from within the 'turn to the subject': the death of the subject itself. Meaning-making as language system always entails a tension between individual speech *agency* ('parole') and language as formal, communicative structure or system ('langue'). This has given rise in our own contemporary period to anti-foundationalism and to the issues arising from post-structuralism and its aftermath. Once again, however, the story is not straightforward since this has also been bound up with a very fertile privileging of Church practices as the ground of systematic theology.<sup>30</sup>

In more general terms, what we can see in this very brief sketch is an overwhelmingly apologetic trend in theology (in our 'dependent' sense), based upon the appropriation of influential schools of current intellectual life, by which we and our contemporaries have sought to understand how it is that we can make sense of the world in the light of Christ. As we argued in the previous chapter, this is suggestive of a strongly import-based intellectual economy where what is shared between theologian and secular thinker alike is an emphasis upon what we can call 'rationalities of subjectivity'. These are ultimately grounded in the foundational logics of our own subjectivity: as

<sup>28</sup> See for instance the discussion of Descartes at CD III.1, 350–63.

<sup>29</sup> Günter Bader 'Spirit and Letter—Letter and Spirit: Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion*', in Günter Bader and Paul S. Fiddes (eds), *Spirit and Letter: A Christian Tradition and a Late-modern Reversal* (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> See for instance, Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000); Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); David F. Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

‘consciousness’, ‘existence’, ‘interpretation’, ‘speech’, or ‘personal experience’ (and critical ‘liberationist’ analytics). Each of these constitutes in its own way our human capacity to be ‘meaning-makers’. Here at least the mind has been free to unfurl its wings and to soar.

## The Second Scientific Revolution

Science has not stood still, however, and today we find ourselves in the throes of a second scientific revolution. Through genetics, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology, the scientific power of description has advanced further into the human and now encompasses subjectivity itself. And with this new power of self-description, it can seem that deterministic explanation has moved within the subject itself. The breakthroughs of this second scientific revolution can appear to set up a new form of deterministic self-understanding, which now encloses our own ‘inner world’. The natural sciences have advanced to the stage that modern scientific writers can describe us even as subjects in comprehensively reductionist terms.<sup>31</sup>

But there are powerful reasons against reductionism in fact, not least the consequences such an idea has for scientific knowledge itself.<sup>32</sup> Like any other kind of academic knowledge, scientific knowledge relies on judgment, which presupposes our human freedom. Only a free subject can come to judgment about something in the sense that we give this word. We may accept that our freedom as conscious subject is constrained by material factors and so is to be thought of as being operative *within* material causation (which in any case is the only way in which our freedom could be real freedom), but the view that causation here is random or even more strangely that it is caused by the material ‘agency’ of neurons or genes, seems to call into question the possibility of rational discourse itself and so also the possibility of science as authoritative knowledge upon which reductionists themselves wish to rely. Furthermore, it calls into question the principles of human responsibility for our acts, and the extensive social structures of accountability and revisability that they support. Are we deluded when we, as human beings, suppose that other human

<sup>31</sup> See Nicholas Humphrey, *Soul Dust: The Magic of Consciousness* (London: Quercus, 2011). But see also Galen Strawson, ‘Soul Dust by Nicholas Humphrey—Review’, *The Observer*, 9 January 2011, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jan/09/soul-dust-nicholas-humphrey-review>> (accessed on 28 July 2012).

<sup>32</sup> On the problems of reductionism, see Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World: A Study of the Boundaries of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also Alan Torrance, ‘Developments in Neuroscience and Human Freedom: Some Theological and Philosophical questions’, *Science and Christian Belief* 16, no. 2 (2004), 123–37, and Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology and Religion: Illusions, Delusions and Realities About Human Nature* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009). See also Nancy Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

beings can ‘mend their ways’ or indeed that we ourselves can change the way we behave if we wish to? And if these are all the result of random events in our brains, then how could we ever perceive this except through the dedicated and responsible forms of scientific discernment, which manifest the very same qualities of free and responsible judgment in what we believe (for which we allow ourselves to be answerable) that such a view would seem to wish to deny in what we *do*?<sup>33</sup>

Conventional forms of reductionism are also at odds with the increasing influence of quantum physics in our understanding of the relation between matter and mind. We are used to thinking that science can only describe the structure of matter (so that ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness’ becomes an incomprehensible ‘add-on’<sup>34</sup>). Quantum physics accommodates both, however.<sup>35</sup> There is no use of reason that is more detached, disembodied, and observer-like than scientific reasoning, but the view of the observer which emerged during the first half of the twentieth century suggested that even as rigorous observer, we remain fundamentally agent, who is intrinsically involved in reality in a way that constantly changes it. We remain fundamentally part of the world, or are one with the world, even where we are most, as observer, ‘outside’ it.

### Science and Disenchantment

But we need first to think more carefully about the second scientific revolution which is upon us, and do so by reflecting a little on how scientific revolutions work. From one perspective of course, science offers new horizons of wonder at the unimaginable complexity of the universe and indeed of our own complex anatomy. But from another, it fosters a process of ‘disenchantment’. Scientific breakthroughs are more fundamentally description than they are narrative. They tell us how the world is in matters of detail at micro or macro-levels of materiality. This is a careful process, which involves stable judgments leading to explanation of data. But inevitably processes of interpretation can also be in play here, especially where broader conclusions are being drawn.

But for scientific breakthroughs to become revolutions, something else is required which brings the new knowledge into the domain of embodiment and social practice. The principle of Funkenstein’s ‘ergetic knowledge’ or ‘knowledge that works’ can be seen in the history of heliocentrism. As a

<sup>33</sup> Merlin McDonald, ‘Consciousness and the Freedom to Act’, in Roy F. Baumeister, Alfred R. Miele, and Kathleen D. Vohs (eds), *Free Will and Consciousness: How Might They Work?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8–23.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Humphrey, *Soul Dust*, 3–24.

<sup>35</sup> Henry P. Stapp, *Mindful Universe: Quantum Mechanics and the Participating Observer* (New York: Springer, 2007); Roger Penrose, *The Large, the Small and the Human Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

theory, this needs to be attributed to the research of Nicholas Copernicus and Johannes Kepler. It is through their mathematical insights and calculations that belief in heliocentrism became compelling. But it was with the work of Galileo that these scientific advances really impacted upon society, now drawing, for instance, overt opposition from the Catholic Church. In effect, Galileo brought the new science closer to society, not least through his technology and the production of kinds of telescopes that offered a direct view of what were for Copernicus and Kepler primarily theoretical constructs (and which also promised to bring the owners of these telescopes social, political, and military gains).<sup>36</sup> It was at the point of its *application* that the truly revolutionary character of the new science began to become clear.

The implications here are that the new technologies which the second scientific revolution will bring about (the capacity to mind-control a computer for instance, or a prosthetic arm or leg, to enhance memory, as well as comprehensive genetic profiling, with its socio-economic and legal implications) will reshape our society in ways that, once again, bring the new insights of science into the space of our own embodiment and human self-awareness. The hugely increased possibilities of intervention in natural processes both within the human body and brain, and beyond these, will certainly make our culture 'scientific' to a far greater extent than it is today. And inevitably, one of their effects will be an extension of the process of disenchantment, with respect now to the 'internal' universe of our own subjectivity, as well as the 'external' universe of galaxies and subatomic particles and all that lies between. This kind of change will—or perhaps already does—shape a framework within which theology can, for its own legitimate reasons, reorientate itself to the world, discerning in the exalted Christ as commissioning the proper ground and object of its reflection.

## MAPPING SELF AND WORLD

In order to analyse the nature of the theological challenge before us, we need to understand better the nature of the changes that have taken place in the mind–body relation or human self-awareness, between the pre-modern period and our own contemporary world. There are in fact stark differences between the

<sup>36</sup> Noel M. Swerdlow, 'Galileo's Discoveries with the Telescope and their Evidence for the Copernican Theory', in Peter Machamer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Galileo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 224–70. See also the discussion of Galileo's awareness of the social and political value of the telescope in terms of scientific discovery in Biagoli, Mario, 'Replication or Monopoly? The Economies of Invention and Discovery in Galileo's Observations of 1610', in Jürgen Renn (ed.), *Galileo in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 277–320.



MIND	<b>MIND</b>	MIND
WORLD	<b>BODY</b>	WORLD

Fig. 2.1. The pre-modern paradigm

different primary historical periods, which can easily be represented diagrammatically. We can begin with the pre-modern or scriptural paradigm of the self in the world as laid out in Figure 2.1.

Here we see Taylor's 'porous' self of pre-modernity.<sup>37</sup> This is a human being who is imaginatively and conceptually at home in what we might call a scriptural world or cosmology. It is an anthropocentric world on the one hand and, on the other, it is the 'enchanted' universe of Peter Berger's *The Sacred Canopy*, which is teeming with music, movement, and life.<sup>38</sup> The earth is full of powers, spirits, and intelligences, which are no less substances than we are, though they are non-material, and the boundaries between the individual mind and the 'intelligible' realities of the world are unclear. Here, too, the body itself is imaged not as being over and against the world, but as being itself 'cosmological'. This is the embodiment as microcosm that we associate with early religious traditions. We are here, as human beings, intrinsically part of the world that surrounds us. From a theological perspective, it is a model that is grounded in the key theological doctrine of creation. All things are united together precisely by virtue of being created by the one Creator God.

The second paradigm is that of self and world in modernity (see Figure 2.2). Here mind and body in their unity stand out over and against the world. But mind controls body in the sense that the body is the instrument of the mind's attempts to bring the material world under its own control. This is the paradigm of the technological self, or Bergson and Arendt's modern *Homo faber*.<sup>39</sup> It represents a distanced and controlling relation between self and world, which we can recognize as one which has force down to the present day. This is Taylor's 'buffered' self of modernity.

Underlying this paradigm is the new knowledge about the world, or Funkenstein's 'ergetic knowledge', by which we are able to manufacture things.<sup>40</sup> Here mind defines matter as forces which can be measured and, by gaining control over materiality in this way, finds that it is now at a distance from the world. Here the human body itself takes on a highly ambiguous role

<sup>37</sup> For Taylor's 'porous' and 'buffered' self, see note 2.

<sup>38</sup> Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1991).

<sup>39</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 294–313.

<sup>40</sup> Chapter 1, note 12.



Fig. 2.2. The modern paradigm



Fig. 2.3. The contemporary or 'integrated' paradigm

since it is both the material instrument of mind and itself belongs to the field of material causation. With a deterministic view of matter, we have to ask ourselves whether we are—as material objects—in fact free at all. This places a commensurate emphasis upon human subjectivity as the secure site of our freedom. This paradigm presents a subject who is *in* the world, therefore, but only remotely *of* the world, since subjectivity is the site of our freedom by which we are free *from* the world as observer and free *to* express our will in the world as agent. In theological terms this becomes the age of theological anthropologies, which highlight specific aspects of the self, or specific perspectives upon the self, in accordance with sophisticated advances in secular thinking. This looks to the different types of human meaning-making which have been associated with them (e.g. existentialism, hermeneutics, deconstruction) and supports a theology of 'dependent' apologetics.

Finally we come to the contemporary paradigm of self in the world, in Figure 2.3, which proposes a new continuity of mind and body through a structure of emergence.<sup>41</sup>

This paradigm represents a more advanced stage of scientific understanding about ourselves, which includes the many subtle layers of the complex interpenetration of matter and mind in us. Although mind and matter are different from one another (and always resistant to the reduction of one to the other), they are now also more clearly indivisible. In the self of the 'second scientific revolution' (of neuroscience, genetics, and evolutionary biology, as well as physics and cosmology), the opposition between materiality and mind has substantially broken down. Body and mind form a continuum and embodiment is

<sup>41</sup> For a study of emergence as a principle of consciousness, see Philip Clayton, *Mind and Emergence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Philip Clayton and Paul Davies, *The Re-Emergence of Emergence: The Emergentist Hypothesis from Science to Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), especially the section 'Consciousness and Emergence', 189–256.

continuous with world. Mind is still a free domain that is other than materiality, but this freedom is now one that is exercised within materiality and not from a point beyond it.

We now know that the material elements that constitute our bodies are all present elsewhere in the universe. What is particular about our material bodies is not its elements but the specific form they take in us, which is to say the unparalleled complexity of material organization in the human brain and body. As we have seen, this new self-understanding prompts us to think of ourselves as being not only *in* the world, as subject, but simultaneously to think of ourselves as being also *of* the world and indeed, more correctly still, as ourselves *being* world. For contemporary science, we are indistinguishable from the universe in which we find ourselves in the basic constitution of our material form (key elements of which we are composed, such as carbon and oxygen, nitrogen and phosphorus, calcium and iron, were created in the centre of stars in the early stages of the formation of our universe, while we share around 99 per cent of our genes with chimpanzees, and 40 per cent with the fruit fly). Where we are distinct is in the richness and depth of the subjectivity which that materiality of unparalleled complexity supports. We are self-aware, sentient creatures, who have knowledge of what we do, as well as of our own end and of the infinity of the universe of which we are part. We are creatures capable of wonder and worship, who can feel ourselves to be addressed by God in the fullness of his creation. It is not yet clear what kind of theologies these changes will support over time, but they may be as different from the theologies of the modern period as these are from the theologies they superseded.

## THE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE FOR TODAY

While the contemporary paradigm may seem to have more in common with the pre-modern rather than the modern one, it also shares with the modern paradigm one key factor, which is the inevitable concern with the character and locus of human freedom in the light of our advanced scientific knowledge. The only place for freedom in a Newtonian universe was human subjectivity itself. In the case of our contemporary paradigm, freedom is effectively a 'given' within the complexity of the mind-body continuum supported by the human brain. How else do we explain scientific knowledge itself or, indeed, the primary instincts we have to hold each other responsible, not least through law, for what we do?<sup>42</sup> Moreover, quantum physics points decisively in another direction since it allows mind itself to be freely constituted within the realm of indeterminacy. This has

<sup>42</sup> E. Nahmias, S. Morris, T. Nadelhoffer, and J. Turner, 'Surveying Freedom: Folk Intuitions about Free Will and Moral Responsibility', *Philosophical Psychology* 18, no. 5 (2005), 561–84.

been interpreted by authoritative figures as indicating that quantum mechanics allows an account of both mind and matter *from within physics* in a way that accommodates the freedom of mind within the parameters of indeterminacy set by quantum effects. As neuroscience bores down into ever smaller particles, quantum theory begins to come increasingly into play, suggesting the possibility of a far higher degree of our interconnectedness through quantum 'entanglement' and suggesting too the play of quantum indeterminacy in human consciousness. Operating at a more fundamental level of physics, this breaks the deterministic model of a more classical mechanics.<sup>43</sup> We are free in a certain sense, because the world itself is free, in a certain sense, in us.

Contemporary science paints a picture of us as existing in a continuum of body and mind, in a way that resists the dualism we have grown used to, in a world in which the freedom of the subject is thinkable within the most fundamental laws of our physics. But at the centre of this new image is our self-understanding of our cognition as embodied and as orientated to acts. The neuroscience of 'embodied cognition' shows that all kinds of processes that we associate with thought alone in fact have a pre-history in the brain and continue to be physical processes even as they are, or become, mental ones. Brain activity appears to become conscious only relatively late on and perhaps as a kind of 'global workspace' which can resolve differences.<sup>44</sup> We appear to be free, in our consciousness, to determine which discrete area of brain activity will finally predominate, and we can act directly upon the material shape of our brain through resolution and will (as when we get rid of a bad habit, for instance, in a process which involves the redirection of neural pathways over a period, usually, of several weeks). Since we now know that primary human cognition is strongly orientated to recognizing objects in the environment with a view to their possible *use*, we can see that far from being autonomous and above our bodily life, human self-awareness is in fact strongly embedded in bodily processes which are orientated to our acts. Neuroscience finds that what seems to us to be self-possession at a distance from the world is in fact deeply embedded in the world and orientated to knowing in order to act well in the world. We don't want to misidentify the things around us that we may need to use. But the notion that we are constructed primarily to act, even in our cognition, is supported also at the more fundamental level by quantum theory. If it supports the possibility of our free indeterminacy as mind, then it likewise insists that our 'observer' intellect is in fact also and more fundamentally a form of action (which collapses the wave function, and allows the world to become determinate). The notion then that we are, and sometimes also act, is

<sup>43</sup> Stapp, *Mindful Universe*.

<sup>44</sup> Bernard Baars, *In the Theater of Consciousness: The Workspace of the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

giving way in our times to the view that our being is in our acting: what we are is in what we do.

What this means more precisely is that we must look to the reflexivity we have in our acts for the locus of our human freedom in our neurological age. If I have to come to judgment about what I do, and if this moment of judgment is intrinsic to my claim to be properly an agent and so properly *free*, then the very fact of having acted will prompt a further level of judgment. I shall have to come to judgment about what I did, and also about who I was becoming, when I acted in such and such a way. In every deliberate act there is a moment of becoming and so also a moment of risk. Who shall I become when I do this? I shall be changed by my act: for better or for worse. I have to come to—free—judgment about the uses of my own freedom therefore.

This is arguably the highest level of freedom that we have. When we are objectified to ourselves in such a way, and so have to come to judgment about ourselves, then the decision to reject who we were becoming at that point leads to apologies, repentance, and atonement (or ‘making up’ for what we have done) as we ensure that we are seen by others to be ‘going into reverse.’ There are innumerable accounts of people undergoing radical change through such a process of apology, repentance, and atonement. Our reflexive freedom before our own acts is a critical dimension particularly in Christianity, with its strong emphasis upon conscience and repentance. There are robust traditions in Christianity which emphasize the primacy of the act as *imitatio* and the realization of our faith as self-giving: the story of the Good Samaritan for instance or the insistence that it is not those who say ‘Lord, Lord’ who shall be saved but those who ‘do the will of the Father.’<sup>45</sup> The calling of Christ through the Holy Spirit is precisely an address to this freedom, which suggests once again that it must come into view here in a strongly personal and deep-seated form.

## Theology and Science

There seem at this stage to be four clearly distinct ways of responding to this challenge of rethinking the relation to science, without following the ‘cognitivist’ route.<sup>46</sup> The first possibility is a position which is likely to view science itself

<sup>45</sup> Luke 10. 25–37; Matt 7.21.

<sup>46</sup> For a summary of cognitivist approaches to religion, see Greg Dawes and James Maclaurin (eds), *The New Science of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2012). There is inevitably the sense in this approach that the epistemology of the method constrains its object. It is surely important in the application of neuroscience to humanly rich areas (such as the arts) that its findings are also recognizable to the community who specialize in them. Cognitive and especially evolutionary approaches to religion can be interesting, but sometimes the need for interpretative findings to be recognizable to the practising communities can be a challenge. See also David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin’s Cathedrals: Evolution, Religion and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

as fundamentally narrative, to which an equivalent Christian narrative can and should be opposed. It is likely to point to thought itself as the primary form of our human freedom (obscuring the difference between act and thought, the thing and its idea). And it is likely that it will wish to celebrate that freedom precisely through a richly subjectivist account of human truth, identity, and hope, as a protest against what will appear an increasingly deterministic understanding of ourselves as complex forms of matter in a material universe. What this approach specifically does not do, therefore, is recognize that new scientific insights are in fact most fundamentally advances in the power of description. Only secondarily are they narratives (though some science writers happily combine the two). Bellarmine effectively argued on behalf of the Church that Galileo's views had the status of 'a way of looking at things' rather than descriptive truth.<sup>47</sup>

The second possibility is to argue for a much closer convergence of theology and science in terms of method. Both belong together as different ways of approaching and dealing with the same reality. This directly challenges the perceived gulf between science and faith. The emphasis here lies upon critical realism as an epistemological method, which arguably both theology and science have in common. This has had articulate exponents in Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Polkinghorne, David Fergusson, Alan Torrance, and Alister McGrath, and it is a very promising point of departure. But the question that such a *methodological* convergence of theology and science poses is whether an emphasis upon theology as a form of critical realism might not already move theology too far away from its embeddedness in Christian doctrine and life? Doctrine in itself, and in its relation to worshipping practices, appears to offer what can best be described as a strongly participative model of knowledge, which contrasts with extrinsic understandings of the world of the kind offered by science. These dimensions of human knowing and living are of course related in life and in the unity of the human person, but are so only in complex and unpredictable ways. The question here then is how does an extrinsic critical-realist account of understanding the world sit with faith as an intrinsic and transformed Christian life of grace?

The third possibility for theology today, in the throes of the second scientific revolution, differs from the other two in that it recognizes that modernity is itself, in its turn to the subject, the cultural product of an encounter with scientific advances from the early modern period which have increasingly seemed to redescribe the world in materialist ways and so, over time, have fundamentally called into question the possibility of human freedom. Modern theology belongs within such a cultural matrix, as a retreat from reductive materialism. The alternative which *Theology in the World* proposes is not to

<sup>47</sup> Marcello Pera, 'The God of Theologians and the God of Astronomers: An Apology of Bellarmine', in Peter Machamer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Galileo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 367–87.

retreat at all, but rather to embrace the new ‘physicalism’ or *non*-reductive materialism of contemporary science as offering an opportunity for us to turn back theologically to materiality and our own ‘earthliness,’ precisely as the place of our freedom through self-reflexivity in the embodied act.<sup>48</sup> This is not the call for a kind of second idealism through narrative as a response to our new self-description in material terms therefore, as in our first possibility. It is rather the recognition that our freedom must be *within* materiality, if it is to be a real freedom. A freedom that is ‘outside’ materiality can only be the idea of freedom. The theological *reorientation* which we are calling for here must be one which takes as its ground not so much our freedom of thought, but rather the freedom of our intelligence and will to come to judgment about ourselves which is only really operative in and through the freedom of our acts. It is in this intimate reflexivity that human freedom is most intricately and transformationally realized.

We can see a fourth possibility in the work of Nancey Murphy, Philip Clayton, and others, who allow a new convergence between science and theology, especially through the principles of ‘emergence’ and cosmic pneumatology. This opens up very interesting theological horizons of possibility.<sup>49</sup> Transformation Theology is not quite like that, however, in that its relation to science is more attentive than convergent. The transformation theologian learns from the history of science in the first place that theology is itself deeply changed by science and so must be understood to be a historical form of thinking which can itself undergo further change. Here the emphasis lies strongly upon a constructive theological mode which allows us to retrieve key doctrines, concerning Christology and New Creation, for instance, rather than pointing to the possibility of a new synthesis of theology and science. But there is a clear affinity nevertheless between Transformation Theology and contemporary science in the focus on the primacy of our human freedom in the act.

## THEOLOGY IN THE WORLD

What we are arguing here then is that the return to materiality, to the world of space and time and to the causal flow or process of *becoming*, calls for a new kind of theology: one which consciously reflects our unity as both body

<sup>48</sup> This terminology builds upon the ‘non-reductive physicalism’ of Nancey Murphy and Philip Clayton, whose work generally lies in a more philosophical register than the doctrinal and systematic register of Transformation Theology. See the bibliography in Clayton’s article ‘Toward a Christian Theology of Emergence’, in Nancey Murphy and William R. Stoeger, SJ (eds), *Evolution and Emergence: Systems, Organisms, Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 320, n. 11 (for further theological works, see also Chapter 1, note 40).

<sup>49</sup> See Chapter 1, note 42.

and mind, and so finds its focus in the act. We need to recall for instance that thought is not something free-standing, like a computer's hard disk that can be moved from one machine to another (rather in us, the software constantly rebuilds the hardware<sup>50</sup>). It follows, therefore, that we have to be able to ask the reflexive question about thought: who is it that thinks? If I am both body and mind together, at the same time, then do I think as someone who understands this? Is my thinking unitive or not? Does it express how I am according to my unity as body and mind or who I am according to the separation between body and mind? These are new kinds of questions to ask, or rather, this is a new and explicit way of asking questions which have previously been implicit. But they are important questions for us to ask. What is on the horizon here perhaps is a new kind of *critical* thinking. We often think in ways that are 'outside' our embodiment. It is not just science but any kind of 'observer' reasoning which does this, when we seek to understand the world without directly acting in it. The fact that our bodies become passive instruments of observation at that point is integral to that kind of reasoning. But we can nevertheless now recognize this as a way of thinking that is appropriate to the needs of an observer to look at the world, and to understand it, in as detached a way as possible. This is not a better way of reasoning than any other; it is a different way of reasoning which is suited to particular contexts. The opening up of the unity of mind and body in us, through contemporary science, poses the question of our own *integration* as body and mind therefore.<sup>51</sup>

It is this new critical thinking about the nature of reasoning—whether the ways in which we reason are unitive in the sense that they bring about our integration as body and mind or not—which has to be central for a new orientation in theology. This is the case since, from a theological point of view, this becomes a question about our own 'creatureliness'. The extent to which we think or reason from within our own embodied life, as mortal, contingent, and vulnerable creature, is the extent also to which we accept the limits of our own creatureliness, at the very point at which we come to self-expression or even our self-realization as reflexive acting person in the world.<sup>52</sup> We have to ask the question, therefore, whether, in our theology, we are reconciled with our being creature. Is this a thinking that springs from our creatureliness or is it the attempt subtly to escape or even to deny it? That is perhaps also ultimately a question about power and powerlessness and the extent to which we are prepared, under divine imperative, to accept our own powerlessness

<sup>50</sup> Francisco J. Varela, *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom and Cognition* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 52–60.

<sup>51</sup> See Paul D. Janz, *The Command of Grace: A New Theological Apologetics* (London: Continuum, 2009), 78–136, for the implications of the different ways that we reason, with respect to embodiment.

<sup>52</sup> There is a parallel to be drawn here in Christian tradition with the thought of John Paul II, whose phenomenological work focused upon the 'acting person', though in this case the metaphysical thought of Thomas Aquinas also played significant role.



as creature at the very point where we realize our own free autonomy as a human being, by deliberately and self-reflexively acting in a way that will 'make a difference.'

## TOWARDS A NEW THEOLOGICAL METHOD

The need to embrace our creatureliness in theology has further corollaries with respect to how we should *do* theology, in terms of its appropriate method. The right or appropriate method of thinking as embodied person in academic theology may turn out to be different from that which we find elsewhere, though of course with some affinities and parallels. The point at issue is motivation: what motivates us to think theologically in the first place? Here we must allow the perspective of a ground or 'object' of theology which motivates theological reasoning. Different kinds of thinking have different kinds of grounds. In the academic world we are used to the thinking of the natural sciences, for instance, as focusing upon different aspects of the physical world. The method of geology, for instance, is defined by the need to understand e.g. rock formations better, and the different methods of geological study will reflect judgments about how best to get access to rock formations in ways that yield the most extensive and reliable results (this may involve going to look at them, or sitting in front of a computer screen, or indeed the application of the latest technology for gathering and analysing data). Sciences are determined by their objects.

A parallel lies also in theology: but what determines us? What is our present material object? We have already presented the case that this must be the living or exalted Christ who is our present material as well as formal object. It is not only the idea of Christ who is our object but also his reality. This is not only a past reality (as recorded in Scripture for instance), but also a present one. And so we can speak of Jesus Christ as the present material and formal object of our thinking.

The question then arises: where is he? This becomes all the more important as a question when we understand that it is according to his Lordship that Christ must be present in his exalted state. Exaltation, or 'ascension' as it was called in the early Church, was the way in which the early Church gave expression to what they believed was the Lordship of Christ. His being understood to be at the very 'highest point' together with the Father meant that he exercises sovereignty over the whole of the created order. But, as we should recall this was a real Lordship and not just the idea of his Lordship because Christ was believed to be still within our spatio-temporal world. For the early Church, heaven lay within the universe and not beyond it. This was a very distinctively pre-modern conception of the way the world is. We do not need to follow that

of course (indeed, we cannot). But we do need to understand what was being said about the Lordship of Christ in this way. What was being said is that Christ is Lord in a way that can directly affect us. In other words, Christ shares our space and time, but he does so specifically as Lord of space and time.

We can only acknowledge Christ in this sense then by turning towards him and recognizing him in our own historical reality or 'crowded spaces' of power and powerlessness. If we fail to do that, we are also failing, in a way, to follow the deeper logic of our own theological enterprise. This requires us to reason freely, as creaturely human beings called into a free relation of love by the Creator, but to do so also within God's imperative of love, which is his self-communication to us in Jesus Christ as Lord. In other words, theology—academic theology—is called to help us to recognize him there, at the turning points of the historical world in our own 'everyday' situational reality, more quickly and more fully. It is called to create a Christian culture in which this recognition itself becomes embodied as a central part of what it is to be a Christian in today's world.

What we are identifying here then is a way of reasoning which is distinctive to academic theology that is concerned to be within the Church and to speak to the Church as it seeks to realize the gospel and its values in our everyday lives. Our second-order theology will of course continue to be theoretical or 'scientific' reasoning but now of a kind that is critically concerned with, and engages with, the active life of faith. No other discipline has to have this concern so centrally, although it can be compared with trends in early Marxian thought which thematically highlight the potential gulf that separates formal and sustained thinking from the domain of acts and the forces of history.<sup>53</sup> And there is a methodological parallel to it in the social sciences, in qualitative research or fieldwork. Ethnography requires the researcher to live among those people he or she studies. But as Johannes Fabian has argued, this is in fact a relationship that is fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding and injustice. The knowledge transfer which takes place between academic and informant is one which has been differently described over the decades, with an emphasis at first upon the priority and privilege of the academic observer, who was held to have a kind of right of access to the local knowledge on grounds almost of imperialism. But this in turn became a form of beneficent preservation, in line with the rationale of museum collections, as vulnerable cultures were recorded and (perhaps) protected. The situation became more complex again when this particular form of knowledge transfer was perceived to be a form of ethnic self-assertion, with rights attaching to

<sup>53</sup> Lukács's concern is that 'in the absence of a basis in real praxis, in labour as its original frame and model, the over-extension of the concept of praxis would lead to its opposite: a relapse into idealistic contemplation' (George Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin Press, 1971), xviii).

those who possessed the local knowledge. And finally it has come to be seen as a form of commodity exchange broadly within a framework of global capitalism.<sup>54</sup> The researcher–informant relation inevitably needs to be one of mutual trust, and Fabian cogently argues that the intrusion of the written text into the face-to-face of this relation changes its temporality. Instead of a shared encounter in the here and now, the writing down of the local knowledge by the researcher automatically distances him or her from the informant and disrupts what Fabian calls their ‘coevalness’.<sup>55</sup> Inevitably for the researcher the informant recedes into the past with the publication of the text, since textuality itself displaces the oral, coeval encounter in a shared here and now. In the light of this, Fabian affirms the priority throughout of this sharing of space and time, and calls for the coeval character of the research–informant relation to inform the writing and reading of the text.

There are things that theology can learn here if it is to be concerned with entering the ‘crowded spaces’ as a ‘movement’ towards Christ. It suggests, for instance, that in the encounter between academic and practitioner, there must be a shared here and now in which each can be equal with the other. With such a time reference of ‘coevalness’, there can be a genuine sharing of perspective in such a way that the academic theology which is produced can reflect not just the experience of the academic in her encounter with the practitioner but also the experience of the practitioner herself. Such a perspective will not be easily produced, for each situation and encounter will be different. But the principle of ‘coevalness’, based on the emergence of a new and shared ‘here and now’, will allow a positive attitude of learning to develop, as a shared task of growth, in the face of the specific challenges of understanding which every situation presents in its own way.

But for theological purposes, the shared ‘here and now’ which develops for the theoretical theologian and practitioner alike, who work together in a shared love for the Church and in the service of the Holy Spirit, needs also to be one which acknowledges the presence of Christ in the world. It has to acknowledge also his own ‘coevalness’ with us. This can be done in different ways, as we can see already in the work of Pete Ward and the ‘Ecclesiology and Ethnography’ initiative.<sup>56</sup> It is visible too in the work of Robert Orsi, for instance, who shows how generative this approach can be in the ‘ethnographic

<sup>54</sup> Johannes Fabian, ‘Cultural Anthropology and the Question of Knowledge’, The Huxley Memorial Lecture, 2011, Royal Anthropological Institute, <<http://backdoorbroadcasting.net/2011/02/johannes-fabian-cultural-anthropology-and-the-question-of-knowledge/>> (accessed on 11 January 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 1–35.

<sup>56</sup> Pete Ward argues for such a methodological attentiveness in the introduction to *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, by which Christian theology can be tested against or within the communities of those who avowedly live the Christian life (Pete Ward (ed.), *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), 4–6).

theology' he develops in *Between Heaven and Earth*, where the scholar comprehensively enters the world of 'religious relations' reflexively but also integrally.<sup>57</sup> This is tantamount to saying that each has to allow the intersection of Easter space and time with their own space and time, through posing the 'where' question in a new way, and doing so together. This is a new approach to theorizing the relation between academic theoretician and practitioner, which now becomes a mode of our being together, in a common here and now which precisely shares in Christ's own resurrected space and time. As such, it is not a form of resolution which moves us increasingly away from the here and now into a closed doctrinal space. Rather, to ask the 'where' question once again, marks the movement of doctrine into the centre of life and into a new openness of mind to reality. It will also creatively unbalance our assumptions about authorship and origination, which is surely right in the case of theology, where it is always sensible to recognize only the weaknesses as one's own.

<sup>57</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make And The Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

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## A Theology of Transformation

### *Act and Theology*

If *Theology in the World* is not a new paradigm of theology but rather a reorientation within theology, based upon the kinds of critical and methodological questions it asks, then Transformation Theology as its constructive phase, can be regarded as a new theology and, like all new theologies, has at its heart a distinctive theological hermeneutic. It finds its positive hermeneutic, of course, in the principle of transformation. If all Christian theologies in a sense already operate with transformational principles (whether as salvation, deification, or liberation, for instance), the theology presented in this volume seeks to make explicit the function of transformation as integral to the theological enterprise itself.<sup>1</sup>

The paradigm case of transformation for this theology is the transformation of Christ, which is to say not just his being raised by Father and Spirit but also his *continuing* glorification by the Father and Spirit, in space and time as Lord of space and time. As we shall argue, it is this formula that accurately represents what the early Church itself understood to be the meaning of the 'ascension' and exaltation of Christ in heaven. In their own times, they were able to use this cosmological expression of Christ's life in order to emphasize the reality of his resurrection into fullness of life and the reality of his continuing presence with us on earth, in the poor and vulnerable, the sacraments, the Church, and in the Bible. Exaltation has to be understood, with Scripture, to be drawing out what is already implicit in a resurrection faith, namely the irreversible character of the transformation effected in Christ by Father, Son, and Spirit.

We do not have such a cosmological framework and cannot follow them in this, but we can achieve the same aim through understanding the locus of

<sup>1</sup> This does raise questions about divine action, which we cannot pursue here. See, for instance, Christoph Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992).

his exalted life in space and time along an axis of intensification rather than extension. We do not have to imagine that we could encounter Christ at the far reaches of the expanding universe, but rather where we are most deeply in space and time, according to our creaturely freedom. It is in the loving act, where we become material cause for the sake of the other through the Holy Spirit, that we are most intensively or fundamentally spatio-temporal, since it is here in self-offering in the name of Christ that we are most fully integrated as creatures who are both body and mind.<sup>2</sup> For us, the hidden depths of matter must lie deep within materiality itself, in a quantum world not fully understood, rather than in the unseen heights. But while a modern and pre-modern understanding of what we might call the axial points of space and time may differ, the fundamental structure of each is the same. What we see through the Holy Spirit is the irreversible realization of God's *power* in Jesus Christ, which evidences the presence of the Creator God in him. The risen and exalted Christ is the transformational centre of the universe and is transformatively active for us in the 'crowded spaces' of the power and powerlessness in our world, as well as in the body of Christ, his Church.

A theology of transformation which identifies the person of Christ himself as the paradigm site of transformation is a theology that is conceived—and in this case *expressly* so—within the question of the Christological 'where'. This means that it is a theology which acknowledges the intersection of Easter space and time with our own space and time and so is also reflexive in the sense of understanding that the 'where', 'how', and 'what' of theology is bound up with the Christological question itself. Theology has to be drawn by the Spirit to the asking of the 'where', towards the transformative life of the risen and exalted Christ, where this is most potent, or where Christ is most present in power.

Transformation Theology then is a Chalcedonian theology which is concerned with the nature of the relation between divinity and humanity in the unity of the personhood of Christ. But it addresses this concern through attention to the *effects* of that unity, tracing them in the first place through the successive stages of Christ's embodiment: as mortal, resurrected, and exalted.<sup>3</sup> Intrinsic to this are questions concerning how we can know and discern this transformational effect in our own situational reality, signalling a divine presence in hiddenness, rather than a divine absence. We need to be able to distinguish hidden presence from absence in the interstices of our living. Here we argue that we can only receive and understand this divine presence in hiddenness where we are ourselves in the power of the Holy Spirit who is 'of one being' with the Father and the Son and who 'searches everything, even the depths of God'.<sup>4</sup> Our discernment of the transformation of the humanity of

<sup>2</sup> See also Chapter 7.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of this theme, see Chapter 4, 110–18.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor 2.10.

Christ by the divinity which it conceals, is itself dependent upon our integration in, and conformity with, the transformational power of God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup> This in turn has implications for how we use our freedom, whether this is properly ‘under obedience’ to the divine sovereignty, and so is the loving response to the God we encounter in Christ through whom God takes to himself the creation.

### God’s Presence in Hiddenness

God’s indwelling of the created order as transformational presence in hiddenness is everywhere present in Judaeo-Christian tradition.<sup>6</sup> In the Old Testament, Israel is called to remember that God is known through signs, blessings, and by the power of his saving acts in history.<sup>7</sup> But if God points repeatedly to his hidden, liberating presence in history, then he is also hidden in the physical elements.<sup>8</sup> In Sinaitic tradition, the direct sight of Yahweh promises to bring certain death even for Moses, who finally sees only the ‘back parts’ of God.<sup>9</sup> The uncreated Creator God is present in the material construction of the Tabernacle and then the Temple, built by the Israelites under the Spirit’s guidance.<sup>10</sup> In the New Testament, the body of Christ is the place of God’s dwelling, where—through the transformation of death, resurrection, and glorification—the hidden divinity comes to expression. But when the human body of the incarnate Christ no longer conceals his glory, Christ can no longer be visible for us. He is now hidden—according to the ancient cosmology—by the material order itself and specifically by material extension, which is the great span of distance that separates heaven and earth (in both spiritual and physical terms<sup>11</sup>). The *visibility* of the glorified Christ on earth will mark the end of history, as foreseen in the Book of Daniel.<sup>12</sup> It will be the coming together of heaven and earth in a New Creation.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor 2.9–16.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase ‘transformational presence in hiddenness’ has implications also for theories of divine action, of course, to which we can only point here. For a valuable summary of the possibilities of understanding divine agency, see Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation*.

<sup>7</sup> We can here contrast the traditional Jewish reading of ‘I am who I am’ (Exod 3.14) as meaning ‘I am the one who has done [these compassionate and liberating things]’ with the Septuagint rendering and subsequent characteristically Christian reading of these words as being a more philosophical statement of divine aseity (see Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2000, 240–4).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the accounts of God’s presence through the appearance of a rainbow (Gen 9.8–17) and Elijah’s encounter with God at Horeb (1 King’s 19.11–2).

<sup>9</sup> Exod 33.17–23.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bezalel at Exod 31.1–3.

<sup>11</sup> Chapter 2, 34–5.

<sup>12</sup> Dan 7.13–4.

The Church can be defined, therefore, by its graced and participatory power of discernment, in the Spirit, of the hidden, transformational presence of God in power within the created order and, above all, as made paradigmatically present to us in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Spirit, the Church discerns the saving and universal nature of the transformation in Christ. In the sacramental order of Catholic tradition, the Church itself lives from the hidden, transformative presence of God: at baptism, the Holy Spirit is hidden in the water; in the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ is hidden in the bread and wine and in the human minister Christ is hidden as true priest and true minister of the sacraments. Our own participatory acknowledgment of the transformational power of God in all these cases is itself part of the Church's rites. Christian liturgical identity is founded precisely on our capacity in the Spirit to recognize that God is not absent but is rather efficaciously present in exactly these ways. This is something that we acknowledge and receive not only cognitively but also through the living of a life that is repeatedly and consistently shaped by the disclosure to us in history of the Creator God in Jesus Christ.

But equally in Protestant tradition, Christ is hidden in the word and in the community of those who receive the word of God. The community is shaped in its own speaking and proclamation by the hidden presence of God himself in the word. Divine hiddenness is a pervasive theme both in Luther's concept of divine disclosure *sub contrariis* in the concealment of the Cross, as it is in Barth's account of divine revelation as being itself 'disclosure in hiddenness'.<sup>13</sup>

## WHERE IS JESUS CHRIST?

The Christological 'where' question is central to the thematics of this book. But how is it constituted and how does it refer? We have already noted the implication that it inevitably brings into reflexivity the question of orientation which is fundamental to Christian identity. We can only properly follow him as disciples when the question of who and where he is actually impinges upon our own movements and so also our acts. The disciple seeks to go where Jesus is, even if the 'going' is no more than a 'turning' to those around us. The 'where' question orientates us to the world, in the light of incarnation, and to that extent can be said to be reference to the world. It is a deliberate human act, entailing all our subjective self-awareness. As a speech act, it is nevertheless recognizable as one of the most everyday forms of speech as we seek to orientate ourselves within our immediate environment, in the presumption of the possibility of

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, CD II.1, *The Doctrine of God*, 'The Hiddenness of God', 179–204.



future movement or action. It represents the most basic of human cognitions. At the same time, an orientation to Christ through the 'where' question points to the fullest expression of incarnational revelation and is, as we have argued, the fundamental disposition of the post-resurrection Church.

### The 'Where' and the 'Who'

The 'where' already intersects with the 'who' at various points during the mortal life of Jesus, as when he visits the Temple as a child, walks on the waters of the sea of Galilee, spends time with prostitutes and tax-collectors, or withdraws into the desert.<sup>14</sup> But the form of their interweaving changes critically at the point of his resurrection. After the death of Jesus, the empty tomb demands a different form of Christological questioning. The 'where is he?' of the community is now acute, and the answering of this question will have eschatological force. The assumption is that Jesus is dead. Sporadic, perplexing, and exhilarating answers to the 'where' question were at the centre of the apostolic witness of the first Church in the immediate post-resurrection period. We can in fact say that the way this question is answered is existentially decisive for the Church: it marks the difference between faith and non-faith. In the encounter with Thomas, the wounds of Jesus not only showed the real continuity between his risen and his earthly embodiment but also affirmed that he was truly in this place with his apostles, as did the meals shared with the disciples to whom he appeared on the road to Emmaus and on the shore of Lake Galilee.<sup>15</sup>

The interweaving changed again with the exaltation or 'ascension into heaven.' Now the 'whereabouts' of Christ was no longer proof of his risen existence, but the Church, inspired by the new Spirit of Pentecost, proclaimed in faith that since Christ still lives and had been encountered in our space and time after his death, he could only be in heaven 'with the Father'.<sup>16</sup> In the more traditional terms which reflect in particular the language of Psalm 110, he now had to be seated 'at the right hand of the Father' in heaven.<sup>17</sup> The Son shares the Father's glory. Within this ancient cosmology, his being in heaven up above established his Lordship over the whole of the creation, which was now subject to him, and had profound implications for how he could also be present on

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Matt 9.10–13.

<sup>15</sup> Luke 24.13–35; John 21.1–14.

<sup>16</sup> See also Peter's account of the pouring of the Spirit from the body of the exalted Christ (Acts 2.33).

<sup>17</sup> David Hays, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity*, SBL Monograph Series (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989). Psalm 110 begins: "The Lord says to my lord, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool". Daniel 7.13–14, with its description of 'one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven', to whom was given everlasting 'dominion and glory and kingship' over 'all peoples and nations and languages', was also an important Old Testament text for the background to the ascension of Christ.

earth below according to his Lordship through those things that mediate him. From now on therefore, the belief that Christ is in heaven was the condition for the possibility that the Church could recognize his presence also on earth, as he had assured the Church he would be present 'with' them 'to the end of the age' and would be present to them in the form of the vulnerable, the sick and the poor.<sup>18</sup>

Once again, it was only by virtue of his exaltation and Lordship that the living Christ was understood to share our space and time. The 'heavenly session' was the cosmological expression of the doctrine of his Lordship.<sup>19</sup> Within such a cosmology, Christ's exalted presence in 'heaven above', and his presence in our 'real-time' reality on earth, made perfect sense. Just how effective this was as an account of the Church's encounter with Christ and understanding in faith what God had done for us in Jesus Christ, is supported also by the widespread prevalence of the heavenly motif in New Testament texts, where it is referred to implicitly or explicitly on some thirty-five occasions.<sup>20</sup> The 'ascension' is fundamentally linked with key doctrines, including the mediatorship of Christ,<sup>21</sup> the coming of the Spirit of Pentecost,<sup>22</sup> and the mission of the Church on earth.<sup>23</sup> It is later developed as the ground of sacramental theology.<sup>24</sup> This scriptural cosmology offered a strong second-order theological account, therefore, of Christian faith as encounter with a living Christ in the midst of our own situational reality. And it did so primarily by giving an account of how such a transformation in Christ could have happened, since a strong belief in 'heaven' as a physical part of our cosmos allowed the conceptualization of a form of materiality that was quite different from our

<sup>18</sup> Matt 28.20; Matt 25.

<sup>19</sup> The central importance of the ascension as representing the cosmic nature of the incarnation, and as opening up the possibility of a new future for humanity in eternal life, is also reflected in the early liturgical traditions of the Church. As P. Jounel points out, the tendency in the earliest period was for the different elements of Easter to be combined in a single fifty-day period. Only later, from the late fourth to early fifth centuries did the celebration of the ascension take on the character of a distinct feast. The spread of the feast probably owed much to the influence of Gregory of Nyssa, while the two sermons on the ascension by Leo the Great on the occasion of its introduction in Rome set out the theological meaning of the new liturgical focus (A. G. Martimort, I. H. Dalmais, and P. Jounel, *The Liturgy and Time: Vol. IV, The Church at Prayer*, transl. M. J. O'Connell (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1985), 57–64). The texts of the two sermons can be found in Leo the Great, *Tractatus* 73, 4, CCL 138A:453. J. G. Davies has pointed out the extent to which ascension and incarnation were combined in the early Church, with respect to Egeria's account of the celebration of the ascension at Bethlehem, rather than Jerusalem, on the occasion of her visit there between 381 and 384. See J. G. Davies, 'The *peregrinatio Egeriae* and the Ascension', in *Vigiliae Christianae* 8 (1954), 93–101, and John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels to the Holy Land*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1981), 77–8 and 141.

<sup>20</sup> Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 275–80.

<sup>21</sup> Heb 1.1–4; 4.14–5.10.

<sup>22</sup> John 6.35–65. <sup>23</sup> Mark 16.19; Acts 2.33.

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 2, 36, note 9.

own mortal one on earth, but which was nevertheless in continuity with it and so also properly and powerfully imaginable for mortal men, women, and children.

## EXALTATION AND CREED

It becomes important, therefore, that we understand the nature and implications of the doctrinal loss that occurred when the scriptural cosmology that supported the exaltation of Christ became no longer viable. Here we must consider the role of the Creed. The present place of Jesus in heaven is classically affirmed in the Nicene Creed, at the centre of the witness of the gathered Church, as the only form of reference to Christ as a *present* reality (and so also, implicitly, as an answer to the 'where' question). Inevitably it fails as reference. We may recognize also that this 'failure to mean' is not denominationally significant; it is not that Protestants accept this scriptural cosmology while Catholics do not (or vice versa), or indeed that doctrinally conservative Christians accept it while liberal ones do not. The failure in our reception of the central affirmation of the Creed is comprehensive and grounded in the fact that something is being said in a *cosmological* language which no longer has any meaning for us. We are being asked to affirm the real whereabouts of Christ in terms that don't work for us.

But the problems that surround this doctrine for us today do not lie so much in the fact that it is impossible for us to make the affirmation in this cosmological form. They lie rather in the way the mind works when we have to make an affirmation of faith that is fixed in terms we do not understand. Inevitably the referential meaning of this phrase will absorb other affirmations about Christ that we make in the Creed, concerning his birth, death, and resurrection, all of which seem to us to be more securely within our own cosmology. In other words, if we cannot make sense of the affirmation that Christ has 'ascended' into heaven and is now up above us in some kind of bodily form, and yet we recognize the central place of this statement of faith in the Creed, then we do this by 'suspending' it within the web of meaning which we can more straightforwardly affirm with regard to his life *before* exaltation. In the Creed we express our belief in the living Christ on the grounds of the other, more meaningful affirmations we make regarding his birth, death, and rising again. We can restate this in the more technical terms developed earlier. For the pre-modern Church, the Creed at this point affirmed the living Christ in a way that allowed him to be the *present* material object of theology (and not only as its *past* material and present formal object). Without that framework of belief, and in a way that makes no presuppositions at all about the nature of our faith, this is no longer possible for modern theology, which can only take

its orientation from a remembered or anticipated Christ, and so always filters the abruptness of the immediacy of living presence through our own human subjectivity.

In sum, the loss of the possibility of *reference* to the living Christ through this cosmological confusion has one very significant effect. When we refer to a living person in the present, we are also tacitly acknowledging their power to disrupt us. We are disrupted by the living in a way we are not by the dead or those yet to come or to return. *The very nature of the living body is its power to disrupt.* The ‘where’ question then is not only interrogative but also includes the acknowledgment of his capacity to disrupt us in our own space and time as one who still truly lives. The Church is surely differently resourced by a theology or theologies that recognize and capture this disruption than by those that do not.<sup>25</sup>

### The Meaning of Christ as Subjectivity and System

We can see in this modern re-reading of the ‘ascended’ Christ then two of the key features of modern theology. The turn to the subject and to subjectivity finds its focus in the priority of subjective memory or understanding of the *past* Christ, and memory notoriously brings reality under our own control. Our memories can be adjusted over time, in accordance with the mind’s capacity to order things and to make sense of them. Disruption, on the other hand, suggests a more immediate interaction in the here and now. The encounter with the commissioning Christ of faith precisely escapes our controlling subjectivity, although—*contra* Bultmann—it is of course the one Christ who is remembered and who disrupts.<sup>26</sup>

The second lies in our capacity to read this central passage in the Creed inferentially, in terms of the surrounding material, which refers to Christ’s earthly and resurrected life. This is meaning as system rather than subjectivity. It is something that we can associate in particular with the work of George Lindbeck, who advocates theology as grammar or semiotic system.<sup>27</sup> Here, in this highly influential paradigm, meaning, and theological meaning, is taken to be structured as a language *in itself* and so is to be understood first and foremost as a shared, communicative system. Lindbeck argued that if Christian doctrine is fundamentally a ‘grammar’ and ‘a language’, then it can be spoken

<sup>25</sup> Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (London: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> There is no element of disjunction in Transformation Theology, therefore, between a remembered Christ and a present, disruptive one, as we find in the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann.

<sup>27</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 30–45.

in many different ways, while still retaining the framework of basic Christian belief and experience. We do not have to make too sharp distinctions on the grounds of doctrine between what are ultimately different 'dialects' of the same language. Nor do we have to be overly concerned if others do not feel the need to speak the same Christian language as ourselves. Christianity sits within a plurality of languages, or meaningful systems, and can coexist peacefully with a great proportion of the world's cultural and religious traditions. The emphasis here is upon the meaning of Christianity as a way of being in the world through its internal coherence as a tradition.

The move from a propositional or existential account of Christian doctrine to one that reflects the primacy of language and culture in human life as shaping our traditions was a natural one to make in the modern period. It has helped us to address some of the most deep-set intellectual problems of the Church, including questions that arise from the desire for unity between the Christian Churches.<sup>28</sup> But the limits of this model have also become evident. With the increasing pluralization of recent years, it has become more and more difficult to defend the 'coherentist' trend in theology, despite its civility, reasonableness, and pragmatism on the one hand and its ideal proximity to biblical narrative on the other.<sup>29</sup> Where is the traction of the living act? Where is the disruption of one body by another? Recent commentators have sought to overcome the potential introversion of the Lindbeckian 'cultural-linguistic' model either by its intensification, deploying more overtly and radically 'post-modern' presuppositions about the creativity of language and thought, or by moderating it through the use of more dynamic and traditional contexts of meaning.<sup>30</sup>

It is not the case that reference as a way of using and understanding language in its openness to world, has no place in Lindbeck's account of theology as coherence. Indeed, Lindbeck does speak specifically of reference. He defines it as 'the ontological truth of religious utterances,' which is grounded either in the intentionality of the speaker (i.e. our subjectivity) or in the extent to which the lives of the religious people concerned can be said to be conformed to 'ultimate reality and goodness' which lie 'at the heart of things'.<sup>31</sup> The former places reference firmly in our own subjectivity however (begging the question

<sup>28</sup> Lindbeck was a Lutheran Observer at Vatican Two, an experience of ecumenism that deeply influenced him. See George Lindbeck, *Future of Roman Catholic Theology* (London: SPCK, 1970).

<sup>29</sup> David Tracy recorded reservations with respect to the potential sectarianism of the book, however, in his 'Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection' (*The Thomist* 49, no. 3 (July 1985), 460–72).

<sup>30</sup> For the former trend, see John Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue', in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 174–91, and for the latter, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 64–9, 51.

what is it that we refer to when we make truth claims?), while the latter neatly excludes ordinary space and time through generalized, even 'Platonic' referents (and begs the question of whether this is real reference to something spatio-temporal at all). These seem far away from what we ordinarily mean by referring to things in the world (or to anything which can be constructed as a 'where' question or 'pointing' or indeed to anything which might genuinely disrupt us).<sup>32</sup>

In contrast, the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer confronts the reference question directly. In his *Christology*, Bonhoeffer develops a powerful and influential form of Christological questioning as reference when he makes a critical distinction between the 'who' and the 'how' of Christ.<sup>33</sup> By doing this, he made a break with the calculations of a liberal Protestantism which sought to domesticate revelation (the 'how'). Instead, he placed the Christological question of the 'who are you', in its unparalleled newness, at the centre of his own existence, as the ground of a radical discipleship. Christ confronts us in the midst of his own life as the *pro me* presence of the divine. In contrast with the emphasis upon either subjectivity or system as the nature of meaning as such, this theology reflects a deeply disruptive encounter, which is closely bound up with the radical call to discipleship which deeply shaped Bonhoeffer's own life and thought.<sup>34</sup>

What is interesting for us here is that Bonhoeffer did not feel the need to develop this encounter in terms of the 'where' of Christ, or time and place of the encounter. He is in fact conscious of the 'where' as a question, and discusses it in the introduction to his *Christology*. But Bonhoeffer specifically allows it to be resolved into the *pro me*. The *pro me* of the 'who' already answers the 'where' question of Christology. In this classical text of modern Christology, Bonhoeffer strongly affirms the reality of the present and 'ascended' Christ, but he does not feel the need to explore what 'ascended' means for us today. Rather its challenge is absorbed into the powerful existential ontology of the *pro me*.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For Nicholas Wolterstorff, divine reference and the speech act of God is central to revelation (Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)), while for Transformation Theology reference is always *human* speech, which is itself a response—fundamentally as the 'where' question—to encounter with Christ in our situational reality. But to say that it is human speech is not to assert that it seeks to control the transcendence of revelation. The difference between these two positions is once again the distinction between what is primarily a transformational model involving material form at a fundamental level (including the material form of language) and a more abstract, transcendent model of communication.

<sup>33</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, transl. John Bowden (London: Collins, 1966), 27–40.

<sup>34</sup> This comes into view in particular in his complex, intense and skilfully 'disrupted' text *Discipleship*, transl. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Works IV* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

<sup>35</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, 47.

It is important, therefore, that we understand why this was the case, and what we should learn from it. One of the striking differences between Bonhoeffer's situation and our own is that he lived in a society in which Christianity was the dominant religion. The deep questions for him turned on an existential commitment to the moral and political claims of Christianity in the face of a corrupted and violent society. This summoned a relatively homogenous Christian culture to its own radical ground of difference and critical distance from the social order of the day. We have seen the real influence of Bonhoeffer in the context of the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, but we do not in general live in such extreme times.<sup>36</sup> The problems we face in our world are not those of totalitarianism but rather of fragmentation and breakdown, which arise in a world that is globalized, pluralistic, and relativistic. Christianity, across the full spectrum of its global presences, is far more diverse than it was even two decades ago. With the ebbing of existentialism, there is a stronger sense today that each community has its own 'who'; each individual has their own 'who am I?', without reference to something held universally in common. This arises not from a lack of faith but from the pluralism and relativism of our age, and so also the relativism with respect to who we are. For Bonhoeffer, the universality of Christ is worked out in terms of his authority over the *saeculum*.<sup>37</sup> For us, however, it needs also to be worked out in terms of ontology which can support the orientation and reorientation of the person of faith to the concrete reality of our everyday lives as the site precisely of the presence of our universal, incarnate, and infinitely empowering God.

## THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

We have stressed throughout this book that theological anthropology is the dominant point of departure for theology, with its apologetic trajectory, in the modern period, just as theology of creation was the point of departure in classical times. This does not mean that theological anthropology is alien to Transformation Theology, however, but only that it cannot be apologetics in the strong, 'dependent' sense.<sup>38</sup> As a reflexive theology, Transformation Theology itself is an attempt to give second-order description to what is a first-order encounter with the transformed Christ in faith. The primary point

<sup>36</sup> John W. de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984).

<sup>37</sup> See Paul Janz here for how this is prefigured in his discussion in the first part of *Act and Being* (Paul D. Janz, *God the Mind's Desire: Reference, Reason and Christian Thinking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 102–22).

<sup>38</sup> This same principle is at work in Janz's account of a transformational apologetics. See Paul D. Janz, *The Command of Grace: A New Theological Apologetics* (London: Continuum, 2009).

of departure has to be Christology therefore, grounded in the openness of the 'where' question, even though the *humanum* of faith comes into view most clearly in the human self of faith, as we are called into proximity to Christ through commissioning, and so become conformed to his own transformed humanity. Characteristically, this has to be an exploration of the human self in the dimension of our freedom, which is precisely the point at which we accept, and live by, the Lordship of Christ. Since that is specifically the Lordship of a Creator God, we learn that we cannot separate our theological anthropology, according to this transformational model, from the doctrine of the creation after all.<sup>39</sup>

The freedom into which the living Christ calls us, by which we find that we can 'make a difference', can be defined as the most radical form of our own human historicity. In this sense our own historicity is grounded in the form of the *pro me*, which is to say his own continuing humanity, given for us. He is the human being in whom God himself chose to act, in living historical form. We shall develop this anthropology of our human historicity further in Chapter 7, but here we need to briefly set out two converging ways of understanding our freedom in the loving act through faith, in obedience to the sovereign divine freedom made present in him.

We can see the pneumatological foundations of this theology when we ask: how then does the freedom, which is the infinite love of a sovereign Creator God in the midst of his creation, meet with our own limited human love and freedom? This is a question which is firstly to be posed with respect to the humanity of Christ himself. The answer, as we shall argue, is that it is as the divine Word that Christ himself becomes the reason of the act: the intentionality of Christ's act of self-offering on the Cross was a divine intentionality. It was something *done by God*. But at the same time, this did not lead to the extinguishing of the free humanity of Jesus Christ, but rather to its perfection. Through the immediacy of the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit, the humanity of the Son was brought into conformity with the divine causality as creative love and itself became New Creation. It was that conforming transformation which changed the world in such a way that the Holy Spirit could enter our space and time with a new urgency and life. The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost follows the exaltation of Christ, and according to Peter's address in Acts, it is specifically Christ in his exaltation who is the source of the Spirit: 'Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.' (Acts 2.33).<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> We can already see the close link between anthropology and Christology as Calvin famously remarked at the outset of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book One, Chapter 1).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. John 14.16–17, 26; 16.7.



And it is the Spirit who communicates the new order of life which floods from the transformed body of Jesus. The Spirit is itself that life and itself shapes that living embodiment according to the Spirit's own ontology of non-objectifiability. It is the Pentecostal giving of the Spirit which extends the irreversible transformation of the body of Jesus into the world and so makes it present too for us in the 'crowded spaces' of our own situational reality. We receive the Spirit in Christ, and Christ in the Spirit. And the reception of this life is that we become at the moment of acting in the name of Christ the mode of his presence in hiddenness in the world, and so also the mode of his power and display. We become his 'servant' in Pauline vocabulary and the mode of his disclosure, though in ways that we can neither foresee nor understand.

It is this structure of divine presence in hiddenness which points also to the sacramental analogy. Sacramental theology identifies the agency of Christ and the Spirit to be at work through the material 'efficacious' signs of the sacraments. This emphasizes the materiality of the human body at the point of movement which is the historicity of the human act. By grace, this movement within the Church can become the form of his presence in hiddenness in life. Just as the Holy Spirit is efficaciously concealed in the water of baptism, or the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic bread and wine, so too the exalted Christ and the Spirit of Pentecost can be efficaciously concealed in the bodily movement we make when we act concretely out of our intentionality of love, in his name. This is not sacrament as such, since it is specifically acting within history as the making new of the world, but it nevertheless shares in some of the properties of the sacramental and, taken together with the sacraments, points to the ultimate unity of the Christian life.

## THE SELF OF FAITH IN MODERN THEOLOGY

Once again it becomes important to show in what ways Transformation Theology, in its conception of the human person and so also, by implication, in its conceptualization of faith, coheres or differs from more familiar approaches. How does a theological anthropology which is conceived within an ancient doctrine of the creation sit with these? What is the significance of the effective identification of theology and ethics through a re-reception of the doctrine of the exaltation as representing the Lordship of Christ? How does the *humanum* come into view here?

In the following section, we shall sketch what are inevitably brief comparisons with five modern theologians (Karl Barth, Stanley Hauerwas, Jürgen Moltmann, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and David Kelsey). In each case, it is the question of reason as representation which is explored. In the final section, we shall make a comparison also with Clodovis Boff and Liberation Theology.

Here it is not the question of reason as representation which predominates, since alone of these theologians Boff places the act at the centre of his reflection. Here we shall explore rather the relation of theology itself to the act.

### Karl Barth

There is a strong interpretative tradition which sees Christian ethics as being at the very centre of Barth's magisterial theological project. According to John Webster, Barth's theology is 'a moral ontology—an extensive account of the situation in which human agents act.' Accordingly

it is primarily devoted to the task of describing the 'space' which agents occupy, and gives only low priority to the description of their character and to the analysis of quandary situations in which they find themselves. Barth's ethics tends to assume that moral problems are resolvable by correct theological description of moral space. And such description involves much more than describing the moral consciousness of agents. A Christianly successful moral ontology must be a depiction of the world of human action as it is enclosed and governed by the creative, redemptive and sanctifying work of God in Christ, present in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

In his ethics Barth was correctly concerned, therefore, to outline an understanding of how the distinctively Christian ethical life is possible in the first place. His conception of this places an enormous emphasis upon divine command but does not do so in ways that particularly engage with the *humanum* in its own distinctive, situational environment, with its own proper integrity and freedom. Barth is concerned to show that there can be no autonomous human dimension of authentic ethical action; all is centred on the divine will and grace. This is a 'purgative' account of divine freedom which wrests from our cognitive control what properly belongs to God, stripping away any misjudged presuppositions we might have about the role of the human and the divine in the formation of a life of faith.

For Barth, the communication in revelation is 'from divine reason [to] human reason.'<sup>42</sup> The emphatically representational character of Barth's 'cognitive' emphasis in his theology of revelation leaves little if any space for an analysis of the structure of human freedom as this is addressed and perfected in space and time through the work of the Spirit. Indeed, there are traces here of the Cartesian and idealist traditions of Hegel and Husserl in the desire to 'protect' the divine communication in revelation from the vagaries and

<sup>41</sup> John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–2.

<sup>42</sup> Karl Barth, CD I.1, 132, 135.

contextuality of time and space. This is a redescription of reality which presupposes a gulf between theological reason and the complex, constantly renegotiated particularities of situational life, where the operative forms of reason are practical and ethical and so are specifically adapted to situational complexity.

Barth's theology is a towering edifice of the twentieth century, but remains deeply concerned to contest the autonomy of reasoning in the liberal theology of the day.<sup>43</sup> While his 'critically realistic, dialectical theology' undoubtedly has a wonderfully disruptive power in a controlling liberal hegemony, Barth's theology inevitably re-enacts this cognitivism. This repeats the presupposition widespread in modern theology that reason in faith is most effective where it is most coherently and authoritatively representational. But for all its comprehensiveness, rhetoric, and power, the 'broad picture' significantly obstructs our capacity to illumine the basic human structures which are set deep in our embodied and situational reality. It is here that grace and the Holy Spirit find the raw material of their sanctifying and perfecting work, in which our human self-reflexivity will always play a role if only a doxological one. Our own fragile, earthly freedom is etched on that reflexivity, however, as the human mark of our createdness, and theology as such needs to make itself available to be present to it.<sup>44</sup>

### Stanley Hauerwas

The enduring Barthian inheritance in terms of ethics lies in its emphasis on an uncompromised divine sovereignty, therefore, rather than on a free, contingent, dependent human agency called into the service of Christ and into a process of growth in holiness over time through grace (cf. the Pauline 'doulos'). In the aftermath of Barthian ethical theology, the work of Hauerwas stands as an alternative focus and point of departure. While he welcomes Barth's refusal to separate ethics from theology (allowing rather the two to fully interpenetrate and inform each other), Hauerwas does nevertheless decisively create a space for the human self in his theology of ethics. If this has to be seen as a rejection of Barth's ethical purism, then it is no less a critical counter to what Hauerwas gauges to be a regrettable though predominant concern in modern Christian ethics with anthropology itself. If Protestant liberal theology (though also Roman Catholic theology as in the case of Karl Rahner) had tended to

<sup>43</sup> See Bruce McCormack's reading of Barth in his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>44</sup> It is perhaps to address questions such as this that Barth returns to an account of real human agency in 'On the Christian Life' which form a late though important addendum to his Church Dogmatics (see CD IV.4: Lecture Fragments, 'Chapter XVII, "The Command of God the Reconciler)'). Barth chooses prayer as the mode of human action that generates an account of human agency as being synergic with respect to the divine will. However explicitly centred upon God prayer may be, to pray is also always a distinctively human and creaturely act. We choose to pray. We might choose not to pray. It lies within our freedom; and yet also belongs to God.

emphasize an account of the human self as detachable from any specifically theological contexts or formats, then Hauerwas's 'ethics of character,' which brings the human self back against Barthian 'purism,' also reinstated the self as irreducibly ecclesial. Here the opponent in view is Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>45</sup> In other words, we cannot think the human self, as Hauerwas wants to think it, outside the context of a distinctively ecclesial reality: as shaped by Church, liturgy, and narrative. In Hauerwas's hands, anthropology is particular in the sense that the gospel itself is particular. Hauerwas's account is not exclusivist, however, in that Christian ethics is a powerful resource, he argues, which continues to shape secular society, far beyond the reach of explicitly theological concepts and language. In his 'ethics of character,' Hauerwas seeks to develop a theology that resonates beyond the boundaries of the Christian community and so is both particular and universalist in complex ways.

However, Hauerwas's focus upon the ethics of self as 'character' has both strengths and weaknesses. Once again, the central question concerns human freedom, or the creatureliness of the creature within contingency. Hauerwas identifies character with narrative and with action.<sup>46</sup> He identifies the agent and the action.<sup>47</sup> In particular, he makes it clear that he does not believe that self-awareness belongs to character. Character is fundamentally grounded in the shared narrative of the community of the Church. For Hauerwas, it is through *narrative* that we make sense of, and find meaning in, what others do and in what *we ourselves do*.

If Hauerwas critiques the Barthian exclusivity therefore, through the demotic, transgressive, and self-disseminating power of narrative, he nevertheless shares with Barth a reluctance to take full account of the complexity within which the self (the self of anthropology) is inevitably confronted with actual ethical decision. Once again, the question arises whether theology is adequately dealing with the reality of human freedom. The implication is that where we become one with the Christian narrative, it tells us what to do, or relieves us of the burden of having to come to judgment and decision about what to do in the complex particularity of the real. Only in that case can there be no gap between the agent and their action, since—on the grounds of narrative—we *know* what to do. But, in fact, the Christian narrative does not, in general, tell us what to do in *this* particular situation. In most situations with which we engage in depth a number of different ethical principles are in play, which need somehow to be reconciled. It is rather the case that the narrative obliges us to engage morally with complex human situations in depth, and

<sup>45</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, 'On Keeping Theological Ethics Theological,' in John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (eds), *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 58–61.

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, 'A Retrospective Assessment of an "Ethics of Character": The Development of Hauerwas's Theological Project,' in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 81–3.

<sup>47</sup> Hauerwas, 'Retrospective Assessment,' 82.

not to walk away. In effect, therefore, the narrative obliges us to confront situational complexity more directly than we would ordinarily do and so to place ourselves specifically within contexts of personal moral decision, in which our freedom is fundamentally in play. In such cases of complexity, for instance, we shall have to act in ways that demand very high levels of self-awareness. We shall need constantly to pose the question: Did I act in the right way? Do I like and want to be the person I became when I acted in this way? Or indeed was this a way of acting which brings me closer to Christ or takes me further away? Such questions only have relevance within the context of the freedom of the agent who can come to judgment about who we ourselves become when we act in certain deliberate ways.

Conscience in the act is the inalienable sign of our freedom. Although Christian narrative has an immensely important role to play in this questioning (or self-reflection) in the formation of the Christian life, it cannot, however, remove from us the burden of this freedom: the freedom to come to judgment about ourselves as we are objectified to ourselves (and to others) through the material irreversibility of the act. Moreover, this is a structure that places the self within doctrine and in a specific sense therefore, outside narrative. In the doctrinal confession of our faith ('I believe...'), we bring the narrative into the realm of our own Christian judgment about what we shall believe and how we wish to live: in other words, we *choose* the narrative (to be steeped in narrative is not the same thing as personally choosing the narrative). Creedal affirmations are the repeated, personal appropriation of the narrative as an authoritative, though constantly revisable, guide to belief and action in the various situations of life. For the human self who comes to judgments about belief and acts, the movement from narrative to doctrinal confession already contains within it the distance between narrative and act or narrative and agency. This can only be traversed in the moment of free judgment when we paradoxically make our lives our own, by a process of discernment and decision. It is only in this way that we can offer this life as a life that is fundamentally conceived through the Spirit, and so is lived *in* the Christ of whom the narrative speaks.

### Jürgen Moltmann

Among post-war theologians, Moltmann holds a special place in his passionate concern with the nature of Christian witness in the world. On the basis of powerful experiences during the Second World War, he was highly motivated to close the gap between doctrine of God and the pressing historical realities of his own time.<sup>48</sup> Moltmann holds that a doctrine of divine impassibility critically fails Christian witness at a time of unparalleled human suffering. In his

<sup>48</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 13–35.

study of Patristic tradition, he argued that the original teaching of the Church was that God truly suffered in Jesus Christ.

Moltmann is right to identify a problem in theology with significant pastoral consequences for the witness of the Church. He is right to presuppose that the problem lies in theology rather than in the Church itself. This is not a question then that can be addressed through devotion or a renewed engagement of the Church with society, for the problem lies deeper than that. Where Moltmann misses the target is in thinking that it concerns the *content* of theology alone. In the previous chapter, we sought to make the distinction between theology as the content of thought and theology as orientation. We reason 'speculatively' (in our beliefs) and we reason 'practically' (in our acts). Beliefs become orientation where they impinge on how we live and what we do. We may believe in the Lordship of Christ, for instance, but it is only when I accept that he is my Lord, that this belief will positively affect the decisions I make in life about what to do. In discipleship, our beliefs about Christ shape our living.

Moltmann rightly identifies that there is a problem, and rightly identifies that the doctrine of the impassibility of God fails us pastorally in that it serves to orientate us away from the world, in which we suffer in seemingly meaningless ways. His intention is to put this right. But he is wrong to assume that simply changing the content of our belief would of itself effect such a reorientation. Clearly, a changed doctrine which explicitly points to the suffering of God on the Cross is seeking to effect such a pastoral reorientation of the Church to the world, but how can we do that as theologians if we remain unreflexively within the second-order, *disembodied* discourse of the academy? Unless the gap between the academy and the practical, embodied life of the believing Church is bridged, through the critically reflexive embrace of a different theological method, the final result of this change of content will simply be the generation of a new kind of theological polemic.

What Moltmann is missing—and missing on the grounds of historical-critical consciousness—is the failure within modern academic theology itself to thematize the gap between the formal thinking of the academy and the life of the believing Church. It is this gap that is the horizon within which the orientation of theology towards or away from, for or against, the world, will be decided.<sup>49</sup> Modern theology is governed in this respect by a pervasive and altogether uncritical assumption that in dealing with theoretical intellect we are in effect already dealing with the thinking of the person who acts. In other words, the assumption as we saw in the case of Karl Barth is that changing the way that

<sup>49</sup> Paul Fiddes in his studies on 'the suffering of God' and on the Trinity and human relationship shows a keener sense of the need to think through the relation between academic theology and life (see Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), and *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000).

we think *about* God can change the way we live. But for the human subject of faith it is not how we think about God that is decisive, but rather how we think in the immediacy of the act. The instinct, imagination, and repetition of first-order theology always claims the space between the second-order, disembodied reasoning of academic theology and the living, moving human being who acts in the name of Christ in ways that change our world. Second-order theology has to connect with the first-order theology that is implicit in Christian acts, therefore, and which makes them distinctively Christian in their intentionality and meaning. It is the fact of this connection which grounds the need for new methods in theology and highlights also the need to include critical reflection on communication into second-order theology itself, if it wishes to be ecclesial theology.

### Hans Urs von Balthasar

In his concern both with the 'glory' of Christ (which is specifically, though not exclusively, associated with Christ 'in heaven'), and in his emphasis on our understanding of the nature of the world in Christ, von Balthasar seems a natural interlocutor for a theology of transformation. Like Moltmann, von Balthasar believes that there is a fundamental problem within theology, not in terms of doctrine, of course, but of metaphysics. His development of a 'theological aesthetics' is in the service of securing an 'ontology of the *pulchrum*'. Von Balthasar wishes to see the reinstatement of the principle of beauty at the heart of an understanding of being as a specifically Christian task. This project reflects the influence of two metaphysical thinkers in particular: Martin Heidegger and St Thomas Aquinas. From the former, von Balthasar takes the primacy of 'Being' in the modern age (as did Karl Rahner). Heidegger gives him the critical concept of our 'Seinsvergessenheit' or 'forgetfulness of Being', pointing to the shallow materialism, individualism and human inauthenticity of our modern age. The last of these points to the alienation from our own truth as metaphysical creatures which is a condition of our modernity and a primary focus of von Balthasar's extended cultural and theological critique. By developing his concept of 'Ontological Difference', which insists on the non-coincidence of 'Being as such' and whatever concretely exists in the world (as *this* person or *this* thing), Heidegger allows 'Being as such' to come into view in itself as something that is everywhere presupposed or even 'hidden' in the world, precisely by being 'more than' whatever concretely exists. It is this 'strong' view of Being which plays through von Balthasar's own metaphysics.

Heidegger does not himself track 'Being as such' back to the primary donating act of a Creator God, of course. In Thomas Aquinas, however, von Balthasar finds a strongly creation-centred metaphysics. For Thomas, it is the 'real distinction' which is the key metaphysical term. In the world, being and essence are separated. Being is fundamentally the *actus essendi* or 'act of being' and so is to

be distinguished from the original unity of *esse* and *essentia* in God.<sup>50</sup> Thomistic being, therefore, which is the object of this primal ontological intuition, is at once total fullness and total nothingness: ‘fullness because it is the most noble, the first and most proper effect of God [...] But being is also nothingness since it does not exist as such [...]’<sup>51</sup> The ‘real distinction’ allows the creature’s own sense of dependency on God and participation in a differentiated world order. Here being is freely gifted by God and since the creature knows that it is ‘separate in being’ from God, it is itself

the most immediate object of God’s love and concern; and it is precisely when its essential finitude shows it to be something quite different from God that it knows that, as a real being, it has had bestowed upon it that most extravagant gift—participation in the real being of God.<sup>52</sup>

The distance opened up by the role of God as Creator thus bestows ‘a new kind of intimacy’ with the creature. In fact, von Balthasar discerns here:

an extension within philosophy of the illumination by biblical revelation of the idea of God as creative principle. When God, in his knowing and omnipotent love, is seen as freely choosing to create, there can be no question of a restrictive fragmentation of being into finite essences. *Esse* can be suspended without confusion or limitation, in creaturely, free infinity and perfection, before the free God and only thus become the allusive likeness of the divine goodness: *ipsum esse est similitudo divinae bonitatis*.<sup>53</sup>

Von Balthasar places this structure of what he calls ‘suspension’ or ‘oscillation’ (*Schwebung*) at the heart of his account of metaphysics. He argues that this lack of a sense of the dependence of our own creaturely being upon the Creator God leads to fateful philosophical consequences. If *esse* is taken to be the guiding principle to which God himself is subordinate (as we find, he will argue later, in Scotus and forms of nominalism), then it becomes ‘a supreme and completely vacuous essential concept’, leading to rationalism and finally to ‘positivistic science’. But its seeming contrary, the identification of Being itself with God, becomes ‘pantheistic idealism’ and again leads to the destruction of philosophy (which we can see in the move from Hegel to Feuerbach). In both

<sup>50</sup> I am capitalizing ‘Being’ in recognition that the underlying Heideggerian meaning in much of von Balthasar is ‘Being as such’. This corresponds to Thomas’s *ens commune* although it is consistently clear that Thomas is not interested in this concept preferring not to abstract the notion of *ens* from individual existents except as a ‘transcendental’ in the medieval sense of running throughout the categories. Von Balthasar looks to Thomas for the ground of metaphysics, therefore, but, critically in this respect, finds the Being of Heideggerian tradition.

<sup>51</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vols 1–7 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982–91); here vol. 4, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity* (1989), 404.

<sup>52</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, 404.

<sup>53</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, 406.



cases moreover Being loses all sense of transcendence and the human observer remains as the sole site of glory.<sup>54</sup>

Being needs to be held distinct from God, therefore, neither confused with him, nor detached from him, but reconciled with him through the proportionalism or ‘analogy’ of divine creation. Only in this way can the principles of reality and mystery, which are the ground of the manifestation of divine love, be maintained:

The metaphysics of Thomas [. . .] is a celebration of the reality of the real, of that all-embracing mystery of being which surpasses the powers of human thought, a mystery pregnant with the very mystery of God, a mystery in which creatures have access to participation in the reality of God, a mystery which in its nothingness and non-subsistence is shot through with the light of the freedom of the creative principle, of unfathomable love.<sup>55</sup>

Von Balthasar’s reflections upon the philosophical condition of the modern world are marked by considerable melancholy and regret:

That which deserved the name of glory in the sphere of metaphysics has been lost to view. Being no longer possesses any radiance, and beauty, banished from the transcendental dimension, is confined to a purely worldly reality where tensions and contradictions, encompassed only by univocity, still remain to be overcome. It is only under this premiss that aesthetics as a strict science becomes possible.<sup>56</sup>

Only the metaphysics of Thomas and to some extent that of Heidegger stand as a bulwark against this, in the former’s ‘real distinction’ and the latter’s ‘Ontological Difference’. In these approaches, Being is set apart from the existent entities in and through which it is manifest: ‘if we close the circle, no matter how, between Being and essence (the existent), then “glory” as a metaphysical category is lost.’<sup>57</sup> It is ‘the transcendentalizing analogy’, promised by Heidegger but achieved by Thomas, which ‘causes worldly beauty gradually to become metaphysical, mythical and revelatory splendour’.<sup>58</sup>

Against the background of this creation-centred metaphysics, von Balthasar comes to focus on the individual who receives or recognizes Being, developing the notion of the simultaneous fullness and poverty of ‘God-given Being’:

fullness as Being without limit, poverty modelled ultimately on God himself, because he knows no holding on to himself, poverty in the act of Being which is given out, which as gift delivers itself without defence (because here too it does not hold on to itself) to the finite entities.

<sup>54</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in Antiquity*, 405–6.

<sup>55</sup> Von Balthasar, Vol. 1, *Discerning the Form* (1982), 407.

<sup>56</sup> Von Balthasar, Vol. 5, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (1991), 597.

<sup>57</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 621. Von Balthasar also argues that being, for Heidegger, hardens into a formal necessity and is thus incompatible with a loving and grace-filled freedom (*The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 625).

<sup>58</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 598.

This structure of fullness and poverty is repeated at the level of the one who receives Being and who now ‘comprehends the letting-go of Being—as letting-be and letting-stream, handing on further—as the inner fulfilment of the finite entity’.<sup>59</sup> This is the language of the *analogia entis*, ‘which makes of the finite the shadow, trace, likeness and image of the Infinite.’ But this participation in the divine image does not mean that

the finite ‘first’ constitutes itself as a ‘closed’ entity or subject (through the seizing and hoarding of the parcel of actuality which it is able to take into itself from the stream of finite Being) in order ‘then’ (and perhaps for the rounding-out of its own perfection) to pass the surplus on. But rather in such a way that the finite, since it is subject, already constitutes itself as such through the letting-be of Being by virtue of an ‘ekstasis’ out of its own closed self, and therefore *through dispossession and poverty becomes capable of salvaging in recognition and affirmation the infinite poverty of the fullness of Being and, within it, that of the God who does not hold onto himself*.<sup>60</sup>

This discussion of the poverty of Being and its symmetries in the life of the individual becomes for von Balthasar what he calls ‘the metaphysics of the saints.’ For these outstanding spiritual leaders ‘[t]ranscendence as a going beyond the self clearly becomes the yielding of the self to the unfathomability of the divine love.’<sup>61</sup> It is such people who live in their own lives the metaphysical reality of God’s dispossessive love who become ‘the guardians of metaphysics in our times’.<sup>62</sup>

Von Balthasar’s account of the ‘metaphysics of the saints’ underlines that he has a very strong sense of the primacy of dispossessive love in the Christian life (or *indifferentia*, as he calls it, signalling the saint’s renunciation of their individual will for God’s sake). He is also aware that the history of the Catholic Church has been deeply shaped spiritually by the ‘charisms of the founders of the great religious orders’. But he is aware too that

[t]he charismatic indifferentia has rarely been immediately reflected in its philosophical counterpart, and so philosophical transcendence has rarely been the true initiation into the encounter with the glory of God. Not the least reason for this was the fact that intersubjectivity, upon which the ethics of the Gospel is based, failed to find an adequate philosophical foundation in the classical period, and even today has yet to become the principal theme of Christian philosophy.<sup>63</sup>

The theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, like that of Karl Barth, stands as a magisterial edifice in all-encompassing reach and profound metaphysical

<sup>59</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 627.

<sup>60</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 627 (my italics).

<sup>61</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 656.

<sup>63</sup> Von Balthasar, *The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age*, 23.

and doctrinal depth. But we are left wondering, once again, whether something has not been left out which is nevertheless quite central to their work as communicative of a distinctively Christian whole? The turn to metaphysics, through aesthetics and the ontology of the *pulchrum*, has the advantage of shifting the axis of theology, in von Balthasar's work, away from what he calls the human self as 'the sole site of glory' to the transcendence of the world itself as God's creation (von Balthasar well understands the de-glorification of the world in the modern period: his theology is a bold attempt to retrieve the objectivity of Christian truth—as a truth about the world—through the metaphysics of a theological aesthetics). Moreover, this is a metaphysical aesthetics based upon the glory of Christ, which is to say precisely upon Christ as exalted, as New Creation, and in a particular sense as coterminous with world. To this degree, therefore, it is in fact a parallel project to that of Transformation Theology.

But the retrieval of *transcendence* as metaphysics has a price. It means for instance that the life of Christian holiness itself becomes a form of metaphysics: the 'metaphysics of the saints'. While this fits well with von Balthasar's programme, it also denies him the possibility of applying an analytic that will acknowledge the place of human freedom and agency: the concrete, embodied *humanum* in fact. And so it will be unable to grasp what is properly *transformational* within transcendence. What we have here then is a concrete account of Christ as glorified, and as the present material object of our aesthetic gaze, side by side with an account of the human person as essentially metaphysical: one which presupposes an aesthetic relation to Christ and, through a metaphysical aesthetics or metaphysics of the *pulchrum*, to the world.

This is not theology in the service of the transformation of holiness in the concrete particularity of life, therefore, but theology as the *reflection* of this holiness in extended metaphysical forms. The assumption is that the cognitive access made possible through configurations of representational intellect can do the work of practical intellect in the place of Christian calling and the real. We have to compare this with the careful exploration in Scotus, for instance, of the role of aesthetics in the formation of the free and moral self. For both von Balthasar and Scotus, creation and createdness are at the centre of theology, but they are divided in their understanding of what this means for the human self, as called. Scotus has a much more nuanced understanding that theology needs to engage in its fullness with the detailed structure of the self in space and time, where this calling takes place. Scotus knows too that this theological understanding is a powerful element within the human capacity to respond to the work of grace, and to the beauty of the moral order, in the concrete particularities of a complex world.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter 8, 200–5.

## David Kelsey

And so we come finally to a theologian who has written most recently and whose latest work is an extended, magisterial study of theological anthropology.<sup>65</sup> Kelsey rightly identifies theological anthropology as a key area of reflection in that it marks the place of intersection between the theological, the secular, and the practical.<sup>66</sup> He understands our human reality to be captured by combining the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘who’ of human life.<sup>67</sup> Kelsey carefully avoids an apologetic trajectory in the relation between the divine and human perspective. Quite rightly, he wants to define the *humanum* in the light of the divine disclosure in Jesus Christ, as set forth in Scripture. He achieves this through the identification of three independent though related narrative strands. The first is ‘how God actively relates to human beings to create them’, the second is how he relates with them ‘to draw them to eschatological consummation’ and the third is how he relates with them ‘to reconcile them to God when they are alienated from him.’<sup>68</sup> He sees these three strands of creation, consummation, and reconciliation, like a triple helix, as informing each one of the three anthropological questions of the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘who.’<sup>69</sup>

Kelsey gives us a sophisticated theology which both reflects an indebtedness to Barth and Frei, for whom the capacity of the scriptural narrative to shape human self-awareness is also key, but he also goes beyond this inheritance.<sup>70</sup> He argues for a comprehensive though also open theological anthropology that is distilled from scriptural texts which speak of, or narratively perform, the divine–human relation in terms of creating (Father), consummating (Spirit), and reconciling (Son).

It is clear, moreover, that Kelsey’s treatment of the human includes dimensions that are uppermost also in Transformation Theology. He is not only suspicious of apologetics, with its need to offer structural hospitality to secular structures of knowledge, but also argues that theology is free to use ‘atheological’ material as long as it has the upper hand.<sup>71</sup> In his reflections on the possible science of the glorified body, Kelsey shows himself prepared to think

<sup>65</sup> David H. Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence: A Theological Anthropology*, 2 vols (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 12–45.

<sup>67</sup> This distinction between a metaphysical questioning of our human ‘essence’, the more historical and existential interrogation of our human authenticity, and issues concerning ‘my peculiar, unsubstitutable personal identity’, also within community, from the perspective of psychology and sociology, appears at the very outset of Kelsey’s work (*Eccentric Existence*, 1–2).

<sup>68</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 895–921.

<sup>70</sup> But, as Buckley points out, the ‘who’ in fact tends to control the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ (James J. Buckley, ‘Buoys for Eccentric Existence’, *Modern Theology* 27, no. 1 (January 2011), 14–25, here 22–3).

<sup>71</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 565–6.

theologically in ways that responsibly incorporate our present scientific self-understanding and our understanding of the world.<sup>72</sup> Kelsey is rightly cautious of the more abstract concept of ‘revelation’ and wishes to ground his theology in the givenness of Christ.<sup>73</sup> He wishes to understand not how we come to faith but the logic of faith itself, which he takes to be bound up with the meaning of the resurrected Christ, as this shapes our identity.<sup>74</sup> A striking parallel with Transformation Theology comes perhaps in his understanding of the relation between theology and practice. For him ‘faith seeking understanding’ is:

the project of exhibiting the intelligibility of practices that compose the common life of communities of Christian faith by identifying the ways in which they are conceptually formed, the ‘end’ to which they are enacted, their ‘standards of excellence’, and how they hang together—that is the pattern of their relationships with one another—all in order to assess critically whether the community’s enactments of the practices are adequate.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, Kelsey stresses that this project cannot itself be undertaken uncritically but that it must itself scrutinize the ways in which it allows these conceptualities to be shaped.<sup>76</sup> The elements of reflexivity, and proximity to the implicit beliefs and meanings of Christian practices, proximity also to the quotidian, and the conviction that the task of theology is a critical reflection upon the givenness of the resurrected Christ as ground of our faith, are all themes that we recognize here as being important to contemporary theology.

And so where does the difference between Transformation Theology with its act-centred approach to theology and David Kelsey’s project in a hermeneutical theological anthropology of practices lie? I think the differences can be gathered around three foci. In the first place, the critical self-reflexivity of theology which Kelsey envisages is itself de-historicized. Kelsey does not break with modern theology as such; he seeks to correct it from within. But the problem with theology, as it were, might lie more deeply in history than can be grasped simply from

<sup>72</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 543–66.

<sup>73</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 910–11.

<sup>74</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 113–19.

<sup>75</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 41. There is a difference here, however, in that Kelsey understands the ‘primary theology’ which informs Christian ‘communicative practices’ to be itself critical and discerning, in terms of deciding which practices are suited to specific situations (Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 19–20). While his ‘secondary theology’ resonates with our ‘second-order theology’ in that this is academic theology in the service of the ‘primary’ or ‘first-order’ theology of our practices and acts, we are arguing here for a more expressive form of ‘first-order’ theology, which illumines and enlivens the acts themselves as meaningful and meaningfully Christian. In other words, the ‘intelligence’ of Christian acts is theologically shaped in first-order theological structures which reflect memory, narrative, imagination, intuition, and feeling, more than they do critical reflection or discussion. The task for second-order theology is to engage organically with first-order theology, in a way that reflects the commissioning Christ who is actively present in the situation to hand, as its present material and formal object.

<sup>76</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 17–24, 41–2.

within a modern theological optic. It may concern our deeper, 'cosmological' history and so also lie in the deep historical assumptions we make in reflection on the 'situatedness' of the living Christ, for instance, with respect to Scripture and theological method.<sup>77</sup> Kelsey gives a balanced account of the scriptural evidence surrounding the ascension of Christ, but concludes nevertheless that 'it seems both exegetically and theologically dubious to harmonize' the Synoptic accounts with their scant regard for the ascension with the Lukan narrative, which does emphasize the ascended Christ. Kelsey rejects the scriptural link between eschatology and ascension and determines to conflate ascension and resurrection. Thus St Paul's witness through conversion and commissioning to the exalted Christ—whose ontology seems so very different in the Pauline account from that of the post-Easter Christ—is set aside, as is the strong scriptural, indeed dominical, attestation to the link between ascension and the coming of the eschatological Spirit at Pentecost. In historical terms, this is a selective reading of Scripture.

And it is also in the area of Scripture that the second focal point of difference comes. David Ford picks out that the three narratives of God's relation to humanity through creation, consummation, and reconciliation are in effect abstracted from their embeddedness within distinctive scriptural genres.<sup>78</sup> These different genres potentially have the capacity to disrupt the narratives and to enrich them (on the lines of a Ricoeurian hermeneutic of Scripture). It is possible to feel that the triple helix of Kelsey's three narratives are in fact a compression of Scripture and doctrine, and a movement away from the distinctively creedal structure of the Church whereby our affirmation of doctrine is the way in which we signal a proper understanding and reception of the narratives of Scripture as the ground of our acts. The *credo* is itself a movement not within narrative, but within life, as we indicate concretely that we receive through judgment that narrative within the body of the Church in a way that determines the meaning and character of our own living. This compression of narrative and doctrine wards off a rationalist propositionalism on the one hand and gives consistent form and shape to the flow of scriptural narrative on

<sup>77</sup> Kelsey identifies the 'apparent incommensurability of the theoretical frameworks in which the pre-modern and modern cultures describe and explain inorganic and organic matter, the nature of life and what happens in death' (*Eccentric Existence*, 37) and boldly confronts these differences in understanding the self and the world. But it is in the human act itself, or the enacted faith of discipleship, that a more deeply rooted continuity between pre-modern and modern comes into view, which is the meeting point of responsibility, individuality, community, and world. It is this capacity of the human to attain an unparalleled degree of integration and unity in the self-giving act that constitutes a universal possibility for humankind, which is non-exclusively realized in the following of Christ. It is this too which allows us to discern continuities also in the key differences in scriptural-cosmological understanding which separate pre-modern from modern, and so to understand the particular historicity of our own modern period as something to be critically revised and understood.

<sup>78</sup> David F. Ford, 'The What, How and Who of Humanity Before God: Theological Anthropology and the Bible in the Twenty First Century', *Modern Theology* 27, no. 1 (January 2011), 41–54, here 43–6.

the other, but it also disallows the possibility that the space between narrative and life can properly be preserved as the place of human freedom, as we are summoned to judgment in our own space and time by our encounter with the sovereign, commissioning God in Jesus Christ.

We are left then with the question: why seek the givenness of Christ in the moment of human engagement with Scripture, exegesis and interpretation? Why not start with the point at which we are called to live actively in and through Christ—in the world which is the locus of Scripture and of which Scripture speaks? Why should we start a theological anthropology with the meaning of Scripture rather than the meaning of the Christian life, lived out in Scripture? After all, if interpretation implies judgment (whereby we choose one interpretation over another), and so also *freedom*, then this is ‘soft’ judgment in comparison with the judgment which attends our acts.<sup>79</sup> In the living out of a life called by Christ, more of ourselves seems to be at stake in the judgments we make about what to do: good and evil, following and not following. Here our freedom is in play in a much more precarious and radical way: so much so indeed that it seems to be a freedom which belongs to Christ himself through the Holy Spirit, as much as it does to us. If, with Augustine, we can say that it is Christ who is the true meaning of Scripture, why should theology not also look to the living and commissioning Christ of our ‘crowded spaces’ as the primary ground and meaning of our theology? This might in one sense be less scriptural, though in another it might be more so.

The third and final focus concerns human subjectivity and freedom itself. Kelsey has a wonderful analysis of why his own project is simply and unequivocally based on the question: ‘What is the logic of Christian beliefs?’ He rejects the question ‘What is the logic of coming to faith?’ as one which inevitably places too much emphasis upon how we fall short of God’s purpose, leading to dualism, rejection of the natural order, the wrong kind of anthropocentrism, and a overweening account of human subjectivity.<sup>80</sup> We are in agreement with him that theology needs to take its orientation from the givenness of Christ, which is to say, in his terms, from ‘the logic of Christian beliefs’ as these are instantiated in the communal Christian life of practices. But where we disagree with him is in the view that the ‘logic of Christian beliefs’ can ever be free from the ‘logic of coming to faith’. This seems to imply a static view of ‘logic’. The Christian life is dynamic conversion. We constantly fall away from Christ and need to be summoned back to him, through a process of the repeated reception of God as Creator, Consummator, and Reconciler, through grace. The proper locus of this repeated ‘coming to faith’ does not lie outside faith, in

<sup>79</sup> And if ‘interpretation’ here really means ‘judgment’, why not call it that so that it can receive an appropriate analytic around the themes of ‘discernment and decision’ as the structure of our personal freedom?

<sup>80</sup> Kelsey, *Eccentric Existence*, 113–18.

some secularizing zone that can distort theology (as Kelsey rightly dismisses it). It actually lies *centrally* within our faith. And here reason bears a very distinctive kind of marking in which we can recognize the contours of our own historical freedom. In the living of complexity, through being radically given over to the command of God and to the other, human reason itself is shaped and reshaped by the presence of Christ in the world, becoming porous and open and becoming itself *transformational*. The 'logic of Christian beliefs' can finally only be constituted as a communitarian consolidation of the 'logic of coming to faith', which must itself be very deeply a response of reason though one that is neither propositional nor linear; but rather an open and 'unresolved' process of reasoning in which what is most essential to our human capacities is drawn, through love and the interpenetration of the graciousness of divine form, to 'recognize', receive, and co-construct the new reality disclosed in him.

### THEOLOGY OF THE 'WHERE'

Earlier in this chapter, we noted a significant shift in the form of the historical 'where' question posed by the Church following the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost. According to St Peter, as recorded in Acts, the exalted Christ pours forth the Holy Spirit, which then becomes visible and audible to those gathered with St Peter on Pentecost.<sup>81</sup> This is a significant ecclesial moment which points to the Lordship of Christ, his pouring out of the Holy Spirit 'on all flesh', which is received by the people in sensible form, who then ask 'what shall we do?' and are called to transformation of life in the Church.<sup>82</sup> With the removal from sight of the body of Jesus, the Church understands *by the power of the Holy Spirit* that the locus of his continuing life is heaven itself. This is a reframing of the 'where' question and it contrasts, for instance, with the post-resurrection, pre-exaltation appearances of Christ.

With the giving of the Holy Spirit, the Church affirms where Christ is by the power of the Spirit in an affirmation which combines two interrelated principles: that Christ is now Lord of all things, 'visible and invisible', and that he is now present among his people and especially among the poor and the vulnerable as 'hidden' in them. This suggests furthermore that it is the Spirit who prompts us to be orientated towards Christ in the 'crowded spaces' of the world. Our asking of the 'where' question on this account then is already within the power of the risen and exalted Christ and thus is already transformational. The eschatological framework of exaltation and Pentecost, together with the eschatological presence of Christ on earth among the vulnerable and

<sup>81</sup> Acts 2.33.

<sup>82</sup> Acts 2.33–47.



needy, of Matthew 25, affirms that exaltation and Lordship on the one hand, and the ‘this-worldiness’ of Christ among the poor on the other, are one and the same thing.

This is not an invitation to us primarily to *see* the world differently, however, but rather to recognize and to understand that in the Christian acts we do, and are called to do, Christ himself moves in the Spirit that is within us and the world itself is made new.

## LIBERATION THEOLOGY

This opens up an important dialogue with Liberation Theology and the work of Clodovis Boff, whose *Theology and Praxis* is the major epistemological statement of the Liberation Theology movement.<sup>83</sup> In this work, Boff sets out an analysis of the epistemological foundations of Liberation Theology in terms of what he calls a socio-analytical mediation. The natural locus of a theology that is concerned with politics is the socio-historical situation itself in which people seek to live out their faith meaningfully. Boff takes faith to be a life of action and to be itself practice. There are historical conditions in which concern for the poor will naturally arise. Boff is concerned with laying out the parameters for an appropriate theological response, and he is keen to avoid theological options that seem to be ‘ideological’ or critically unable to address positively the problems to hand. Boff looks to Marxism (or what he calls ‘the social sciences’) to provide the effective answer to questions of the appropriate ‘liberating’ political response. It is this socio-political analysis which Boff argues should become the ‘material object’ of theology. This means that in the socio-analytical mediation, Marxism delivers the practical analysis of liberating action, which theology accepts from this specialized, non-theological science, and to which it brings its own theological hermeneutical reconfiguration.

Liberation Theology has been criticized for being disinclined to subject Marxism itself to other forms of sociological critique. In the same way, its view of theology is untouched by complex, characteristically Northern concerns with theodicy (given our twentieth-century Judaeo-Christian history). But more than any other modern theological movement, Liberation Theology has succeeded in holding theology together with the option for the poor and social action. More than any other theology, Liberation Theologians have succeeded

<sup>83</sup> Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). See also Zoë Bennett, ‘“Action Is the Life of All”: the Praxis-Based Theology of Liberation Theology’, in Christopher Rowland (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39–54, and Denys Turner, ‘Marxism, Liberation Theology and the Way of Negation’, in *Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 229–47.

in forging a link between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, through pointing to the inescapable foundation of the latter for Christian life.

Where Transformation Theology principally differs from Liberation Theology is in its insistence that the openness of the individual Christian towards the suffering of the poor is already within the domain of the theological, prior to the advent of any other analytic. We have glossed this 'openness' as the implicit and explicit posing of the 'where' question. A significant difference here is that Transformation Theology operates with a distinction between the 'first-order' theology which is intrinsic to our acts and historicity, and the 'second-order' of academic theological reflection. For Boff, on the other hand, the distinction between first- and second-order theology is defined by its content: 'first-order' questions are those that arise within theology itself (i.e. concerning doctrine and Church) and 'second-order' questions are those that arise within non-theological sciences. It is this distinction which allows Boff to maintain that theology as a second-order practice does not have the authority in non-theological political areas which other sciences have, and which it has itself in its own first-order practices.<sup>84</sup>

The critical difference between Liberation Theology and Transformation Theology, therefore, lies in the separation between first- or second-order theology and the life of faith. While it is entirely true that theory or academic reflection 'effects no transformation in the world', it is not the case that there is a complete divide between theology as theory and transformational Christian practices.<sup>85</sup> The second-order academic theology of Transformation Theology has to be understood to be a clarification of first-order theological premises that are implicit in Christian acts and which already describe their intrinsic intelligence. The Christian self who is concerned by the oppression of the poor is already under the sway of the Lordship of Christ in such a way as to be openly orientated to the situation interrogatively. This first-order theological commitment is already prior to any second-order analysis and reflection. By enriching the first-order theological life of our Christian acts through a retrieval of the doctrine of the exalted Christ as commissioning, we are able to bring theological reflection into the ground of our Christian life *as social action*. This does not yield or take the place of a 'socio-analytical mediation', however, but it does mean that such a mediation will be contained and be already subject to theological criteria. These are not the criteria of some pre-considered 'political theology' (of which Boff is rightly suspicious), but are rather the foundational criteria of a Christocentric *imitatio*: a common-sense consideration of cause and effect. Being constituted as an existential openness in history, this foundational orientation of the Christian self to the 'crowded

<sup>84</sup> Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 3–34.

<sup>85</sup> Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 17: 'knowledge of salvation is no more salvific than knowledge of sugar is sweet'.

spaces' of the world necessitates a degree of epistemic openness which always militates against the encroachments of political or theological ideologies.

In sum, therefore, Transformation Theology places the one who thinks, even in academic or 'first-order' theology, within the flow of history itself. This is not just an extrinsic or superficial placing in a way that suggests that all subjectivity is historically located. It is rather an intrinsic and in-depth placing since it is presupposed here that our entry into history as the conscious embrace of our free, human historicity, accompanies our being called and received by the commissioning Christ who already stands, in his risen life, at the source of history. This presence of Christ is already a transformational one, to which the disciple responds and with which she is conformed. It follows, therefore, that our engagement with a social reality is already grounded in the transformational presence of Christ as exalted in the situation to hand and that this presence can itself be theologically reflected prior to any other, appropriate theoretical or practical consideration. It thus allows that any practical response will itself be tested against the horizon of ultimate goodness conceived not as an abstract or calculative ideal but as a way of being radically human in a world still being 'taken up' into incarnation.

#### FROM SUBSTITUTION TO MEDIATION

The discussion with Liberation Theology highlights one particular critical function that falls to Transformation Theology in particular. The recognition of the exalted Christ as the transformational principle at the centre of any historical situation of freedom, struggle, calling, and becoming immediately recontextualizes the other elements that naturally belong there. In his exaltation, Christ is the true criterion of change. He is the principle of our becoming. This means that everything that belongs to the situation, including our own narrow interests, come under his authority. It is natural, however, that precisely those places of freedom (where something can be changed) become the battleground of all kinds of instincts, interests, and priorities. It is precisely where change is in the air that we most struggle within ourselves and with others, to determine that change in ways that suit us or, less optimistically, reflect our attachments and 'obsessions'. Idolatry is the misuse of freedom.

The nature of Christ's presence as authoritative principle of change, or as New Creation at the heart of the old order, is his pre-eminence: his calling to us, in history, and to our own radically human, creaturely freedom. Our appropriate response, grounded in the 'where' question, is our own openness to him. The doctrine of the exaltation, as the theological recognition of the commissioning Christ, should not be an abstraction that leads to closure of the self, to be repeatedly exercised, in the face of the openness of history as material causal flow. It should be the precise opposite. It should commit us to history in

openness and joy, and in the delight of being free in the face of both contingency and constraint. This is not a freedom of the self over and against the world, but it is in contrast the deepest freedom we have, which is a freedom precisely *in* the world, as we discover this world to be most foundationally *his* world.

An important part of the critical function of Transformation Theology, therefore, is pointing to religious structures of ‘substitution’ (which contest the Easter space and time of the exalted Christ) rather than those of ‘mediation’ (which receive his Easter space and time and are brought into conformity with that). The first such critique, however, is the one made in this volume, which is a contestation of the widespread tendency in modern Christianity to mistake exaltation (or ‘ascension’) for the absence of Christ rather than the fullness of his presence in the world in power, in and through the Spirit of Pentecost.<sup>86</sup> But there are other areas in which the effects of ‘substitutionism’ are felt.

### Trinity

If Jesus is ‘absent’ in his living humanity, for instance, then the Spirit may come to be seen as the autonomous immediacy of the divine presence in our lives, and so effectively as *replacing* Christ. This can occur in some forms of Pentecostalism where the demonstrable charismata of the Spirit are seen as self-guaranteeing in the sense of being detached from loving discipleship in the power and powerlessness of the Christian life.<sup>87</sup> However, the Pentecostalist emphasis upon the objective presence of the Holy Spirit in the world, is otherwise a powerful counterbalance to a more pervasive and subtle form of substitutionism of the Spirit. This occurs where the Spirit is taken to mediate not a present but only a past Christ. This means that the Spirit is held to be in the present, in the here and now, while the saving act of the Son is in the past. We can call this ‘event’ Christology. Here Christ’s sacrifice is not made present to us in the living Christ, in and through the Holy Spirit, but is rather recalled by us, subjectively, at the Spirit’s prompting. According to this structure (which arguably we can see beginning in the theology of Zwingli), it is the Holy Spirit acting within the human spirit who makes that memory present in its saving

<sup>86</sup> Even Douglas Farrow seems to lose the *pleroma* and so openness of Christ as present material object of theology by taking this excessive fullness to be in fact an *aporia* in his scholarly account of the ascended Christ (*Ascension and Ecclesia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999). Farrow holds, rightly, to the imperative of retaining the humanity of Jesus even as ascended but understands the placelessness for us of that ascended humanity as ‘meaningless’. This allows ‘one particular man to stand over against us as a question mark against our very existence’ (*Ascension and Ecclesia*, 268–9). By this emphasis upon the ascended body as presenting an irresolvable contradiction to the cognitive *mind*, our attention is removed from the ungraspable *pleroma* of Christ’s transformed embodiment made present to us by the Spirit, and encountered in history.

<sup>87</sup> For what seems in effect to be a substitutionist view of the Spirit, see G. W. H. Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

power.<sup>88</sup> In its positing of the objective existence of the Holy Spirit in the world, Pentecostalism is decisively opposed to this subtle identification of human and divine s/Spirit and so resists this kind of closure.

Any understanding of the work of the Spirit against the background of a perceived absence of Christ will inevitably place the Spirit in some degree in a substitutive role. Rather than communicating the immediacy of Christ's presence in the here and now, according to the Spirit's own divine primordially, the Spirit will itself come to replace Christ's presence in the here and now. While this still offers a Trinitarian model, it is one in which the missions of the Persons seem to follow each other in a linear sequence in history, rather than synchronically or perichoretically, in the free indwelling of love, according to their common *homoousion*, or 'consubstantiality', in history.

### Eucharist

We can find substitutionism also in Eucharistic theology. In terms both of the history of Eucharistic (and sacramental) theology, and also of the continuing meaning of the Eucharist, we find an intrinsic emphasis upon the exaltation of Christ. It is encounter with the commissioning Christ who calls us to the Christian life of discipleship in history which qualifies us as part of the Eucharistic community in the first place. Moreover, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (according to Catholic tradition) points to the exalted Christ in history. If Christ is present as sacrifice, or according to his free sacrificial death and his being raised to life, then Christ is already present in the Eucharist *in act*. Since he is most essentially act, the Eucharistic communion in the body and blood of Christ is already our participating in his act through a transformed way of life in the Spirit. This is why in principle the failure of our life of discipleship has to be repented for before we can be re-admitted into Eucharistic communion.

Not all Eucharistic theology has recognized the extent to which the Eucharist itself is embedded in and opens out into the active Christian life of following Christ. In the modern world, a strongly metaphysical or hermeneutical account of the Eucharist may well obscure the extent to which it is not itself purely the object of devotion, or the effecting of a changed cognition, but is most fundamentally the celebration of a whole-person change of life, based in Christ's own power of act. Henri de Lubac has captured the underlying historical structure of Eucharistic substitutionism in his magisterial study *Corpus Mysticum*. Here he lays bare the shift from the presupposition that the transformational agency at work in the Eucharist is the exalted Christ himself (as in

<sup>88</sup> Chapter 2, 36–7.

tradition) who transforms the Eucharistic elements, to the presupposition that the transformation element is the Eucharist elements themselves which now transform the Church (as in modernity).<sup>89</sup> According to the former paradigm, the Eucharist is constituted in the way that the heavenly or historical Christ transforms the Eucharistic elements, while according to the latter it is constituted in the way the Eucharistic body transforms the Church. Properly speaking, this is not so much a new Eucharistic theology as an adjustment within the traditional theology as a response to the revaluing of Christ's exaltation (or ascension) as signifying his absence rather than the fullness of his presence. The modern scheme can be used to justify the belief that the Eucharistic Christ 'substitutes' on earth for an absent, ascended Christ. This is a very different formulation from what Augustine and Aquinas meant when they affirmed that the Eucharist is the *mediation* on earth of the continuing real life of Christ in heaven (which leaves open the further possibility of the mediation of the heavenly Christ in our human history as the Christ who calls). As substitutory, this would also leave us with the question of who is the Christ who calls us into Eucharistic communion in the first place, and how can Christ now be judged to be greater than or prior to his presence in the Eucharist? It also leaves us with the question of how the divine act in Jesus Christ connects with our own human power of acting. Eucharist is the Church's celebration of the victory of God in Christ in history. It is constituted in the power of Easter. Eucharistic theology needs to reflect that relation if there is not to be the risk that the historical Christ whose being raised to life in history we celebrate at Easter is not to become a distinctively unhistorical and 'cultic' Christ of modernity.<sup>90</sup>

## Scripture

If the perceived absence of Christ can lead to a culture of substitution in pneumatology and ecclesiology, then so too in the Christian reception of the

<sup>89</sup> This is the central thesis of Henri de Lubac's magisterial study *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, transl. Gemma Symmonds et al. (London: SCM Press, 2006). The shift from transformational agency in the exalted Christ in heaven to the Church itself is summed up in the passage: 'Of the three terms which were in use ['historical body, Eucharistic body and ecclesial body'] and which it was necessary to order with respect to one another, simultaneously opposing and uniting them with one another, the caesura was originally placed between the first and the second [i.e. 'historical and Eucharistic body'], whereas it subsequently came to be placed between the second and third [i.e. 'Eucharistic and ecclesial body']. Such, in brief, is the fact that dominates the whole evolution of Eucharistic theories' (*Corpus Mysticum*, 256, translation slightly adapted, with added square brackets).

<sup>90</sup> In this respect, the emphasis upon the role of self-giving as the communitarian principle of the Eucharistic sacrifice that we find in the work of Matthew Levering is particularly to be welcomed (Matthew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005)). See also Philip McKosker, 'Sacrifice in Recent Roman Catholic Thought: From Paradox to Polarity and Back Again?', in J. Zachhuber and J. Meszaros, eds. *Sacrifice and Modern Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Bible. Here it can take the form of a biblical fundamentalism. Once again this exhibits a structure of closure in the face of history and of the real presence of Christ in history. The Bible is a prophetic text which has a unique textual relation to the living presence of Christ in history, since it is itself Spirit-inspired (though we may conceive of this inspiration in various ways). This is the same Spirit who communicates the living presence of Christ in the here and now of history. The very essence of the Church's everyday reception of Scripture, therefore, is that it should be read from the perspective of our own embodied openness in history, which is the proper life of faith. This means that it should be received openly as canon, and thus as internally and externally interactive and intrinsically pluriform within the canon. Any one text demands to be read in the light of other texts, and the ecclesial reading of Scripture is always in some real sense under the guidance of the living Spirit in history. Scripture as a whole has the Spirit-filled function of speaking to us in the integrity of our own individual lives, precisely from the perspective of how the Spirit is at work in us and in our lives, shaping us in the light of the Kingdom. One text or set of texts will speak to us at one point in time and another at another. This is a canon which the Church community receives dynamically and generatively, from within its own Spirit-filled life of service to the commissioning Christ of history.

Any attempt then to reify a single text or set of texts, or a single interpretation of texts, against this living dynamic removes the text of Scripture from history. It abstracts the text, and sets it up in opposition to the historical. The fundamentalist's reification of a single text is embedded in forms of unthinking certainty which utilizes our subjectivity against the openness of history which is its true locus. When one particular meaning is taken to have the force of divine presence or communication outside the particular contexts of the lived, ecclesial reception of the word of God, Scripture is being required to substitute for that presence and is compromised in its capacity to be in the service of the Word made flesh.

## Conclusion

We can summarize the risks of 'substitutionism' arising from the redundancy of the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ in terms of a more general failure of theology to support *ecclesia* in openness as 'communion'. 'Substitutionary' theologies resist theological recognition of Christ as commissioning in the midst of life. The recognition of the exalted or commissioning Christ in history itself gives new theological priority to the human person who acts in loving response to the divine act in Jesus Christ, which we encounter in the struggles of our everyday lives. As such, theology can also prioritize what is most essentially human about ourselves, namely our capacity for joint or common

action. We bond humanly most strongly where we put ourselves at risk with others in the active pursuit of common goods based on shared values. In withholding theological recognition of the commissioning Christ, substitutionary theologies can find that they foster a shallower and more divisive collectivism of 'shared perspectives, interests or points of view' in the Church rather than the more deeply and richly held experience of communion. This can only be based in the common practising of our radical humanity, as we are called to acts of love in the midst of our lives by the living Christ in history.





Part II

Church and Life

Christ in Us



# 4

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## Living Doctrine

### *Transformation and Trinity*

In this second section, on the Church, we need to begin by recalling the extent to which our doctrine, and specifically our doctrinal understanding of how Christ lives today, has been shaped in the past by advances in natural science, concerning the nature of materiality, self, and world. These changes have tended to shift the emphasis in theology away from the human act to human thought. This is the emphasis that we all receive in the modern theological tradition. In our own times, however, science itself is changing and is changing in ways that are already leading to a second 'scientific revolution', brought about not only by new scientific knowledge but also, and perhaps more importantly, by new technologies and social practices.

The new view of the human that is emerging through recent scientific advances and their cultural analogues is one that points to the centrality of the act in human life. It is when we unconditionally embrace the complex particularity of the real, in the loving, ethical act, that we can be said to be most personally in history as human material cause.

#### HISTORY AND FREEDOM

And if it is Christ himself who is most fully in history through the Father's will, to the extent of becoming the source of history, then it must be through the loving act in the name of Christ (where we are most 'in him' as he is 'in us') that we too are most fundamentally in, and part of, history as the material causal flow. We must in this sense be most fully part of the 'becoming' of the world. And it must be in the life of discipleship, whose meaningfulness centres

on the pattern of such acts as a sharing in the meaning of Christ's own life and person, that we should look to discover the sovereign presence in power of the Trinitarian Persons in history. If the Triune God is in history, then it must be where we are ourselves most historical through our encounter with him, that we can build a Trinitarian theology.

Freedom is the mark of our creatureliness. We can not only be free in what we choose to do, but, as we have seen, the very process of acting sets us before our own freedom in a new way. We become the object of judgment to ourselves as we do to others. If the deliberate choice to witness to Christ is itself a form of self-positioning in the world (we self-position in all our deliberate acts), then doing what we do triggers a further and higher level of self-positioning: how do I self-position, or judge, who I am myself becoming by acting in this way? In the case of a Christian's acts, our freedom takes on a yet further level of intensity since we cannot self-position with respect to ourselves (or who we are becoming) without also self-positioning with respect to the life of Christ himself. Do I want to live as he lived or not? This is rendered even more complex by the role of the Holy Spirit in making the living Christ present to us, or in closing the gap between where we are and where he is through the transformation of present space and time. Christ is not just an exemplar with whose life we are familiar: we feel that he is present to us and *in* us through the Holy Spirit. This means that his own freedom is not just something we know about and can judge from a distance; it is also something we know directly as communicated in the life of the Spirit. Through the Spirit then, we already know implicitly what it is to be transformed *in him*. When we act in the name of Christ, then the question of self-positioning takes on a further form. If we have to ask ourselves at some level 'do I want to live as he lived?', then on the grounds of the role of the Spirit as communicating his life to us and in us, we also find that we are implicitly asking: 'do I want to *become* him in this situation or challenge, in this here and now?'

These questions of becoming, of freedom and self, of Trinity, the act and history, are central to a theology whose hermeneutic is the principle of transformation. If this is a theology that seeks to base itself on the way that we are changed through faith, then we don't want to feel that we are changed in faith by forces beyond our control. In other words, if we are changed in what we do, this must involve the integrity of self-possession and judgment. We do not want, through our Christian acts, to become alien to who we most truly are: someone capable of living a personal and responsible life. The paradox, for a Christian, is that maturation in this sense is identified with living a life more deeply in Christ, which is more deeply a sharing in his life. The Christian experience is that the meaning of our life as a unity of Christian beliefs, practices, and acts becomes ever more expressive of, and participatory in, the meaning of Christ's own life, as made present to us through the Spirit, at the centre of our own historical living.

## TRINITY AND REVELATION

We cannot expect to reflect upon the realization of the Trinity's power in the loving act as the response of faith unless we first learn from Scripture concerning our human historical experience of the life of the Trinity in history. How is God revealed in the Trinity, and how are we affected by this? The paradox of revelation is the following. A God who is Creator cannot be authentically revealed unless God reveals Godself. But neither can the Creator God be authentically revealed *to us* unless this is a disclosure that happens in our own space and time. But this leads to the further question: how can a Creator God, who as Creator is necessarily uncreated, be in our space and time in such a way that the self-revealing of this God can be genuinely received? How can the self-revealing of an uncreated God be known by us as his creatures? We have to answer that with the presupposition that the presence of the uncreated Creator within the creation is known by its transformational *effects*. The principle of transformation determines the relation between the divinity and humanity of Christ as being one in which the divinity is hidden within the humanity and is only known as being hidden, rather than absent, by virtue of the transformation it effects. The Holy Spirit allows us to discern that transformation as indicating God's presence in power. We do not know God directly in revelation, therefore, but know him through the 'Personal' and 'Trinitarian' changes he effects in the world, by which we too are changed, and so come to recognize his hidden presence within these intimate effects.

This may offer us help with respect to some of the enduring problematics in Trinitarian theology. What is the relation between the 'immanent' and the 'economic' Trinity, for instance? The former is how we express the idea that the Trinitarian Persons must exist 'outside' time and space and so be free of any spatio-temporal constraint if they are to be truly God. The latter is how we conceive of their existence as real, within our shared space and time. The conundrum here is that if there is no 'immanent' Trinity, then the Persons cannot be the uncreated Triune God (and must be 'myth,' according to Karl Rahner), while if there is no 'economic' Trinity, then there can be no revelation. For Rahner, Christianity requires the unity of the 'immanent' and 'economic' Trinity, as a properly historical religion.<sup>1</sup>

But if this is the case, how are we to conceive of their unity? What kind of relation can this be? A transformational model finds its way here by insisting that we need to focus on the *effects* of the Trinitarian missions. We need to hold to the principle that in the three Persons of the Trinity, God makes Godself known *in power* in the midst of his creation. In this way we can consider that

<sup>1</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1970), 21–4, 86–7. See also Catherine Lacugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991).

the 'immanent' Trinity is, from our perspective, reference to the Trinity as uncreated Creator God who is present as hidden from us within the created order. The 'economic' Trinity points to the Trinitarian Persons as the intimate form of the divine transformative power in the world. In their hiddenness, the unity and relationality of the Persons is inaccessible to us, but in their unified and unifying power, their divine unity and relationality becomes accessible to us as newness of world, in which we discover ourselves to share through the Holy Spirit, in a new level of unity within diversity, or 'plural oneness'. With a transformational model, we don't need to essentialize these terms as meta-physical or ontological. God comes to us in power; we know God as creatures not just from but also, and more fundamentally, *in his effects*.

It becomes important in the transformational model, however, to reflect upon what kind of transformativity and transformation are in play here. If the effects of the Trinitarian missions are themselves in the domain of 'becoming' (since the transformatively acting Persons are in our space and time), what kind of 'becoming' is this? Above all, we have to ask the question: what becomes?

The answer has to be that it is the world which *becomes*, though not in the sense that it emerges or is produced from nothingness, although that is the ultimate testimony of the divine transformational effect. But the effects of the Trinitarian missions are that they represent, or constitute, the perfecting or realization of the creation precisely as the *creatum* of God. In other words, what we see in the Trinitarian Persons is the perfecting, reconciling, and sanctifying of the world order, through the advent of the divine as clothed by the world, or as hidden presence in the world. In the case of the Father, this is a power of transformation that is known in the world's createdness: in our simply existing and in the existing of the world. In the Father, we see God's transformative power of becoming in the principiality and utter unconditionality of the *ex nihilo*. In the case of the Spirit, it is known in the sequential laws of cause and effect, which is to say in the limitless connectedness of things, which we call history and which has led to the evolution of advanced cellular, self-aware life. In the Spirit, we see God's causal power at work within the creation, as the transforming power of growth, life, and history and the deepening of the interconnectedness of things. We see the divine agency of the Spirit at work in human beings as causal agents. In the Son, we see the capacity of the creation itself to be transformed by the power of God, in the perfection and realization of its createdness, and so to be made new. Even as a self-aware human being, Jesus is as much *of* the world as he is a subject *in* the world. In the Son, we see God's transformative power of healing, reconciling, and perfecting the creation with its own proper nature, so that in the body of Jesus Christ, risen and exalted, the creation is brought back to its origins in the *ex nihilo*. Through the action of the Father and the Spirit, the world is 're-primordiated' at its source in the Son. Through his compassionate Son, the

Father is shown to ‘belong’ to the world as the world belongs to the Father in accordance with its createdness.

Before we proceed to the principles of Trinitarian transformation, we need to consider a further typically Trinitarian problem. How do we reconcile the dynamic and interactive life of the Trinity, which is genuinely in history, with divine ‘transcendence’ or ‘permanence’? How can the Persons interact with the world and yet also, as God, be unchanging? How can God ‘belong’ to the world through the Son, but not be its object? But since the divine agency is grounded in the divine Persons who are hidden in the world, their transformative effects are changes in the world and not in them. The transformational effects which we witness in the disclosure of the Trinitarian life of God in history (or what we call Christian revelation) do not in themselves signal a change in God (as we might change), but rather change of the world. This is not process theology, therefore, but what we see here rather is a transformation of the world by a hidden divine presence which is a presence in power. The Trinity comes into view more perceptibly in salvation history because the world itself is made increasingly transparent to God’s divine life, through the greater power or glory of God.

## FIVE PRINCIPLES

We can summarize Trinitarian transformation in five principles. Firstly, we can follow the Patristic formula here that all three Persons act not just with a common purpose but with a common agency. This is captured in the traditional formula: *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* (‘the acts of the Trinity *ad extra* are indivisible’). The unity of the Persons in diversity as Trinity grounds the unity of their separate actions. In the Trinity, God acts as a single Creator.

But what is changed by this unified and unifying power? Where does the unity of its effects lie? This needs to be addressed with reference to our second principle of divine transformation, which is its *cosmic* character. In effect, we can say that the cosmic order is perfected, sanctified, and realized over time by the nature of revelation itself: the transformational presence of the uncreated Creator within the creation. This ‘perfecting’ is the bringing into unity of the creation in all its diversity, in the presence of the Creator. But it is a transformation which concerns the whole of the created order as it stands in relation to the Creator, and specifically in terms of the becoming, consummation or destiny of the creation. This must mean, therefore, that it encloses pastness, presence, and futurity, and so can be considered an *eschatological* transformation in which end and beginning become one.

The third principle is that this must be a *real* transformation. Even though it is cosmic at its foundation, it must also be local and present at a particular



place and time. This lays the ground for an understanding of the incarnation and the body of Jesus as the specifically Trinitarian disclosive event. It is in the transformation of this man, Jesus Christ, who is wounded and glorified, that we see the realization in history of the victory of the Triune God. His 'Trinitarian' (as we shall argue) and transformed body is the seedbed of the New Creation. *The world is now made new in him, in its very becoming.* But it is in his personal and identifiable body, that created causality is repristinated or brought back to its ground in the divine 'becoming' of creation.<sup>2</sup> This is a cosmic transformation, therefore, which begins and ends in his embodied particularity. He is the living, cosmological shape of the ultimate transformation or glorification of the world. In him the world is made present to us as God's world.

If the Persons always act together, and always act in a way that brings about *ultimate* and *universal* transformation, then the creating, reconciling, and sanctifying which are their traditional separate tasks are ways in which the world is brought into its wholeness as God's creation. All three 'missions' are fundamentally ordered to the overcoming of division and to the establishing of a new harmony which is based on true createdness as unity in distinction. We can describe this as the order of love. This leads us to the fourth principle of Trinitarian transformation, which is the central role of human beings in this account and our capacity for loving acts. Alone of creatures (although there may be a continuum of empathy and concern with other higher primates), human beings are capable of freely reciprocating and freely initiating self-giving love (where we love on behalf of the other who does not yet love).

But the possibility of this freedom and love is not self-generated. It is gratuitously given within the flow of our situational reality, as *kairos* moments of calling and commissioning. These arise from the contingent flow of events. In other words, we cannot finally separate our self-determination as loving in loving acts from the nature of our situational reality itself, in which we are confronted with the need to act in the name of Christ for the sake of the other. Not all moments are *kairos* moments. The very notion of being 'called' to love means that we recognize its gratuitous nature, and so also look to the concept of providence as the working out of the fullness of the divine will in terms of the contingency of history. In the same way, we cannot separate our capacity to love in practical ways from the grace that enables us to do that and which is always given in the particular moment. The fifth principle of Trinitarian transformation then is that it lies within history as the providence of God. It is not just the expression of our own subjective freedom, or simply God's address to us as subjects in the world. The freedom of the response of love is itself a dependent freedom to the extent that it is part of the providential reality of God's love for us, coming about graciously within the contingency of events.

<sup>2</sup> See the discussion of the continuing identifiability of Christ's exalted body, Chapter 5, 127–8.

Jesus prayed in freedom: 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'<sup>3</sup> St Paul also wrote: 'For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.'<sup>4</sup> We cannot finally separate the risen and exalted Christ from the way the world is and from who we, in faith, become as this part of the world which is intimately and personally called by him, who is the centre of the world. In the commissioning Christ we encounter the world as a free world, but one in which he is hidden as transformative providence within the contingency of events. The nature of sovereign providence is that it encloses and perfects the randomness of chance.

### TRANSFORMATIONAL TRINITY

The inner structure of the incarnation must be one of reciprocal love. It must, therefore, be one in which free and sovereign divinity comes freely into union with created human freedom.<sup>5</sup> And if this is the case, we cannot separate reflection on the incarnation from questions concerning its nature as a *historical* event. To be in history is to be within space and time according to its causal flow. We have to ask therefore: how did the Word enter history in the first place? How did the Word become historical? How did the Word *become*? This is a vital question since, if it turns out that God entered history by a divine *fiat*, we may feel that his intimacy with us in history is itself the result of a discontinuity, and one that is at odds with what we normally understand by real historicity. On the other hand, if we feel that his entry into history arises from within history itself, or is indeed even 'emergent' within it, we will be able to see this as a more natural 'becoming'. But then we have to ask, of course, how such a natural 'becoming' can also be this truly divine and revelatory event?

### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE BIRTH OF JESUS

We have to begin an approach to these Trinitarian questions by considering the role of the Holy Spirit at the birth of Jesus. The birth narratives of Luke and Matthew are read today in different ways. The reading I am offering here is one

<sup>3</sup> Matt 6.10.                      <sup>4</sup> Rom 8.19–21.

<sup>5</sup> Nicolai Berdyaev, *Freedom and the Spirit*, transl. Oliver Fielding Clarke (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1935).

within what Paul Ricoeur calls ‘second naïveté’, by which he means an awareness of modern critical approaches to these texts but a determination nevertheless to receive these texts as they naively (or ‘textually’) present themselves to the reader. This mode of reading acknowledges the debates but allows the text to state its case. The theological point at issue here, which concerns the relation between divine and human agency in the birth of Jesus, lies more deeply than the issue of the virgin birth however. Readers who receive the virgin birth as a construct will still be confronted by the same questions concerning the genesis of revelation and the person of Christ. Traditional readings of the virgin birth seem in fact to identify and address this problem in a particularly clear way.

Tradition affirms the agency of Mary, as natural cause of Christ’s birth, and the agency of the Holy Spirit, as supernatural cause. We are left with the question then of the relation between these two. Is it an intrinsic relation, for instance, in the sense that it is itself a relation which is historical and so within the causal flow? Or is it an extrinsic relation which presupposes that it is the superimposition of a different causality upon history? The latter would mean in turn that it has to be understood to be the advent of the divine into history in discontinuity. Such an extrinsic relation might seem to have implications for the status of Jesus himself within history and so also for the nature and provenance of faith as the whole-person, Spirit-filled ‘seeing’ which is the Church’s discernment of the divinity in him. Perhaps then it would also be more difficult to argue that Jesus himself undergoes a full transformation within history, and that the Church’s discernment of this is itself properly historically transformative and so is indeed what we normally mean when we speak of conversion as a visibly changed way of life. Without such an authentically historical origination of the incarnation, perhaps the model of divine presence in hiddenness would finally become a liberation through transcendence *from* the world rather than that for which we are arguing here and which surely corresponds to the human and social reality of faith: namely a transformation in freedom *within* the world.

### Mary and the Angel

The key passage comes in the early verses of the Gospel of Luke where we read of Mary’s encounter with the angel in the announcing of the forthcoming birth of her child.<sup>6</sup> The angel Gabriel stands before Mary as a messenger who carries the authority of the divine imperative of love. Nevertheless, Mary questions the angel (‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’) and her response (‘let it be with me according to your word’) is one of judgment and free assent. It follows then that Mary understands the angel’s declaration to be addressed to her in her freedom. This is divine imperative spoken to free human being.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 1.26–38.

And we should consider for a moment what it is that she is assenting too. Is Mary giving conceptual consent to the setting out of God's 'plan'? Hardly, for it is quite unclear what can be made of the promised 'overshadowing' of God's Spirit. Rather, what we see in Mary at this point is a free movement of the will, assenting to God's imperative of love, in the face of the incalculable *complexity* of the event of which she is part. The birth of Jesus will elude all human calculation, at every level, and above all at the level of Mary's own life-journey. Yet still, in the pure obedience of her love and in the integrity of her own living, Mary gives assent to the angel and to her own body becoming material cause in this way.

The question then of how divine and human cause come together in the conception of Jesus Christ, which is his own entry into history or 'becoming historical', has to be found in Mary's freedom. It is this freedom which is the condition of her assent. However we understand the role of the Holy Spirit here, Mary is placed before her own historical freedom, or real freedom in history, by the angelic annunciation. This is not just presupposed by the angelic voice but is actually *made possible* by the way that the angel speaks with her. Mary can make a difference by assenting as a woman to her body becoming, in the first place, life-giving material cause for another. This is already a very deep form of human freedom which, in its embodied self-giving, generativity, and risk, is akin to the religiously motivated self-sacrifice of a universal love. But secondly, she is freely assenting to give birth to 'the Son of the Most High', in whom will be disclosed the universal reality of God's love, and whose Kingdom 'will have no end'.<sup>7</sup> Mary is implicitly accepting that this greater life will become a fundamental part of the meaning of her own life (though once again in ways beyond her calculation).

The nature of Mary's assent as an implicit recognition of the divine meaning of Jesus' birth invites us to consider what the role of the Holy Spirit may be here who, according to Gabriel, will 'overshadow' her. We can contrast Gabriel's encounter with the priest Zechariah, which precedes the annunciation to Mary. At the proclamation that his wife Elizabeth will bear a child, Zechariah exhibits the lesser, 'perspectival' (or self-centred) freedom of resisting the divine word: this proclamation does not make sense to him since his wife is 'getting on in years'.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, he finds himself unable to speak. A consequence of Mary's freedom, however, will be that she chooses not to speak, but rather 'treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart', suggesting the self-reflexivity and coming to judgment about oneself which is associated with the deeper, 'ethical' form of our freedom as the loving embrace of God's law.<sup>9</sup> As we argued above, we generally rely upon the circumstances of

<sup>7</sup> Luke 1.32–3.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1.18.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 2.19.

the situation and on the deeper obligation of religious ethical imperatives in order to enter into the—at times—overwhelming complexity of life in which we express our deepest freedom as human agent within the real. What the textual contrast between Mary and Zechariah's case points to, therefore, is that Mary accepts the complexity of the real, while Zechariah is resistant to it. Mary seems to exercise a deeper freedom therefore; she becomes herself more deeply free. But we need to note not only that the girl Mary can respond with the authentic 'here I am' of Old Testament vocation and commissioning but also that the Holy Spirit (who is mentioned in Gabriel's annunciation of Jesus' birth but not in his preceding proclamation of John's birth), is now 'in attendance'. What does that mean?

The perfecting of Mary's creaturely freedom at the annunciation is a key element in the ancient identification of Mary with the Church. Mary has to be free, at a point before the incarnation of Christ, with the same freedom that characterizes the fullness of the life of the Church after the resurrection and exaltation of Christ and after the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost. Paradoxically, she has to be free in a way that we associate with the world as it comes decisively into the power of God through the incarnation: namely as a work of the Holy Spirit or Third Person of the Trinity. At this moment, Mary cannot be less free than the Church which will follow her.<sup>10</sup>

### The Spirit and Freedom

At key points in the Old Testament narrative of Israel's history, the Spirit empowers individuals. And yet material agency always remains with the human partner. This is the traditional paradigm at work in the case both of the miraculous birth of Isaac to the elderly Sarah and Abraham and the birth of John to Zechariah and Elizabeth.<sup>11</sup> In Mary's case, however, according to the Lukan narrative, there is a significant new departure in the Spirit's role since the Spirit intervenes more directly in history by taking the place of the human father. Thus the Holy Spirit appears to be acting in the birth of Jesus *generatively*, within material creation, as Life-Giver.<sup>12</sup> There is a strong hint then in this passage from the Gospel of Luke that the Holy Spirit is present in the conception of Christ according to the divine power of the *creatio ex nihilo*. In other words, it may be that the narrative is telling us that the Holy Spirit, who will be present to Mary at the point of the conception of the man Jesus as

<sup>10</sup> We can of course speak, with Rahner, of the efficacious nature of Christ's victory as extending back into pre-Christian history (see Karl Rahner, SJ, 'The Immaculate Conception', in *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 1, *God, Christ, Mary and Grace* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 201–14). Rahner doesn't thematize the role of the Holy Spirit at this point, however.

<sup>11</sup> Gen 18.1–15; Luke 1.5–25.

<sup>12</sup> Gen 2.7; Ezek 37.1–14.

the incarnation of the ('pre-existent') Word or the 'Word made flesh', needs to be understood not just in the light of the Old Testament Spirit of God but also already in the light of the New Testament Spirit as Third Person of the Trinity. Even though the consubstantiality of the Spirit with Father and Son was defined well after the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father (around the time of the Council of Chalcedon in 451) in our own historical terms, it may be that we see in the narrative of the perfecting of Mary's creaturely freedom at the annunciation, signs not only of the anticipatory power of the incarnate Christ, but also the anticipatory power of the Spirit in power of Pentecost.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps Mary is set free here in terms that are also distinctive to the action of the Spirit at Pentecost, not as 'speaking in tongues' of course, but as a speaking of assent which is fundamentally within the power of the Holy Spirit.

In fact, we can place this question concerning the nature of the work of the Spirit at this point within a more fully Trinitarian register. We can ask for instance: if the birth of Jesus is ultimately disclosive of a Trinitarian God, and if the internal life of the Triune God is itself love, then does the Spirit who helps to bring the Son into space and time according to his own principiality as generated from the Father (and the Spirit), *love* the Son from within space and time or 'outside' space and time. In other words, if it is according to the Trinity's hiddenness as 'immanent' Trinity that the Spirit loves the Son 'eternally' and 'infinitely', then to what extent could we say that we now see the personal effects of the Holy Spirit as transformative within history? When posed in this way, the question has to invite the answer that we are already seeing the deepening presence of the Spirit, through the Spirit's effects of cosmic love, at the point of the birth of Jesus. It is not just a 'hidden' Spirit who makes Christ present on earth, therefore, but also the Spirit in power who is transforming material causation itself through being this form of divine presence at the point at which the Son enters material causation through becoming a human material agent. This does not in any sense 'replace' incarnation, but it does mean that we cannot see incarnation as wholly set apart from the 'emergence' of the Spirit at the point of the annunciation and the conception of Jesus. This means that we must see the incarnation itself as being part of a more generally Trinitarian presence in power. In the same way, we can see that humanity too is already marked as the form in which God's creation can collaborate and be shaped by this divine power in freedom, not yet in Jesus but in the woman Mary.

<sup>13</sup> The consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Father and the Son was implied by the creed coming from the Council of Constantinople (381). A letter sent by the post-conciliar synod to Pope Damasus in 382 spoke of the 'uncreated, *consubstantial* and coeternal Trinity'. See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (London: Longman, 1972), 338–44.

### Continuity between Old and New Covenant

A further question concerns the relation between Old and New Covenant in the narrative of the birth of Jesus. Christians want to see the incarnation as a radically new departure in divine revelation. This brings before us the difficult and intimate questions of how we should understand the continuity of Old and New Covenant *historically*, which is to say in terms of the material causal flow. If we think of this transition as being grounded in divine agency which *transformed* material causality, and so was within history as material causal flow, we will answer this question quite differently from how we would answer it if we believe that the cause of the incarnation actually lay ‘outside’ what we normally think of as history, and was in fact the superimposition of an entirely different kind of causality on history, acting disruptively upon it. It is the woman Mary then who stands at the intersection of these two possible interpretations of how God became flesh.

This question is not so easily asked, however, since, if we allow the presupposition to stand that there are in fact two orders of causation in play here, one divine and the other human, natural or material, we will find that we need to hold these two together in our minds. This is already problematic since, like an annoying piece of software, the mind will already fill in the blanks for us and give us to think that these two forms of causality are in fact already of the same kind. One is ‘within’ space and time, while the other—divine agency—is ‘outside’ it. What these terms both have in common is space and time itself even though the former is configured as ‘temporal’ and the latter as ‘eternal’ (like our ‘economic’ and ‘immanent’ Trinities). But since divine agency or causation must be *uncreated*, it cannot be ‘outside’ anything at all. In this case, spatio-temporal language is being used literally of created things but only metaphorically of the uncreated. In preference to such a reduction of divine agency through placing it within a spatio-temporal metaphor (and relying upon the reality of something else), we should think theologically about divine agency in terms of its actual power and effects at the level of the ‘real’: which means to say according to its capacity transformatively to redefine the real, in the light of the *ex nihilo*.

### The Birth of Jesus and Miracle

Our third principle of Trinitarian transformation, which insists that such transformation should be particular and within the spatio-temporal real (even if its effects are cosmic), encourages us to think of this change—through divine causation—at the level of the real as ‘miracle’. ‘Miracle’ defines divine agency in terms of its effect in space and time and not in terms of its own supposed metaphorical locus ‘outside’ natural causation.

But we must, nevertheless, be careful with this term too, since it can easily become removed from its own proper moral and social contexts, and become the object of a false veneration. The 'miraculous' must be anchored in history and the ultimate meaning of history, therefore, in parallel with the Johannine 'signs'. Simply to define the conception of Jesus in terms of 'miracle', without such an anchoring in the meaning of the world, can lead to its de-historicization, which is precisely what we want to resist in our use of theological terms.

However, the concept of the 'miraculous' can help us to avoid thinking in terms of a dual causation, where human and divine agency find no common ground, or where the one becomes assimilated into the other (both of which possibilities imply the denial of our human freedom as the mediating term). But we should be careful to avoid a situation in which what was before (i.e. the Old Covenant) and what came after (i.e. the New Covenant) are forever separated by what is simply an *incomprehensible* miracle. As mystery, the miracle cannot be something that is merely incomprehensible or contradictory. We can always recognize a mystery in our space and time, as having meaning beyond itself (at the prompting of the Holy Spirit), while incomprehensibility is always the failure of recognition. Miracle as sign is always mystery in this sense, therefore, and incomprehensibility would be its removal from history. In other words, we have to ground the miracle of this fundamental transformation between a pre- and a post-incarnation world in something we can recognize as being itself properly historical and so also meaningful as part of salvation history. We need to know where that point of transformation happened in the natural order if its miraculous nature can have proper historical meaning for us, as historical creatures.

The site of this transformation that we must identify here then is Mary's own free, embodied life. She is herself the place of the miraculous, where this transition between Old and New Covenant occurred. Her embodied reception of the divine Word, present with the angel (Old Testament) and with the Spirit (New Testament) through anticipation, shows that she spans the age of Old Testament prophecy and New Testament Pentecost *in her own bodily life*. She is the living connection and the place of the historical transformation. Her maternal body belongs both to the world of the Old Covenant (looking back to figures such as Sarah and Elizabeth) and to the world of the New Covenant, for the child Jesus grows in her womb and is, at this stage, *one with her body*. Mary is, therefore, 'historical' in the most profound sense of all, in that it is she who receives the presence of angel, Spirit, and Word in her own embodiment, and so becomes herself *the first place of their transformational effects*: as Old Covenant deepens into New. Moreover, these effects are not extrinsic to Mary as a living human being but are rather integrated into the form and meaningfulness of her own personal, historical life as a woman through her own free assent.



Following our third principle of Trinitarian transformation then, the effect of divine causation in her is one which is wholly particular and universal at the same time: it belongs both to herself and to God in the perfecting of her human freedom. Mary gives birth to her own child in whom the world itself will be decisively changed. And if it is the case that the seeds of the Christian Church are already contained in the body of Jesus—who is head of the Church—from the point of his conception (as we shall argue below), and if the body of Jesus is initially part of Mary's own body, then the point of transformation between Old and New Covenant is itself historical in terms of being also the real, historical continuity of her own embodied life. It is this which forms the fundamental, 'biological', and therefore *historical* substrate of the 'cultural' continuity which is recorded in the social communication between Mary and Elizabeth,<sup>14</sup> on the one hand, and between Mary and the apostle John at the foot of the Cross, on the other.<sup>15</sup> That historical and biological reality is a transformational one in that it entails a transformation in Mary's own *reproductive fertility*. She bears her own child within her, historically, who she will herself be 'in', eschatologically, through the *ecclesia*, at the point of her death.<sup>16</sup>

### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE LIVING BODY OF JESUS

Within such a transformational framework, it becomes important then that the form of revelation should itself be historical. If we ourselves are in history and subject to change over time, revelation too needs to be in history as something that changes and grows. As we have stated, our transformational framework precludes the necessity that we should think of this as change in God, however, since divinity communicates to us in its activity or power. What might appear to be change in God is in fact change in the world, as the result of God's advent. What we do need to include, however, within this model is the inherent *transformability* of the created order: its permeability, attentiveness, and responsiveness to the divine power. This is deeply communicated in the Old Testament accounts of the Holy Spirit as being coextensive with the creation and always at hand to be the mode of divine power at work within the 'natural' created order (principally though not exclusively as 'wind', 'air', or 'breath', according to the Hebrew *ruach*). But this permeability comes into view definitively in the New

<sup>14</sup> Luke 1.39–45.

<sup>15</sup> John 19.26–27.

<sup>16</sup> This is not a supercessionist reading of the relation between Old and New Covenant, therefore, following the principles articulated by John David Dawson in his study (John David Dawson, *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002), especially 19–82). Our 'historical' reading on this point corresponds broadly with what he calls 'figural reading.'

Testament with Jesus himself and his whole-person response to the power of the divinity *within* him, being himself the mode of its concealment.<sup>17</sup>

We live in an age that has not received theologically the meaning of the exaltation, although the existence of the exalted Christ is everywhere presupposed in faith: the encounter with Christ in the midst of life is to be called by a living Christ in any age, who continues to be fully human and fully divine. With the loss of the exaltation, what we can see then is the ‘interruption’ of the body of Christ precisely in its historicity or capacity of ‘becoming’. Living human bodies grow and so constantly ‘become’. The loss of a theology of the exalted Christ calls into question our capacity to conceive of the living body of Jesus as properly *becoming*, and so as dynamically present. This becoming is of course bound up with the glorification of the Son by the Father, and with the enlivening power of the Holy Spirit. It is not the result of a created network of cause and effect. In Jesus, the Father takes the principle of becoming, which conditions all created things, into himself. He transforms the Son according to the power of the *ex nihilo*, and so the incarnate Son *irreversibly* becomes in him.<sup>18</sup> This is unending and unlimited life, which springs directly from the source of life that is Creator divinity.

We normally refer to the ‘becoming’ of the human body as its capacity to grow. The human body grows so that the old woman is still to be identified with the young girl, in continuity of identity within substantial change. In a parallel way, we can think of the body of Christ as continuing to ‘grow’ beyond death, in the power of the Father. We can think of the Church too as his ‘body’ on earth which itself continues to grow in his life through the Holy Spirit. In the Christology that follows, we will argue that the historical growth of this body falls, in fact, into three distinct phases or stages of embodiment, from birth and his mortal existence, to the Easter appearances, and finally to his current, exalted or what we can call, in a certain way, his ‘ecclesial’ state. The living embodiment is of course a way of making present the ‘history’ of the previous stages of embodiment. Human life is identity over time. If the young girl still stands before us in the living body of the old woman therefore, this can stand for us as an analogy of how the life of Christ over time is made fully present to us in his exalted form, as wounded and glorified, in the fullness of life of the one who is himself Life.

This principle of growth within material form of Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, suggests again that it does not make sense within a Trinitarian, transformational framework to separate the work of the Son and the Spirit, but to see both as working in different ways to the same end.<sup>19</sup> The implication is that if the Trinitarian revelation is genuinely in history and is itself historical

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter 3, 60–1.

<sup>18</sup> See 117–18.

<sup>19</sup> See our first principle of Trinitarian Transformation, 101.

through the transformative power of God, we can not only affirm that the Father and the Spirit—in their consubstantiality—brought the Son into the world according to the Son's principiality or origination (as being generated), but that likewise the Father and the Son—in their consubstantiality—brought the Holy Spirit into the world, according to the Spirit's own principiality or origination: which is to say as *proceeding* from the Father (and Son, in Western tradition). We see the first signs of this in the Spirit's role at the birth of Christ, but we see it more completely at Pentecost, when the exalted Christ 'poured out' the Holy Spirit on the Church and the world. It may follow from this that we can say in the exalted Christ the ontology of the Spirit itself becomes manifest in the Son's own exalted ontology, according to the Spirit's consubstantiality with the Son, without, however, undermining the principle of difference in the Son's incarnate nature. Through the exalted Christ, we may in fact begin to see more completely in our space and time the unity in difference of the Holy Trinity itself: no longer to be thought but rather to be received in life as transformational newness of world of which we ourselves are a part: our own self-discovery as subject who understands herself already to belong to this strange newness of world, as both body and mind.

### Mortal Life

We can begin to track the influence of the Spirit in the first stage of incarnation, as God's presence among us, which we can call the 'mortal' life of Christ. This refers to the earthly or creaturely embodiment of Jesus as described in the Gospels. Here we recognize the human condition, with its vulnerabilities and dependencies. We see someone who suffers frailty and need. He can and does finally die. This 'mortal embodiment' is one which is primarily expressive of the fullness of the humanity of Jesus, within the Chalcedonian principle of the union of two 'natures' in a single person. But even here scriptural traditions surrounding the nativity, including of course the role of the Spirit, tell us that this body can potentially have meaning in ways which go beyond those of a mortal human existence. Inevitably, these indicators present in ways that are baffling for those around Jesus. Already in his boyhood there are unsettling signs of an unusual authority.<sup>20</sup> Later, Jesus' own miracles and teaching attest to his unique relation with God. There is no suggestion at all that his humanity is not like that of other people, but there is the recognition that there is something about him which 'does not fit'. In the terms outlined here, there is already something in his mortal embodiment which points to a future and wholly unpredictable—because unique—embodiment of risen flesh. There is the sense of a yet greater 'permeability'.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 3.16.

As we recall the consubstantiality of the Spirit with the Son and Father of later doctrinal definition, we can see the key role played by the Spirit during this time, following the birth narrative. When John the Baptist is asked whether he is the messiah, he points to one who will come after him and who will baptize ‘with the Holy Spirit and fire.’<sup>21</sup> It is the Spirit who descends upon Jesus following his baptism by John in the Jordan, prompting the Father’s words: ‘You are my Son, the Beloved: with you I am well pleased.’<sup>22</sup> It is the Spirit who leads him into the desert in preparation of his ministry,<sup>23</sup> and he is ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’ at the outset of his ministry.<sup>24</sup> According to this Lukan account, the first reading by Jesus in the synagogue is from Isaiah which begins: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor [...]’.<sup>25</sup> It is the Holy Spirit then who is at attendance at the beginning of the life of Jesus, and at the outset of his ministry, which is the point at which the meaning of his life begins to come to the fore. We have the sense here then that the Holy Spirit ‘rests upon him,’ to use the language of the Gospel of John.<sup>26</sup>

Shortly before his departure for Jerusalem, a further significant event happens which gives a fuller sign of this potential greater life. The Transfiguration is the glorification of Jesus, together with Moses and Elijah, on Mt Tabor and it points to an existence beyond death and the natural limit of the human.<sup>27</sup> But the disciples who are with him do not know what to make of it.<sup>28</sup> In the Matthean version there is a reference to Jesus’ words to his disciples that they should tell no one of it ‘until the Son of Man is risen from the dead.’<sup>29</sup> How is this man, whose body seems to hover between mortality and glory, to be categorized? The Transfiguration seems to anticipate the problem of classification which will be the case also with the post-resurrection appearances. But the transfigured Christ seems even more baffling, and even disabling, for the disciples. Why is this? We hear from the Father almost the same words at the Transfiguration that we hear at the bestowal of the Spirit on Jesus at his baptism: ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him.’<sup>30</sup> But the Spirit has not yet passed from his body to the disciples in the world. The bestowal of the

<sup>21</sup> Matt 3.11.

<sup>22</sup> Matt 3.13–17; cf. Luke 3.21–2. This evokes the imagery of the anointed king (Ps 2.7) and the servant of the Lord (Isa 42.1).

<sup>23</sup> Luke 4.1.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 4.14–15

<sup>25</sup> Luke 4.18 (Isa 61.1–2 LXX).

<sup>26</sup> John 1.32–3.

<sup>27</sup> Matt 17.1–13; 9.2–9; Luke 9.28–36. That the disciples witness here the ‘glory’ of Christ is made explicit at Luke 9.32.

<sup>28</sup> Matt 17.4.

<sup>29</sup> Matt 17.9.

<sup>30</sup> Matt 17.5 (this exactly follows the words uttered from heaven at the baptism in Matt 3.13–17, with the addition of ‘listen to him’ (which follows Deut 18.15 and the command to listen to the future ‘prophet’ who will be like Moses).

Spirit at Pentecost, by whom the Church will be fully empowered to receive the glory of the Lord, still lies in the future.

### The Death of Jesus

The latter part of the mission of Jesus seems to be dominated by the imminent transition between the first and second stage of embodiment. This is not an organic and naturally occurring evolution (it is not straightforwardly 'growth' in that sense) but one that has a fundamentally gratuitous and personal passage at its heart. It springs from a strongly transformational and spiritual divine effect, which is the perfecting of Jesus' human freedom, through his power of embodied act. This is the very real and profound struggle in Jesus himself to accept the Father's will and to act in accordance with his imperative of love. As with any human being, this is an intensely personal story of which we gain just glimpses in the Gospel narrative. But it is also a cosmic story of course. His approaching death, which is set in the framework of the suffering servant of Second Isaiah, is the realization of the destiny of Israel as laid out by the prophets. The best way to understand his death is in terms of *sacrifice*. Christ himself is the 'victim' here in a historical context of the advent of the end times which has been determined by God the Father. The extent to which Jesus himself understood his imminent death to be sacrifice can be judged from the words and gestures he used at the 'institutional narrative'.<sup>31</sup> Here the breaking of the bread (as his body) and pouring of the wine (as his blood) are indicative of the New Covenant which is being made with his closest disciples in a way that also establishes it as having universal significance.<sup>32</sup> In giving the New Covenant cultic expression moreover, Jesus is acting as anointed priest.<sup>33</sup> He is mediating God, by acting for and on behalf of others in the presence of God. But he is doing this in a way which means that that offering, and indeed priesthood, will prove acceptable to God as he is raised according to his Lordship and is glorified 'in the presence of the Father' in heaven.<sup>34</sup>

But we have to consider also the nature of Jesus' death. The struggle between divine and human freedom is at the heart of his dying. As a human being, Jesus was constituted by his capacity for free, intelligent, bodily movement by which we express our will in the world through deliberate acts, self-defining and

<sup>31</sup> Mark 14.22–4; 1 Cor 11.23–5.

<sup>32</sup> Exod 24.3–8; Jer 31.31–3.

<sup>33</sup> Gerald O'Collins identifies Christ as acting according to his priesthood more broadly, through his ministry and teaching and wherever 'he proclaimed the Kingdom of God that was breaking into the world' (Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 16–19).

<sup>34</sup> John 17.5.

self-positioning in a way that secures our own well-being. But as Emmanuel or 'God with us', Jesus was also determined as the place where, or the person in whom, the divine sovereign freedom of the Creator has entered the creation. Sacrifice is the convergence of the two freedoms and the perfecting of Jesus' human freedom in the presence of divine authority or law, as the imperative of the Creator's love. In the passion, we can see the shape of his sacrifice. Crucifixion is a form of execution in which death comes from the restriction of our most basic human freedom to move, placing strain on pulse and breath. It is thus the most basic disruption of our human capacity to act freely in the world, as intelligent, embodied life.

In choosing freely to undergo crucifixion, in conformity with the divine law of a total, self-giving love, Jesus thus also chose freely to lose this defining human freedom of the power of acting, by which we move intentionally in particular ways in order to express our will, and to sustain our life. The renunciation of that capacity allowed him to offer himself in the fullness of his embodied life, to the divine imperative to love, in what was nevertheless a *free and deliberate act*. The stretching of his human freedom upon the Cross, was paradoxically the most total, free conforming of Jesus' humanity to the divine sovereignty in him. His resolute free acceptance of death, even in the unfolding of it, maintained his human freedom as the reception in love of the divine command of love. His passion was the fundamental transformation of his embodied intentionality as a human being away from the perspectivalism and particularism of the creature, naturally concerned with continuity of the creature's own life, to the world-affirming life-centredness of divine Wisdom. In the passion and sacrificial act of Jesus, his capacity to act intelligently was transformed, moving from the human to the divine centre, but *without ceasing to be authentically embodied human reasoning*. In his free, sacrificial dying, Jesus acted with full human integrity but according to the mind of God. We can say also that the intentionality which came to realization in the free self-sacrificial act of his saving death was the Logos, or divine Wisdom, itself, which is the universal *meaning* of God. From another perspective, we can say that in him, divine logic or reasoning transformatively became embodied: became act. And so, in the passage of the Spirit from him into the world, became also newness of world.

And so finally we can draw a parallel between the 'transformational embodiment' or historicity of Mary's embodied life and that of Jesus himself. In the young woman Mary, God brought about the transition between Old and New Covenant, while in Jesus, who himself is both God and human, the transition that takes place within him is that between old and new creation. But there is a parallel in the nature of the transformation in each case. For Mary, it is her human fertility which becomes the site of the divine transformative power in history. In the case of Jesus, it is his embodied life in its fullness which becomes the 'womb' of New Creation. New Creation will flow, evolve or 'grow' from his glorified body

in ways that deeply involve the power of the Holy Spirit as Giver of Life. The Church, as the harbinger of the New Creation, will be 'born' from the overflowing Spirit-life of the body of Jesus, and members of his Church will live by his life and call themselves his—adopted—sons.

### Easter Life

Easter brings the second stage of Jesus' embodiment. For all the transitional character of the latter part of his mortal life, this new risen life is definitively set apart from his former existence. Jesus now lives from the divinity in him. But crucially this remains nevertheless a wholly embodied life. The post-resurrection appearances are remarkable for their repeated and explicit emphasis upon the continuity of this new life with his former mortal life. The new life makes the earlier life present, in continuity of embodied identity. Indeed, this risen body still seems an ordinary kind of body to the extent that the disciples who encounter him on the road to Emmaus do not identify him initially.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Jesus is not immediately recognized by the disciples who encounter him in the early morning on the shore of Lake Galilee.<sup>36</sup> There is a profound strangeness here. But Jesus is nevertheless identifiable in the intimate recognizability of his bodily actions, as when he breaks bread in the former case and gives instructions to the fishermen in the latter. In both passages there is also the suggestion that the disciples already intuitively recognize the personal features of this particular body against all expectation.<sup>37</sup> In the narrative of Thomas who doubts, Jesus appears to go to considerable lengths to show the continuity between this and his 'mortal embodiment' by inviting Thomas to inspect his wounds.<sup>38</sup> And on the two key occasions of his disclosure to the disciples, Jesus joins them in the eating of a meal.

At the same time, this is not just an ordinary body. It lives beyond death and exhibits an outrightly ambiguous ontology. It seems to move in and out of sensible objectifiability. Jesus appears to pass through doors and also to vanish from sight.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, he now possesses an unequivocal divine authority of command and commissioning. Any doubts are swiftly banished, and there are no hints in the scriptural narrative at this point of the kind of discussion, negotiation, refusal, or denial among the disciples which was characteristic in his mortal life. But the extraordinary character of this 'ordinary' body comes

<sup>35</sup> Luke 24.13–35.

<sup>36</sup> John 21.1–14.

<sup>37</sup> At Luke 24.32, for instance, the disciples say 'did our hearts not burn within us while he talked with us on the road [. . .]'; while there is no suggestion in the narrative from John that the disciples questioned the instructions about fishing they received unbidden from a stranger on the shore.

<sup>38</sup> John 20.27.

<sup>39</sup> John 20.26; Luke 24.31.

most clearly into view in the initial encounter of Mary Magdalene with Jesus in the garden at the tomb. She fails to recognize him and takes him for someone else.<sup>40</sup> But when she reaches out to him, he tells her not to ‘hold on’ to him, since he has ‘not yet ascended to the Father’. The *noli me tangere* is a strong statement of the interim character of this ‘post-resurrection’ embodiment. It needs to be taken together with the passages from John in which Christ, prior to his death, tells his disciples of his return to the Father and the coming of the Spirit which will ‘guide you into all the truth’.<sup>41</sup> What the *noli me tangere* suggests is that the new relation between divine and natural causation in Jesus, which was realized in his sacrificial death and being raised to life, has not yet come to its full *historical* expression. The body still remains in part objectifiable, in space and time, in its capacity at times to be touched and so to be affected by the bodily acts of others. The transformation underway in this body is not yet *irreversible*, therefore, in space and time. The realization of the universal power of God specifically in Christ is not yet complete.

### Exalted Life

Both mortal and post-resurrection life have a forward momentum and appear in the scriptural record as transitional forms of embodiment in the progression from mortal to exalted Lord. The exalted embodiment makes these earlier ‘identities’ of Christ truly present. But with the exaltation, we come to the third and final embodiment in which the ‘ascended’, ‘glorified’, or ‘exalted’ Jesus is no longer in history as one who is himself subject to change. This remains a historical embodiment, however, for history cannot dissolve this body, despite its particularity. In the language of the Scriptures and of the Fathers, his body did not know ‘corruption’.<sup>42</sup> In our terminology, Jesus lives and shall not die.

Yet if he lives in history as one who is no longer subject to history, this is because in this embodiment he is subject to change in a different way. He still becomes, which is the mark of flesh, but now his becoming is a process of glorification by the Father and the Spirit, which is irreversible and whose source as becoming is the *ex nihilo* of the Father and the Spirit. His life springs directly from the source of all life. In him Creator and creation are one, within difference, to the extent that the divinity is now no longer ‘hidden’ by his humanity but his humanity rather *reveals* his divinity. As glorified, his humanity is now itself the instrument of glorification; it is itself divinely *efficacious*. In his body the created order is rendered so permeable to God’s divinity that it becomes itself the source of truly and fully divine transformative power in him.

<sup>40</sup> John 20.11–18 (the account at Matt 28.1–10 does not include the misrecognition).

<sup>41</sup> John 14.15–18. Cf. John 14.26; 16.7. <sup>42</sup> Acts 2.31.



But in being efficacious, and the 'first fruits',<sup>43</sup> this body now becomes both universal and particular. It sanctifies the creation, but since it is not absorbed into divinity, it remains particular and identifiable. The mode of the universality of this body is the Holy Spirit itself which both flows from the body but is also made present in space and time, by the Father and the Son, *according to the Spirit's own principality*. At Pentecost the fundamentally Trinitarian nature of Christian revelation is made visible by which the unity in diversity of God in God's self (or what we can call the 'immanent' Trinity) so shapes the world in power as the 'economic' Trinity that the world is made permeable to the presence of the Creator, who elects to be 'with' it in Covenant and compassionate love.

Since in the birth of Jesus, the Father and the Spirit together make the Son present in space and time in accordance with the Son's principality, or 'eternal generation', and since at Pentecost, the Father and the Son make the Holy Spirit present in the Spirit's own principality, as 'proceeding', we can see that God's transformation of the world in power through the 'economic' Trinity is itself historically manifest and cosmically efficacious. It is to this Trinitarian embodiment of the Triune God at work cosmically in the particularity of human historical life that we must now turn. At the end of this chapter, we need to re-engage with the reality of Christ in our everyday lives by asking the 'where' question, with which this book began.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Cor 15.20.

## Christ in Us

### *Spirit, Freedom, and Church*

It seems paradoxical that a restatement of the ‘where’ question should lead us to a chapter that bears the title: ‘Christ in us.’ But in fact that is altogether consistent with a Christ who is universal. At the heart of the Easter claim that Christ is risen, there lies a complex reality. It is that Scripture informs us that the nature of his risen life is ‘heavenly’, in the terms of the day. We can of course simply repeat that phrase today, but it is very evident that early Christians meant something specific by it which is quite different from anything that we might mean. As we unpack its original meaning through our critical historical self-awareness, we realize that we can in fact capture the meaning of the ancient ‘heavenly’ for us today but that we will have to state it in very different terms.

For the early Christians to place Christ in heaven, as they understood it, was for them to affirm that he is still in this same world but now in a radically different form. The manner of his being in the world is that we can encounter him and his power, through the Holy Spirit (who was ‘poured forth’ from precisely the point that he underwent this change, and became ‘heavenly’) in the everyday reality of our own lives. But we encounter him there precisely in his otherness, which means according to his Lordship. This is the sovereignty of an uncreated Creator in the midst of the creation. This is a divine *presence* which of itself, as presence, fundamentally changes the fabric and destiny of the world of which we ourselves are a part. We cannot encounter him, therefore, without also discovering *newness* of world. The world is now ‘in him’, in the sense that the material causal flow which we call history is under his Lordship and subject to the deepest reality of his living presence.

We can refer this biblically to Christ as the incarnate form of divine Wisdom. What we encounter in him along with this newness of world (which we may experience as a sense of radical change, in faith, hope, and love) are the demands of a new way of thinking or logic: a new priority of thought at the

point where we make decisions about what to *do*, which is to say at the points where we make our lives our own through deliberate patterns of judgment and acting. Here, through him and the Holy Spirit, we become conformed to a new openness of thinking, which lessens the way in which, quite naturally, we seek to take everything on our own terms, filtering out whatever does not fit that. With respect to the structure of human life, this means that we find ourselves, in obedience to him and in the power of the Holy Spirit, drawn more deeply into our own embodiment and into life, as someone who reasons, wills, and feels, in the face of life's irreducible complexity.<sup>1</sup> The more deeply we are in life, the less we can escape the complexity of the real and the more we must trust in the providence that is at the heart of life while doing our very best to use our own reason as well as we can.

The picture that emerges here is one of human openness, in the acceptance and fullness of our creatureliness, which is our reasoning, willing, and feeling as embodied life. We follow him now not in bodily movement, as did the disciples who got to their feet and walked with him. We truly follow him, as they did, but differently. We follow him as people who have learned to think in a certain way and with a certain logic about what they will do in the concrete situations of life. We can call this the logic of sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> This is the way people think who are seeking to put someone else's interests first. It involves what we will later call a 'finality of non-resolution', when our reasoning is fundamentally open in the world, and not used in a way that filters reality according to any prejudices we have made about what is 'in it for us'. We can think of it as living openly in the present rather than imposing upon the 'dangerous' present of openness and becoming the fixed positions of a past identity that will automatically *reduce* reality for us, cognitively, in accordance with what has already been.

What we are identifying here is the suspension of our quite ordinary and natural ways of managing the complexity of the real in such a way that we are not overwhelmed and so become unable to secure our own fundamental interests of well-being and survival. We have a natural need to reduce the openness of the real, with its evergreen newness, if we are to survive the complexity that surrounds us on all sides. But the immediacy of the call of Christ is one which presents us precisely with a newfound freedom and, with that, a radically new possibility of *becoming*. This is a different engagement and depth of world: a quite new intensity of life. We can only manage this 'becoming' by receiving it within a new or renewed identity as Christian. It cannot

<sup>1</sup> Chapter 7 offers a further discussion of this structure.

<sup>2</sup> 'Sacrifice' here is used in Augustine's sense as meaning 'every work that establishes community between human beings and God' (Augustine *de civitate dei* X, 4–6; see Johannes Zachhuber, 'Modern Discourse on Sacrifice and its Theological Background', in J. Zachhuber and J. Meszaros (eds), *Sacrifice and Modern Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

be accommodated by the 'old man' in us, for it belongs not to the past but to the present.<sup>3</sup>

It is at this point of following, in the immediacy of the present through the call of Christ, that we are 'reborn' in the Spirit and become Church. As such it only becomes possible where we both have trust in Christ, who we recognize at the point of our calling, and also receive within ourselves the new life of the Holy Spirit who flows from his body and shapes us in the form of a new birth, grafting us into the intentionality of that exalted body. In our calling, the Spirit makes present that body to us, in power, and transforms our own embodied life into the shape, meaning, and form of Christ's own life. Here the accent lies upon the victorious presence of Christ, and upon the new intensity of life that we receive from the Spirit, and yet both are bound up with the particularity of our own situational and embodied reality. Both are experienced *within* that reality. This points to the character of the universalism of the exalted Christ, who is present precisely in the turning points of the world, and points also to the possibilities of our own freedom, which is never a freedom from the world but always a freedom *in* the world.

The particular combination of the universalism of the exalted Christ with the specific forms of our own situational reality is again what we recognize as Church. Church is the particular transfigured by the universal, and so the meaning and life of our Christian acts displays precisely this combination of universality (Christ as Divine Word) and the life of the Holy Spirit, with the particularity of our own embodied living in concrete reality.

We need at this point then to begin to clarify what we can say about the ontology of the *universal* Christ, who is precisely the Christ of whom it can be said that he is 'in us', in the place of our particularity. Christ can only be in us in this way through the Holy Spirit, and his being 'in us' can only be made possible through a change in space and time, which we can associate with the transformation effected in his living body, and which bears the name for us of *ecclesia* or *Church* as the *place* of our calling. The Old Testament prefiguring of the Church then is the point when Moses, who is already addressed and called by God through the angel in the burning bush, is told that the very ground on which he stands is holy.<sup>4</sup> God makes that ground holy, but it remains nevertheless the ground on which we stand with our own two feet. It is impossible to imagine a more concrete image of the divine transformative power.

Church needs to be realized within us, as a new Spirit-filled identity in the present, with a new 'past' of sin and repentance, and a new 'Israelite' history as a community of desert wandering and prayer. But it needs also to give cultural,

<sup>3</sup> For Paul on eschatology and cosmology, see Edward Adams, *Constructing the World: A Study in Paul's Cosmological Language* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Davies, 'Reading the Burning Bush: Voice, World and Holiness', *Modern Theology* 22, no. 3 (July 2006), 439–48.

architectural, and artistic expression to that 'holy ground'.<sup>5</sup> The Church recalls and re-emphasizes the spatio-temporal dimensions of our common calling. It establishes us as a people who are called *together*, as his people, in whose calling the world itself is 'called' and made new. As a reality to be 'built', the Church is a place of effort and endurance, of falling away and return. It is a charismatic place of grace, in which we share in one another's gifts and allow ourselves to be touched by the needs of others.

Transformation Theology then is part of the ecclesial task of calling and construction. It allows the community of the Church to come to expression theologically in theology's method of interfacing between those who have skills in practice and those skilled in theory. It seeks to serve the life of the Church as transformatively engaged with society. By asking the 'where' question, theology has its place in the construction and reconstruction of *ecclesia* as receiving and celebrating Easter, and as constantly bringing before the mind of the Church the intersection of Easter space and time with our own space and time.

#### THE EXALTED BODY: THEOLOGICAL SOURCES

But where shall we look for the sources of such a theology of the exalted Christ? If one set of scriptural sources allowed the classical period to develop an exact ontology of the living Christ as having 'ascended' into heaven up above, and so as still being in continuity with our own space and time, then today we need to find an alternative set of authoritative scriptural sources which will allow us to develop an equivalent account which does not depend so extensively on an ancient cosmology we cannot share. We need to be able to find passages that speak of the exalted Christ, who is certainly a cosmic Christ, but in terms that are not already defined by the cosmological thinking of the ancient world. In fact, the passages that would seem to meet our needs are those from Acts in which St Paul's encounter with the living Christ is detailed in a way that makes this the source for his subsequent theology and mission. These passages are remarkably free of cosmological influence, as it happens (whatever image of the cosmos St Paul may have assumed and been influenced by elsewhere<sup>6</sup>). Moreover, St Paul authoritatively locates this appearance to himself within the sequence of appearances to the apostles and so within primary revelation itself.<sup>7</sup> There is one difference, however.

<sup>5</sup> Exod 3.5.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. 2 Cor 12.1–7.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 9.3–19; 22.6–16; 26.12–18. We have to distinguish, of course, between the accounts set out in Acts and St Paul's own account of his 'revelation' (1 Cor 9.1; 15.8; Gal 1.12, 16). At 1 Cor 15.5–8, he tells the Church at Corinth that Jesus had appeared after his death to Cephas and the apostles, and to 'more than five hundred brothers and sisters' and '[l]ast of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me'.

Whereas the apostles encountered Christ as mortal and risen (pre-exaltation), St Paul encounters him in his exalted or 'ascended' state. Thus St Paul, even as the last of the apostles, *shares this final form of his embodiment with us*. We are contemporary with St Paul in a way that we are not, or not quite, with the other apostles, since the Christ who commissions him, uniquely, into faith is the same exalted Christ who commissions us. There is, of course, only one Christ, who is both fully human and fully divine at the same time, but we can nevertheless take the scriptural description of St Paul's experience of encounter with Christ on the Damascus road as being a particularly valuable resource for developing a better understanding of the ontology of the living Christ for us today.

Of the three narrations of this encounter in Acts, two are broadly identical and the third is convergent. It tells of a world-transforming event involving the man who would become the apostle to the Gentiles and whose theology based on the encounter would itself profoundly shape the Christian Church. It is to this event that St Paul looks for the attestation that he bears an equal authority to that of the other apostles. St Paul tells the Galatian Church that he did not receive the gospel 'from a human source' but 'through a revelation of Jesus Christ'.<sup>8</sup> We may assume, therefore, that the event of this disclosure was one from which he learned in such a way as to allow it to shape his distinctive theology of the Church as one of mission, encounter, universalism, and New Creation in Christ.

As we have noted, St Paul's experience on the way to Damascus is strikingly free of the cosmological framework that is otherwise characteristic of accounts of the 'ascended' Christ in the New Testament, from St Stephen's vision at his martyrdom or the Letter to the Hebrews.<sup>9</sup> A further distinctive element in this account is that it seems to communicate a direct and life-transforming encounter with Christ after Pentecost, which does not, however, follow upon a prior reception of the Holy Spirit. This is more than a conversion experience, however (which a parallel in Acts suggests might occur before receiving the Spirit).<sup>10</sup> It is also, on St Paul's own account, revelation.

### The Hiddenness of the Exalted Christ

Christ comes to St Paul on his journey nevertheless as hidden, for this is indeed revelation as presence in hiddenness. While St Paul tells us at 1 Corinthians 9.1 that he has 'seen Jesus our Lord', he does not give further details of his physical appearance. At 1 Corinthians 15.8, he tells us that Christ 'appeared' to him. The emphasis in Acts is upon the 'brilliant light' of the appearance, and there is

<sup>8</sup> Gal 1.11–12, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 7.55–6. This immediately precedes the Damascus road narrative of course, and concerns both Saul and the 'ascended' Christ.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 8.14–17.

no suggestion at all, unlike the post-resurrection, pre-exaltation appearances, that this was a body that St Paul might have touched. It seems that the exalted body speaks but, unlike the pre-ascension body, it nevertheless remains hidden (words are an *effect* of the body and not the body itself). But where is Christ hidden: what conceals him?

Jesus says to Paul: 'why do you persecute me?' This suggests that his locus is the Church in Damascus itself, which Saul is seeking to persecute and oppress. But Christ does not appear to Paul in the midst of the body of the Church in Damascus, or in the liturgy, or even indeed in Damascus, and yet Jesus clearly identifies himself with all three. The exalted Christ does have a clear ecclesial presence, therefore, in the sense that we can say that he is indeed hidden in the Church, and hidden in power, but this is not the whole story. He appears to Paul and Paul's companions outside of this direct framework. He appears in fact as the 'head' of the Church, which constitutes his body. But this is not a head that is dependent upon the body, or confined by the presence of the body. The later Pauline metaphor of the organic unity of the head and body cannot be directly applied here. Jesus is free to act beyond the spatio-temporal confines of the liturgical and ministerial Church. He is present to St Paul as hidden in history, in the causal flow, where St Paul encounters him directly. St Paul is not yet in the Church. His frame of reference is his journeying with his companions towards Damascus, and so we can say that he is profoundly *disrupted* in Christ's appearing to him. The account of the loss of his sight in Acts and his need to be healed by Ananias suggests the depth of that disruption. St Paul is called by an encounter with the commissioning Christ not as hidden in the Church, but as head of the Church who is hidden, in power, in history.

And the response of St Paul will itself be one which is *historical*. He will travel across the ancient world and will challenge each and every exclusivity: from Roman Empire, to Greek cultural hegemony, to Hebrew law. He will literally cross the major boundaries of the ancient lands, traversing humanity, but will also do so in the name of a new religion (not yet known as 'Christian') which brings with it the powerful and persuasive vision of a quite new universalism which will long outlast the eclipse of Rome and the hegemony of Greek culture.<sup>11</sup> It is a vision that will introduce a different kind of power, not that of the ruler but of the *doulos*, or commissioned servant of Christ.

The question of how and where Jesus is hidden in St Paul's encounter with him in power has a further dimension, however, which concerns St Paul himself. When he later recalls this event, St Paul himself wrote that this 'revelation' of Christ occurred '*in me*'.<sup>12</sup> Later, of course, he will also speak of 'Christ

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter 9, 229–32.

<sup>12</sup> Gal 2.20. The meaning here has been interpreted as being both 'in me' and 'to me' (the latter translation is commonly used, although the form *en emoi* and not *pros me* is used).

in me.<sup>13</sup> From now on the risen and exalted Christ will be *in* St Paul, we might say. This is consistent with the principle that the uncreated Godhead is now no longer concealed by the glorified body of Christ, and so Jesus must be present as hidden in some other material form. As exalted, he cannot be directly present, since—according to Scripture and tradition—the created order has not yet been transformed in accordance with the transformation effected in the body of Jesus in such a way that it can sustain such an immediate presence. The presence of Christ has to be mediated, therefore, by created materiality; it has to be hidden. This mediation takes place through divine rather than created agency, however, and rests within the regenerative purposes and power of God. It is something that we specifically associate with the agency of the Spirit in the power of God.

When we affirm that Christ is ‘in’ St Paul from this point on, what we mean to say is that the encounter with the living Christ so changes his bodily life that from now on Paul himself will be a mode of Christ’s hiddenness in the world and so also of his power to transform the world, in accordance with the glorification by the Father and the Spirit of Jesus’ own human body. The existential ground of this ‘concealment’ is St Paul’s own status as *doulos*, or servant of Christ. At this point, St Paul’s own embodied life becomes conformed to, or grafted into, Jesus own Spirit-filled embodied life. What we should speak of here, therefore, is a convergence of the very essence of our bodily life, which is our deep-seated freedom and our capacity for intentional acts. It is in our power of deliberate movement that we are most human, for it is by this power that we can as human beings ‘make a difference’. What we see in St Paul then, in the ‘Christ in us’, is a flowing together in the Spirit of our finite human freedom and the infinite freedom that is divine sovereignty which we encounter in Christ. Christ brings that divine freedom into the world in a way that makes possible a new depth and radicality of our finite human freedom, as a freedom specifically of enacted love.

But St Paul will not let us speak of ‘Christ in us’ without also speaking of the extent to which we are ourselves ‘in Christ.’<sup>14</sup> The ‘Christ in us’ and our being ‘in Christ’ are mutually implicating and suggest the intimacy of a relation in the Spirit, who is ‘poured forth’ from the body of Jesus in conformity with the ‘consubstantiality’ of the Spirit and the Father with the Son. Since this is the transformational power of the exalted Christ who is no longer in history except as the Lord of history, we have to agree with Christiaan Beker that the meaning of the ‘in’ of the *en christo* is finally eschatological, or apocalyptic.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rom 8.10.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase ‘in Christ’ occurs 164 times in the ‘chief Pauline letters’ (Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (eds), *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove, IL and Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 98). For this usage, we can in particular identify the following cases: Rom 16.7, 22; 1 Cor 1.30; Gal 1.22; 1 Thess 3.8; 2 Cor 1.2.

<sup>15</sup> J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980), 272–302.



This is not the ‘in’ or spatiality of being, but the spatiality of a radical becoming: and indeed of a becoming, through the Spirit, in him, so that ‘if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation.’<sup>16</sup> As such, it is also the movement of glory, and so also of a certain breath of the divine power, into and around us in the situational reality of our own everyday lives. This dialectic is captured, by St Paul, in his words: ‘So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.’<sup>17</sup>

The ‘where’ question, with which we began this book, turns out then to be a much bigger one than we thought (although it can be asked with integrity without understanding that). It is finally a question about the nature of our world as New Creation in Christ. To ask the Christological ‘where’ question is to open ourselves up to the possibility that to be alive can be infinitely greater and deeper than we had thought, and that we ourselves may be able to participate in that newness of life in ways far beyond our imagining: even indeed that we are already beginning to share in that life, by asking this question with integrity. What we learn from St Paul is that to share in that life, is to have Christ ‘in us,’ as we are ‘in’ him, and so is to be the place of his hiddenness or presence in power. In this way we come to receive him, through service to the power of God, as one in whom the world itself, of which we are part, is disclosed in a new way.

### The Exalted Body as Mystery

It is undoubtedly ambitious to ask questions concerning the nature of the exalted body of Christ by which our life becomes discipleship and so, through faith, the mode of his hiddenness. As we stressed earlier, however, this task is not the undermining of mystery but rather its centring at the heart of our human life. We need to understand its shape and form in order to know that it is indeed mystery and not simply something that is to be naively allocated purely to the domain of experience, devotion, or faith. The very nature of revelation—and St Paul’s Damascus road experience was that—is that it can be thought about by human beings in appropriate ways and can be better understood precisely as mystery.<sup>18</sup>

It follows, of course, that an analysis of the Damascus road appearance cannot yield either the historical ontology of a mortal, Palestinian Christ, nor that

<sup>16</sup> 2 Cor 5.17.

<sup>17</sup> Col 3.1–4.

<sup>18</sup> It is the incommensurable quality of the relation between divinity and humanity in Christ that makes the Chalcedonian formula ‘mysterious’ rather than contradictory, for instance.

of a post-resurrection Christ (as recorded through the experiences of those who encountered him in that form between Easter Sunday and the Ascension). Nor can it be a straightforwardly pneumatological account of Christ's presence, however central the Holy Spirit may be in Christian conversion of life. But an ontology of Christ, as St Paul experienced him, will need to be distinct from these earlier forms of embodiment, while also making them present for us today. The exalted body of Christ cannot be one of discontinuity but only a body of continuity, albeit in a new stage of inclusivity, fullness, and universality. We shall have to be mindful of this continuity throughout our ontological thinking about Christ in his exalted, living, or contemporary state, while at the same time being aware that this is a very radically *transformed* body whose life comes to us through ethical command, on the one hand, and deep imagining on the other.

The following section has three parts, divided into seven thematic areas (1–7). We deal firstly with the ontology and then the theology of the exalted body of Christ as *encounter*, and finally with the relation between the exalted Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. The discussion of the ontology is divided into four thematic areas: his 'identifiability', 'non-objectifiability', 'authority', and 'ecclesiality'. The discussion of the theology is divided into two further areas: the 'headship' and 'priesthood' of Christ. In the final part, we consider the role of the Holy Spirit, as Spirit of Pentecost, in the making present of Christ's exalted life, in which we encounter him as commissioning. Here in this final, seventh section the emphasis will lie on how the universal Christ can be *in* us, through the Holy Spirit, and so how we too are constituted in him and with him as Church.

## THE EXALTED BODY: ONTOLOGY OF ENCOUNTER

We begin then with the first of our four thematic areas. However extraordinary the transformed life of the human body of Christ, risen and exalted, may be, it has to stand nevertheless in clear continuity with the earlier forms of his embodied life. At the centre of this is the claim to his *identifiability*.

### 1. Identifiability

We need to begin then with the recognition that according to the narrative in Acts, St Paul clearly did identify him as the same Jesus who appeared to the apostles before him: 'have I not seen Jesus our Lord?'<sup>19</sup> This suggests that St Paul experienced Christ in this encounter as being recognizably present in the fullness of his personal, historical, and embodied life. This comes through

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 9.1.

even more forcefully in that St Paul was not one of Jesus' disciples during Jesus' own lifetime, of course. However unique the ontology of the living body of Christ, it allowed him to be recognized by St Paul as the wounded Galilean. We can say then that in this account, it was still a body which makes present its own past (as living bodies ordinarily do).

The question of the identifiability of Christ has to be central to the personal character of his continuing life. Maintaining this principle brings us close to the terms of the Lutheran debate about the 'ubiquity' of the exalted Christ. Zwinglians argued that 'ubiquity' replaced the 'particularity' of his personhood. Although Luther was accused of such a replacement, his theory of 'ubivoluntarianism' in fact carefully avoided such an effacing of the particular in the light of the universal.<sup>20</sup> We have to recall here also the Chalcedonian non-reduction of the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ. There can be no contradiction in positing the union of divinity and humanity in Christ. As Herbert McCabe argued, these are not opposites but incommensurables.<sup>21</sup> In Kathryn Tanner's terms, they have a 'non-competitive' relation.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Non-Objectifiability

But in the case of the uniqueness of this state of life, we have to maintain that the 'identifiability' of the living Christ is not to deny another key property of his embodiment, which is its 'non-objectifiability'. There is no suggestion in St Paul's description of his encounter with the exalted Christ that this body had particular features, or that Christ could be touched. He was the source of radiance, but there is no suggestion of specific bodily traits here such as those by which Jesus was recognized in his post-resurrection appearances and by which he interacted with his disciples. Again, this raises questions about the nature of his presence to us in this ontology of encounter. Bodies are normally historical in the sense that they can be perceived through the senses. They are the form of our own historical agency (our capacity to influence how one thing leads to another) and, through their capacity to be touched, they can be the object of other people's actions. In their objectifiability, bodies are vulnerable to the power of others, just as others can nourish and care for them. If the objectifiability of a body is a condition of its historicity, what kind of historical status does the living body of Jesus have, in terms of both its agency and its vulnerability, if it can be present to us as 'identifiable' but is also 'non-objectifiable'?

<sup>20</sup> *Luther's Works*, 36, Word and Sacrament 2 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 340–2.

<sup>21</sup> Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), 57–8 (quoted in Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 216–25).

<sup>22</sup> Tanner, Kathryn, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 1–33.

As we have seen above, this question can be illumined by a very specific reflection that St Paul made about his encounter. In the Letter to the Galatians, he states not that Jesus was revealed *to* him but rather *in* him.<sup>23</sup> Since we cannot think that *in* him here has the meaning of a private and enclosed experience, we have to see it as suggesting an ontological condition in which this body was neither 'objectively present' to St Paul nor 'subjectively' present, which is commonly the alternative to ordinary 'objectivity'. St Paul's companions fell to the ground, we are told, as they too heard the voice, even though there is no suggestion that they were somehow 'qualified' to hear Christ speak, nor indeed that they were subsequently converted by this experience.<sup>24</sup> This seems to contrast with the experience of his disciples in the case of their encounters with the risen but pre-exaltation Christ, in which the appearances seem only to have been to the faithful.

If, therefore, in his 'Damascus road' embodiment, Christ was neither 'objectively present' in the ordinary sense of the term, but neither was he 'subjectively present', then it appears on the basis of the account in Acts that his exalted form defies the normal categories of subjectivity and objectivity altogether. This can be read as a further stage in the development of the ontology of the transitional, pre-glorified body of Jesus of the post-resurrection period, which appeared to move in and out of normal objectivity.<sup>25</sup> The suggestion here then is that the 'non-objectifiability' of the exalted body results not from its failure to be real, or from its being only partially real, but rather from our own incapacity as creatures to grasp the full depth of the reality that is disclosed in it.

And we can see some further hint of what the nature of this reality might be when we consider that St Paul himself (according to the account in Acts) lost his physical sight through the brilliance of the 'great light' which appeared 'about noon'.<sup>26</sup> The dominical remedy was Ananias' laying on of hands so that St Paul's sight would be healed and he would be 'filled with the Holy Spirit'.<sup>27</sup> Why does this need to happen if there are not implications in this encounter for how St Paul himself is now in the world, through his ordinary senses? Immediately following the encounter, his 'seeing' of the risen and exalted Jesus and his ordinary seeing of the world became discontinuous. This suggests that the former 'seeing' has implications also for his ordinary cognition. This in turn recalls the idea that the world which St Paul perceived in ordinary cognition has itself in some way been changed for him through his encounter with the risen Christ, in accordance with St Paul's understanding of the link between the exalted Christ and New Creation.

<sup>23</sup> At Gal 1.16, St Paul tells the Church in Galatia that God was 'pleased to reveal his Son in me [*en moi*], so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles' (the NRSV translates as 'to me').

<sup>24</sup> Acts 9. This appears in inverse form at Acts 22, where his companions 'saw the light' but did not hear the voice.

<sup>25</sup> E.g. Luke 24.39; John 20.24–9.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 22.6.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 9.17.

What we may be seeing here, therefore, is a structure within faith which is normally hidden from us. We are not apostles but walk with the apostles, and there is an apostolic distance which separates us from St Paul. The Damascus road experience was for him an unmediated encounter with God in Jesus Christ. It was primary revelation. What his experience shows us, however, as narrated in Acts, is that the encounter with Christ in faith cannot be categorized as other encounters or experiences can: there is in fact something strongly anti-empirical in his account of things. This does not mean that this was not a real occurrence, however, but rather the encounter with Christ is so comprehensive as to require specifically the language of indwelling which is more characteristic of how we speak of the world: we are *in* him as we are in the world. But he is also decisively *in* us, as we might speak of the Spirit being in us, particularly in our historicity or agency of doing and saying.

The language of a dual being 'in' effectively combines both objectivity and subjectivity. In fact, it surpasses the distinction between them. If the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is himself Creator, whose incarnate presence in the midst of the creation inaugurates the Kingdom of God on earth and renews all creation, then the Damascus road encounter suggests that St Paul was now no longer in the world in the same way. The appearance of the risen Christ to him as commissioning was also the revealing to him that he was now in the world in a different way, or was in a transformed world or more precisely still, was in a world that is now *being* transformed in Christ.

On the evidence here, we cannot finally separate the newness of self in the commissioning of faith from the newness of world encountered in Christ; indeed the latter is a precondition of the former, since it is fundamental to the nature of the person of the universal Christ whom St Paul encounters. This must also belong inseparably to our ontology of Christological encounter therefore. In Christ we meet newness of world since it is that which corresponds to his own revealed divinity as Creator. The divinity in him cannot but make the world new, bringing it back to its own ground in the divine *creatio ex nihilo*. His universality as present anywhere in the created order, at any place and at any time, is a function of his exaltation, just as it is the expression of the triumph of the divine causality in him over created causation: New Creation over old. In his exalted and universal body, the 'becoming' of the created causation of our own space and time is transformed into the becoming of the world as New Creation in him: in him, world itself becomes new. We can say that in him, the contingency of the created order becomes the providence of the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>28</sup>

Following his encounter on the road to Damascus then, St Paul is in the world in a new way, without ceasing, of course, to be also in the world in the old way, in accordance with his mortality. But if this new manner of existence,

<sup>28</sup> N. T. Wright, *How God became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012).

or new life or rebirth, is itself always at the same time a way of being *in* Christ as Christ is *in* St Paul, then we can begin to see the power of the transformational model that underlies the classical form of the doctrine of Christ's exaltation. The disclosure of God for us in Jesus Christ is known precisely by the transformation it effects in the world. This is not a change *in* the world, however, but rather something far more fundamental: it is a change *of* the world. But it cannot be separated from the change in Christ himself. His 'presence' everywhere is a sign not only of his own divine authority but also of the fact that the world is now decisively changed in him in terms of its ground and its destiny. St Paul's own mission, therefore, was first and foremost that of communicating this experience of being in a changed world 'in' Christ to others. He could only do this by himself increasingly becoming Christ, through the Holy Spirit, or by being more and more integrated into New Creation, even during his mortal life. The urgency of this world-mission or characteristic Pauline 'universalism'—though one still based in the particularity of St Paul's own embodied life—is what we can still feel today in his use of the key terms of being 'in Christ' just as Christ in 'in me'. It remains the defining theological characteristic of St Paul's life and witness, and so also of the inheritance we receive from him.

### 3. Authority

This 'cosmic' dimension of Christ's presence leads us to a third property of Jesus' exalted life, which is the 'authority' with which he appeared to St Paul. The whole passage is set within St Paul's opening address to him as 'Lord'.<sup>29</sup> Christ appears to be present now in the fullness of his Lordship. During his mortal life, the Lordship of Christ was discerned only indirectly by signs and miracles. In his post-resurrection life even, Christ's Lordship was still embedded within other human ways of relating. Jesus demonstrated his wounds to Thomas and walked with his disciples on the road to Emmaus.<sup>30</sup> In the case of the exalted Christ, however, there appears to be no distinction at all between the personal identity of Jesus and his meaning as universal Lord. There is no deferral or negotiation in St Paul's encounter with the living Christ. In Christ glorified, God dwells in his fullness, and it is Godhead that is made immediately present to St Paul as the overwhelming imperative of love.

Jesus Christ is in space and time as the one who commands space and time: as one who has conquered. He is in history as one who is himself the living providence of God. From this perspective, his authority is bound up

<sup>29</sup> The Greek word *kyrios* can of course also mean 'sir' (F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 198).

<sup>30</sup> John 20.24–9; Luke 24. 13–35.

with the cosmic dimensions of the incarnation and with Jesus' own identity as the one in whom the Creator becomes incarnate in the midst of his creation. But this still leaves us with the question: how does he share our space and time? How is it that his authority is a real authority? In our discussions of Lordship, we have already stressed that real authority has to be grounded in our own space and time. Real authority is for us always an actual and embodied authority, linked with a human agent. This is not the same as the *idea* of authority, however compelling. The measure of real authority for instance lies in its capacity to be disruptive, as encounter in our own here and now, and so as affecting what we do in *this* particular situation.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Compassion

This has further implications, therefore, for the nature of Christ's authority. If he shares our space and time but is not subject to it, in what sense can he said to be vulnerable? And yet if he is not vulnerable, can he truly be said to share with us our history? How could we learn to trust such an authority of God in Christ if it were one grounded solely in power and not in love as the fundamental, self-emptying sharing of our space and time? The answer to this lies in Jesus' words to St Paul: 'Why do you persecute me?' This does not mean that he is in himself vulnerable in the sense that other agents can act directly upon him. Indeed, he cannot be vulnerable in that way. His vulnerability rather lies in his personal love for the Church and for each of us as we are represented in the vulnerable and powerless in society: 'what you do to the least of these, you do also to me'.<sup>32</sup> What we see here then is the structure of the exalted Christ specifically as the disruptive compassion of God. The ontology we are developing here is one of the disruptive, compassionate God of the Old Covenant who became flesh and still dwells among us in the New Covenant.<sup>33</sup>

This means that the ecclesial relation to Christ is very intimate indeed. The commissioning Christ is also the compassionate Christ who reaches out through his Church to the world, as the hidden presence within it. The constant theme of Jesus' good works in the New Testament is that he is guided in what he does by 'compassion' (the unusual Greek words *splanghna* and *splangh-nizomai* seem to be specifically Christological terms).<sup>34</sup> In the Song of Zechariah,

<sup>31</sup> Nor can it be some kind of 'transcendent' and unlocalized experience of Christ's Lordship therefore.

<sup>32</sup> Matt 25.40.

<sup>33</sup> For the place of 'compassion' in God's self-description in the Old Testament and its development in the Hebrew scriptures, see Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2000 and Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 240–4. The key texts are found at Exod 3.6–13; 6.1–13; 33.12–33.

<sup>34</sup> Davies, *Theology of Compassion*, 244–6. The key texts are to be found at Mark 1.41; 6.34; 8.2; 9.22; Luke 7.11–17; Matt 9.36; 14.14; 15.32; 20.29–34.

Christ in his advent is specifically identified with 'the compassion of God'.<sup>35</sup> But this Christological use of the language of compassion in the Gospels (around the same cluster of rare Greek words) is likewise used of the Church in the later epistles, where Church or 'ecclesiality' seems to be defined by the compassionate quality of its internal and external relations and by its sharing in the compassion of Christ.<sup>36</sup> What we can see here is a configuration of outflow and interpenetration. In his exaltation the body of Jesus 'flows out' into the world in and through the Holy Spirit as the creative life of God, which is also the risen Jesus' own life. The structure and form of that life is both authority, or Lordship, and solidarist, self-giving compassion. Here powerlessness and power are one, in a kenotic structure of sacrifice, which is at the centre of the meaning or 'logos' of life itself.<sup>37</sup>

### THE EXALTED BODY: THEOLOGY OF ENCOUNTER

We can summarize the above by suggesting that in his exaltation Jesus Christ is known according to his *intentionality*. Intentionality is what we freely *do* with our bodies, on the basis of our judgment. Our embodiment is our purposive presence in the world. We are recognizable and responsible in our intentionality, and it is through our intentionality that we do what is right and wrong. Intentionality in this sense is the true life of the human body. It is where we are 'intelligent embodiment' possessed of pulse and breath and capable of moving freely in deliberate ways which will 'make a difference' in the world. We can say, therefore, that in the Christian claim that Christ lives, in resurrected and exalted life, is the claim also that he lives from his intentionality: from the *pro me* which is his own transformed, embodied humanity. If it is our intentionality which constitutes our human power for life, then we cannot think of Christ as living in any other way than from the purity of his intentionality. We have mentioned the scriptural emphasis upon him as 'the compassion of God', which is already to speak of capacities of cognition, empathy, and volition.<sup>38</sup> These constitute us as people who can recognize the needs of others, who can feel with them and who can wish to come to their aid. But while 'compassion' includes the determination or the will to act, it does not necessarily include the act itself (for sometimes we cannot act as we wish to in our compassionate motivations). The theme

<sup>35</sup> Luke 1.78.      <sup>36</sup> Davies, *Theology of Compassion*, 246–9.

<sup>37</sup> See in particular Nancey Murphy and George F. R. Ellis, *On the Moral Nature of the Universe: Theology, Cosmology and Ethics* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996). See also John Polkinghorne (ed.), *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>38</sup> Martha Nussbaum, 'Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion', *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 27–58.



of 'sacrifice' on the other hand does of itself include the moment of our acting, when we commit ourselves to history as free, embodied agents: as human, material cause for the other or for the world. For the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus lives in his 'priesthood,' according to his self-offering, while in Catholic traditions he is present as 'living sacrifice' for us and for the world in the Eucharist. And we could say that the authority of the living Christ over us as commissioning in history, lies in his compassionate self-offering for us.

In his exaltation then, the true life of Christ becomes also participatively the true en-Spirited and so also embodied life of the Church. This is not a new reality that is imposed upon us, but it comes rather through the perfecting of our human freedom, which is at the core of our own intentionality, through Christ's own freedom in act as communicated through the Holy Spirit. If we come to live by the power of his intentionality, we live also according to our own free distinctiveness and integrity, or what makes us truly ourselves. His identifiability means that we recognize him according to his intentionality for us and for the world. His non-objectifiability means that he is closer to us than we are to ourselves. His authority is the mark of the truly divine nature of the transformation in him, as wounded and glorified, and his ecclesiality is the measure of his continuing reaching out in our space and time, as the living, compassionate, power of the Creator God within his creation.

To think of the living Christ who we encounter in faith in terms of his intentionality, follows from the language of Christ as indwelling wisdom and understanding, just as it points to the language of the headship and priesthood of Christ, as expressing the unity of the Church as his body, with him. The potential contribution of this theology to the life of faith lies in the fact that it presupposes that the ground of faith as 'friendship with Christ' or as the personal knowledge of Christ resides not in the memory of who he was on earth, as recorded in the Gospels, nor indeed on some subjective construction of faith, nor does it lie in an understanding of the Holy Spirit as the one who *replaces* the exalted Christ as the form of immediacy of the divine presence. Rather, it depends upon our experience of faith as a constant renewal of encounter in which both we and another come together, with particular effects, in the passage of life. This is not an imagined encounter, and it can be taken up into a second-order, academic theology, as well as remaining securely within the first-order language of faith.

## 5. The Church and the Body of Christ

Both the New Testament theology of the 'headship' and of the 'priesthood' of Christ are intimately bound up with Christ's own embodiment and intentionality, and taken together, they give living, symbolic form to the paradoxical unity of divinity and humanity in him, and his paradoxical unity with his Church.

The 'headship' speaks of Christ as he governs and protects us, and the 'priesthood' as he supports and guides us. A theology of the 'headship' of Christ can be found in particular in extended opening passages from Colossians (1.1–29) and Ephesians (1.1–23). The image of Christ as 'head' is being used in the first place here in order to express precisely the 'intentionality' of Christ. Human beings act purposively: we are accountable for what we do. The 'head' indicates our capacity to act deliberately and freely, in accordance with our judgment. But we cannot use the term 'head' today without also thinking of the human brain and the revolution in human self-understanding which the neurological sciences have brought us. Today we conceive of a far-reaching and interactive unity of brain, body, and environment, by which the 'head' (as consciousness/reason/mind) is intimately bound in with the way we perceive the world (through body/senses/movement). The old dualistic world has given way to an interactive and integrated model of body and mind working together within a unity of consciousness, perception, and neural networks. In the image of the 'head' we can begin to see not only the role of authority but also the extent to which Christ as the divine Logos enlivens the body of his Church *interactively*, in a unity of divine Wisdom, Spirit-filled perception, and free human movement. Here Christian language of discipleship as 'following' includes also the basic, 'hard-wired' social forms of reciprocal interaction and imitation which are characteristic of the human face-to-face. For us today, this is also an essential part of our own self-understanding.<sup>39</sup>

### *'Head' and Wisdom*

In passages from Ephesians and Colossians, we find a pronounced sense of the animating Logos of Christ as the 'head' of the Church. St Paul speaks of 'the mystery of God's will', which Christ has made known to us 'with all wisdom and insight'.<sup>40</sup> This is God's 'plan for the fullness of time'.<sup>41</sup> St Paul's prayer is that the Colossians may be 'filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding' so that they might 'lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him'.<sup>42</sup> The 'word of God' is 'the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints'.<sup>43</sup> St Paul draws upon the vocabulary of a knowing or understanding of the divine 'plan', which seems to be communicated in the Spirit (or which is at least *pneumatikos*<sup>44</sup>). He also suggests that the mystery of which he speaks is one in which we are ourselves intimately bound up through our embodied life, since this mystery is finally 'Christ in you, the hope of glory'.<sup>45</sup> The key parallel phrase in Ephesians occurs in the prayer that 'the God of our Lord

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 7, 172–6.

<sup>40</sup> Eph 1.8–9.

<sup>41</sup> Eph 1.11.

<sup>42</sup> Col 1.9.

<sup>43</sup> Col 1.25–6.

<sup>44</sup> Col 1.9.

<sup>45</sup> Col 1.27.

Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you [...].<sup>46</sup> The image of Christ which emerges here then is not one of the passive victim of cosmic events, the significance of which he does not himself understand but which we can understand through considering his life. Rather, Jesus is seen here as a free participant in the divine drama: one who understands the divine purpose in so far as it shapes his own life as one of total self-sacrificing love for God and humanity. Jesus himself seems to reveal the mystery of creation as much as it is revealed in him.

### *'Head' and Unity*

This capacity for 'wisdom and spiritual understanding' of the purposes of God can be communicated and learned. But in the symbiotic, organic spaces of the Church's faith in Christ, who himself lives 'in' the Church, we can see a unity between Church and Christ—and a transference between his embodied intentionality and ours—which itself suggests the organic unity of a single body: even if we are paradoxically set apart from him by being defined as 'the fullness' of his body or life or as 'coming to fullness' in him as 'head'.<sup>47</sup> The notion of the body's 'head', in combination with the body's parts and 'ligaments', all 'working properly' together is a powerful image of 'the body's growth in building itself up in love'.<sup>48</sup>

But if the theology of Christ as 'head' emphasizes cohesion and the 'interactive continuity' of mind and body, as we understand it today, then it also suggests the cosmic power of God that is displayed in him. As 'head', he oversees the whole of the creation as Creator and has 'first place in all things'.<sup>49</sup> God has 'put all things under his feet and has made him the head of all things [...]'.<sup>50</sup> The opening passages of Ephesians and Colossians both point to faith as the recognition of the unparalleled power of God that is displayed in the exalted Christ, as ground of our hope. This is the language of elevation and so also of distance between Christ's divinity and our own humanity. In Chalcedonian terms, we can recognize here the overwhelming manifestation of the divinity within the continuing unity of divinity and humanity in Christ's person. But his authority as Lord of all also manifests to us in our own limited space and time. The universal Lordship of Christ becomes our own commissioning in the intimate situational reality of our own lives: for us just as it did for St Paul. We have to add to the 'headship' of Christ then a different register, one which

<sup>46</sup> Eph 1.17–18.

<sup>47</sup> Eph. 1.23; Col 2.9–10.

<sup>48</sup> Eph 4.16; cf. Eph 2.21; cf. Col 1.28.

<sup>49</sup> Col 1.18.

<sup>50</sup> Eph 1.22.

thematizes his continuing humanity, and explains how the 'head' of all things in power so far above, can also be so intimately known by us, his creatures.

### *The Priesthood of Christ*

The imagery of priesthood is of course more closely linked with the continuing humanity of Christ and with the theme of his sacrifice. It can be found throughout the New Testament, where Jesus is referred to as the 'lamb', for instance (in an assimilation of the tradition of the slaughter of a lamb at Passover, celebrating the memory of the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt), or where there is reference to him as *hilastērion*, or atonement (deriving from the lid of the Ark of the Covenant on which the high priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur). This is in play where his body is referred to in terms of the Temple at Jerusalem itself, where his death is understood to be a self-offering, where there is reference to the last supper as the beginning of Eucharistic tradition, or where he is imaged as interceding for us, or representing us, in heaven. It is only in the Letter to the Hebrews, however, that Jesus is referred to directly as 'priest' or 'high priest'.<sup>51</sup>

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the meaning of the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ is set out in terms that derive from the cultic priesthood of the Temple.<sup>52</sup> Since Jesus did not belong to the Levitical priesthood, he is described as being a priest of the order of Melchizedek (and so pre-dates the Levitical priesthood). There is no lineage attached to Melchizedek and so Jesus is 'a high priest forever'.<sup>53</sup> Whereas the expiatory, sacrificial acts of the high priest which are associated most with the holy day of Yom Kippur, when the high priest entered the inner sanctum itself or Holy of Holies of the Temple at Jerusalem, had to be repeated and were performed by successive priests, Jesus' own expiatory act was performed once and for all. Jesus was himself 'victim' as well as 'priest', and his sacrifice took place 'outside the city gate' with implications for its universality.

The notion of 'priesthood' is more dynamic than that of 'headship' in itself, since it directly presupposes movement, in the ritual role of the priest for and with the people. The priest stands for the people, and enters the Holy of Holies on their behalf. The priest mediates or intercedes for us in the presence of the Father. We can think of this as 'being with' or as 'being alongside'. The priest represents and interprets the purposes of God to the people, through teaching, and represents the people to God, through intercession. This is the movement of a dynamic two-way relationality in which the priest belongs to the place

<sup>51</sup> Gerald O'Collins and Michael Keenan Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 45.

<sup>52</sup> Heb 13.12.

<sup>53</sup> Heb 6.20.

where God and humanity meet and so is 'holy'. But a fundamental part of this two-way process is the transformed humanity of Jesus, and of his capacity to 'accompany' us or to be 'alongside' us, in the unity of human–divine personhood.

A key text in this respect is Romans 8. This begins with a reflection on sin and culpability in the context of Jewish law and the affirmation that 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death'.<sup>54</sup> The emphasis here is not upon the elevated authority of a distant God but upon a God who has sent 'his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh' in order that 'the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'.<sup>55</sup> Here the emphasis lies upon the Spirit of God as indwelling us and informing what we do (our 'walking' in life).<sup>56</sup> We find a phrase again which suggests that Christ is 'in us',<sup>57</sup> and there is the implication here of what is boldly stated in Colossians: that his being in us is, for us, 'the hope of glory'.<sup>58</sup>

The initial emphasis on life through divine presence of the Spirit rather than death through sin with which Romans 8 begins, and on the Christ 'in us', then gives way to reflection upon the diverse ways in which God, through his Spirit, guides our life in its most intimate detail. The Spirit 'bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God' and that 'we suffer with him, so that we may also be glorified with him'.<sup>59</sup> It is the Spirit too who is present 'in our weakness' and who guides us in our prayers, bringing our minds into conformity with God's will for us.<sup>60</sup> But there is also a strongly marked cosmic dimension as St Paul contemplates that the whole of creation will be set free in him, leading again to an emphasis upon hope: 'For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience'.<sup>61</sup> The passage concludes with a series of images which give content to this hope. The apostle says that 'We know all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose'.<sup>62</sup> He adds 'He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?'.<sup>63</sup> Finally he points to the power of God as evidenced in the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, who 'is at the right hand of God, who intercedes for us'.<sup>64</sup> It is on account of this that the apostle then asks: 'Who will separate us from the love of Christ?'. In this same mix of the intimacy of an individual human life and the immensity of the cosmos, he concludes that neither 'hardship, nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine [...]' and 'neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor

<sup>54</sup> Rom 8.2.<sup>55</sup> Rom 1.3–4.<sup>56</sup> Rom 8.9.<sup>57</sup> Rom 8.11.<sup>58</sup> Col 1.27.<sup>59</sup> Rom 8.16–17.<sup>60</sup> Rom 8.26–7.<sup>61</sup> Rom 8.25.<sup>62</sup> Rom 8.28.<sup>63</sup> Rom 8.32.<sup>64</sup> Rom 8.34.

depth, not anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>65</sup>

It is in the priesthood of Christ, therefore, that the cosmic character of Christ according to his Lordship is shown to be earthed in his humanity: his 'eternal' priesthood is precisely the unity of these. Christ 'withdraws' from us in his 'ascension' according to his Lordship, but this is a new making available of his humanity to us, universally, by which he fulfils the purposes of the incarnation as the dwelling among us of God's love. Exaltation therefore presupposes the notion of Christ's priesthood, or being present for us by being 'alongside' us. It is the language not of distance but of intimacy, as organically conceived, in the imagery of indwelling and in the power of life of the Holy Spirit. As Keyvan Cyrus has argued, if his withdrawal as high priest is a form of Christ's hiddenness, then it is also his presence in power.<sup>66</sup>

## 6. Church and the Holy Spirit

As we have seen, one of the central questions for a Trinitarian theology of transformation lies in the relation of the living Christ and the Holy Spirit. This is a question which has much broader resonance of course for modern theology in that it is difficult within the parameters of modern theology to find a connection between Second and Third Person of the Trinity which in any way parallels the organically close association in Scripture between the 'withdrawal', 'ascension' (or what we are calling the 'exaltation' of Christ), and the new entry of the Spirit into the world at Pentecost, who is 'poured out' from the body of Christ.<sup>67</sup> An 'interrupted' Christology will struggle to bridge the Son and Spirit in ways that guarantee each their rightful place in the Trinity. We have argued that the roots of that disjunction can already be found very early on, in the debate that took place between Luther and Zwingli in the third decade of the sixteenth century and which concerned the nature of the Eucharistic presence of Christ.<sup>68</sup> This debate rested also upon other questions however, most specifically the issue of the ontology or state of the exalted body of Christ. Luther understood this to be in heaven according to the scriptural witness, where it was in a glorified state and could also be genuinely present in the Eucharist. Zwingli on the other hand believed it to be in heaven specifically

<sup>65</sup> Rom 8.35–9.

<sup>66</sup> I am grateful to my doctoral student Keyvan Cyrus for insights regarding the connection between Christ's withdrawal into the Holy of Holies as eternal priest and the principle of his presence in hiddenness, which is presupposed in the more cosmological structure of 'ascension'. See his forthcoming work on Christian priesthood.

<sup>67</sup> Acts 2.33. On this theme, see also Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 55–8.

<sup>68</sup> Chapter 2, 35–7.

in an 'untransformed' state, and so could not also be present in the Eucharist. Luther rightly surmised that the underlying issue between them was one of the authority of Scripture with respect to natural science. Luther preferred Scripture over science, whereas Zwingli evidently wanted to maintain the principle that Jesus had risen in a real human body and so that body could not have a different ontology from other real human bodies.<sup>69</sup> Once the principle of the transformability of matter was denied, it was not possible to maintain the belief that the very nature of the universe itself allowed Christ who was 'locally' present in heaven to be also 'substantially' present in the Eucharist, but neither could the Holy Spirit make Christ present to us in the fullness of his divinity and humanity through the transformation of the material order (as Calvin was to maintain). If Luther and Calvin replaced the Catholic cosmology and metaphysics with a Holy Spirit who made Christ present, then Zwingli replaced the living Christ as immediately present to us through faith or in sacrament with a living Holy Spirit who now comes to meet us in a place where Christ could not be, namely our own present space and time. But in making this move, which, as Luther rightly identified, was based on the new scientific description of matter as untransformable, Zwingli left us with a tradition of ambivalence as to how exactly the relation between Spirit and Son was to be conceived, if it was not that simply of linear succession.

The scriptural and traditional Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit is that it puts matter and material causation in the service of life and the purposes of God.<sup>70</sup> We can see this dynamic already at work in the Old Testament, principally in 'wind' or moving air, in flowing water, in fire, and in embodied life. The Spirit of God indwells living animals. It moves the mouths of prophets. The Spirit is found, therefore, in those moving elements which we associate with the presence of life. A dead world is a stationary one. This emphasis upon movement makes sense also in the human and animal domain. A dead animal does not move; the presence of the Spirit indicates movement and life. But we see the Spirit active also in the shaping of Israel's historical life. By the power of the Spirit, the leaders of ancient Israel win military victories or have the power to encourage and to persuade others.

But the Spirit also inspires the building of the Temple, the place of God's dwelling on earth.<sup>71</sup> This seems to prefigure the Spirit's role in the incarnation itself, in terms not only of the birth of Christ but also of his life and mission. It is suggested in Romans 8.11 that the Spirit has a role in the raising of Christ

<sup>69</sup> Chapter 2, 37.

<sup>70</sup> There are interesting attempts to link the Holy Spirit specifically with the evolutionary impetus towards greater complexity, or 'emergence' (for Philip Clayton on this, see Chapter 1, note 40, and Chapter 2, note 56). It is the Spirit who lays the ground for the 'emergent' Christ in Ilio Delio, *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Catholic in an Evolutionary Universe* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), especially 69–71.

<sup>71</sup> Exod 31.3.

from the dead. During his lifetime Christ promises to give the Spirit to the apostles<sup>72</sup> and St Peter directly links his exaltation with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>73</sup> In the Gospel of John, the Paraclete functions as a witness to Jesus, and glorifies him.<sup>74</sup> But the Spirit also teaches and helps the disciples<sup>75</sup> and stands as judge of the world.<sup>76</sup>

What we see here then is the Spirit's prompting or animating of movements within the created order which are orientated to the advent of the messianic age. With the coming of the Messiah, the Spirit works to constitute the created order in service to the Kingdom. It enlivens the material order with the life of Christ and establishes it in freedom. The Spirit, which is 'poured out on all flesh', facilitates the conforming of creation to the transformation effected in the body of Christ, who is 'raised up' above all things.<sup>77</sup>

In the human domain, the Holy Spirit is the key to the understanding of the reality of the divine presence in the risen Christ, and so also fundamental to our understanding and reception of the newness of world in him. The Spirit constitutes the Church around and in the body of Christ, as a form of human life in which we can share in his risen life. The transformation effected in him is irreversible, and we can only participate in this reversibly (since we are still subject to space and time), but it is the Spirit, who springs from the exalted body, who constitutes us in our present life as conformed to that transformation.<sup>78</sup> By sanctifying, cleansing, and illumining us, the Holy Spirit grounds us in the new order of life which is the Church: as that part of the created order which already lives from his deeper life and has become permeable, through the Holy Spirit, to the power of God in him.

## 7. Church, Theology, and Enacted Love

We are allowing ourselves to be guided throughout this book by the 'where' question: 'where is Jesus Christ in the world today?' We are arguing that this is a fundamental question for the contemporary Church. We are arguing too that the rationale of the 'where' question, as this is posed openly and with integrity, brings us finally to the 'Christ in us' of Christian discipleship, by which we are called and constituted in his body the Church. This has considerable implications for ecclesiology and for the role of theology in the Church. Fundamental Christology, as Christology of the Christian act, places theology

<sup>72</sup> Luke 11.13; 12.12; 24.49; John 14.15–18, 26; 16.7; Acts 1.8; 2.4.

<sup>73</sup> 'This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear' (Acts 2.33).

<sup>74</sup> John 15.26; 16.14.

<sup>75</sup> John 14.16–17, 26.

<sup>76</sup> John 16.7–12.

<sup>77</sup> Joel 2.28–9; Hebrews 1.

<sup>78</sup> Col 3.1–11.



in a very particular relation with the Church as the community of those who follow Christ, as it does with respect to the different ways in which ecclesial communities understand themselves theologically. There is a broad range of ecclesiologies among the different Churches in which the antiquity of the different denominations plays a key role. If Transformation Theology is indeed a reorientation within our modern, pluralistic theological tradition, then we need to identify the ways in which it can contribute to mutual understanding between the Christian Churches which can actually stand quite differently in our common Christian history.

We can generalize so far, however: the Christian Church (broadly understood) is the community of those who feel called through the Holy Spirit to a change of life in Christ. This is a re-patterning of our beliefs and acts in a way that looks to the life of Christ himself as a model but which also includes the sense that this is a new life which is lived in and from, and which genuinely shares, the meaning of Jesus' own life, death, and resurrection. The Church is the community of those who are not only called to compassion but who realize that compassion in loving acts. To be Church is to act in a certain way therefore, which Christians experience as an acting 'in Christ', through the Holy Spirit, as the instrument of his will.

Theology of transformation then is distinctive as a theology to the extent that—as an act-orientated theology—it *knows its own limits*. Together with the medieval Franciscans, the Liberation Theologians, and the 'school' of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it knows that to think is not to act. Rather, theology needs to rediscover its own proper nature as being in service to the Christian act. We need to relearn a certain humility, but also a certain wisdom in the recognition of the distinction between second- and first-order theology. As we have used these terms in this book, first-order theology belongs to the act itself. All properly free and deliberate acts are intelligent (we ourselves, as human beings, are 'intelligent embodiment'). First-order theology is the Christian intelligence that grounds our Christian acts. This is quite different from second-order or academic theology, which addresses what we should believe and think rather than the intelligence of our acts, or what we should do. It is the act that we privilege in the actuality of life and not our capacities for theoretical or university reasoning (however important these may be in modern society). We hold each other to account for what we do rather than what we think. Our legal systems as ways of managing social behaviour are predicated upon the importance of what we do and how we affect one another through the deliberate bodily movements we make which constitute our acts.

In Transformation Theology, therefore, as a theology of the Christian act, theology learns to 'make a space' for the Christian act itself, and so also for the one whose own acting and life becomes, through the Holy Spirit, the ground of our own acting and life. In this way we become, as he became, but do so in him. We become like him, followers or disciples who share the excessive, transgressive,

and superabundant meaning of his living; who are received, made anew, into the newness of world that comes about in him and in which, from an eschatological perspective, all acting is spontaneous and free in him.

If the *imitatio* or following of Christ in the pattern of enacted love in his name, is the foundation of our discipleship in him, and if this is Christian calling and so the basis of our ecclesial belonging in the ground of the Church, then Transformation Theology will not contribute a fully developed ecclesiology as such but will rather provide a more fundamental mode of ecclesial thinking which can point to the foundations of our faith and to the ways in which we belong to one another in Christ. We can think of this as a fundamental ecclesiology and perhaps also an ecumenical one. While not contesting the differences between Christian communities, a 'transformational ecclesiology' can highlight and thematize what is often left unsaid about our Christian acts, even though it is commonly understood that learning to act together is a key dynamic in ecumenical relations. It can become, therefore, a theology of what is presupposed in the Christian life, namely our common commitment to a Christ-centred life in which Christian beliefs and acts come together within the patterning of a personal and Christian life of following.

And, last but not least, perhaps a transformational hermeneutic can also cut across many of the differences between world religions. Here too 'acting together' can easily build a solidarity which discussion around concepts can rarely achieve. Indeed, common or combined actions can create a new environment in which more difficult discussions about traditions and beliefs can seem less fundamental to the potential common life of religions. Convergence in our common goals and values may provide the foundation for new kinds of public identities as religions, in an increasingly pluralistic world.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Oliver Davies, 'Religion, Politics and Ethics: Towards a Global Theory of Social Transformation', *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 7, no. 4 (2012), 593–618.

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## Holy Scripture

### *Hermeneutics and Life*

Science and the second scientific revolution have been at the centre of our discussions in this book. The transition from one scientific age to another has immense implications also for culture and for how we should understand ourselves today as human beings. Little remains untouched by this shift of emphasis from a dualistic paradigm to an integrated one.

One of the major areas to be affected is language. We often forget that language is in fact always material: words are material signs (all the words by which we communicate are either shape or sound, even when digitally represented). We are aware of the enhancement of the material nature of the sign in the arts, and especially in poetry and song (where the sound itself supports some of the meaning). But the very nature of the sign is to point to something other than itself, which, in the case of words, is concepts. We cannot be aware of the materiality of the sign at the point at which it communicates its conceptual meaning, therefore (neither poetry nor song communicate meaning in the ordinary sense). The effect of this is that the materiality of language is in some degree concealed from us, at the point where language performs the communicative function for which it was designed.

But what we find in effect is that in our own ‘dualistic’ modern period, there has been a strong emphasis on language as abstract and to be identified entirely with mind. This has been the thrust of idealist forms of language (in Hegel, for instance), in ‘phenomenological’ or ‘logical’ forms of language (as in Frege and Husserl), and then in propositional, verificationist forms of language (e.g. logical positivism). It has also been a tendency in strong forms of structuralism (with its abstract structures and forms) and hermeneutics (with its all-enveloping ‘narrative’). This contrasts with the medieval period, with its very robust account of the material nature of the sign (see Augustine and Dante, for instance<sup>1</sup>). It also

<sup>1</sup> St Augustine, *de doctrina christiana*, II, 1–6; Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, 1.3.

contrasts significantly with a contemporary understanding of language as sign, which arises from neuroscience, and which sets up a fertile resonance between religions as ancient hermeneutical systems on the one hand and the contemporary neurology of language on the other.

## SCRIPTURE AND THE MATERIAL NATURE OF THE SIGN

Contemporary neuroscience suggests that mind and matter exist in a continuum in us in such a way that pre-rational or intuitive forms of meaning already arise from within our embodied experience. This is more akin to aesthetic meaning than it is to the discursive, logical meanings we associate with the higher powers of reflection.<sup>2</sup> Both in terms of our evolution as a species and our maturing as individual human beings, the capacity to discern, discover, explore, and make meaning are fundamental to who we are. Fundamental too, in a technological age, is our capacity to shape and make material objects in a way that gives them new meaning. *Homo sapiens* is also *Homo faber*: tool-maker.<sup>3</sup>

But the most decisive way in which we make meaning is through language. In our evolutionary past, language development appears to be closely linked with those brain areas that are associated with tool-use.<sup>4</sup> Since words are composed of either shape or sound, we can legitimately think of language as a way in which we recruit our physical environment in order to deepen and extend our capacity to generate and manipulate meaning. Andy Clark stresses the extent to which words are ‘material objects,’ which are ‘amodal’ to the extent that they can be ‘carried’ between different contexts.<sup>5</sup> They are ‘potent real-world structures,’ which ground the ‘neural wet-ware’ of the fluid processes of our consciousness and cognition, helping us to consolidate and objectify what it is that we think.<sup>6</sup> But, according to Andy Clark, in addition to grounding us in the here and now, the effect of the materiality of language is also ‘to press minds like ours from the biological flux’ in our own immediate environment.<sup>7</sup> As such, from an evolutionary perspective, language—like

<sup>2</sup> Mark Johnson, *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (Washington, DC: University of America Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> See Kathleen R. Gibson and Tim Ingold (eds), *Tools, Language and Cognition in Human Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 44–60.

<sup>6</sup> Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Clark, *Supersizing the Mind*, 60.

cognate ‘tools’—is understood to have greatly contributed to the development of human cognition and reasoning.

The most fundamental hermeneutic in the ‘Abrahamic’ religions, with their strong account of creation, is that whatever meanings we may discern in the material world around us, all created things ultimately point to the Creator. We already find this structure in the divine interventions or epiphanies in the Old Testament where God specifically designates natural objects as signs of God’s engagement with the world as Creator. Both the rainbow and the dove that mark God’s peace with Israel are examples of this.<sup>8</sup> From the injunction to the Israelites to bind ‘these words’ ‘as a sign on the hand’ to the New Testament injunction to ‘do this in memory of me’, Temple and Church are urged to recall the divine acts of the past through cultural memory based on repeated signs.<sup>9</sup> The hermeneutics here reflects the richly meaningful intimacy of the relation between Creator and creation and the centrality of human beings within that relation, through our possession as creatures of language as writing and speech.

But if language itself is already materiality that means, the question arises how language that is about God, or which is formed as sacred text in response to revelation, can be marked out as being different from other kinds of language. The tradition itself signals this by pointing to the exceptional character of its divine source. Moses descends from the summit of Mt Sinai with the ten commandments inscribed on stone.<sup>10</sup> We find consistently throughout the ‘Abrahamic’ religions communicative, devotional, or ritual structures which allow the movement from written text to oral performance.<sup>11</sup> Whether we think of traditional forms of Jewish exegesis and midrash, or the memorization of Qur’an, or indeed of Protestant theologies of the preached Word or the speaking of the Words of Institution in the Catholic Mass, we can see the same principle of overcoming the distance between the original entextualization of the divine communication and its return in the present in live form through oral performance.<sup>12</sup>

The recognition or ‘remembrance’ of the materiality of the sign has also been one of the particular characteristics of religious hermeneutics. Long traditions of manuscript illumination and calligraphy (shape and colour), harmony, music, chant, and cantillation (rhythm and sound) are all instances of the celebration of the material nature of the sign in the liturgical traditions of

<sup>8</sup> Gen 9.13; 8.11.

<sup>9</sup> Deut 6.8 (cf. tephillim); Luke 22.19.

<sup>10</sup> Exod 31.18.

<sup>11</sup> F. E. Peters, *The Voice, The Word, The Books: The Sacred Scripture of the Jews, Christians and Muslims* (London: The British Library, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> On the dynamics of ‘entextualization’ and ‘contextualization’, see Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (eds), *Natural Histories of Discourse* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

many of the world's major religions. Here there is a proximity to what is purely 'aesthetic' or 'art', but in effect religious texts are very much bound up also with the clear communications of meaning. To read a religious text 'religiously' is not to read it purely aesthetically. These texts are also authoritative in their communication of meaning, including imperatives and injunctions, which lead to the interiorization of the scriptural text by those who live according to their principles of action. In the Abrahamic religions, outward presentation and declaration of the sacred text goes together with the inward recollection and performance of the text as embodying divine imperatives of action.

### The Text of Scripture and the Body of Christ

It is this remembrance of the incarnation through the materiality of the signs of Scripture which opens up a new theological possibility: a theology of the text of Scripture as such.<sup>13</sup> If we can define the work of the Spirit as the transformation of material form through the power of God, and if we identify the Spirit as having a particular role in the original formation of Scripture, as well as its continuing reception, we will be constantly brought back to the same set of questions. In what sense are the material signs of Scripture themselves transformed and en-Spirited materiality? What precisely is changed in these signs? What is the relation between the transformed materiality of Scripture and exaltation and Pentecost? To what extent can the text of Scripture be said to *mediate* the presence of the living, universal, and commissioning Christ in our own present space and time? If he is its meaning according to his unceasing priesthood for us, how can that meaning be also 'embodied' or made present in Scripture? Can we indeed say that Scripture is one of the ways in which he draws close to us, pressing his meanings upon us with the urgency of the Spirit of life, as one who is hidden in power by the world? The implication is in fact that in the repeating patterns of the biblical text (i.e. the spatio-temporal materiality of the signs which constitute the text of Scripture), God has changed space and time, and has done so in such a way as to allow Christ to be spoken of in the Spirit, and to allow others to receive this speaking at the centre of their embodied life.

To say that Scripture is one of the ways in which the risen Christ approaches us is not in fact to take that text out of our space and time; it is rather to say that it belongs in space and time in a particular way. There has to be a sense

<sup>13</sup> This is different from, though it nevertheless resonates with, recent attempts to retrieve a properly theological reception of Scripture without falling in any sense into inflexible or 'unreflected' readings. Here we might point for instance to Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds), *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) or Sandra S. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999) as well as the works of Luke Timothy Johnson and many others.

in which the world is itself 'set free' through the Spirit in the biblical word of God. It is for this reason that Scripture is inexhaustibly generative of meanings which continue to address us in the unfolding particularities of our own lives. As a linguistic structure, Scripture cannot be primarily the communication of 'a world' as 'opening up' 'from' or 'before' the text itself (as identified in Lindbeckian or Ricoeurian tradition), but is rather in the first instance material form which is so shaped by the Holy Spirit as to be able to become a point of access for us to our own space and time in the light of New Creation. This text, which 'is sharper than any two-edged sword', must have a privileged relation to the New Creation in Christ, through the Spirit.<sup>14</sup> It must in some sense communicate that, becoming for us a point of entry into our own here and now within divine providence. In this sense a biblical hermeneutics must finally be a hermeneutic of this transformation or what Walter Brueggemann calls 'power for life'.<sup>15</sup>

## A THEOLOGY OF SCRIPTURE

If we are to develop a theology of Scripture, we need to be able to listen to what Scripture itself has to say to us on this theme, both directly and indirectly. If in Christian Scripture at its core (along with the Church at its core) the world has already become *irreversibly* permeable to the power of God, and if it is only appropriated by us in our still reversible participation in Christ, we need to be particularly attentive and open to what Scripture tells us on this theme. We need to approach it with open hands. Scripture itself has to be the condition for the possibility of its own reading. It is important, therefore, that we firstly discern those texts which Scripture itself presents as being a place of beginning: as being Scripture's own way of speaking about itself. For our present purposes, therefore, we shall comment on two particular texts. The first is an extract from the Song of Songs and the second from St Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 3.6). In each case a claim can be made on the grounds of traditions of reading these texts in the Christian community that something is communicated here which concerns the nature of Scripture itself: in the former case the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament and in the second the nature of a Pauline epistle.

<sup>14</sup> Heb 4.12.

<sup>15</sup> This is an idea which permeates Brueggemann's many readings of the Old Testament.

## OLD TESTAMENT: 'THE SONG OF SONGS'

The one canonical book which has been repeatedly read in its entirety, by Jews and Christians alike, as a commentary on the Hebrew Bible or Christian Scriptures as a whole, is the Song of Songs. The Song has a long pedigree as part of both the Jewish and Christian canon. But while it firmly occupies a place in the canon, there have always been factors which have made the Song difficult to locate. There are elements in the Song which mean that it can disappoint or disrupt our hermeneutical expectations. That is for us a positive sign here, however, for if there is some transformational capacity located within Scripture itself, which shares irreversibly in the transformational power of God, then it is where our best efforts to characterize and so also to reduce Scripture in terms of genres and meanings are most frustrated, that such a power may be coming *textually* into view.

We need to recall then that being able to place a text is essential to our capacity to read it. We need to be able to identify the genre of any text, for instance, in order to be able to read it as it is meant to be read (newspapers are not poems, nor love letters work emails). This is important also for biblical texts. We need to know how any biblical text fits. Does it continue the historical narrative for instance, or is it more like a devotional or liturgical text? Is it a prophetic text giving warning and advice? Or is it like a philosophical or 'wisdom' text, containing insights and observations? How does the content and even position of the text fit thematically into the Bible as a whole?

In the case of the Song of Songs then, it is not even clear whether it is a narrative. Should we read it sequentially as being about specific people or a specific person—what does the ascription to King Solomon mean here? Or should we read it simply as an allusive, poetical text in which its meaning has to be sought in the interlocking surfaces of the text and the fleeting moments that are the atmospheric distillation of character from within a sequence of discontinuous exchanges? The way that this question is answered will extensively determine the basic shape of our reading of the Song: narrativity will call for assessment of character and plot, and will allow for the development of both within the poem, matching the one with the other. A narrative approach will also have a keen eye for social and historical detail, against which the drama unfolds. A semantic reading on the other hand will focus on the expressive qualities of language and image, and will call for the kinds of skills required in the analysis of lyric. In practice, it is difficult in the poem's immediacy to discern a clear narrative thread, since it is often not evident who is speaking, or how the different sections relate to one another, or where the authorial control lies.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> J. Cheryl Exum, *The Song of Songs*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3–6, 33–7.



Ellen Davis asks of the Song of Songs: 'Is it the least "biblical" book in the Bible or the most?'<sup>17</sup> There is also very little indication of how this text belongs to the principal themes of the Old Testament. This is something that can often be judged on the basis of the kind of vocabulary we find being used in a text, which is shared with other texts. There is much repetition, memory, and allusion in the Old Testament. But in the case of the Song of Songs there seem to be more single occurrences of words than in any other book of the Bible, despite its short length, as well as a number of rare words. Although this is a highly allusive text, we do not find the kind of language in the Song taken as a whole which allows us to place it within the historical narratives, for instance, or poetic forms of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, the key emphasis on the language and imagery of sexuality is a challenge to its placing within the canon.

In addition to questions of genre, modern historical criticism has simply added to the problem of locating the Song. The text has elements that point to both an early and a later date, and there has been no consensus about the date of its composition. Some commentators attribute it substantially to Solomon himself, in the tenth century BC, while others suggests a much later date in the third century BC.<sup>18</sup> There are also unresolved questions about the gender of the author of the Song since female authorship is very unlikely and yet the majority of verses are spoken by a woman narrator.<sup>19</sup> In terms of the origins of the text, there is a tendency to see it as an anthology of 'love poems' (or what Tremper Longman has called 'a kind of erotic psalter'<sup>20</sup>), though with widely differing estimates as to the number of its songs (and perhaps with its roots in wedding rites?).<sup>21</sup>

The inclusion of a text that is so difficult to place, within the authoritative canon, inevitably creates the possibility that commentators will either simply ignore it or attribute to it some special significance. The latter is already apparent in Rabbi Akiba's comment that 'all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is the Holy of Holies.'<sup>22</sup> If we tend to read the Song as a 'love song', then early Jewish exegesis tended to read it as representing God's relationship with Israel and so as being a kind of summary of the whole.<sup>23</sup> The influential

<sup>17</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 231.

<sup>18</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 63–7.

<sup>19</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Song of Songs*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Wm. B Eerdmans, 2001), 7–9; Exum, *Song of Songs*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> Longman III, *Song of Songs*, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Parallels have been drawn with the *wasf*, or love poem of Arabic tradition. See Ellen F. Davis for a reading of the 'Song' as integrating religious and sexual love (Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 231–302).

<sup>22</sup> R. E. Murphy, *The Song of Songs*, Hermeneia, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 6.

<sup>23</sup> The Targum (AD 700–900) presents an allegorical interpretation of the Song as an account of the divine presence with Israel from Exodus to the Messianic age, which was to become the classical Jewish reading (Longman III, *Song of Songs*, 24–6).

medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides thought it concerned the true nature of reason, or Solomon's encounter with divine Wisdom.<sup>24</sup> Among the early Christian theologians of the Song, Origen regarded the text as an allegory, in Patristic fashion (with his ten volumes of commentary). For him, the historical Church replaced Israel as the bride, and in his mystical reading of the text, Origen argued that it represented the union of the soul with the Logos. It was also Origen who in his reading of the kiss (1.2) first understood the Song to be offering a key to Scripture: a hermeneutic of the reading of Scripture as sacred text. Perhaps reflecting Christian ascetical traditions, Origen's commentary gave an allegorical meaning to all the references to the human body in the text, and the seeing of allegorical rather than literal meaning here was taken to be the work of the Spirit and part of the individual exegete's own inner, spiritual transformation.<sup>25</sup>

We find another 'radically semantic' reading in the position adopted by Denys the Carthusian in the fifteenth century. Denys argued that in this text, uniquely, the literal meaning (which is to say the 'first' or 'immediate' or 'most evident' meaning) is in fact the allegorical one.<sup>26</sup> On the one hand, Denys can be seen to be closing out the very possibility of an erotic interpretation of the text, even as something to be overcome on the journey to an understanding of the true meaning of the poem. But, on the other, his approach can be taken to suggest that this text has a unique semantic character. To say that the only sense of the Song could be its allegorical meaning is from one point of view a contradiction in terms, since the allegorical depends of necessity upon the literal meaning, of which it is itself a higher level of interpretation. But the suggestion that the semantics of the Song is not like that of any other biblical book, and that what we encounter in the Song is not just a question of two or more competing levels of meaning, is one that opens up new, quite different possibilities of reading this text. As such, it asks us to consider that something quite distinctive may be going on here in terms both of *what* this text means and *how* it means.

### Reading 'The Song of Songs'

We can already see the very unusual character of this text in its opening verses, in terms both of its poetic features and its capacity to allow motifs and themes

<sup>24</sup> For a summary of the later and more Aristotelian commentary by Gersonides on the Song of Songs, see Menachem Kellner, *Commentary on the Song of Songs, Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> See 'The Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs', in *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works*, transl. Rowan A. Greer, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 217–44.

<sup>26</sup> For these insights, I am indebted to Denys Turner, in conversation.

to combine and fuse in a way that appears to reflect at a conceptual level the very same tendency to combine sounds through repetition and alliteration which marks out its poeticity. These read in English translation:

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. 2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine, 3 your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you. 4 Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you. 5 I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. 6 Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept! 7 Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions? 8 If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents. 9 I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariots. 10 Your cheeks are comely with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. 11 We will make you ornaments of gold, studded with silver. 12 While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. 13 My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts. 14 My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En-gedi. 15 Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves. 16 Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely. Our couch is green; 17 the beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are pine.<sup>27</sup>

The very first words tell us that we are reading a text which is using language poetically. In the opening verses, each of the first six words contains the distinctive 'sh' sibilant, which is followed by 'r' in the first three and by 'q' in the last two (in Hebrew: 1.1–2: *šir haširim äšer lišlōmō yiššāqēnī minnēšiqōt*). This is followed by the equally assonantal 'š-m-nkh/n/kh' configuration in the third verse (1.3: *šemanika, šemen, šemeka*). These verses are linked by the same sounds in repeating form. Even though we may quickly find ourselves at a loss to understand who is speaking (i.e. who is the 'we', 'you', and 'they' of 1.4?), which might suggest a certain arbitrariness, the poetic force of these words tells us that enormous care is being taken in the composition.

The opening lines straightforwardly suggest an erotic 'love' (cf. Prov 7.18 and Ezek 16.8), and 'chambers' recalls the place for love-making (cf. Judg 15:1 and 1 Kings 15:1). The image conveyed is that of a woman eagerly awaiting her sweet-smelling lover, whose love for her is 'sweeter than wine'.

But the sense of a straightforward thematic progression does not last long. The reference to her 'darkness' ('I am black and beautiful') and skin exposed to

<sup>27</sup> Song of Solomon 1.1–17 (all scriptural quotations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted).

the 'gaze' of the sun, and then to the failure to keep her own 'vineyard', suggests in fact that she may be a prostitute or fear being thought of as one. We cannot think this without being aware also of the comparison elsewhere of Israel to a prostitute (in her infidelity to Yahweh) and to a vineyard (which God has planted).<sup>28</sup> Perhaps the woman is Israel and her lover is the God of Abraham? She then compares her deeply tanned skin to the 'tents of Kedar' and the 'curtains of Solomon', where both references can be read in a specifically liturgical sense. At this point we begin to recall the earlier occurrence of the word *zkr*, which is translated as 'extol' ('we will extol your love more than wine'). The verb *zkr* ordinarily means 'to remember' but it is a key term for liturgical practice as corporate remembrance of what God has done for Israel.<sup>29</sup> A little further on, the woman's reference to her lover as 'you whom my soul loves' also suggests Deuteronomy 6.5, with its command to Israel to love God 'with all your soul'.

Interwoven with the language of human sexuality there may be a further layer of resonance, therefore, which suggests the cultic world of the Temple of Solomon and Jewish law. This evokes not only divine-human relations through rite and sacrifice, but also the reception of the divine law and the restoration of social and indeed cosmic peace or harmony.<sup>30</sup> The Temple of Solomon, which was built from aromatic cedar wood, seems to be repeatedly evoked in these references to the room where the couple meet and to its fragrances. There is a traditional Jewish reading of the kiss (1.2), as alluding to the giving of the law on Sinai (God spoke with Moses 'mouth to mouth').<sup>31</sup> The phrase can then be read as expressing Israel's covenantal love for God, as Lawgiver. There is also a direct reference to Israelite history here when the man compares the woman to 'a mare among Pharaoh's chariots' (which is an allusion to the tradition that Egyptian chariots were brought into disorder by the release of a mare in heat).

But there is a third dimension too. Connections seem to be made, both directly and subtly, between the figure of the woman and the land of Israel. She is referred to in terms of topography and animal life. Ellen Davis points out that the text ('our couch is green') seems to play with an inside-outside distinction in a way that opens up new possible horizons of meaning to do with the land of Israel and indeed the earth as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Jer 3.1–10; e.g. Isa 5.1–7.      <sup>29</sup> Exum, *Song of Songs*, 92.

<sup>30</sup> See Walter Eisenbeis, *Die Wurzel šlm in Alten Testament* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969), for a comprehensive account of the close link between Temple sacrifice and the restoration of 'peace' and 'wholeness'.

<sup>31</sup> E.g. Num 12.8.

<sup>32</sup> Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 248.

### The Poetry of 'The Song of Songs'

In this text, motifs linked with human love, Temple rite (and its associations with law and sacrifice, especially perhaps with the 'peace-offering', which is at the centre of divine-human love), and 'comely' land come together in a way that defeats any attempt to hold these themes apart. Our failure to read the Song as a linear *narrative* (despite the best efforts of some commentators) can be taken to signal the fact that the meaning of the work is not like that. Not all of the Old Testament is narrative, however. There are also psalms, songs, and sections that are strongly poetic. If the principle of narrative is sequential clarity (so that we can understand what is going on historically), then the principle of poetry (or poeticity) can lead to the intensification and combination of themes through the use of imagery and alliterative effect. The convergence of sound and image can be used to highlight specific themes and their interrelatedness, for instance, though it can also have the effect of disrupting linearity.

It becomes important at this stage that we understand what the poetic principle in literature really means. It was very well defined in linguistics by Roman Jakobson, who pointed out that in normal speech we seek to convey a message about something to someone, in which it is the intentionality of the one who seeks to communicate that governs the whole.<sup>33</sup> If the communication is to be successful, the words used must efficiently serve as signs of the things to which they refer. The functionality of language here is fundamentally one of service, requiring the transparency of the signifier with respect to the signified. In the case of poetic language, however, the focus shifts from the intentionality of the one who communicates to *the message itself*. Now language no longer serves to point beyond itself, but rather turns in upon itself and engenders a world not beyond language but contained within it.

But the setting aside of reference to the external world in the poem has the further consequence that poetic language always tends towards being ambiguous. This flows from the prioritization of language itself as the medium of communication, with the consequence that the language is no longer controlled by the communicator's intention to say what they want to say about the world. The boundaries of the poem now serve to create an inner-linguistic space: a world within the poem. Jakobson described this as the projection of 'the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination'.<sup>34</sup> What this means is that when we construct a non-poetic sentence, we *select* a word from a number of broadly equivalent words that we exclude as not suiting our meaning, and then follow it with another word that we have similarly selected out from a range of alternative possibilities. In non-poetic

<sup>33</sup> Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', in Jakobson, *Selected Writings*, III (The Hague, Paris, and New York: Mouton Publishers, 1981), 18–51, here 21–2.

<sup>34</sup> Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics', 27.

language, people who wish to communicate something important are very careful in their choice of words, and the listener or reader is well advised to pay as much attention to the words that are *not* being used as they do to those which are. In the poetic function of language, however, the choice of a word is determined in no small degree according to its capacity to coalesce with the other words that come before and after it.<sup>35</sup> The choice of the poetic word then is determined not by its opposition to alternative words from among which it has been selected but rather by the ways in which it can *combine* as sound and image with the other words of the poem. Thus 'the succession of similarities and differences are the forces which keep together and enhance poetic constructions.'<sup>36</sup> As Edward Stankiewicz has said, Jakobson's 'message' now becomes 'autotelic', possessing its own goals, and 'the Kantian formula of art as "purposiveness without purpose" epitomizes also the essence of verbal art: poetic language is purposive in terms of the internal organisation of the message, and purposeless in terms of the external reference.'<sup>37</sup> This same point was made more succinctly by the critic Northrop Frye when he wrote of the poetic word that it 'does not echo the thing but other words.'<sup>38</sup>

These insights into the nature of the poetic use of language are a useful key to understanding the language of the Song of Songs. We can see that the use of the 'sh' sound so many times on the opening verses means that the choice and positioning of each word used there was determined as much (if not more) by the need to reproduce the 'sh' sound (or 'assonance' as it is called), than it was by the straightforward meaning of the word. In the same way, different themes coalesce in the image of both 'name' and being 'poured out'. This does not mean that we cannot understand the first two sentences but it does clearly indicate that something else is in play in the choice of words used than just their simple meaning: they have to fit the poetic form of the text.

<sup>35</sup> What this means concretely is that where the poetic function does not apply, we might say of a sleeping child: 'the child/infant/boy/girl/son/daughter snoozes/sleeps/does/slumbers'. Whichever one of these options we choose will depend on what seems most appropriate at the time (Do we know the sex of the child? Do we approve of their sleeping?), and the chief criterion will be efficiency of communication within a specific speech context. Where the poetic function applies, however, we have to take into account the semantics and phonology of what precedes and follows this statement within the overall unit of utterance. If it is followed by the words 'and the father snores', for instance, then we may opt for 'son' and 'snoozes' ('the son snoozes and the father snores') in order to get the contrast in subject and alliteration in the verb. 'Son' picks up 'father' in a way that 'boy' does not, and 'snoozes' seems to be more appropriate for an infant in the way that 'snores' is for a full grown man. Thus perhaps we can see the future man in the sleeping child (and the child in the man?).

<sup>36</sup> Edward Stankiewicz, 'Poetic and non-Poetic Language in their Interrelation', in D. Davie et al. (eds), *Poetics, Polish, Russian* (Gravenhage: Mouton & Co, 1961), 11–23, here 15.

<sup>37</sup> Stankiewicz, 'Poetic and non-Poetic Language', 15.

<sup>38</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 81.

*Canonicity*

But in *canonical* literature, the poetic principle goes deeper than this. One of the key features of sacred text traditions is that such texts generally come to form a canon, which may then become a further, authoritative point of reference for the meaning of any one text. This is a key distinction in religious texts as new kinds of readings are made possible which presuppose the authority of the canon and so can be described as readings which are generated from within the community itself (in the sense that they cannot be shared by those who reject the canon and so are outside the tradition). From its outset, the historical-critical method of reading and analysing texts rejected the canonical frame of reference as undermining the capacity of the scholar to get at what was distinctive to the particular text being studied. The achievements of the historical-critical method require this kind of focus upon detail, and so also 'fragmentation', in contrast with theological or 'canonical' readings, which will tend to vault the boundaries of different texts, including even sequential boundaries (so that earlier texts will be read in the light of later ones, as can happen for instance in Christian typology). Christian canonical readings also wish to preserve a role for the Holy Spirit as inspiring Scripture, in one way or another, as governing the emergence of the canon, and so also as informing the Christian act of reading.<sup>39</sup>

Canonicity is central to the possibility of reading the Song of Songs in terms of the capacity of this text to represent a biblical hermeneutic therefore. While there are great strengths in the modern emphasis on the Song as a 'love poem' in the face, for instance, of traditional Christian ambivalence about human sexuality, this approach also has its limits. As something situated in the historical-critical method, it tends implicitly to ignore or close out the canonicity of the text, and so can subvert the possibility that the human sexuality it represents may also take on broader theological meanings which are expressive of the tradition as a whole.

The function of canonicity in a reading of the Song is that it allows us to extend the principle of poeticity beyond the immediate context of the choice of words which make it so distinctive, into its biblical content or thematic imagery which it shares with Scripture as a whole. We find three principal themes in the Song: in addition to human erotic love, we find allusion to divine-human love in the Temple rites and in the holiness of land. These are the dominant themes of the biblical narrative itself, of a God of Covenant and compassion, a land of hope and promise and a people who receive God's law in the intimate social life of their domestic world. What is distinctive to the Song of Songs, however, is that these themes are not separated and held apart but are

<sup>39</sup> This seems to be fundamental to the structure of the Christian reception of Scripture, and is not contradicted by the fact that the Christian canon exists in several versions.

rather *combined*. It is not that they do not form a unity in the biblical narrative itself. We can see such a unity, for instance, in God's leading his people into the Holy Land, which is a gift of his Covenant, and in the place of Jerusalem as city of the Temple, where a social and cosmic peace is built and restored through sacrificial practices.<sup>40</sup> We can see it too in the key description of the God of Israel as 'compassionate', in which the Hebrew root for 'compassion' (*r-h-m*) is strongly suggestive of the 'visceral' feeling that binds parent and child or which forms the basis of sibling relations.<sup>41</sup> But what in the mainstream biblical texts are occasional and specific points of intersection become in the Song an intensive representation of their dynamic unity overall. In short, it is their unity which itself becomes the theme of this work.

### The Meaning of 'the Song of Songs'

In a canonical reading of the Song of Songs, therefore, it can be shown that it does not present a theology which is different from that of the other books (or indeed no theology at all), but is presenting the same theology in a different way: more 'poetically' in fact. In the light of this it seems natural that there should have been such a strong commentarial tradition, both Jewish and Christian, which has understood this text to be in some sense about Scripture in its wholeness and fullness, and which shows us even—in some cases—the way in which we should access it. Any text that presents the fullness of Scripture will need also to shape the way we read Scripture as text, which must be very different from the way that we would approach the reading of any other text.

It becomes important then that we ask what the *meaning* of this text is, despite all its ambiguity, allusiveness, and expressivity. If this is indeed a 'mystical' text, and so in a sense set apart (as Akiba and Origen, as well as Maimonides and Denys the Carthusian, were insisting), we need to know what makes it that. The question can be stated in a different way: what do we *learn* from our reading of the Song of Songs which cannot be learned from any other book, even if, once learned, it seems to be something that is true of Scripture as a whole, as a unified corpus of different books? If the Song is indeed in its own way also a Wisdom book (as influential commentators, such as Maimonides, have maintained), how is it that we can learn wisdom in our reading of it?

There are, once again, two ways to approach this question: in terms of the 'what' (or content) of communication and the 'how' (or mode of

<sup>40</sup> See note 30.

<sup>41</sup> See Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2000 and Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 240–4.



communication). The content of the Song of Songs not only represents the unity of the three principal themes we find there, but also seems to point to the further theological principle of their *intrinsic* unity. But what is it here that holds the domain of human eroticism and fertility together with the theme of Covenant and law or divine–human relations on the one hand, and of Temple rite and land on the other? There seems to be a three-way movement. God brings fertility and produce to the land of Israel, which supports the life of his people and allows them to flourish under the divine order. Human fertility is within that dispensation. But sexual love is a human concern and experience, which is also the productive root of society. A society lives in its reproductivity. But the covenantal relationship as the guarantee of that continuing life and flourishing is itself a divine–human relation, and the Temple is the place of the meeting between the Creator God and his people, with its underlying theme of sacrifice: as a peace-bringing return of life to God its Creator. The unity here is found in the interfolding of the deep bonding of human–human love and divine–human love therefore, within the burgeoning world of life, which is itself the product of the covenantal and ordered love of the Creator. The Song seems to present these separate loves *specifically in their interpenetration*. Thus the divine love is not extrinsic to the human love but is the very condition of its possibility. It also reaches into the depths of human social life, through law and rite.

Perhaps then we can summarize this emphasis upon the unity of God's dispensation, within the separateness and indeed intricacy of these discrete domains, by pointing to divine Wisdom as the integrating theme of this text. Human participation in divine Wisdom allows the human being to see God at work in all things. It also shapes our world and society, through those wise things that we do. The outpouring of erotic life itself becomes the complexity and generativity of mature, or wise, relationship in a family that is the stable base of a healthy society. But there is something else in Wisdom too, which is its own intrinsic attractiveness. It is this that seems to be highlighted in the very particular *textuality* of this text: in its constant foregrounding of assimilative, assonantal sounds, and its combination and recombination of major, related themes. It is impossible to read the Song openly without feeling the extent to which this is a *pervasive* text. Resisting categorization, the text seems repeatedly to impose itself upon us pervading our sensibility as reader, through sound and association. It is not a text without content but is rather a text whose content has been integrated within its own expressive, self-communicating poetic power. As Paul Ricoeur has noted about the power of texts, this text has the capacity to undermine the dominance of the interpreting cogito, so that in it we seem to encounter the world itself as made present to us in this particular collection of images and sounds. But if that it is the case, then it is the world as shaped by Wisdom and as communicating Wisdom which is made present to us here, in this text. This is the Wisdom which Maimonides celebrated in his call for a transformed reason, grounded in God and accomplished

sublimely in the heart-practices of worship.<sup>42</sup> And it is this same Wisdom that the Christian believes he or she encounters in the compelling grace of the commissioning Christ in history.

## NEW TESTAMENT: 'SPIRIT AND LETTER'

Here too we must begin with a brief history of the exegesis of this passage: 'for the letter kills but the spirit gives life' (2 Cor 3.6). It has a long history, which begins with Origen (who characteristically prioritized 'spirit') and Augustine (who prioritized 'letter').<sup>43</sup> Here we can see the tension between historical and allegorical accounts of Scripture in the early Church. In Luther, the same formula becomes an expression of the tension between law and grace, and so also of Judaism and Christianity. In the present day we find a similar resonance in the deconstruction of the 'deadly dominance of the subject', in the work of Hartman, Derrida, and also Ricoeur.<sup>44</sup> In parallel with 'the Song of Songs' therefore, 2 Corinthians 3.6 is a passage which has been interpreted and reinterpreted from the perspective of what it appears to say about Christian theological hermeneutics as a whole.

One of the key interpretative questions in the text itself turns on the meaning of the Greek word *gramma* (or 'letter'). Does this effectively signify 'law' for instance, in a polarity with *pneuma* as grace, or indeed 'New Covenant' in contrast with the 'Old'? Here I am dependent upon an invaluable close reading by Michael Wolter who argues that, contrary to other views, the Spirit-Letter opposition of 2 Corinthians 3.6 is not the same antithesis which holds elsewhere between Spirit (or grace) and law, between New and Old Covenant.<sup>45</sup> In terms of the broad history of reading 'spirit and letter' in 2 Corinthians 3.6, Wolter argues against the tradition which is based on Augustine (and adopted by Lutheranism), which reads 2 Corinthians 3.6 as an opposition between law

<sup>42</sup> For an overview of Maimonides' philosophy, see Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 157–204.

<sup>43</sup> See Morwenna Ludlow, 'Spirit and Letter in Origen and Augustine', in Günter Bader and Paul S. Fiddes (eds), *Spirit and Letter: A Christian Tradition and a Late-modern Reversal* (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

<sup>44</sup> Bader and Fiddes, *Spirit and Letter*.

<sup>45</sup> In his study "Spirit" and "Letter" in the New Testament, Michael Wolter points to four occurrences of the *gramma-pneuma* polarity in the New Testament (Bader and Fiddes, *Spirit and Letter*). All are in Paul (2 Cor 3.6 [x2], Rom 2.29; 7.6). The Corinthian occurrences belong together, while in the first of the passages from Romans the true opposition is firstly between *gramma* and *physis* (2.27), leading to an opposition between what is 'internal' and 'external'. The opposition in Rom 7.6 is between law and Spirit. Wolter argues that the stark opposition of *gramma* and *pneuma* at 2 Cor 3.6 is without parallel in extra-biblical tradition, either in classical Greek tradition or Hellenic Jewish writings, and that it was not in use in the Christian

and Spirit, as he argues too against the tradition based on Origen (and adopted by Ernst Käsemann) of understanding it to refer to two different modes of interpreting Scripture: one Jewish and the other Christian. Wolter understands the distinction between *gramma* and *pneuma* at 2 Corinthians 3.6 to be fixed rather within the apologetic context which extends from 2 Corinthians 2.14–7.4, in which Paul writes from his confrontation with Jewish-Christian ‘apostles’ at Corinth.

In effect, therefore, Wolter argues that *gramma* here means nothing more than ‘something written’. The occurrence of the Spirit–Letter opposition has to be seen as forming part of Paul’s apology as a missionary delivered against those others whose alternative missionary activity had recently gained influence in Corinth, an area initially evangelized by Paul. The Spirit–Letter polarity expresses the reality of the life-giving activity of God’s Spirit, which authoritatively mandates evangelization, in contrast to another kind of missionary activity which is false and which looks to letters of recommendation for the basis of its authority. The operative distinction at this point, therefore, is between a ‘sacred’ text which is written in or by the Holy Spirit, and a secular text which is not. The self-understanding of this Pauline text at this point effectively presents us with a careful theological interpretation of what it is to be an epistle: it offers us a commentary on the theological structure of New Testament epistolary textuality (and perhaps in a certain sense New Testament textuality as such) in parallel with the emergence of the structure of Old Testament textuality which we have witnessed through a reading of ‘the Song of Songs’.

In the pairing ‘spirit and letter’ we are returned to the familiar problematic of an opposition between the abstraction and immateriality of mind (‘spirit’) on the one hand and the intractable resistance of materiality on the other (‘letter’). This is not just a historical opposition but it is one which also has considerable resonance for us today. In the previous chapter, we suggested that the Christian life itself, in its integration of body and mind through self-offering, and in the communicative modes of this form of the mind–body relation, can be seen to be precisely an overcoming of this particular conflictual duality (through the realization in act of our own truth that we are ourselves ‘complex materiality’ and ‘pure subjectivity’ at the same time). This is critical to our capacity to self-define as *creature*, according to our createdness, in this material, moral, and complex world.

communities which were otherwise influenced by Pauline language (it appears neither in the deutero-Pauline nor in the Lukan material for instance). It was, therefore, an ‘ad hoc’ usage. Michael Wolter believes that *gramma* here is most appropriately translated as *das Geschriebene* (‘a written thing’). While there may be resonances of this passage in later occurrences, Wolter argues that there are no grounds for reading back into this very first application of the Spirit–Letter antithesis any reference to law as a theological idea.

This same polarity can also be read in a quite different way, however. We can take it that 'spirit' here is uncreated Spirit while letter or body is created. This is a reading which only becomes possible with a deepening of the opposition between the two terms to the extent that it becomes a fundamental one. We know that that is a cultural option which begins to become possible with Zwingli's identification of 'spirit' as being in fundamental ontological opposition to 'matter' in his discussion of the nature of the divine presence in the Eucharist with Luther. Zwingli adopted this position on account of his humanist learning which insisted that matter could not be *transformed*, while Luther advocated a continuing scriptural account of this contrast as ethical and therefore relative. In the context of this Eucharistic debate, human and divine 'spirit' elided in their common opposition to matter and the material. Here we can see the emergence of a new paradigm of 'spirit' as marking a transcendence or 'escape' from the material in place of what was originally a transformational paradigm.<sup>46</sup> Inevitably in its expansion this elision would introduce a new and potentially much more powerful form of dualism into our cultural life. Far from being a way by which we are in the world, our 'spirit' has come to be read as indicating that we are 'outside' the world, in our subjectivity, as a creature who has now become the shadow of a Creator God.

We have argued in earlier chapters that the new 'scientific' description of ourselves as being both in the world and of the world (as being inalienably and simultaneously both mind and matter) is replacing this dualistic self-understanding which developed from the early modern period. We have argued that this new state of affairs resonates positively in fact with ancient forms of Christian anthropology, and so represents an opportunity for contemporary theology. We are further arguing in this chapter that the dominant paradigm of New Testament textuality that emerges at this point in 2 Corinthians itself represents for us the realization in the Holy Spirit of the overcoming of the mind-body opposition. Effectively this text *communicates* the realization of our creatureliness, in the Holy Trinity, as a function of all scriptural textuality.

In this passage St Paul's presents the view that false apostles believe the evangelical message to originate from themselves whereas, for Paul, the true apostle is one who understands the message to come not from himself but from Christ, of whom the apostle is a true servant. The critical difference between false and true apostles comes in 2 Corinthians 1–3, with the distinction between a letter (*epistolē*) of recommendation on the one hand and a different kind of *epistolē* on the other. This latter usage is 'metaphorical' and is identified firstly with the Corinthian community themselves, to whom Paul is writing: 'you yourselves are our letter'. Paul then gives a gloss to this new

<sup>46</sup> See Chapter 2, 37–8.

usage and states that this *epistolē* is written ‘on your hearts’ (variant: ‘on our hearts’), that it can be recognized and read by all, and that it is the *epistolē* of Christ: Christ is its author. Unlike the former letter, which is written in ink, this letter is written *pneumati theou zontos* (2 Cor 3.3), or ‘with the Spirit of the living God’.

The activity of the Spirit can be seen then, though not as letters on a page can be seen. It can nevertheless be seen with the senses; for it manifests in the changed life of the Christian body. St Paul states that he (and his companions) are ‘clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made *visible* in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you’ (2 Cor 4.7–15).

This is a text then about different kinds of visibility, both equally physical, but the one predicated upon a writing and a receptor which signals that the agent of the writing is God, while the other signals that it is not God. The former of course is the human body itself, which becomes the place in which the ‘power for life’ of the divine Spirit is displayed, while the latter is a sheet of paper or parchment or animal skin. Something that exists only in ‘spirit’ understood solely as interiority or invisibility cannot be real or does not have ‘the divine signature’, in Wolter’s phrase: it lacks the proof or evidence of authenticity.<sup>47</sup> That proof is a demonstration also that it is Yahweh the Creator who is causal agent in the case of the spiritual *epistolē*. Unlike the invisibility of ‘spirit’, the visibility of body stands in direct continuity with the material world. The changed life we read from the bodily gestures, actions, and expressions of the apostle signal that this is specifically a causality of the Holy Spirit which operates from within the world, bringing about a transforming unity of subject and object, of mind and matter, which in the continuing life of Christ also points to the consummation of New Creation.

Finally then, this reading sees the text as both communicating and constituting the principle that the transformative unity of mind and body, self and world, is the work precisely of the *uncreated* Spirit within the created order. The polarities of mind and matter, uncreated and created, have become confused in our tradition. Paul’s depiction of the Spirit of God returns us to a point prior to that confusion. Both human mind and body are created, and it is the uncreated Spirit who perfects these, precisely by drawing them together in our unity as *creature*.

<sup>47</sup> Wolter, “‘Spirit’ and ‘Letter’”, in Bader and Fiddes, *Spirit and Letter*, forthcoming.

## SCRIPTURE AND LIFE: BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

What kind of hermeneutics emerges then from the reception of Scripture as transformed material form, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and generative of meanings which can reflect the integrity and unity of the world as God's creation and of the place of human beings, as God's creatures, within it? After all, those meanings will themselves have to be transformative, leading us ever more deeply into the reality of the world as God's creation, which in the Pauline text is irreversibly changed by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ himself as 'firstborn' of the New Creation.

We can see some pointers to this in the paradox that St Paul's own confrontation with the false apostles with their *written letters* of recommendation itself comes in the form of an *epistolē* of the literal kind. His own claim to authority is communicated in the form of a letter, to be handed over, since he cannot himself be physically present (2 Cor 1.12–2.4). But this is in fact a highly creative paradox for there is the implicit claim here that the very letter in which St Paul is saying these things is not to be compared with the merely 'external' letter of recommendation which the false 'apostles' have, but rather with the 'internal' letter that is written by the Holy Spirit on the hearts of the community at Corinth. St Paul's letter is implicitly also the claim to a kind of apostolic witness and authority *through a text* which the false apostles do not have. To that extent it is a way of making present the person of St Paul himself, as servant of Christ. He appears not as an observer from outside, but actually as a participant who is intimately and dynamically involved in the situation to hand, but is so from a spatio-temporal distance.

What we seem to see here is a kind of attraction, or assimilation, between the materiality of the transformed apostolic community at Corinth and the text of St Paul's letter itself: both stand in a fundamental relation—as *matter*—to the power of the Holy Spirit. Both are in the power of Christ through the Holy Spirit, and both belong together in their being ordered to New Creation. What was an exuberant and celebratory materiality in the Song of Songs, under the aegis of divine Wisdom, is here qualified as materiality which is conformed to the body of Christ himself, through the Spirit, and so is communicative of his risen life as incarnate Wisdom. In a certain sense, the risen Christ himself pushes through the text of the Pauline epistle, and into the world, through the Spirit witnessing in the baptized to his resurrection and abundance of life. It is this life which permeates not only the text of the epistle and the community at Corinth, but also the space and time between them. There have to be further implications then for how *we* read and receive this text today.

Here we can begin to see what must always be a fundamental aspect of the relation between text and reader in the Christian Church, from the perspective of a Christian scriptural hermeneutics. We have to recall at every stage that Scripture, like any other text, remains a collection of material signs: words

as sound or shape. Like any other text, we receive Scripture first and foremost through the senses. If it is not strictly true to say that the world is in the text (with Lindbeck), then it is also not strictly the case that the text is in the world. We must say rather that a text is itself materially part of the world of space and time which is made meaningful or generative of meaning in a particular way (as signifying shape and sound). The ancient idea of an immeasurable reciprocity or connectedness between the text of Scripture and history itself, as the world unfolds in the divine dispensation of space and time, contains a truth also for us with our quite different understanding of how texts mean. We cannot follow the early Christians in their belief that Scripture has an immediate and straightforward reference to the events of history, for we know that interpretation and imagination, tradition and community have a role to play here, as well as an editorial function. For us, the relation between biblical narrative and the events of history is far more complicated. But we can make explicit what is implicitly known by them, which is that the text of Scripture is shaped by the Holy Spirit working in human minds and itself bears witness to Christ and to the meaning of his history. In other words, we can acknowledge too that the text of Scripture is itself *historical* and *transformed materiality*. In the repeating patterns of the scriptural text, the world is reconfigured in such a way that this materiality becomes capable of causal effects which are conducive to the coming of the Kingdom.

What are the implications of this for someone who reads this text? The question again is this: do they read it normatively through liturgy and within the community who draw together in the presence and reception of the biblical text? Through song, picture, and place, liturgy always involves the recognition that our own space and time is fundamentally changed by the presence of this text and the one who it communicates (or who presses himself into presence through it, by the active work of the Spirit). In the case of the Catholic Eucharist, we have to speak of a divine presence which manifests at the level of the real in the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ: a coming into presence which is itself the result of a scriptural performance through the words of institution spoken by the priest which itself becomes the mediation of the exalted presence of Christ as living sacrifice for and with his Church. Mediation plays a key role also in the case of Protestant liturgical practice, since the proclamation of the word by the preacher can become the transformative and life-giving advent of the Word of God speaking in power through the Spirit to the gathered Church. But in both cases an environment is generated in which such transformations are possible and are themselves recognized as realities by the community itself. What we see here, therefore, are scriptural environments and communities in which change is not only mental and internal but is also more fully material in the particular way that the Holy Spirit cleanses and sanctifies our bodily life. We are changed in the fullness of our embodied life, in community, by intimate contact with this text which is born from the

Spirit's life and which communicates it to us: indeed, we can say that this text already *is* that life.

This text not only communicates to us as transformed materiality through the meanings it engenders concerning the world as God's world, in its becoming New Creation. It also communicates to us in a way that is more fundamental than discursive meaning. It communicates *as world that has already been taken up into New Creation and so can mediate the presence of New Creation in our own here and now*.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, we can say also that Christ is present as hidden in this particular text, so that he can always be in power within it. We can recognize and receive him there. But its power does not depend upon our reception and recognition of it, of course. For the text is already transformed life and world, and so is always present to us as that, whenever we allow ourselves to be formed by it. If we encounter this text in a very special way in the liturgy, through the recognition in the community of how it mediates and communicates a life that shapes the very core of our environment as empirical space and time, we can also say that it mediates and communicates this same power in and through us, wherever we are, when we carry Scripture with us and within us. The presence in us of the recurring patterns of meaning within Scripture—its *textuality*—through memory and grace, imagination and longing, also structures the empirical reality in which we find ourselves according to the flow of its grace. It sanctifies the world where we are. If Scripture shapes the space and time of the community in liturgy, by mediating the power of Christ in the Spirit into the causal world around us, then so too does Scripture—as language—carry this shaping into the new contexts in which we find ourselves when we go about our daily business (in neurological terms, language is intrinsically 'amodal' meaning that it can be carried from one context to another, without ceasing to be itself<sup>49</sup>). By being itself transformed material reality, it mediates the source of that transformation—the living Christ, through the Spirit—into our own here and now and draws out the presence of Christ as hidden in the unfolding circumstances of our daily living. While it bears the life of the Spirit, Scripture itself—unlike the Spirit—is material form and so can be with us in our situational reality as a glimpse of New Creation: reaching out to the living Christ who is present as hidden, and so in power, wherever he calls us.

We can observe here a recognizable shift between the meaning of materiality in the Song of Songs and its meaning in 2 Corinthians, therefore. In the

<sup>48</sup> This contrasts with the understanding of textuality as revelation that we find in Ricoeur's discussion of this theme in "Toward a Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," *The Harvard Theological Review* 70, no. 1/2 (Jan–April 1977), 1–37. It is not only the power of text to open new horizons of meaning and existence which is revelatory, but also its power as material form to communicate: in the case of Scripture, to communicate in participatory and enlivening form the risen life of Christ, in and through the Holy Spirit.

<sup>49</sup> See 174, note 6.



Old Testament 'Song,' this most poetic of texts brings into presence a world that is unified by the divine Covenant in a way that unites the land of Israel, Temple rite, and sexual union, suggesting a hermeneutics of dynamic social and cosmic harmony as each of these principles of Israelite life cohere with one another, within a framework of the divinely instituted order of creation. But in the case of 2 Corinthians, something else is in play. In his text, St Paul presents a world in upheaval: fundamentally disrupted by the risen body of Christ, to whom St Paul gives witness. But this is more than an extrinsic testimony which 'competes' with those of the false apostles. It is in fact an intrinsic and transformational one in the sense that St Paul is testifying to Christ as one whose own bodily life has been fundamentally changed by the power of the Spirit. Second Corinthians is permeated with the language of the Spirit as representing the possibility of a transformation of matter and material life through the power of the risen Christ. St Paul appears implicitly to believe that his own epistle itself communicates this transformation: and is itself witness to and indeed communicative of the life of the risen Christ.

The implication here then is that these two texts, precisely as material form, are separated by a dramatic change in the nature of materiality itself. In its impressive play upon the materiality of the sign through poetic effects, the text of the Song communicates a religiously integrated world in its abundance of life. Second Corinthians, on the other hand, communicates possibilities of divine-human interaction which may exist as promise in the first but are not yet realized there. In particular, we can say that the materiality of the sign in the text has taken on eschatological implications which are not yet present in the first. There is a sense for St Paul that the question of how others respond to his letter can have profound consequences for their future life; and he holds before them its provenance as material sign. Everything in this letter suggests a cosmic urgency and commitment to others in the sense of witnessing to a momentous change in the world in which they too, and indeed all life, will be caught up. It is an address to the reader in our ultimate freedom.

## Part III

# Social Transformation

## Newness of World



## Faith, Freedom, and World

### *The Logic of Sacrifice*

#### INTRODUCTION

The question of our human freedom is a perennial one and it returns to us in a new form today. We can no longer think of our subjectivity as being free 'outside' the material order; our freedom must be one that is exercised within our materiality. If our freedom is real, it must be a freedom that is *in* the world and not 'from' it. The question of our freedom then can be found in the contemporary paradigm of mind and body, self and world, which we have explored as showing an integrated or 'non-reductive materialist' view of the human and which centres in particular on the nature of the mind-body relation. Here it can be identified in the potential realization of our *unity* of who we are as both mind and matter.

The question of this potential unity will dominate this chapter as the issue of our freedom. We shall argue that our highest freedom lies in the greatest realization of this unity, as both body and mind, and it is to the living out of this unity that we are called in the Christian life of discipleship. The loving act itself is the point at which this unity is most realized since it is the point at which we are most unconditionally in the world.

In the analysis that follows, we shall need to separate this unity which is the *integration* of our subjectivity *into* our bodily life—the life of the creature—from the 'instrumentalization' of the body through our subjectivity. The latter is a different kind of unity, one which, while natural, expresses our subjective need to control the world in order to establish a manageable life. Here we take life on our own terms and place ourselves at a controlling distance from the world. We are, however, at the same time in the world and part of the world. If instrumentalization is the process whereby we manage the world by distancing ourselves from it, then integration is the process whereby we accept our most basic truth that we are in and of the world, in the moment of our acting

for another. This means that we have to freely, consciously, and dynamically accept the vulnerability, interdependence, and contingency which come from being mortal material form in an unpredictable world.

### Reason and Freedom

But how do we do that? We argue here that it is through the character of our reason at the point when we come to judgment that we integrate into our bodily life. We reason as an observer, at a distance from the world, when we wish to understand the world, and this gives us the sense of a freedom 'from' the world. We reason as an agent when we seek to get our way in the world, and this gives us the sense of a freedom 'to'. In each case, we *reduce* the complexity of the world, either by limiting the questions we ask or by filtering the world through the active pursuit of our own self-interest. It is only in our ethical acts, when we have to take account of the perspective and interests of another, that we find we can no longer reduce the world's complexity but have to survive it at the point at which we commit to action, through judgment.

It is how we reason (or the kind of reasoning we do) at the point of judgment which is of interest here. It seems that the character of our reasoning changes in a way that reflects the different degrees of integration of who we are as mind into who we are as body. It seems also that these successive stages of integration of our subjectivity into our own embodiment mark different degrees of our integration into the world. The kind of reasoning which is of most relevance to us here, in our reflections on the Christian life of discipleship, is what Paul Janz calls a 'finality of non-resolution', when we commit to acting ethically in the world for the sake of the other or others.<sup>1</sup> This phrase refers to our capacity to come to judgment about what to do in a way that does not reduce the complexity of the world. This is 'open' rather than 'closed' reasoning. It brings the finality of decision and act but not the closure of reduction or resolution. In the ethical act, something is done but nothing is resolved. We don't know whether we have done the right thing; we feel that we have done the right thing, and we move on.

We reason in this way in the ethical act because we have to. We have to tolerate the complexity introduced by the other and embrace it in the moment of our free decision to act for the sake of the other. At that moment we accept our own embodied life by which we are in the complexity of the real, in vulnerability and interdependence. But in the embrace of our own bodiliness (or creatureliness), something else happens. We freely accept the *conditions* of our own freedom. After all, we can only be a subject in the world who can freely

<sup>1</sup> Paul D. Janz, *The Command of Grace: A New Theological Apologetics* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 118–36.

come to judgment about things since we already possess a different and more radical form of freedom, which is our own pulse and breath. Heart and lung have the freedom to *move*, and their free movement gives us life. This is our deepest freedom (without which we won't be able to choose or do anything at all). But it is nevertheless a dependent freedom in the sense that heart and lung do not move according to my will: they are not in my possession in that way. Nevertheless they are still my heart and lung.

The choosing by our higher order freedom as subject (possessed of the powers of reasoning and willing at the moment of judgment) of our own fundamental *dependent* freedom, in the ethical act, is the radicalization of our freedom as a human being. In that moment we no longer use our own freedom as subject to reject or distance ourselves from the basic dependent freedom by which we are in the world in the first place. We necessarily accept our creatureliness in our free choosing to act for the sake of the other and so accept the complexity of the real, with its contingency, vulnerability, and interdependence. We accept in effect our creatureliness, by which we are in the real, as the condition of our freedom as subject.

The place of our reasoning and willing in judgment has to be central here for this defines how we position ourselves in the world as subject. Are we exercising our subjective freedom as being free *from* the world, as being free *to* act in the world (for my own purposes) or am I using my freedom for the sake of another, in a way that means that I freely embrace my own fundamental human freedom as being dependently *in* the world. Am I in fact using my 'autonomous' freedom as self-possessing subject freely to accept my own proximity to the other and interdependence with the other in a shared world: my own being *of* the world?

### Social Transformation

What we are describing here is how we can use our freedom in a way that radicalizes our humanity, or which makes us radically human. To be radically human is the active acceptance that we are in and of the world according to our creatureliness. The embrace of the being 'of' is grounded in the free acceptance of our interdependence, vulnerability, and contingency, which occurs when we freely receive the other, in complexity, as the form of the real for us in that situation. This describes a change that occurs in us at the point when we accept the other as conditioning our judgment as a judgment within complexity: one which accepts the weight of the real. Although this is a *personal* change, it is one nevertheless that comes about in immediate proximity to another and in the acknowledgment of our own interdependence. Such a change then, in the face of the other, is likely also to have an effect upon them, and so is likely also to be *socially* transformative.

## THE FACE-TO-FACE

We are fortunate today that we can give a more exact description to the nature of our human interdependence, through our contemporary, scientific self-understanding as social creatures. What is being described here is of course ‘hard-wired’ and so not to be identified with the domain of our freedom. But it offers us nevertheless a glimpse of the central role that face-to-face interaction has in our human biology. In sum, we can say that our neurobiology determines us as openly interactive with others, in such a way as to explore our potential to ‘get on’ or to work together. This is the basis of our ‘social cognition.’ Of course, we have far more resources as human beings than just this neurobiological structure. We can choose how we will respond to other human beings, and whether we want to ignore, befriend, or challenge them. Here culture and personality and all the sophisticated mechanisms of human life play a part. We can resist the face-to-face of social cognition, or we can refuse it. But in a face-to-face encounter with another human being, our common neurobiology will trigger a common response, whether we wish it to or not. To refuse this then means that we will need to turn away.

We should think of our neurobiology as something that we carry with us into every form of social interaction. It is simply how we are. But every situation of social encounter will be different, and in some, we may wish to choose to remain within the face-to-face to build or sustain bonding and close working relationships. Alternatively, we may choose to avoid this. In some contexts, the cultural milieu of the encounter will positively encourage us to allow the activation of our neural social cognition in the interests of bonding and community, while in others it will not. But since it will never leave us, we need to understand more about the basic structure of our ‘social biology’, and especially those aspects of it that we can already recognize—even at this subliminal level—as processes of reasoning, willing, and feeling.

Very complex, empathetic, and emotional processes are in play in face-to-face encounter which communicate to consciousness as ‘liking’ someone or finding them ‘congenial’. The chief characteristic of this encounter, in fact, is that it obliges us to accept and negotiate very high levels of complexity. The sense data that we are receiving is highly complex in terms of reciprocal movements, facial expression, and gaze orientation (in which both timing and context are all important). But the need to come to judgment about the other person, through our own monitoring of their reciprocal responses to us and indeed through our own self-monitoring with respect to inferences we make from gestural or linguistic signals, also imposes a heavy burden upon us.<sup>2</sup> We

<sup>2</sup> Leonhard Schilbach, Bert Timmermans, Vasudevi Reddy, Alan Costell, Gary Bente, Tobias Schlicht, and Kai Vogeley, ‘Towards a Second-Person Neuroscience’, *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, in press, 2013). For an overview of work on

are 'hard-wired' to expose ourselves openly to the other, in unavoidable vulnerability, in order to be able to come to a judgment about our potential compatibility for common action. And the judgment too is complex in another way, since the two areas of brain activity in social cognition (the amygdala with its 'gut feeling', and the posterior cingulate cortex with its informational input, for instance) are providing what are ultimately incompatible sources of knowledge (the latter is 'received' as it were while the former is 'home-produced').<sup>3</sup> From an evolutionary point of view, it is in our capacity to form sound judgments about our compatibility with others, which will determine our capacity for joint social action, that species survival is secured. We have long lived in communities that extend beyond our immediate kinship group, and our human capacity to build community is resourced through the biology of the 'face-to-face'.

### Language

One of the primary ways in which we openly interrogate each other and seek to establish the possibility of building something together is the art of conversation. In the words of Herbert Clark: 'People use language for doing things with each other, and their use of language is itself a joint action.'<sup>4</sup> Language plays such a central role in the formation of active social cohesion precisely because it is itself already a form of joint action (the neurology of language suggest in fact that we regard words are akin to *tools*<sup>5</sup>). When we converse happily together, we are already in effect taking joint ownership of our common 'here and now'. We are exploring and exploiting our immediate environment together, and are learning to share it.

We are not used to thinking about conversation in these terms, of course, since a 'modern' view of language is one which tends to see language principally as communicating conceptual structures and so as precisely removing us from the concrete and embedded 'here and now'. The mind is at odds with our physicality, according to this model. Mind precisely removes us from our here and now. But language is in fact a more physical phenomenon than we have presupposed and is the way in which our brains lever themselves through material form, into higher levels of self-reflexivity. We use the physical form of

social cognition and 'interpersonal coupling', see Jonas Chatel-Goldman, Jean-Luc Schwartz, Christian Jutten, and Marco Congedo, 'Non-Local Mind from the Perspective of Social Cognition', *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7, Article 107 (April 2013), 1–7.

<sup>3</sup> Schilbach et al., 'Towards a Second-Person Neuroscience'. See also Bojana Kuzmanovich, Leonhard Schilbach, Fritz-Georg Lehnhardt, Gary Bente, and Kai Vogeley, 'A Matter of Words: Impact of Verbal and Non-Verbal Information on Impression Formation in High Functioning Autism', *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders* 5 (2011), 604–13.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert H. Clark, *Using Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 387.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 6, 145.





Fig. 7.1. The modern paradigm

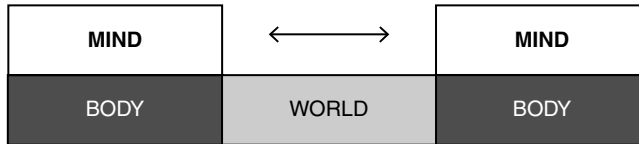


Fig. 7.2. The modern social paradigm

language—its sounds and shapes—in order to be *mind* more fully. But at the same time, language is the way in which the ‘neural wet-ware’ of our very fluid consciousness is grounded in the material form of the reality of our immediate here and now, and so is rendered more fully conscious.<sup>6</sup> As social communication, language grounds us within the here and now as a shared here and now. Through a mutual interaction with another speaker, language becomes a diagnostic, relational construction or experiment of human bonding, at a specific place and time.<sup>7</sup>

The extent to which this contemporary model offers a revolutionary way of understanding what is most essential to our social humanity becomes evident when we compare it with the ‘modern’ or ‘dualist’ model of social interaction. We can recall the model shown in Figure 7.1.

The social and communicative implications of this dualism can be given as laid out in Figure 7.2.

Here self and self meet across distance, and world as the connecting reality is suppressed by the predominance of the mind–body relation as a distinctive unit, in which the self is set apart from the world, just as mind is set apart from body. As a communicative paradigm, this supports individualism and collectivism, or social construction around the principles of perceived common interests. This paradigm suggests a self—and a society—that is risk-adverse and is focused upon the controlling powers of the subject self. The social self

<sup>6</sup> Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 53–60.

<sup>7</sup> The structure described here is distinctive to human social cognition in the sense that it contrasts with that of our higher primate cousins. See Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010) and *Why We Cooperate* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).



Fig. 7.3. The contemporary paradigm

here is haunted by the fear of the unpredictable other and by the threat of complexity which will be perceived as chaos and the breakdown of structures of separation and control. Here the mind–body relation is highly instrumentalized since the body is primarily experienced by the subject *functionally* as the means whereby we pursue our goals, ambitions, and needs.

This contrasts with our contemporary paradigm, which we give again in Figure 7.3.

What this model shows is that each term—mind, body, world—belongs with the others in a way that forms a whole: we cannot think one without also having to think the other two. No one aspect, mind, body, or world, predominates to the exclusion of the others. This model points to the possibility of the ‘integration’ of mind within our embodiment, and integration of self within the world. This points not to an ‘instrumentalized’ relation between mind and body but to the body as the mode of our belonging in the world, and so as the ground of our discovery of the world as a place of both belonging and sharing. This is not risk-adverse to the same extent but can be described as a resilient and communicative self, who looks to others as a potential resource for collaboration and community.

We can express these themes more dynamically in an another model which derives from work in neuroscience on the nature of the interactions that occur in human face-to-face encounter (see Figure 7.4). Here the two selves involved in social contact are overlapping within a shared world, with which both are in continuity.

If the modern paradigm supports ‘theory of mind’ of a kind which envisages that we encounter the other as a problem in our environment (so that we have constantly to reconstruct the possibility of the existence of other minds), our contemporary model of human social cognition points to a direct or overlapping encounter with the other in a shared world.

This dynamic, integrated model of human interrelatedness brings with it its own challenges, however. How are we to model this, and specifically how are we to model it in terms of the human, faith, and the Christian act when we are called to the realization of our unity in freedom as both body and mind? What is the relation between our self-understanding through science with the social forms of our cultural life? And what is the relation between these and the life of faith we have through the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ?

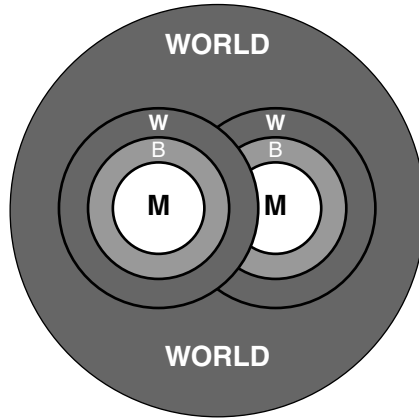


Fig. 7.4. The contemporary social paradigm (W = World; B = Body; M = Mind)

### THE STRUCTURE OF OUR CREATURELINESS

Theological anthropology has to be concerned with the structure of our creatureliness, which is how we are both body and mind in a world of God's making. But as we know from experience and find confirmed in the new science, it is also, and more particularly, to be a person who can communicate with others (in many different ways) in the building of collaborative community. From a Christian perspective, it is to be someone who can recognize the revelatory 'face-to-face' in Christ in the life of the Church and who can be called by him in that recognition. This points to the Church as a community constituted in the relation between the Son, Spirit, and Father on the one hand (signalled in the anthropomorphic polarity of 'Son' and 'Father') and, on the other, in the relation of the Triune God with us as creatures, through the 'face-to-face' encounter of Jesus with the apostles, and of the apostles, through the Christian community over time, with us.<sup>8</sup> Here theological anthropology will bring us close to what in us is most essentially human.

We can summarize this *humanum* in terms both of our biology and of our cultural life. We can summarize it indeed in terms of a convergence between the two, or a free *choosing* in human life of the reality of our interdependence mediated through our neurobiology. If our social encounter leads to ethical decision-making in which we must allow the perspective of the other to condition our judgment, we can now recognize this as the point at which we accept the complexity of our own material interrelatedness and so *allow our own neurobiology (of 'hard-wired' interrelatedness) to shape our cultural life*. We freely receive our own bodiliness or creatureliness bodily self in the cultural

<sup>8</sup> This has affinities with both Levinas's 'face' and 'face of God', and Rahner's 'hearer of the Word', but is not to be identified with either. It sits closer to the theology presented in David F. Ford, *Self and Salvation: Being Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

moment. At this point we allow our own subjective powers of reasoning and willing, informed by feeling, not to distance ourselves from the complex real, but to accept that we must allow the complexity of the real to shape our judgment (as ‘finality of non-resolution’): the reality which we meet ‘head-on’ as it were in the encounter with the other.

This can only be a choice in freedom, which is not exercised in the abstract (as if we could choose to do that outside any specific context), but is rationally and deliberately made in the free choice of our ethical decision-making in the concrete circumstances of our everyday living. When I willingly receive the complexity of the other, I am already ‘corresponding’ with my own neurobiology and so am choosing to integrate within my embodiment within the world and not to distance myself from the world, through instrumentalizing the body by which I am in the world. I am choosing the deeper truth that through my embodiment I am ‘of’ the world and not just ‘in’ the world as agent, or indeed, as observer of it.

Two elements emerge here therefore: judgment and wholeness (or unity). In approaching the structure of creatureliness, we shall need to consider these. It is through judgment, engaging our subjective faculties of reasoning, willing, and feeling, that we position ourselves personally and socially in the world. But we need to consider also our embodiment by which we share in life, and we need to reflect on how we can realize and live our unity as both body and mind in integration or wholeness, through the Christian act. The implication of this structure is that in faith we are called to live in and from the integration, wholeness, or unity of who we are as both body and mind, which is realized in the Christian act, and that means also living as a creature who is ‘of’ the world, or at home in it as God’s world.

## Judgment

Judgment is central to human life. The question of judgment is central to faith. However grace-filled it may be, faith is also the realization of our own humanity and of our own free agency in the world. It has to be the perfecting of our creatureliness, and not its denial. It is important that we understand what judgment is, therefore, and how exactly it shapes who we are and how we live in a world shared intimately with others.

Judgment is best understood as being the way in which we self-position in life, precisely as social beings. We do that when, through a process of discernment and decision, we consciously take responsibility for what we do or believe. Since it involves both reason (discernment) and will (decision), and is informed by feeling, judgment is the point where we self-define in the world, according to the unity of our reason, will, and feeling. We realize ourselves as *this* person at *this* point in space and time. We can think of it as the point at which we take responsibility for ourselves and so make our lives our own. In

judgment, something of ourselves is at stake. But this is not an individualistic account of the self, of course, since judgment is also the form of our orientation to others in the world. Being capable of judgment, we presuppose this too in others and seek, or are obliged, to accommodate that. Judgment underlies the structure of our social responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, in the ordinariness of life we do not have to come to judgment all the time. Much of our behaviour is habituated movements and repeated patterns of response. Many of our beliefs are ingrained or simply about interpretation. It is only when habituated forms of life no longer seem suitable to occasions as they arise, or our interpretations no longer have any traction in life, that we find we need to come to judgment about what to believe or do. At the point we may have feelings which tend in one direction or another, and which are part of the truth of who we are. In this way, we come to choose one interpretation over others, or one course of action, and are prepared to defend that choice.

And here we encounter something fundamental about judgment. We come to judgment because we have to. We are surrounded by complexity in life: the ways in which we self-determine through judgment will reduce the possibilities and simplify the complexity. We find a very powerful idea in the work of Niklas Luhmann, in his concept of *autopoiesis*. This refers to the way in which we can only secure our own social and personal identity by excluding the otherwise overwhelming complexity of the real. The history of human identity and meaning is one of self-building through selecting out from complexity in a way that reduces reality to a manageable form.<sup>10</sup> This means that our coming to judgment is principally the way in which we gain control over the complexity of the real, making our life identifiably our own. It is the consolidation of our human identity in the face of an intractably complex real. A meaningful human life is one that is shaped by judgment, making what we believe about the world and how we act in the world consistent and convergent.

Judgment then can also be understood as the way in which we assert that we are free in the face of the overwhelming complexity of life. Complexity disables freedom. It is only because I can carve out this space for myself, through judgment which resolves that complexity, that I can make my freedom real. This reduction of complexity through judgment would seem to be a fundamental characteristic of the human.

But what happens to our human freedom of judgment when we find ourselves in the presence of Christ, according to his Lordship? How can we be free

<sup>9</sup> On 'judgment' in a political context, as involving 'moral discrimination' and a concern with 'truth' and 'efficacy', see Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 3–12.

<sup>10</sup> Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 34–6 and *passim*.

when we know that grace and the Holy Spirit are fundamental to encounter with Christ as living sacrifice at the turning points of the world? Here it is important to recall that we know Christ in such circumstances as commissioning. His presence in our lives makes a difference to the extent that it prompts us to action. We do what we would not ordinarily do. This commissioning by the sovereign Christ speaks to our freedom, and our discipleship is based in our free doing, which involves our free human judgment. That this should also bear the weight of our relationship with Christ, who inspires us to act transformatively in the Holy Spirit, should not deflect us from the ordinary character of our acting in faith. We do not cease to be a rational and willing human being who comes to judgment freely about the things we believe and do when we act in his name. What is at stake here is not our faith in a formal sense, but rather the necessity that we should *enact* our faith, without which it will not be what faith needs to be. Christ is genuinely in us and we in him where we make faith real in the world, by acting in his name. This is not grounded in random or 'heteronomous' imperatives, however. As commissioning, Christ speaks to us in the very ground of our human rationality, not as reducing the complexity of the real, however, but precisely within it. Those who reason 'in him' may well feel that they encounter in him the transformative, pleromic reasoning of the Wisdom of God. Far from impairing us, this calls forth the very best, most patient and open form of our human reasoning, which can stand within the real in a way that is adequate to it.

What we see here then is what we can call an asymptotic relation. In our acts in Christ's name, we grow ever closer to him, but do so through *following*. We become more and more a channel for his acting in the life we recognize as authentic discipleship. But as we have seen, this does not mean that we are less free. The proper response of faith is one of active love for our neighbour, which is of necessity free. But this freedom is rather the perfection of our ordinary freedom, and is a consequence of his presence to us in our space and time as Lord of space and time. By his power we come to our own freedom. We are free *in* him. He 'sets us free'.<sup>11</sup>

### Wholeness

It is through our embodiment that we are in the complexity of life. The living body is the primary form of our belonging. The most fundamental freedom we have is the freedom of life or freedom to move, by which we can act and so deliberately shape our environment as we need in order to survive. This freedom of life as our power of movement is itself based in a yet more fundamental, dependent freedom which is the power of involuntary movement

<sup>11</sup> John 8.32.

as pulse and breath. We do not control these movements (any more than we control our own 'hard-wired,' interactive sociality), but they are constitutive of our freedom of life.

The key point here from the perspective of our creatureliness is that who we are as body precedes who we are as mind in life. From the perspective of our wholeness then, or the realization of our unity, we have to be interested in the particular form of judgment which includes the acceptance and awareness of our embodiment within it. It is this 'open' judgment that we can associate with the unconditionality of the ethical act. Reasoning of this kind is indicative of our freedom, since it entails personal judgment in the situation to hand (without short cuts). Moreover it is perhaps the need for wholeness, and for the sense of freedom which inheres in that (however difficult), which drives our orientation towards the ethical. Perhaps we need to feel that we are both body and mind at the same time in a way that integrates our capacity for meaning-making and our truth.

Much in human life is taken up by instrumentalizing the body in natural ways in the attainment of that unity on the terms of our subjectivity. Whenever we have a good meal with others, or engage in leisure sports, or even when we watch others achieve great physical feats, we are effectively celebrating the triumph of our own human meaning-making over the irresolvable seriousness of our human and mortal truth. But if it is the case that the very attempt to attain that unity through our endeavours as subject will always alienate us from our own truth, how can we ever achieve such an integration, or wholeness, which must be based first and foremost on who we are as body, since it is this which places us in life in the first place? It is the body that is the condition of our possibility as subject, since it is the dependent freedoms we have as body that allow us to continue to exercise of our higher freedoms as subject. This means that integration will be a process of the integration of our subjectivity and subjective freedoms within our embodiment, by which we are in life. This has implications for the structure of mind and body, but also for the question of the degree of our integration of our living body and the world. How deeply are we in the real? How at home are we in God's creation as God's creatures? Or to put this in terms of the language of 'the gift,' how deeply have we received God's gift of intelligent, embodied life and genuinely made it our own in a way that allows us to be transformed by its power?

The integration of mind and body implies the acceptance of the condition—or truth—of our embodiment, which will manifest as a patient feeling of the fear and insecurity of our creaturely vulnerability, contingency, and mortality. The integration of our subjectivity with or into our embodiment, as our primacy or dependency of life, necessarily brings with it our subjective awareness or recoil from the uncomfortable dimensions of our embodied life. As a form of life which specifically engages us in the fullness of our unity and in its realization in life through the loving act, Christianity has a specific investment in supporting us in this integration, bringing us hope in the

ultimate providence of God (against contingency), the ultimate compassion of God (vulnerability), and ultimate hope in the power of God (salvation and the after-life).

## PHENOMENOLOGY AND METHOD

This new understanding of our capacity to express and to realize the unity of our life as both body and mind through the loving act demands to be thematized and brought into our reflexive self-understanding as such. This means that it also leads to the challenge of developing an objective, analytical language which is appropriate to that. But this is not a straightforward issue. As Sarah Coakley has remarked: ‘why, are “bodies” simultaneously ubiquitous and yet so hard to get our “hands” around?’<sup>12</sup> There is certainly something about the human body, and our relation to it as subjectivity, which means that when we seek to objectivize it as such analytically, it turns into the reductionist terms of the so-called ‘proper’ body which is ‘the unit of individuality’. As such, it is ‘a skin-bounded, rights-bearing, communicating, experience-collecting, biochemical entity’.<sup>13</sup> Or, alternatively, we can grasp it in a very fluid way through ‘representation’, at the centre of which is semiotics and the construction of meaning. As Thomas Csordas has observed, there is often a dualistic division between ‘mind/subject/culture’ on the one hand and ‘body/object/biology’ on the other at the centre of this approach.<sup>14</sup> It is precisely such a dualism that we wish to avoid.

But the need to find a method that will allow something fundamental about the human body to ‘come into view’ prompts us to consider phenomenology. This is not, however, the phenomenology of the early Husserl, with its prioritization of the self as observer rather than participant. It is rather an approach which will resemble more the turn in late Husserl and, paramountly, in Edith Stein and the late work of Merleau-Ponty, for whom the self is beginning to come into view precisely as ‘enfolded’ in life and the world, and as fundamentally embedded within complexities and interdependences.<sup>15</sup> This phenomenology will need to be adequate to an ‘enfolded’ self who is also an interactive agent capable of bearing responsibility in a social world that is also political and now global. We can perhaps see the

<sup>12</sup> Sarah Coakley (ed.), *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar (eds), *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Csordas, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9.

<sup>15</sup> See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, transl. Alphonso Lingis, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997). On Edith Stein, see Davies, *Theology of Compassion*, 239.



outline of such a self in Csordas himself or in the phenomenology of movement of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, or in the anthropological thought of Tim Ingold.<sup>16</sup>

On account of the emphasis we place here on reasoning (as determining the form of the mind–body relation) and on language (as the form of our socially transformative self-expression and communication), it will need to be a phenomenology that is open to the influences of critical theory on the one hand and theory of communicative action on the other. More generally, it will need to sit within a long historical tradition that emphasizes the material nature of the sign and philosophy of the act. This begins with the hermeneutics of Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante, but also of Johann Georg Hamann and Jacques Derrida. An Aristotelian philosophy of the act is developed by both Catholic and Marxist thinkers, such as Maurice Blondel, Mikhail Bakhtin, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin (and the early Marx himself), as well as modern Thomistic philosophers such as Herbert McCabe and Denys Turner.<sup>17</sup> The Jewish philosophers Franz Rosenzweig and Joseph Soloveitchik also find a place here (as does, from one perspective, the work of Emmanuel Levinas).<sup>18</sup> The emphasis upon the material nature of language finds classic expression, however, in the words of Marx:

From the start the ‘spirit’ is afflicted with the curse of being ‘burdened’ with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men, and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well; language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men.<sup>19</sup>

The privileging of the material nature of the sign, here through the insights of contemporary neurology, can also serve to build bridges towards the theory of communicative action and the work of Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann. We can recall here Luhmann’s definition of the proper object of sociological reflection as words which are *communicated*. For Luhmann, ideas cannot in themselves be the object of sociological analysis since we do not know what anyone thinks or believes until they communicate their thoughts. At the point of communication something is uttered or written (or communicated in some other material way), and this act of communication within

<sup>16</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2011), and Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London and New York: Continuum, 2005), and Denys Turner, *Julian of Norwich, Theologian* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1983).

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), 51.

space and time can be the proper object of sociological reflection.<sup>20</sup> Implied in Luhmann's position is also the point that it is in our communications that we express our nature as *social*. But though he sits differently and more distantly to the Enlightenment project than does Habermas, Luhmann remains a thinker who is concerned paramountly with the systemic and the universalized 'horizontal'.

There can, however, be something very deeply at stake of the self in the 'how' and 'when' of our particular communications. Where communication is also self-offering, through the development of the expressive materiality of language as the *medium* of communication (rather than solely its content), we can legitimately talk about the perpendicular dimension in communication: its capacity to bring to expression dimensions which belong equally to the depths of materiality and embodied life (we can think of the 'erotic' speech of lovers) and to the heights through the 'heavenly' use of language as doxology. This 'perpendicular' dimensionality of self-offering and self-sacrifice through communication will require a phenomenological method in order to allow it to come into view. A phenomenology that recognizes language as material and interactive process knows that it cannot impose the 'observer' gaze upon the complexity and multiplicity of life, as a form of 'reduction,' but must be open to the coming into view of a complex, social, cultural, and also linguistic world as fundamental to the self. It will not negate the theory of communicative action therefore. Rather, it complements it.

## A COMMUNICATIVE PHENOMENOLOGY OF FAITH

In the following section we need to develop an analytical language that will be adequate to the *humanum* of faith as this comes into view in the reception of the commissioning or exalted Christ. This is not as abstract as it sounds. What we are saying here is that a renewed theological focus on, or reorientation to, the Christ who calls, will inevitably open up new understandings of what happens to us in the moment of this calling. If the calling of Christian discipleship is a life patterned on our Christian acts, it is important that we try to understand as best we can what happens to us in the moment when we enact that calling, under the imperative of his love. It is after all in the moment of action in the name of Christ, that the source of the meaning of the Christian life is found.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the anthropological implications of Luhmann's positions, see Hans-Georg Moeller, 'What Happens to the Human Being?' in Moeller, *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 2006), 79–98.

<sup>21</sup> Matt 7.21: 'Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father in heaven.'

We will need to focus on questions of reason, identity, freedom, and communication. And we can outline the questions in the following way: What happens to a human being in faith? What happens to our reason and our will? What kind of identity does faith support and what kind of freedom? Above all, we will be concerned here with the place of language in the communication of faith. How is faith communicated? What are the similarities and differences between someone who acts ethically in the world and someone who acts in the name of Christ as disciple? And here we will need to recall two principles. The first is philosophical and is: *the free acceptance or integration of the self as being in truth fundamentally body as well as mind is accomplished precisely through the acceptance of complexity at the point of judgment as the inescapable condition of our mortal and contingent life*. This concerns our human truth. The second is theological and is: *the exalted Jesus himself stands at the centre of that complexity, to where we are drawn by the Holy Spirit, slowly perfecting our creaturely freedom and bringing us into conformity with him through our learning to following him into the midst of life and the world by acting in his name*. This concerns the truth of divine revelation in Jesus Christ, which is convergent with our own human truth, which comes into view in a particular way when it is informed by our new scientific understandings of how we have evolved to communicate openly and radically with others in the building together of shared community.

## THE 'PARTIAL' SELF

We can begin our study of the observer, agent, ethical self, and self of faith with an outline of the first two, both of which can be described as 'partial', since both are based on a reduction of the complexity of the real through the privileging of our own particular cognitive and volitional perspective. These are naturally occurring, and neither is in any sense 'bad' or reprehensible, but at the same time neither can represent the fullness and wholeness of the human as living integration of mind and body, self and world. Neither can become the basis of a radically free, radically human life.

### The Observer Self

The 'observer self' is how we are when we are concerned to understand the world around us. Here *reasoning* is speculative and orientated towards beliefs rather than acts. I want to know what I should think and believe. The observer self seeks and communicates a 'disembodied' form of knowledge, which is to say knowledge that has been abstracted from a variety of contexts and can

now be transferred freely from one context to another. This transferable form of knowledge plays a crucial role in today's complex, interconnected society where technical 'know-how' is a key element in so many different facets of our lives. Many of us are trained professionally to apply the same acquired knowledge in different situations. Our employers need to feel that they can supervise and have oversight of how we will function as employees, and so skills training, which allows us to identify situations as being 'such and such' in which we will act in 'such and such' a way, becomes part of who we are.

The observer encounters complexity of course and has to reduce it in some way. Typically, the observer refines the questions asked and extends the deadlines. The emphasis here lies upon maximally reliable knowledge. The 'observer self' seeks the certainty of 'irrefutability'. This is a cognitive reduction of the complexity of the real (albeit one which has an ascetical element to it, for a good scientific investigation of the real has to be properly disinterested). And it is a cognitive 'reduction' because we can only ask the questions that can reasonably be answered with the available resources and in the available time-scale. In other words, we need to be able to control the questions in order to be able to answer them, in the face of the cognitive complexity of the real. The *identity* it supports is of one who has authority on the grounds of what he or she knows. This authority has its own *freedom*, which is an increased freedom 'from' the world through gaining a better understanding of how the world works.

### Observer Communication

The 'observer self' communicates through the use of an artificial form of language which banishes the ambiguities and vagueness of ordinary speech, preferring a propositional, exact, and transparent style. This is a style suited to clarification and instruction, with a preference for mathematical quantities and specialized symbols, and it presupposes a similarly impersonal or disinterested perspective on the part of the reader. The 'observer self' self-communicates in a dispassionate, authoritative mode of expression, pointing carefully to data which has been observed and to what can, therefore, be understood. It presupposes that the recipient of the communication will be drawn into a similar stance of detached observation and abstracted understanding. This fosters a linguistic community of specialized observers who have a common interest in sustained observation through the overcoming of a personalized perspective, in which human embodied agency becomes passive receptivity through extended process of its instrumentalization (it goes without saying of course that such specialists will also use very different forms of communication and embodiment in other areas of their lives).

We can represent this form of the self in the model set out in Figure 7.5.

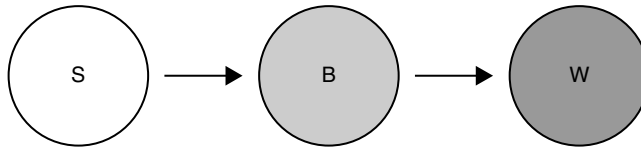


Fig. 7.5. The observer self (W = World; B = Body; S = Subjectivity)

### The Agent Self

In contrast, the ‘agent self’ is ‘partial’ in a quite different way. He or she is typically concerned with achieving specific goals of a practical nature, which are aimed at arriving at a state of physical or personal well-being. The paradigm case of our ‘agent self’ might be the businessman or woman or someone who lives by a trade (though we can think also of the busy mother with several children, motivating and organizing their actions under the pressure of time and space). Here the human body is not a passive instrument for gathering data (as in the case of the ‘observer’ above) but is rather the active instrument for expressing our ‘will’ in the world and for bringing about the specific changes that we intend in the world. The nature of the *reasoning* of the ‘agent self’ is ‘practical’ and is orientated towards acts in the midst of life. He or she will typically reason towards acts and practical outcomes rather than the acquisition of knowledge for itself.<sup>22</sup> This is not reasoning which is controlling or ‘closed’ on account of its ‘disembodied’ character therefore.

But once again we encounter a ‘perspectival reduction’ in the face of the complexity of the real. This is not the cognitive ‘perspectival reduction’ of the ‘observer self’, however, but the volitional ‘perspectival reduction’ of someone who is seeking to realize their own purposes in life, and for whom the body is an active instrument rather than a passive one. Rather than embracing a cognitive ‘perspectival reduction’ in the interests of gaining a more objective and universal knowledge, as ‘agent self’ we perform what is precisely a volitional ‘perspectival reduction’ or reduction through our own natural perspective of the complexity of the real. We filter out what does not directly concern our own needs and interests. After all, we have our own established goals and expectations in life. This allows us to come to judgment in the face of the complex real through the calculation of our own enlightened self-interest as we receive this from the past. Here we can say that we reduce the unmanageable complexity of the real, in the immediacy of the present, through the power of identity as something we receive from the past through habituated actions and

<sup>22</sup> See Janz, *The Command of Grace*, 2009, 79–98, for a fine discussion of what he calls ‘motive reason’.

through memory. We constrain the immediacy of our 'becoming' in this new 'here and now' with the pastness or 'being' of our identity.

We might call this 'conditionally embodied' reasoning. But despite the controlling perspectival reduction, there are still significant elements of risk. When we come to judgment in the urgency of life, with practical ends in view, there is no time generally to refine the questions and we will find that our information is always more limited than we would like. Here we cannot hope for the certainty of 'irrefutability', therefore, (as can our 'observer self') but must resign ourselves to the certainty of the 'irreversibility' of what we do. Although we may be able to atone for our deliberate acts (if they turn out badly), we shall never be able to take them back.

Our *identity* as 'agent self', by which we carve a place for ourselves in the world according to our deeply rooted sense of self over time, resides in the power we feel in doing things, for good or for ill. Although inevitably self-interested, complexity can return through our awareness of the implicitly moral dimension to what we do in its possible unseen effects on others (as it can for the 'observer self' too, who may be concerned with the uses to which others might put the new knowledge gained). We have to understand as agent, for instance, that what we do can have historical implications that go beyond the immediacy of serving our own enlightened self-interest. In contrast with the *freedom* 'from' of the observer self, we can appropriately define the freedom of the agent as a freedom 'to'. Again, the distance from the world presupposed in the agent perspective need not be a form of alienation. It can also give us the sense of being part of society: a community of the strong who build for themselves and so also, indirectly, for others. In the same way, the 'agent' can at other times be an 'observer' and vice versa.

### Agent Communication

The agent's *communication* is often 'thickly' persuasive, and it is very much embodied, belonging dynamically to a specific occasion. We use rhetorical language as we seek to sway others to our own point of view, and our body language can be intensely, even flamboyantly, gestural. We do not operate with agreed codes as does the 'observer self' but calculate what is most likely to work communicatively in this particular situation with these particular people. Communication here is shaped by the purposes of our perspectival interest. This may come to expression either individually or collectively, as the purposes of a particular group to which we belong through national, political, or economic interests for instance. In our communication as 'agent self', we place a premium not on clarity, therefore, but on rhetorical persuasiveness. Others will also feel that we are communicating something of ourselves in the

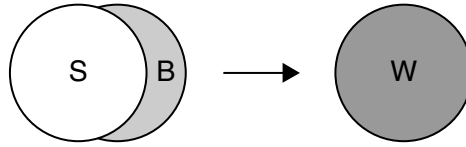


Fig. 7.6. The agent self in act (W = World; B = Body; S = Subjectivity)

way we use language (unlike the depersonalized 'observer self'), but the self that is communicated is one with specific needs and wants.

We can represent this form of the self in the model seen in Figure 7.6.

### THE 'ETHICAL SELF'

At this point we need to make a clear distinction between the modes of reasoning and willing that obtain in the observer and agent self and those which form our ethical and religious self. Here we need to recall a third principle, which is as follows: *the 'partial' reasoning of 'observer' and 'agent' already presupposes a perspective on the world in which, implicitly or explicitly, we have already effected a process of selection in such a way as to ensure the reduction of the complexity that confronts us. We have already decided to take life on our own terms, against the complex depth of the real.*

Here a further important point follows concerning the way in which we perform that reduction. As a process of discernment and decision, coming to judgment brings 'finality' (i.e. the end of a process of discerning and deciding). But the 'perspectival reduction', whether cognitive or volitional, ensures that we will arrive at a judgment which not only brings 'finality' but also 'resolution'. All judgment brings both finality and resolution when it is performed in a way that allows us to find 'the right answer', in the face of the irreducible complexity of life. It is precisely through 'resolution' then, which comes either cognitively (by already having the 'right answer') or through our personal will (by knowing 'what is in it for me'), that I carve a place for myself within the complexity of the real that will hold that complexity at bay. In this case we can talk of 'closed' judgments, which place us at a controlling distance from the real, and which define me subjectively as feeling a sense of 'freedom from' or 'freedom to'.

And this finally is the key to understanding the nature of our ethical acts. When we become ourselves human material cause for another, through acting deliberately and freely for them or on their behalf, then we cannot properly speak of any meaning-making or reduction here at all but must speak rather of a meaning that is *discovered*. The meaning of the ethical act is neither my

meaning nor yours, for it is precisely the perspectival reduction, by which we *make* meaning, that we find is no longer possible when we come to ethical judgments for the sake of the other or others. Here our presuppositions have to be different. Other human beings demand recognition as having a perspective or point of view that is of equal value to our own. If we wish to maintain such relationships, we will have to affirm in some degree what is already a given: the proximity of the other to us, as differently situated. This recognition of the other entails in fact that *we will have to affirm that we already live in a world which is irreducibly complex and so is never to be taken only on our own terms.* Our 'ethical self' cannot be equated with our 'observer' or 'agent self' therefore. It is not that in our 'ethical self' we simply elect to respond to a complex world differently: choosing a different starting point. The reality is that we are already bound into life and into our primary sociality with others through the suffering of, and vulnerability to, complexity. Complexity is constitutive of the real, and of the world, in which we are located as subject, with other subjects. In its rejection of perspectival reduction then, ethical reasoning is based not on Luhmann's *autopoiesis* or principle of selection therefore, but rather upon the principle of *inclusion*.

The question then is whether at the point when we are using our faculties of reasoning and willing in judgment, we are doing so in ways that allow us to escape that complexity (and so evade the real), or are we embracing and recognizing the real, precisely as a domain of irreducible complexity? The living movement of the deliberate act, which is itself constitutively open, is our affirmation both of the world and of our being mind and body in a world that is intimately *shared*. The integration of mind and body in the ethical act is itself a closing of the gap between self and world and self and other, *at the same time*. As such, it points to a different order of 'wholeness'.

### Wholeness in the Ethical Act

The ethical act can be distinguished from any other kind of act to the extent that it involves a wholeness that is grounded in the meaning of the world. The 'meaning of the world' is here the way in which a caritative act has meaning which is predicated precisely on the renunciation of the ways in which we ordinarily *make* meaning by carving ourselves a space in the world. At that point, when we become human material cause for another in our ethical acts, mind and body are integrated as are self and world. In this way, we become 'not other than' the world. The implicit meaningfulness of the ethical act must, therefore, be recognizable also as the meaning of the world. Ethical acts are also the proclamation at some level of our implicit trust in the world.

This is a difficult concept, but it is one that becomes clearer from a theological point of view. We can then recognize the self-donation, or putting oneself



at risk for the sake of the other which belongs to the ethical act, as being a form of 'sacrifice', for instance. Sacrifice is a well-attested theological term, which, in its original Hebrew context, includes the notion of wholeness and harmony, or the restoration of *shalom* or the peace of the world.<sup>23</sup> Sacrifice in its proper, self-giving sense, is the way in which persons and communities are most deeply in the world as a world of God's making. Sacrifice has its own particular logic therefore. It is a logic of the world within the particular: the good or wholeness of the world in a particular act. It has its own form of human *reasoning* then which grounds it. This is what is described as the non-calculating, non-controlling reason of 'finality of *non-resolution*'. This means that the ethical act is based on a process of coming to personal judgment, in responsibility for the other, which knows that there can be no 'right answer', in the midst of life's complexity, and understands that this knowledge is precisely part of what it is to act for and with another. The self-sacrificial aspect of our good acts lies precisely in the recognition that we cannot in principle be sure that we are not going to do something which has precisely the opposite effect for others from that which we set out to achieve. The nature of complexity is that we can only reason in it openly and reflexively, acknowledging the risks we take upon ourselves, and that this knowledge itself forms part of our self-offering for the other.

The extent to which acting ethically involves the renunciation of our own meaning-making, by which we 'autopoietically' determine ourselves against the unmanageable, unpredictable complexity of the real, is also the extent to which we open ourselves up in life, in vulnerability, affectivity, and empathy for the other. It is here that we see the emergence of our relationality and embodied embeddedness in the materiality of the world as a place of sharing. The ethical act, in which we renounce our meaning-making, is not meaningless, therefore, but rather exhibits a different kind of meaning. Its meaning is intrinsic to the act itself. The act *is* its meaning. The meaning of the act is that at this moment I am in the world in this way. In a sense, in this moment, I *am* world.<sup>24</sup>

The meaning of the ethical act then is that it affirms and itself enacts a different way of being in the world from our other, perspectively reduced, 'partial' or self-interested acts (however enlightened this self-interest may be). It inaugurates in fact a different understanding of how the world is and of *how we can be human in this world*. This is radical and revolutionary meaning, which is more easily practised than explained. Its ground as truth resides in

<sup>23</sup> This is particularly true of the 'peace-offering'. See Walter Eisenbeis in Chapter 6, 153, note 30. See also Jonathan Klawans, who reads Temple sacrifice as a form of *imitatio dei* and way of 'attracting and maintaining the divine presence' in the community (*Purity, Sacrifice and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 68–73).

<sup>24</sup> See Chapter 9, 245–6.

the meaningfulness we experience by acting in this way: the intrinsic human meaningfulness that we discover within it. Since this is a non-teleological form of meaningfulness (from which our own narrowing of interest has been stripped away), we can see that this is a meaningfulness that begins to take on a certain spontaneity and graciousness. We can associate this with the spontaneity and graciousness of the work of art. We are drawn to the ethical act, *in its own terms*, as to the beauty or excess of meaning that comes to meet us in a powerful work of art. We are drawn in fact to the *freedom* that announces itself in a fine work of art: a freedom within materiality, which, by our ethical acting, we become.

In contrast with our 'observer' and 'agent' self, the 'ethical' self enjoys a freedom 'in'. Our ethical *identity* is grounded in our rootedness in the world or, more exactly, our being world when we freely choose to be personal, human material cause for another. This suggests that there must be something universal in play in the ethical act. But in fact, our ethical identity is very restricted precisely because it is an identity which is bound up with the particular movements we make when we act (and by which we act). Where we witness the acting movements of another, we can be profoundly influenced by them (as we can if we can clearly imagine them). But generally the movements which constitute our acts are particular and will only be observed by a relatively small number of people. Our ethical acts are personally transformative but not so socially performative, therefore.

And there is a second reason why ethical actions do not communicate effectively into the public domain. Paul Ricoeur usefully makes a distinction between what he calls our *idem* and our *ipse* identity.<sup>25</sup> The Latin word *idem* answers the question: who are you? The Latin term *ipse* answers the question: who did this? We can identify the former as pointing towards the stability of 'being' or pastness and memory, while the latter points towards 'becoming' and the dynamism of agency and our present and future orientation. *Idem* requires consistency and repetition, as we build up a stable identity through acting—and so choosing ourselves—consistently in different situations as they arise. Identity in this *idem* sense is itself the result of the perspectival reduction, therefore, where we choose to close down the complexity of the real by preferring habituated processes of gratification or enlightened self-interest. The *ipse* identity, however, is dynamic and of the moment. As 'becoming', it resists the constancy and repetition of 'being'. We cannot, therefore, build an identity on the *ipse* since we cannot abstract it from the particular moments of its enactment. As 'becoming', the *ipse* is in fact inherently bound to the act, and is disruptive of our 'being' and its identity.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, transl. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1–25.

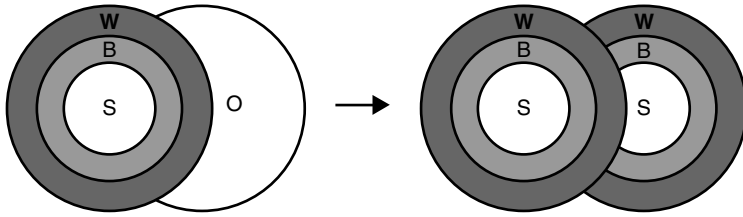


Fig. 7.7. The ethical self in act: personal transformation (W = World; B = Body; S = Subjectivity; O = Other)

The conundrum with ethical acts then is that they are of the moment and their meaning is embedded and inseparable from the movement of the act itself, at a specific point in space and time. If each ethical act is based on the recognition of the particularity of the other, to whom we come ‘alongside’ in proximity, then this particularity will resist codification and so will not easily become a social and cultural *idem* identity, based on common memory, consistency, expectation, and ‘pastness’. While we may seek to persuade others of our ideas through speaking to them or writing books, we can only seek to persuade others to follow our values or way of life by testimony and imitation. If we want other people to learn how to be ethical, we know that they will need to discover this for themselves through first acting ethically.

And yet the ethical wants to become universal, since it is itself a way of acting that is predicated on the ultimate meaning of the world and our ethical acts are themselves the way in which we *become* world. This generates a further model, which is the model of the ‘ethical self’ who undergoes personal transformation through a free, caritative proximity to the other (see Figure 7.7).

### Ethical Communication

We would expect to find that the ‘ethical self’ uses language in a very different way from either the ‘observer’ or ‘agent self’. And indeed this seems to be the case when we consider the role of listening in our ethical acts. By acknowledging the proximity of the other (or by coming ‘alongside’ another), we need to know how the world seems from their perspective. The role of listening is significant here too because it is the form that language takes when we empty it of content. The content comes initially from another. As such, the receptivity and responsivity of the ‘ethical self’ which is performed in listening is markedly different from either the clarity of the observer or the expressivity of the agent. But listening still remains within language: when we listen, we refrain from talking and allow ourselves to be filled with someone else’s speech. Listening may also lead to a state of affairs where we speak for another: allowing their perspective, in the ‘alongside’, to shape our own speech.

In the ethical use of language, we allow language to become more fully expressive of who we are, to the extent that we are making ourselves available to another. We allow its nature as bodily performance to come more fully to the fore. Listening can show an openness to complexity, within a particular relationship, and can promise the giving of time, resources, and attention. As such, listening can be more directly an act than other modes of speech.<sup>26</sup> It creates the space for someone else to communicate and so to concretize themselves in ways that allow them also to reflect on what has been said. The capacity to listen and to receive the other, creating with them a new cultural and personal space, also brings to expression the deeper proximity we share, though rarely acknowledge. It acknowledges their equality of speech and presence, and emphasizes the potential for us all to grow and to learn. As such, it stands in a transformative relation to observer and agent speech, subverting the reduction and partiality that they share. Listening is the form of the linguistic construction of community. As such, it becomes a speech act that performs our acknowledgment of the proximity of the other to us, as differently situated; and can itself constitute our openness to the real.

#### FAITH AND THE CHRISTIAN SELF

The 'ethical' self brings us to the brink of the 'Christian' self. Like the 'ethical' self, the 'Christian' self accepts a high degree of complexity in coming to judgment for the sake of the other. For all the force of divine commands, these tend to remain general (i.e. 'love your neighbour as yourself') and call for a good deal of interpretation in the light of the particular circumstances in which I find myself. Divine commands bring the imperative of engagement with complex situations of power and powerlessness, but do so in a way that fosters the kind of reasoning we have called 'finality of non-resolution', which involves the renunciation of any perspectival reduction.

In contrast with the 'ethical' self, however, the 'Christian' self is founded upon a strong and stable *idem* identity. This has unique characteristics since it is an *idem* identity which is extensively based on the Christian act, which we would normally expect to support an *ipse* identity of 'becoming'. In other words, Christian identity is based on a form of 'being' which is based upon our 'becoming': an *idem* identity of the *ipse* in fact. This can seem like a contradiction in terms, since our *idem* and *ipse* identities are generally in tension with one another. Under normal conditions, the stability of the *idem* wants to

<sup>26</sup> See Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), for a broad survey and analysis of the positive value of listening.

close down the dynamic openness of the *ipse*, and in our ethical actions, in which we precisely renounce our perspectival reduction through self-interest or self-centredness by which we 'make meaning' in the face of complexity, we find it difficult to construct a stable identity of the act. Our ethical actions are personally transformative in the sense that they affect those immediately around us who are in contact with the specific ethical acts, but they are not socially transformative as religions can be, operating beyond the range of those whom we know and to whom we are personally close. A central question for us here, therefore, is how the Christian self is formed in an identity which includes both the *idem* and *ipse* and which can in fact be described as a stable identity of the open dynamics of our acting precisely *within* complexity. The answer has to involve the nature of our freedom in the Christian act.

In each and every deliberate act, we are objectified to ourselves as someone who acts in such and such a way. We can, therefore, choose to be that person, by embracing the act, or choose not to be that person, by renouncing it. To the extent that we repeat that way of acting, our primary identity will be formed by it: we will be 'such and such' a person who acts in 'such and such' a way. The nature of Christian acting, however, is that it is always to some extent 'conversion', since the Christian act requires that we lay down our own capacity for meaning-making or for taking the complex real on our own terms. The mode rather is one of the discovery of meaning in and through the ethical act itself. But in the Christian context, the freedom that is intrinsic to all our acts, and especially to our ethical acts, takes on a new and higher level of realization, for the Christian narrative offers us an identity which is one precisely of openness and acting. More exactly, it offers us the option of choosing to be a disciple whose identity is one of repeatedly choosing to live within complexity in a life-form of following. What is specific here is the nature of the one we follow.

Following is a free and deliberate act whose meaning comes not from the act itself but rather from the one we follow. The following that is discipleship is an entirely unique act, therefore: it is always my free act, but its meaning can only derive from the meaning of the acts of the one who I follow. As an act, following is a sharing in the meaning of the one who leads. It is structured as trust and relationship, therefore.

The *livingness* of discipleship is the meaning that comes to us from our relation with the one whom we follow, therefore. That relationship must itself be meaningful. Most particularly in terms of the Christian act, it must become a relationship in which we experience ourselves as free. These can seem contradictory terms: following that is free, living from the meaning of another's life. But this is the structure of the Christian life of faith: following Christ willingly and freely, as someone who feels called or commissioned, and in a way that leads more deeply into both meaningfulness and the sense of being set free in a world that is itself made new in him. But why should this life be socially transformative, something so intimate but nevertheless to be shared with those we

have never met and never shall meet? How can it be both a personal and a universal relation at the same time?

## CHRISTIANITY AND THE FACE-TO-FACE

This brings us back to questions of human intimacy. We cannot trust those with whom we have no face-to-face relation (though of course we can trust them where to do so is to trust intermediaries with whom we do have a face-to-face relation). We know from recent insights into our neurobiology that face-to-face communication is the point at which nature has made the greatest investment in our powers of relating to others, allowing us both to analyse and to discover who they are: whether they are a potential ally and collaborator. We are capable of relating *diagnostically* to others in the face-to-face, which is why we rely upon this as far as we can when we need to come to judgments about others. But this is a process that also involves high levels of self-discovery as we openly monitor ourselves in interaction with the other.<sup>27</sup> At the outset of this chapter, we identified the structure of our reasoning, willing, and feeling in the face-to-face. Here we have to accept the complexity of the other and of our own relation to the other, we have to keep ourselves in that complexity as we struggle to come to judgment, weighing together quite different cognitive inputs, and we necessarily engage emotionally and empathetically with the other to whom we reach out in such a way and who we receive so extensively. All of this is foundational to who we are as social creatures, though it is of course 'hard-wired' and subliminal. We cannot speak here of what we normally understand as freedom. If we choose to escape our social 'hard-wiring', then under normal circumstances this will mean that we shall have to avoid the face-to-face, by 'turning away' from the other. But likewise we shall have to use our own neurobiology of the face-to-face if we seek to form real bonds with others with whom we have not grown up or lived in proximity. In this case, we shall have to specifically learn to re-enact the structure of our most basic social cognition as human beings *at the level of culture*. The extent to which we can do this is the extent to which we can let in complexity: the complexity of the other. It is the extent to which we allow their perspective on the world or 'point of view' to shape my own self-positioning through judgment.

It is difficult to form such relationships with people with whom we have never come into the face-to-face. And yet Christianity, in parallel with other world religions, is capable of fostering strong, visceral bonds within a global community of faith (sometimes denominationally, though not necessarily so).

<sup>27</sup> See note 2.

Indeed the very requirement of Christianity is that of a universal though also concrete and practical love, which is precisely the drawing together of universal meaning with the particularity of individual ethical acts. To act ethically in the name of Christ is precisely to affirm, in faith, that this particularity is universal without ceasing to be particular and so also personal. How can this be?

It can only be since we experience Jesus himself as the meaning of the world. We recognize him as the Word 'through whom all things were made.'<sup>28</sup> He is 'the alpha and the omega.'<sup>29</sup> We can never escape him; or fail to find him. He straddles our past and our future in a present that comes to us repeatedly as freedom: the freedom to choose him or not, to receive him in the Spirit or not. Human life is a long lesson in freedom as our burden, origin, calling, and joy. Nowhere do we encounter that freedom more radically and more humanly than in him, where he calls us in the flow of life to act in his name.

### Christian Communication

If Moses encountered God on Mt Sinai in the face-to-face (*panim el panim*), and if Jesus sits in the 'face-to-face' with the Father in heaven (*ad dexteram patris*), then the Church too is constituted in the face-to-face with Christ. If we follow the Gospel of John, the apostles received the Holy Spirit as the breath from his mouth.<sup>30</sup> We encounter him and he remains with us in what is most essential to his humanity: the human face-to-face. This becomes the domain very specially of the Holy Spirit who reconstitutes and reprimates the spaces between us, which make possible of course our own identity in relation.

This would mean that the Christian Church is constituted most fundamentally in the way that we encounter the other in the everyday of our lives (which is the place of face-to-face encounter, with our 'neighbour'). To be 'Church' is to meet one another in that way, repeatedly both in the actuality of our lives and in our worshipping together. But it would mean too that the particular face-to-face would have to be constantly restructured as a place of potentially universal hospitality. And that perhaps is what happens in our distinctively Christian use of language. We listen to God, in liturgy, worship, and our devotional lives. We receive his Word. But we do so in ways that ground a new way of speaking, in the Church. We allow this scriptural speaking to shape our everyday lives and to inform our judgments about what we shall believe and what we shall do. This is finally a common language; one that is shared, through the Holy Spirit, in him. And in this way, we too become his 'words', as we are uttered or spoken by him, in living speech-acts that transform.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 2, note 18, for the scriptural passages that present a 'cosmological' Christ.

<sup>29</sup> Rev 22.13. <sup>30</sup> John 20.22.

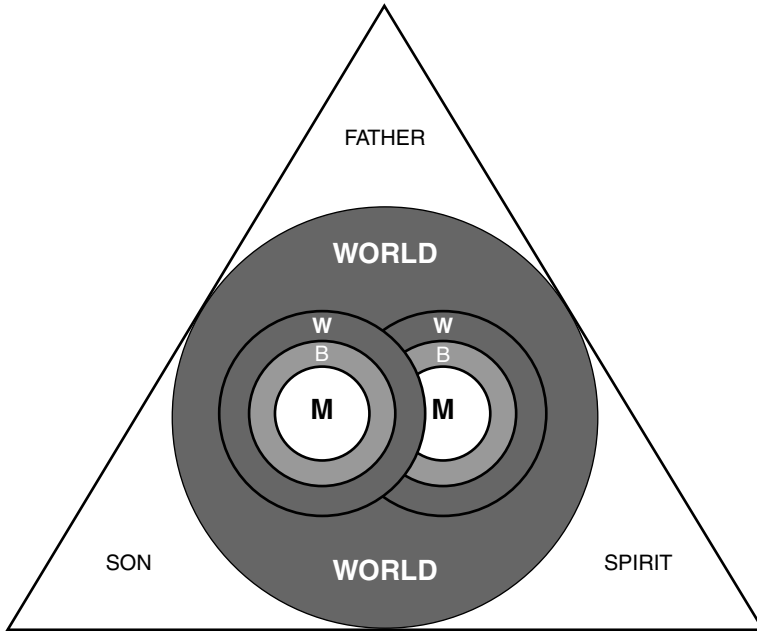


Fig. 7.8. The Christian self in act (W = World; B = Body; M = Mind)

And so we come to our final model, of the Christian self in act (see Figure 7.8).

What we see here is that this model is not wholly different from the one that precedes it. In other words, the 'ethical' self is deeply related to the 'Christian' self. The difference lies in the meaning. We can see this in the 'inchoate' nature of the meaning of the ethical act as the meaning of the world. We feel the rightness of the good things we do. We don't arrive at this sense through calculation, and yet it is nevertheless a deeply rational response. This is rationality as process rather than outcome. We have to remain within complexity in our ethical acts, in a fully open way, which means that we have to continue to explore and to listen until the very last moment in the hope of making the best possible judgment and decision. This takes an engagement of the will, which seeks not our own interest but the interests of those on behalf of whom we make the judgment about what to do, in minor or major ways. It is this way of reasoning, according to the logic of sacrifice, that brings us into our own embodiment and into the world in a new, integrated way. We *become* world.

It is precisely this phenomenon that we cannot explain or make sense of from a purely ethical point of view. We have no language for that ethically. But we do receive a language for the meaning that is intrinsic to our ethical acts from our Christianity: it is the language of the Triune God and of Jesus as the Word of God, in and through the Holy Spirit. We can recognize the meaning of our ethical acts as the Wisdom that is the meaning of Christ's own life, as



witnessed to in the Gospels or as received in the Spirit from the Easter space and time of the glorified Christ as this intersects with our own personal and social history. We can recognize that when we act in authentic attentiveness and self-offering, we live from a deeper logic that is the logic of the world itself as God's world, moving ever closer to him.

This may not seem so strange from a scientific perspective if we recall that science itself shows that the human mind can grasp the fine-tuning of the world in which we live. All things connect in marvellous ways and, although we may never find a 'theory that explains everything', we know at every stage that the world is profoundly ordered and that the human mind can extensively track this ordering. It seems natural to surmise, therefore, that if we can recognize and reflect back fine-tuning objectively, as observer, we can also perhaps recognize and reflect it back practically as rational agents, seeking to decide what to do as best we can. It will of course be the case that this is effortful, since all our tendencies are to manage the world solely from the perspective of where we are at the moment. Both scientific and religious reasoning foster ways of going beyond this natural perspectivalism to a 'point of view' that grasps the universal within the particular. Just as the scientist can sometimes see something of the whole, in its great mysteriousness, through receiving the 'here and now' as a field of data to be analysed and understood, so too the religiously motivated, unconditionally ethical actor, can sometimes feel the mysteriousness of the whole as the felt logic in a free movement of the body in which they make of themselves a self-offering for what they authentically understand to be the greatest good. It may be that we shall have to wait for scientific understanding to come closer to the meaningfulness that ethically (implicitly) and religiously (explicitly) motivated people discover in their acts, but it is important nevertheless to signal that these two ways of being 'effortfully' human may not be so far apart.

And if this is the case, then it may also be the case that in our Christian communication we are really using language in a way that communicates what it is to live in the world as a Christian and communicates something of that deep logic which is lived out in the life of Christian discipleship. It may be that how we say something is quite as important as what we say. And it may be that the nature of the life that is lived is more important than anything we could say, so that when we do say something, a whole way of life becomes evident in the speaking of it. And so it may also be that the life lived is itself framed by another, deeper form of meaning, which is the meaning of the world itself, as this is continuously taken up into the living body of Jesus.

## Christian Philosophy

### *Love and Reason*

The history of philosophy in the Western world has been closely bound up with the history of science. It is impossible to consider modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes for instance, except in the light of the new scientific advances which have defined the modern era. The history of the philosophy of that period shows the extent to which human freedom and Christian faith were placed under stress by the rise of Newtonianism. The resulting dualism introduced new tensions into the very heart of Christian reflection as theology. Our argument in this book is that our response to the rise of science in the early modern period was more its 'accommodation' than its assimilation on our own theological terms and that today we have the opportunity to make good this accommodation on account of changes in science itself in our own times. As we have stressed throughout, however, this is not an opportunity for nostalgia or a 'return to the past'. It is rather an opportunity for new growth from ancient roots.

This chapter is divided into three sections, therefore. In our first section we shall look back to the past, to high scholasticism and a period when the Church first encountered the challenge of scientific rationalism in order to see what we regard today as having been its successful assimilation into theology. We shall focus here on the work of John Duns Scotus and Meister Eckhart, rather than the more familiar Thomas Aquinas. In our second section we shall consider a key debate between Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion who together pick modern philosophy down to the bone in their frank and open discussion of reason and faith within the phenomenological method. Here, as we shall argue, the limits as well as the strengths of the philosophical method are in sight which has dominated philosophical theology and much Continental philosophy since the beginning of the twentieth century. In our

third section we shall begin to explore tentatively the shape of a new philosophical approach which will need to be critical and in tune with contemporary science but which can also reflect the concern with the human person as such, in our unity, and in our belonging to the world, which also reflect the classical concerns of Christian philosophy.

## LEARNING FROM THE PAST

We begin then with the mid thirteenth century and the sudden advent of Aristotelianism, as his ancient texts, which were both scientific and philosophical, became newly available. We cannot associate this period with the rise of new technologies, of course, as we can in the modern period, but the new Aristotelianism nevertheless threatened to unbalance theology in ways which called for an extensive response and which effectively determined many of the principal concerns of high scholasticism. The condemnation of the Aristotelianism of the School of Arts at Paris in 1277 brought these concerns into focus.

### Scholasticism and Rationalism

The Augustinian inheritance that the new Aristotelianism challenged was one which placed a particular emphasis on the two faculties of love (will) and reason (intellect) and their combination in Christian life. This was classically set out by St Augustine in *On the Trinity*, where the theme of human loving and knowing was developed in line with the divine faculties of loving and knowing within the Trinity itself. We see in the creature the same alignment of loving and knowing by which the three Persons know and love each other. And it is by our knowing and loving that we too come to know and love God.<sup>1</sup> A key question for Augustine turned on the motivation for the integrative interpenetration of intellect and will in our orientation towards God. What combines the two? What draws each on towards God as the object of both our knowledge and desire? A. N. Williams has pointed to the extent to which the principle of beauty is in play here which, for Augustine, is always a question of proportion and relation. Beauty is harmony of form, but one which can manifest either within material objects or in more

<sup>1</sup> These are summarized in A. N. Williams, in 'Mysterious Reasons. Rationality and Ineffability in Theological Aesthetics', in Eric Bugyis and David Newheiser (eds), *The Trials of Desire and the Possibility of Faith: Essays Presented in Honor of Denys Turner* (forthcoming).

abstract forms, such as that of music or mathematics. She surmises also that there is some appropriate proportionality of relation—through grace—between the self and God, so that to the extent that we come closer to him in terms of both our willing and loving, the more harmoniously integrated we will be in ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

The Augustinian account of the relation of the two faculties of loving and knowing in us proved an influential inheritance in which love had the upper hand. With the rise of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century, however, it was precisely this caritative emphasis which was called into question. Aristotelian philosophy offered a rigorous and penetrating account of human cognition as based on sense-contents and mental abstraction, which shifted the axis of thinking away from the will to the intellect and from revelation to natural philosophy. For all the multiple ambiguities of this historical text, the condemnation by Bishop Stephen Tempier in 1277 of 219 propositions reflecting the new Aristotelianism at Paris was indicative of the deep tension that was felt between philosophers and theologians around these questions at this time.<sup>3</sup> The condemnation targeted the new rationalism on the grounds, among others, that it fostered an overly naturalistic account of human nature and our felicity during this life which was based on our powers of reasoning alone, and that it allowed insufficient space both to human freedom and to the precepts of revelation. It was indicative of an increasing tension between Church and university: the life of Christian acting and the life of Christian thinking. How could these be integrated in the light of the new thinking? The late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were characterized by an attempt to rebalance philosophy and theology, therefore, through developing a more stable account of the integration of will and reason in the life of faith.

We are generally better acquainted with how Thomas Aquinas succeeded in integrating the two domains before the condemnations, but in fact it was perhaps in a later generation, which included the Franciscan John Duns Scotus and Thomas's fellow Dominican Meister Eckhart, that we find a more pointed attempt to take back ground lost to rationalism in the aftermath of the 1277 condemnations.

<sup>2</sup> A. N. Williams, 'Mysterious Reasons'.

<sup>3</sup> Jan A. Aertsen, Kent Emery Jr., and Andreas Speer (eds), *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277. Philosophie und Theologie an der Universität von Paris im letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 3–19. See also Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Age* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), and de Libera, 'Philosophie et censure. Remarques sur la crise universitaire parisienne de 1270–77', in Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer (eds), *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1998), 71–90. For a list of the condemned articles, see R. Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277* (Louvain and Paris: Peeters, 1977), and D. Piché, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277* (Paris: Vrin, 1999).

## JOHN DUNS SCOTUS

The question of the relation between love and knowledge (will and reason) is at the very centre of Scotus's thinking. Indeed the argument that the will is inherently rational, and that this rationality is intrinsic to the freedom of our will is fundamental to his thought. Arguably, Scotus develops a position that moves from affirming the intrinsic interconnectedness of will and intellect to identifying the will itself as a form of intellect.<sup>4</sup> The core of his argument is that the will can be operative in three distinct ways. We can positively choose an object (*velle*), or we can positively refuse an object (*nolle*), or we can do neither, in the sense that we refrain from either choosing or refusing (*non velle*).<sup>5</sup> It is in this capacity of 'not choosing' or of 'self-control' that the will shows itself to be free.<sup>6</sup> Following Anselm, Scotus envisages this capacity for self-control to be realized also where we allow the principle of a love for justice (*affectio iustitiae*) to overrule the principle of a self-interested possessiveness (*affectio commodi*).<sup>7</sup> This is a very radical form of human freedom, therefore, which indicates first and foremost a freedom over oneself, in one's own capacity to desire. But it is not an autonomous form of freedom in the sense, for Scotus, that it presupposes divine revelation.

For Scotus, it is critically important that the whole of the created order is contingent and free, and that it is the product of divine will, which is itself creative and free. He understands our own radical freedom in moral choosing to be in the nature of our createdness and to be itself a reflection of the original divine free will by which the world was created and is held in being.<sup>8</sup> It is from within the doctrine of the creation then that Scotus presupposes that God is dynamically present in our own situational reality and is present specifically as one who freely accepts the offering of our own freedom and freely rewards it. For Scotus, it is only because the world as created is contingent and free that human beings can also be free within contingency and can discover in this freedom their own reciprocal mode of moral creativity.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Mary Beth Ingham and Mechthild Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision of John Duns Scotus* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press of America, 2004), 162–72.

<sup>5</sup> Ingham and Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision*, see especially 146–72. I have drawn extensively on this volume for the following references to Scotus's work. Where not otherwise stated, references to Scotus are to this work.

<sup>6</sup> *Ordinatio* IV, d. 49, 9–10 (text in Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 155–62, discussion can be found at 42–5). See also *Questions on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, IX, q. 14 (text in *Questions on the Metaphysics*, II, 602).

<sup>7</sup> *Ordinatio* II, d. 6 (text in Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 295–302). For a discussion of this text, see A. B. Wolter, 'Native Freedom of the Will as a Key to the Ethics of Scotus', in Marilyn McCord Adams (ed.), *The Philosophical Theology of John Duns Scotus* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 148–62.

<sup>8</sup> See *Ordinatio* IV, d. 7 and *Ordinatio* III, suppl. dist. 37 (Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 195–207).

<sup>9</sup> *Ordinatio* II, d. 34–7, q. 5, n.96 (ed. Vat. 8:408). Quoted in Ingham and Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision*, 138–45.

As a medieval theologian, Scotus also has an intense concern with questions of metaphysics and epistemology, in which he is of course a recipient of Aristotelian terms. The Franciscan is renowned for his theory of the univocity of being by which he understood that the word *ens* or 'being' could be applied equally to what exists finitely in the created world and to God himself whose 'being' is, however, infinite: he took the terms 'finite' and 'infinite' here to designate only a mode of 'being'.<sup>10</sup> Scotus carefully argues his case in a way that maintains the principle that God is truly present to us in his creation. Scotus has a strong account of the potential continuity between heaven and earth or, more specifically, between our knowledge of reality in the present and our potential knowledge of God in the beatific vision. He argues that our capacity to be open to the real in embodied cognition is already the condition for the possibility that we can have of the immediate presence of God in the beatific vision in the next life where God chooses to make himself freely and graciously present to us as *obiectum voluntarium* or 'object of the will'.<sup>11</sup> With this emphasis upon the intelligibility of the real, Scotus follows Aquinas in identifying two powers of our intellect which are unmistakably different. In the first place, we possess the power of 'intuition' by which we recognize that something 'is' (*ens*), but we also have the power of Aristotelian 'abstraction', by which we know something for what it is (according to its *quidditas*).<sup>12</sup> It has been suggested that in light of this emphasis upon the real (*ens*) and upon the possibility that we shall encounter God in his immediacy in the beatific vision, Scotus has a strong sense of theology as a science that is based upon cognitive abstraction rather than the direct apprehension of God.<sup>13</sup>

At the centre of Scotus's metaphysics is a further set of insights which gather around his use of the term *haecceitas* or 'thisness'. This is an innovation in thought by which he seeks to capture the principle of individuation as such.<sup>14</sup> What is it that makes something both identifiable as a specific kind of thing ('species' or 'common nature', i.e. 'dogginess') but also numerically one (which allows us to say that this dog is not the same as that dog; in fact even these two identical poodles are not the same)? Scotus decides that this is not the result of its individuation through matter, as Aquinas thought. It is something that is

<sup>10</sup> Allan B. Wolter, *The Transcendentals and their Function in the Metaphysics of Duns Scotus* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1946), 4–11.

<sup>11</sup> Ingham and Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision*, 31–3. See Allan B. Wolter, 'Duns Scotus on the Natural Desire for the Supernatural', *The Philosophical Theology*, 125–47.

<sup>12</sup> *Lectura* II, d. 3, nn. 285–290 (ed. Vat. 18:321–3). This capacity to grasp the real, or 'what is', through intuition is important too for Scotus's understanding of moral judgment. As Ingham and Dreyer point out: 'In *Ordinatio* III, d. 14, Scotus presents the intuitive act as a necessary condition for any affirmation of the truth of a contingent, existential statement. The [intuitive] act reveals the present state of affairs to the moral subject' (Ingham and Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision*, 30).

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Dumont, 'Theology as a Science and Duns Scotus' Distinction between Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition', *Speculum* 64 (1989), 579–99.

<sup>14</sup> Ingham and Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision*, 108–16.

grounded neither in the ‘common nature’ (‘dogginess’), nor in the materiality, nor indeed in the relation between the two. It is rather grounded in the fact that dogginess here is *this* dogginess, matter is *this* matter, and the relation between the two is *this* relation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, Scotus identifies a further principle in existence, which is the being of *this* thing in *this* here and now. It is precisely in this way that something is grasped by the intellectual faculty of ‘intuition’. But the perception of the ‘thisness’ of a thing also has implications for our own existence in the here and now and so also for a certain kind of reflexivity which obtains when we are in a situation which obliges us to come to moral judgment. It is this self-reflexivity in the moral act, when we are aware of ourselves as being *this* person in *this* place and time, that Scotus sees as the source of our capacity to mature as moral agents over time, linking this with prudence, therefore, as the form of our moral wisdom.<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Scotus follows Augustine in identifying the discernment of beauty or harmony of relations as a key element in our moral acts. We are attracted by the good as right moral action on the grounds of our perception of the harmonious relations that exist within the concrete contexts of our moral decision-making. For Scotus, at the point of our free moral action we harmonize with the objective moral order as this is present to us in the here and now. The concept of ‘intuition’ as our perception of the real plays a key role for Scotus here too in that this both locates us in the here and now and also connects us to the objective framework of the moral order. For this latter point of course, Scotus draws upon an explicit metaphysical realism and an understanding of the doctrine of creation that allows him to view human morality as being embedded in the nature of the world as God’s creation.<sup>17</sup> It is precisely this objectivity that allows him to develop an account of human moral agency which he can describe as a ‘science of praxis’.<sup>18</sup>

### Transformation Theology and John Duns Scotus

Seven hundred years divide Transformation Theology from the work of Scotus, and yet there seem to be a number of strong similarities. Scotus likewise gives priority to freedom as being bound up with the nature of reason and

<sup>15</sup> *Ordinatio* II, d.3, qq. 1–6.

<sup>16</sup> *Ordinatio* III, d.36 (Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 252–74). See Ingham and Dreyer on prudence as self-reflexivity which allows ‘the choice for a moral orientation of life’ (197).

<sup>17</sup> This also has implications for the beatific vision to the extent that Scotus affirms that the cognitive conditions which already exist in the moral freedom of our natural life continue in heaven with the difference that there God is present to us as an *obiectum voluntarium*. On this, see Allan B. Wolter, ‘Duns Scotus on the Natural Desire for the Supernatural’, in his *The Philosophical Theology*, 125–47.

<sup>18</sup> *Lectura*, prol. pars 4, qq. 1–2 (Wolter, *Will and Morality*, 127–35).

the will in combination at the point of moral judgment in concrete situations. He places that freedom in our capacity for self-denial (and so to be wholly self-determining) in what we choose to do. This seems to approximate closely to what we have described in Paul Janz's term as 'finality of non-resolution.' In particular, Scotus's emphasis upon *non velle* as self-control in judgment suggests the openness, patience and indeed vulnerability of the moral agent in the face of the real, although we are placing more emphasis on the psychological and even spiritual aspects of this transition.

If, for Transformation Theology, it is the embrace of complexity that allows us entry as subject into the deeper life of the real, then for Scotus too, moral judgments depend 'upon the agent's intellectual access to moral truth as it appears in the present situation a form of learning in the particularity of our situational reality'.<sup>19</sup> It is not something that is simply given by a virtuous character, but is more a way of being openly alive in the world as God's reality. But in each case there is an emphasis upon our access to *haecceitas*, or the actuality of life, as the spatio-temporal place of encounter with the Creator. For Transformation Theology this is worked out Christologically while, for Scotus, it is developed in terms of the beatific vision at the end of life. The human act is the place of our own greatest actuality and also freedom, in a way that is closely aligned with the Creator's own freedom and presence within the creation.

And access to the real in its positive respect is also conceived in terms of aesthetic principles in both cases. We feel the rightness of moral judgment, in a way which for both entails the recognition that it is a moral *order* that is in play here. Scotus conceives of this in terms of the creation (which, for Scotus, includes science or physics<sup>20</sup>), while Transformation Theology looks to a Christologically determined world order within faith which can, however, also point to a secular scientific analogue in the fine-tuning of the universe. The contemporary and the medieval are worlds apart in the separation of religion from science.

## MEISTER ECKHART

But Scotus was not the only theologian who was particularly concerned with establishing a new relation between reason and the will in faith. Meister Eckhart was perhaps not so straightforwardly articulating a response to the condemnation of 1277, which was in fact notoriously unclear in its targets.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ingham and Dreyer, *The Philosophical Vision*, 193.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> See note 3.



But we do seem to see exactly the same tensions in his thought between the cognitivism of academic theology on the one hand and the practical life of faith on the other.

As a German Dominican, Eckhart stood within a strongly intellectualist tradition, though one that was more influenced by Neoplatonic sources in many ways than by what we would recognize today as Aristotelianism.<sup>22</sup> Eckhart was strongly influenced by the Neoplatonic radicalization of Augustinian illuminationism which was characteristic of the work of his Dominican mentor Dietrich of Freiberg.<sup>23</sup> His theory of analogy differed from that of Thomas, for instance, to the extent that he insisted that our properties as creatures always remain in some real sense in God and are only ever 'on loan' to us, whereas Thomas insists that they become properly our own.<sup>24</sup> This same distinction is apparent in the way the two Dominicans understood knowledge or human intellect, Eckhart holding that the ground of our intellect lies within God himself while Thomas believed that it is a fragile light that is properly given to us as creatures. Characteristically, Eckhart reasserts a strongly Augustinian account of the intellect through illuminationism, which is implicitly against more autonomous Aristotelian understandings of intellect (and certainly against the Averroist tendency to separate intellect from the human self), and he combines this with a radically dynamic theory of grace and so also of ethics.<sup>25</sup> In fact, Eckhart embeds a radically Augustinian account of the intellect into an overarching theory of transformational grace. This comes to expression in particular in his rhetorical device of the 'birth of God in the soul'.<sup>26</sup> The *gotes gebuehrt* is a highly transformative image, which envisages God as a wholly dynamic 'acting' (or *wirken*) in the depth of the soul which effects a change in us which is both ethical and ontological at the same time. Eckhart calls this effect *abegescheidenheit* or 'detachment', which is a kind of selflessness which he works out in terms both of metaphysics (as meaning that we transcend the properties of our individual nature) and ethics (meaning that we live beyond the narrowness of our own self-interest).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> For the Neoplatonic sources of Eckhart and the Rhineland tradition, see Alain de Libera, *Introduction à la mystique rhénane d'Albert le Grand et Maître Eckhart* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1994).

<sup>23</sup> See Burkhard Mojsisch, *Die Theorie des Intellekts bei Dietrich von Freiberg*, Beiheft 1, *Corpus philosophorum teutonicorum medii aevi* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1977), and Kurt Flasch (ed.), *Von Meister Dietrich zu Meister Eckhart*, Beiheft 2, CPTMA (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Oliver Davies, *Meister Eckhart: Mystical Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1991), 100–7.

<sup>25</sup> Otto Langer stresses the practical theological dimension of Eckhart's work in his 'Meister Eckharts Begründung einer neuen Theologie', *Meister-Eckhart-Jahrbuch* 1 (2007), 1–25. On the unity of ethics and metaphysics in Eckhart, see also Dietmar Mieth, *Die Einheit von Vita activa und Vita contemplativa in den deutschen Predigten und Traktaten Meister Eckharts und bei Johannes Tauler* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 1969).

<sup>26</sup> Davies, *Meister Eckhart*, 145–59.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, *Meister Eckhart*, 162–76.

There are two themes in Eckhart's thought that are particularly relevant here. The first concerns this understanding of the radical unity of the self which comes about through the 'divine birth of God in the soul', while the second concerns his understanding of the way in which language can communicate that unity to others. The 'detachment' which the 'birth' brings about is a unitive state, marked by a radical apophaticism, as intellect and grace intensively combine through the immediacy of God's 'active' presence to the soul. The divine presence drives intellect and grace together in us in a way that brings a transfigured, unitive 'unknowing' rather than a self-possessing and controlling 'knowing'. For Eckhart, God is one in himself in a non-numerical unity which points to divine infinity. But through the realization of the ground of the intellect in God, we too—as creatures—become one in God. The 'apophatic' self is the 'detached' self, or the self who lives ethically 'without a why', in unity with God, and it is this which is represented by the thematic of the 'birth of God in the soul'.

The second key Eckhartian theme of language and the communicability of this unitive state is more implicitly than explicitly present. In the first place, it is performatively present, as the reader of Eckhart's German sermons will quickly see, in the evident contrast of the theological language used here and the academic discourse of Scotus or Thomas. But this distinctive language use also has a theoretical base.<sup>28</sup> Eckhart understands human language to participate in Trinitarian processes and so to be effectively a way of communicating Trinitarian life. The intellectual character of words means that, in preaching, language can express either its materiality or its immateriality. It can either make us one with the multiplicity of the material order or make us one with the unicity of the intelligible and Trinitarian order, in Eckhart's terms.<sup>29</sup> We can see this dynamic at work semantically in Eckhart's determination to render the form of language as abstract or as 'immaterial' as possible (involving the coining of new abstract nouns in German), which Quint referred to as his 'de-concretization' of language.<sup>30</sup> Through a Neoplatonic metaphysics of the 'image', Eckhart can describe language in Augustinian terms as something which is in the Word and which flows from the Trinity, but which also remains within the Trinity, just as the Son remains within the Father.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Bruce Milem develops the link between Eckhart's distinctive use of language in his German sermons and his theory of the image in his study *The Unspoken Word: Negative Theology in Meister Eckhart's German Sermons* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2002). This builds upon Walter Haug's account of the transformational nature of Eckhart's language which he developed in 'Zur Grundlegung einer Theorie des mystischen Sprechens', in Kurt Ruh (ed.), *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 494–508.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *Meister Eckhart*, 99–125.

<sup>30</sup> Joseph Quint, 'Die Sprache Meister Eckharts als Ausdruck seiner mystischen Geisteswelt', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 6 (1928), 685.

<sup>31</sup> 'Adolescens, tibi dico, surge' (Sermon 18, J. Quint (ed.), *Meister Eckhart: die deutschen und lateinischen Werke, hrsg. im Auftrage der deutschen Forschungsdienst* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1936ff.)). See O. Davies, 'Meister Eckhart: Preaching the One

For Eckhart as Dominican preacher and following Augustine therefore, there is a close link between the 'birth of God in the soul', human reasoning and the performance of language in the sermon. A central concern for him is the role of apophasis or that kind of speaking which we call 'negative theology' as the signature or even as the mediation of the passage of the 'birth of God in the soul' into the community of the Church. In other words, the nearness of God to us which is captured in this doctrinal theme brings about a distinctively apophatic or paradoxical reshaping of human reason. This in turn can be communicated in a certain use of language which mediates to others this comprehensive human unity in God that comes about in the immediacy of the divine proximity.

What we can see here then in Eckhart and Scotus are two different attempts to counter the separation of philosophy from the Christian life. Scotus seeks to achieve this through his account of the self in whom reason and will combine in freedom in the moral act. Eckhart on the other hand brings together a radical Augustinian illuminationism with a strong account of transforming grace. Scotus turns to the created order as concretely experienced in our situational reality as the source of transcendence. God is encountered in the moral form of the universe, which we discern and to which we attune ourselves through 'intuition' in concrete situations. Eckhart on the other hand seeks this in our connectedness with the source of the created order in God, through the power of intellect as this comes to us from God and as it is communicated and shaped through language. Scotus is a very Franciscan thinker and Eckhart, a member of the Order of Preachers, a very Dominican one.

But it is nevertheless striking how each places such an emphasis upon the integration of the will within intellect. Reasoning which stands outside will is autonomous and reason which is in the service of will is narrow. Both advocate the overcoming of possessiveness: Scotus through the triumph of the 'love for justice' over the 'love for possessions', and Eckhart through his self-less 'detachment'. But critically both see this as involving also the overcoming of the autonomy of reason, without, however, suspending reason as a process which is fundamental to our humanity. For Scotus, this is achieved through the integration of will and reasoning in the light of freedom: the freedom to refuse both wanting and not wanting (*velle* and *nolle*) through the primacy of the love of God. This freedom of the *non velle* requires the fusion of intellect and will in a process of 'non-resolution' (to use our term) and indeed also 'finality of non-resolution' as the moral order of the world is aesthetically discerned in *this particular* situation. For Eckhart, on the other hand, this

to the Many', *The Way* 37 (October 1997), 334–8. For the Augustinian basis to this, see also O. Davies, 'Die Rhetorik des Erhabenen: Sprachtheorie bei Meister Eckhart', in G. Steer and L. Sturlese (eds), *Lectura Eckhardi: Predigten Meister Eckharts von Fachgelehrten gelesen und gedeutet* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1998), 97–115.

transformation of reason is achieved performatively through cognitive language, and specifically through the development of a new radically apophatic form of theological language. This reflects Eckhart's concern that we have to be transformed specifically in our conceptualization of God. Unlike Scotus, who wishes to argue that we have to understand the self differently in the light of the revealed truths of incarnation and the creation, Eckhart presupposes that this transformation can be effected through language. In this, Meister Eckhart, who already writes in German at the dawn of the vernacular age, shows that he has a far stronger sense of the capacities of our speaking to transform ourselves and others, in which he clearly anticipates—as he does in other ways too—the age that is to come.

### THE FATE OF INTELLECT

Scotus and Eckhart are separated by the use they make of their central terms for knowledge: Scotus with his 'intuition' ('cognitio intuitiva' or 'intellectio intuitiva') and Eckhart with his 'intellect' ('intellectus' or 'Verstand'). Both are used to express our knowledge of God, but Scotus finds God as Creator in the reality of things, which is perceived through his 'intuition', while Eckhart finds God through 'intellect' as Divine Intellect in the source of things. The origin of these terms lies in the idea that there is a separate faculty of the soul, which is mysterious and set apart, which we find in Aristotle, specifically in the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>32</sup> The context to the discussion is Aristotle's investigation of how we arrive at valid conclusions about things. As a way of escaping the infinity problem, or how one element in a logical sequence always depends upon a prior element, Aristotle proposed that there is a faculty of the mind, which he called *nous*, which penetrates to the *archai* or 'principles' which underlie valid demonstrations. In other words, Aristotle wanted to short-circuit the progression of premises, each depending upon prior premises and threatening to extend to infinity, and he wanted to do so by introducing a human capacity which reaches directly into the nature of things.

Over 1500 years later, drawing upon this same passage from the *Posterior Analytics*, Thomas Aquinas used a similar argument. In this case he was discussing the nature of truth, and asked the question what is it for something to be something (that is, if we wish to know what is truth, then we must know what it is for something to be something, e.g. for a dog to be a dog)? In this case the issue is not deductions but definitions, though the problem of infinite progression is the same: 'It should be said,' wrote Thomas, 'that just as

<sup>32</sup> *Posterior Analytics*, II. 19.

in demonstrable matters a reduction must be made to principles the intellect knows *per se*, so too in investigating what anything is, otherwise there would be an infinite regress and all science and knowledge of things would perish.<sup>33</sup> The Aristotelian *nous* has here become the Latin *intellectus* (translated in this passage as 'intellect'), and it is by means of the intellect that we comprehend principles or the ways things are. We can see the force of *intellectus* in the distinction Thomas makes between its operation and the operations of reason as *ratio*, since the former stands to the latter 'as motion to rest or acquiring to having'.<sup>34</sup> When we have certain knowledge of something it is because the mind conforms in its reasoning to the way things are, and so mind and world are in harmony. Thomas is less anxious about this than Aristotle, since he believes that God has created the world and that humanity has a central place in that order. It is entirely natural, therefore, that the human mind and extra-mental reality should be ordered one to the other, and 'intellect' is the accomplishment or perfection of that relation.

In his use of 'intellect' then Eckhart stands in a long tradition which has understood this term as denoting something extraordinary within the human mind. For Aristotle, our distinctively human 'intellect' is 'immortal and eternal'. In *Generation of Animals*, he calls it 'divine' and states that its origin lies 'outside' the point of human biological reproduction.<sup>35</sup> For Thomas it is part of the divine ordering of things. But this is not, of course, to make of our 'intellect' the faculty by which we are *capax dei* and can know God in Thomas. It is through the 'intellect' that we have certain knowledge of the world and so are properly at home in the world as God's world and as creature in a created universe.

For Eckhart then, who stands in the same general epistemological tradition as Thomas, though with distinctively 'German' Neoplatonic nuances, *intellectus* does not primarily signify a cognitive capacity by which we know God, which is set apart from our other cognitive faculties by which we know objects in the world through sensibility. It denotes rather the *source* of our cognition in the world and so the miraculous nature of our ordinary cognitions in their capacity to manifest the right-ordering of things which is quintessentially a divine order: the order of creation. For all its spiritual and unitive power, the term *intellectus* in Meister Eckhart does not in fact take us away from everyday life but actually back towards it. It asks us to see the ordinary world we experience, and our ordinary perceptions of that world, in a new way: that is the meaning of the 'divine birth' in us. Intellect, for Eckhart, is transformative.

<sup>33</sup> *On Truth*, q. 1.1 (Ralph McInerny, *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1998), 166).

<sup>34</sup> ST 1, q. 79.1, art. 8 (Suttor, Timothy, transl. and ed., *St Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae*, Vol. 11, Man (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 175).

<sup>35</sup> *Generation of Animals*, II. 3.

It is here, in our most basic cognitions, that we encounter the miracle of the creation and so also encounter ourselves as called to be ‘in the image’ of the Creator God.

This distinctively pre-modern use of the term *intellectus* did not survive into the modern period, however. It was effectively ruled out by Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, which disallowed the possibility that we can use the same vocabulary of reasoning about things perceived in space and time and non-spatio-temporal things such as divinity. Naturally enough, there followed a reaction against this since Kant had interrupted a tradition of rational discourse about God in which there was the interweaving precisely of the spatio-temporal with divine things. We can see this reaction already in the immediate aftermath of Kant with the work of Jacobi, who applied the term *Vernunft* or reason to suggest the capacity we have to grasp what is outside particular space and time. He specifically understands reason (or perhaps Reason would be a better rendering) in this sense to be a form of ‘knowing not-knowing’. This allows him to separate this term off from our everyday, unmysterious ways of knowing, which Kant had shown to be normatively sense-based and so orientated to the particular and the material. Jacobi was seeking to preserve a place for what post-Kantian philosophy would call ‘transcendence’, which is to say broadly the creature’s knowledge of the uncreated Creator God, and critically he was seeking to define this kind of knowledge ‘apophatically’, as a form of ‘unknowing’.<sup>36</sup>

The alternative to Kantian rationalism which Jacobi proposed was one which was grounded in a different understanding of the principle of reason. In the Preface to the treatise *David Hume on Faith* (1815), Jacobi set out the key points in his critique of Kant’s philosophy. He stressed what he saw in it as an unnecessary and fatally contradictory disjunction between the role of understanding and reason. The failure to emphasize the place of reason, as a transcendental perceptive faculty equal to that of understanding, would lead inevitably to a form of absolute subjectivism. ‘Representations’ on their own are no more than a kind of ‘negation of nothingness, a something that passes for mere “not-nothing” and would pass for plain “nothingness” if reason (which still retains the upper hand) did not forcibly prevent that.’<sup>37</sup> Jacobi defined reason as the faculty, unique to human kind, which had as its objects the true, the actual, the good, and the beautiful.<sup>38</sup> These have a veracity beyond

<sup>36</sup> See Oliver Davies, *The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 63–6.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel ‘Allwill’*, ed. and transl. George di Giovanni (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 580 (Hamilton Beck (ed.), *David Hume über den Glauben, oder Idealismus und Realismus* (New York and London: Garland, 1983); facsimile reproduction of 1787 edition and the *Vorrede* to the 1815 edition, 102).

<sup>38</sup> di Giovanni, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 540 (Beck, *David Hume*, 9).

that of mere 'representations.' These transcendental properties are possessed by reason as its objects of knowledge with an absolute certainty of 'faith,' which Jacobi in turn describes as 'a knowing not-knowing.'<sup>39</sup> They are the secure foundation of the *actuality* of the world such that it resists absorption into the self, or into a transcendental self, in its irreducible alterity. Jacobi refers to this faculty as 'a spirit immediately from God' and states 'just as this spirit is present to man in his highest, deepest and innermost consciousness, so also is the Giver of it, *God*, present to him [...].'<sup>40</sup>

The transcendentals of ultimate reality are communicated not through sensation (*Empfindung*), which easily becomes internalized and subjectified, but through true perception (*Wahrnehmung*).<sup>41</sup> Reason complements and contextualizes understanding therefore, for reason's knowledge of its objects, of the Kantian thing-in-itself, is not given *in* or *through* the appearances but *with* them in a way that is 'mystical' and 'incomprehensible both to the sense and to the understanding.'<sup>42</sup>

Jacobi's innovation marks the first point, I believe, at which a cognitive term is used to denote a 'mystical kind' of knowledge which is set apart from, or—more exactly here—is superimposed upon, ordinary or natural cognition as 'understanding' (in the distinctive and far-reaching sense which this term takes on after the publication of Kant's First Critique). Jacobi's 'reason' inhabits a very particular space in that 'reality' is now no longer known through our 'understanding' of particular things but through our grasp by 'reason' of the transcendentals. What was previously a unity, therefore, (which is to say the 'miraculous' within the 'particular' of pre-modern metaphysical realism based upon revealed creation) has separated out after Kant in such a way that Jacobi's 'reason' does not miraculously grasp the truth of the world in the particulars of 'understanding,' but grasps the truth of the world as the 'transcendentals' which are superimposed upon the particulars of 'understanding.' Reason and understanding now have different objects; they are different faculties which are required in a world in which divinity and creatureliness are no longer in the same proximate relation as they once were. This is epistemology in a world that is no longer God's world.

For creation-centred theologians like Scotus and Eckhart, however, the divine is known in and through the created order, or at least not separately from it. That is precisely the issue that hovered in the background in the 1277 condemnation. Within such a framework, the knowledge of God will always be implicitly if not explicitly transformational with visible consequences for the life lived. Jacobi is not addressing primarily a problem of life, however, but primarily a problem of cognition. How can he maintain the principle against

<sup>39</sup> di Giovanni, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 545 (Beck, *David Hume*, 20).

<sup>40</sup> di Giovanni, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 588 (Beck, *David Hume*, 119–20).

<sup>41</sup> di Giovanni, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 553, 551 (Beck, *David Hume*, 39, 34).

<sup>42</sup> di Giovanni, *Main Philosophical Writings*, 546 (Beck, *David Hume*, 23).

Kantian tradition that we can directly know the transcendent world? Rather than argue critically from within the Kantian framework (as the idealists do, and especially Hegel), Jacobi's focus is upon the generation of a new cognitive vocabulary which will create a *cultural* space for transcendence. If we use the word 'reason' in his sense, we stake a claim to a knowledge of 'transcendence.' But since this can no longer straightforwardly be a transformational knowledge (with the gulf between 'reason' and 'understanding'), we are left wondering quite what it is that 'reason' knows?

## CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The role of the apophatic has been marked in modern Continental philosophy and in modern philosophical theology. The reasons for this may have something to do with the nature of modern philosophy itself. It is a striking historical fact that Jean-Paul Sartre<sup>43</sup> (initiating French existentialism), Martin Heidegger<sup>44</sup> (existentialism), Paul Ricoeur<sup>45</sup> (contemporary hermeneutics), Jacques Derrida<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Sartre published his first philosophical work in 1936, with the title *La transcendance de l'ego. Esquisse d'une description phénoménologique* (*Recherches philosophiques*, VI, 1936–7). Writing several years later, Sartre observed: 'Husserl had captured me...I saw everything via the perspectives of his philosophy...I was "Husserlian"' (see Robert Denoon Cumming, *Phenomenology and Deconstruction*, Vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), who offers an analysis of this passage). Sartre was critical of Husserl of course for his unworldliness: 'Unfortunately, as long as the I remains a structure of absolute consciousness, one will still be able to reproach phenomenology for being as escapist doctrine, for again pulling a part of man out of the world and, in that way, turning our attention from the real problems' (Stephen Priest, *The Subject in Question: Sartre's Critique of Husserl in 'The Transcendence of the Ego'* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 148).

<sup>44</sup> Heidegger's *Being and Time* was published in 1927, in Husserl's own journal, the *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung*. He dedicated the volume to Edmund Husserl 'in respect and friendship'.

<sup>45</sup> In 1943, when Ricoeur was held in Germany as a prisoner of war, he obtained a copy of *Ideas I* and made a detailed study of it. He eventually published an annotated French translation of this text in 1950. Ricoeur's response to Husserl, and his own contribution to the development of phenomenology, was sketched out in his article 'Méthodes et tâches d'une philosophie de la volonté', 1952 (ET in Ricoeur, *Husserl: An Analysis of his Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 216). Ricoeur argues that transcendental phenomenology alone, which is purely concerned with perception, is prone to imagine that it possesses a freedom, a freedom to create, which is in fact a chimera. This is a kind of naïveté akin to the naïveté of the 'natural attitude' which transcendental phenomenology itself seeks to overcome. What is required, Ricoeur believes, is a further phenomenological reduction, of transcendental phenomenology itself, which will show that human identity is most properly known not through the unmediated knowledge of the introspective, spectator self, but through a demanding and ascetical tracing of the self in its actions—above all in its linguistic mediations—in the living world of possibility and constraint.

<sup>46</sup> Derrida's early engagements with Husserl were published in the collection *La voix et le phénomène* published in 1967 (ET *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, 2nd ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995)). Although Derrida was



(deconstruction), and Emmanuel Levinas<sup>47</sup> all wrote their first or earliest works in a close engagement with the thought of Edmund Husserl. Indeed, the thinking of these philosophers seems in no small degree to have been defined by Husserl: though not in terms of the content of his thought so much as his philosophical method. The early works of Husserl with which they principally engaged (*The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* and *Logical Investigations*<sup>48</sup>) were intensive investigations of the nature of the real, in terms of time, consciousness, and world. But at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Husserl had also begun to develop a new analytical method within philosophy which presupposed the *epochē*, or 'bracketing' of the world. This was a process of suspension of belief in the objectivity of world so that the consciousness of things in our own minds, which can be taken to exist with absolute certainty on account of its immediacy, could come into view. Husserl understood this new phenomenological method of reflection to be a truly *scientific* mode of thought and so was the kind of philosophy which was most adequate to and grounded in the real.<sup>49</sup> Human consciousness was more fundamental than data since data is itself held in consciousness. For Husserl, the mind was more immediate than the world, and so the exploration of our own consciousness, by which we are aware of the world, takes priority over an exploration of the world itself.

That the mind is more immediate than world involves a point of judgment, however, and it is really here that we begin to see the outline of a distinctive and new philosophical method. There is nothing necessary about the judgment that leads to the bracketing of the world: it is elective and indeed free. It is a point of self-positioning whereby the possibility that mind and world can be detached in this way is preferred over other views. As such, it is of course

writing long after the publication of Husserl's mature works, the texts critiqued again represent Husserl's early philosophy, primarily the *Logical Investigations*, the *Ideas*, and the *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*.

<sup>47</sup> Emmanuel Levinas wrote two full-length studies of the work of Edmund Husserl: his dissertation *La théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, 1930 (*The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973)) and *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, 1949 (*Discovering Existence with Husserl*, transl. and ed. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1998)). Levinas's engagement with Husserl's thought actually began earlier, with his long review article on *Ideen I* published in *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 1929. He also translated, with Gabrielle Pfeiffer, the *Cartesian Meditations* into French, and has to be counted as one of the principal mediators of Husserl's thought into the French-speaking world. In his late work *Otherwise than Being* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), Levinas offered his sharpest delineation and critique of Husserl's account of meaning and the self given in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*.

<sup>48</sup> *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* was principally based on lectures which Husserl gave in 1904–5 and which were edited by Martin Heidegger for publication in 1928 (Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990)). *Logical Investigations* was published in two parts in 1900–1.

<sup>49</sup> The concept of the *epochē*, and of its scientific character, was developed in the *Ideen* of 1913.

a form of reduction, since an option for the immediacy of mind reduces the complexity of the world. To that extent it is also scientific, since the scientific method always—legitimately—reduces the world's complexity in order to make the questions we seek to answer manageable. Husserl in fact could be said to have used human consciousness or awareness of the world to make the world more cognitively manageable. To this extent he could be said to be the first philosopher to have applied modern scientific criteria so fundamentally to the human person. This is perhaps the reason why he holds such a key position historically in the evolution of modern thought.

What Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur, and Emmanuel Levinas all learned from Husserl, therefore, was the freedom to self-position subjectively as a thinker, and so the daring to impose powerful, far-reaching forms of subjective meaning-making upon the structure of the real. Each of these forms of modern thought is 'scientific' in the sense that it entails its own 'perspective': in language or existence, absence or presence, consciousness or the sign. Like Husserl's bracketing itself, each is a form of perspectival reduction (as we have defined this term cognitively) and so effectively effaces the complexity of real space and time which is the place of our own radical freedom of life. These perspectives are all grounded in our subjectivity and do not take account of the irreducibly material nature of our world or, indeed, of the centrality of the act in human life when we embrace our own possibility as human material cause.<sup>50</sup>

This widespread 'perspectivalism' in modern philosophy has had two key effects. In the first place, it has generated a hugely engaging account of human life through reinterpreting a range of dimensions of the human from the same perspective. Hermeneutics and existentialism are powerful analytics of what it is to be human, for instance. But at the same time it has led to what are always *partial* accounts of what it is to be human. When we interpret ourselves through our will (existentialism), our powers of interpretation (hermeneutics), our pure, ethical transcendence (Levinas), our interruption through 'différance' (Derrida), something particular is left out by this moment of 'bracketing': the world itself in its irreducible unity. What is left out is the 'real', which imposes itself upon our subjectivity, irreducibly, as limit to mind and to will. It is precisely the *resistance* of the real world of space and time that gets bracketed.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>50</sup> There are of course exceptions to this far-reaching reduction in the modern period. We can point for instance to the early Marx who understood the 'object' of his analysis to be the 'actual life-process' of human beings 'in their actual empirically perceptible conditions of human development' (*The German Ideology*). In making the contingently *historical* subject the object of his science, Marx in principle allowed a place in his thought for radical human freedom, albeit in the political form of proletarian revolution. This is the influence upon Sartre also in his critique of Husserl, on account of his neglect of the primacy of the act (see note 43).

<sup>51</sup> François Laruelle, *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

For a human being to adopt such a partial perspective cognitively while living in the world as embodied agent (as we do) is always to encounter the possibility of tension between how we think and how we act, as material creature in the world. We constantly experience the world as resistant, within complexity, but may not allow this to shape the framework of how we view the world deliberately and analytically. The shimmering, rhetorical brilliance of much modern philosophy can seem almost to be like the finest technology: the product of an advanced civilization which is at home in the material world as never before but which can nevertheless not assuage the fundamental condition of our contingency, vulnerability, and mortality. In the light of such a perspectivalism, it is inevitable perhaps that the world should reassert itself within the fabric of our sustained and luminous thinking apophatically, as the irresolvable paradox: as the aporia of thinking itself, as human embodied subject, in a world specifically of infinite *causal* complexity. And there is a case for the view that it is those philosophers such as Heidegger, Levinas, Ricoeur, and Derrida, who have been most aware of the limits of their perspectivalism, who have also most intensely and authentically engaged with ‘negative theology’.

### Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida

The return of the world in the form of the apophatic is something that has created a repeated point of contact between Continental philosophy and the history of Christian thought. This is a relation which provides a background to a particularly interesting debate between Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida which took place at Villanova in 1997. Here Marion was concerned to show that he is primarily concerned with asserting the rightful place of Christian religious experience as a point of departure in an overwhelmingly secular discourse, while Derrida expressed his commitment to the phenomenological method while also showing his awareness of its constraints and limits.<sup>52</sup>

The discussion turned on the nature of ‘givenness’ and ‘gift’, which had been a distinctive topic of debate in philosophical theology, as well as the more general background of the ongoing dialogue between generally French philosophers in the Husserlian phenomenological tradition and their more theological counterparts.<sup>53</sup> There had been sensitive issues on both sides. From the

<sup>52</sup> The debate was published in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), especially 54–78.

<sup>53</sup> J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation and the Gift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–14, for a discussion of this theme, including a bibliography of this debate. The continuing dialogue between phenomenology and Christian theology came to a head with the publication in 1991 of the French collaborative volume *Le tournant théologique de la phénoménologie française* (published in English as Dominique Janicaud et al., *Phenomenology and the ‘Theological Turn’: The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

theologians' point of view, if the phenomenological method could be found not to be hospitable to religious experience as a foundational method, then religion would become a second-order phenomenon which is appropriately to be dealt with at the cultural and not philosophical level. For the philosophers, on the other hand, if the religious moment can be integrated fundamentally within the phenomenological perspective, then religion might not only become normative in human consciousness but might also, by its very nature, become *foundational* and so regulative. In this debate, the character of phenomenology itself was under scrutiny from one perspective and the place of religion within the rationality of thought from another. Those who wished to defend Husserlian traditions were naturally concerned at the threatened loss of the neutrality and therefore integrity of the phenomenological method, as they perceived it, while theologians, for their part, could see the possibility of establishing a more substantial framework for Christianity within Continental phenomenology rather than Anglo-American empiricism.<sup>54</sup>

In their debate at Villanova, Jean-Luc Marion and Jacques Derrida focused specifically on the meaning of the Husserlian term 'intuition' in Marion's work. Marion had argued that in the religious phenomenon (such as the Eucharist), which he calls the 'saturated phenomenon', the 'givenness' of things becomes revelatory and excessive. But he nevertheless locates the 'saturated phenomenon' squarely within what can be grasped by the phenomenological method through his insistence that the givenness of the 'saturated phenomenon' communicates to the *intuition*.<sup>55</sup> This is a key term of Husserlian epistemology. It denotes the way in which phenomena appear to the human subject. It stands at the centre of the construction of 'reason' in one of the most influential philosophies of the modern period therefore. Indeed, the whole thrust of Marion's argument is that the givenness of religious phenomena should be retraceable to the domain of non-religious appearance: it is not a wholly distinct 'givenness'. If, for Husserl, 'givenness' (*Gegebenheit*) is a neutral term which denotes simply that something exists, then for Marion it is a term which is suggestive of distinctively Christian or religious associations of createdness.

Here we can immediately see Marion's challenge. If he uses a term other than 'intuition', he will inevitably be placing the 'saturated phenomenon' of religion outside the phenomenological method and so within the domain of special and not general cognition. But the use of 'intuition' in association with 'givenness' (where Marion's 'givenness' takes on connotations which Husserl's use does not have), leaves Marion open to the charge that he is deploying the possible theological associations of the word 'givenness' itself to suppress or outweigh what Husserl originally meant by it. In other words, the charge will

<sup>54</sup> See note 56.

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Luc Marion summarizes this in 'The Saturated Phenomenon', in Janicaud, *Phenomenology*, 176–216.

be that he is using it *rhetorically*. The philosopher Jean-François Courtine was on the mark, therefore, in his surmise that the a priori of phenomenology—its presuppositions about the ‘correlation between experienced object and manners of givenness’—is put into question if the ‘givenness’ or *Gegebenheit* of religious phenomena can be shown to intersect with the *Gegebenheit* of non-religious phenomena.<sup>56</sup>

In the debate, Derrida argued that within the context of Husserl’s philosophy as a whole, those passages in Husserl to which Marion referred in his argument could not be expanded in accordance with Marion’s own ‘extraordinary extension’ of *Gegebenheit* without doing violence to the phenomenological method itself.<sup>57</sup> Derrida argued that Marion’s wish to preserve a real link between the phenomenal structure of the ‘gift’ in the economic order (i.e. as involving giver and recipient as well as the gift itself) with the ‘givenness’ of what simply is, led to a contradiction. Marion’s argument was of course a very subtle one. He argued that the ‘givenness’ of phenomenality itself (or what is) need not turn us directly to a Creator God, but that if only one element in the triad of the phenomenal structure of the ‘gift’ was present (giver, gift, and recipient of the gift), then the others could be inferred. Moreover, Marion argued that there is a specific ‘intuition of excess’, where the latter term is the incapacity of concepts to disclose the object or what is. This excess, of something beyond concepts and thus beyond presence, is thus only known through the phenomenal, as what is excessive to it, but still it is ‘intuited’ as such. It is the ‘saturated phenomena’ of religion, and specifically the Eucharist, which are the disclosive phenomenal sites at which this ‘excess’ can be communicated to the human ‘intuition’.<sup>58</sup>

Against this view, Derrida maintained the ultimate primacy of *khôra*, which is to say the language of a fundamentally neutral ‘place’ in which phenomenality comes about and in which *Gegebenheit* in its neutral, Husserlian form is to be located.<sup>59</sup> In particular, he is critical of Marion’s use of the ‘intuition of excess’ in the sense that intuition in phenomenology has a precise meaning and can only be the intuition of an object (i.e. something phenomenal). If

<sup>56</sup> Janicaud, *Phenomenology*, 121–6.

<sup>57</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 67.

<sup>58</sup> See Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002). Marion summarizes his views on the Eucharist in ‘The Saturated Phenomenon’, in Janicaud, *Phenomenology*, 176–216.

<sup>59</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 73–7. Derrida understands *khôra* as that which does not reveal itself but remains possibility within the phenomenal. He is referring here to space and time itself as the matrix of the possibility of emergence as phenomenon. This is not the transcendence of phenomenality as such (which Marion has in mind as the disclosure of its ground in ‘giftedness’) but rather the transcendence of particular phenomena by phenomenality itself. It is, therefore, an ‘excess’ that is within phenomenality and not beyond it. Derrida tells us that for him the question remains unresolved of whether his own thinking of the *khôra* results from the influence of Judaeo-Christian traditions of revelation or not (Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 73).

excess is excess over and beyond the object (and not itself spatio-temporal), then 'intuition' cannot appropriately be used. Derrida sees Marion's position as compromised in that he wishes both to hold to the 'givenness' of the phenomenological method as a form of universal reason, while also holding to 'gift' as a distinctively religious and revelatory term. He points out that when Marion makes 'gift' or 'givenness' in his specifically religious sense the object of neutral or phenomenological 'intuition', then Marion is effectively arguing that this religious 'givenness' can itself be recognized as such from within ordinary, which is to say, phenomenological or non-religious reasoning. The implication in Derrida's argument is that had Husserl used some word other than *Gegebenheit* or 'givenness' for the neutrality of the phenomenological method, then Marion would not have found himself able, through a process of interpretation, to bridge the gap between 'gift' as religious thinking on the one hand, and the neutral being of things, as accessible to philosophy, on the other.

Derrida strongly objects to Marion's insistence that this 'excess beyond conceptuality', which is generated by the 'saturated phenomenon', can fall within the phenomenological at all; he points out, at the same time, that it is not the case that he disagrees with Marion's embrace of 'the gift' as such. Indeed he reminds his audience of the importance of this theme in his own work.<sup>60</sup> Derrida lays out his wish to preserve the gift and indeed human otherness precisely as something that *cannot be contained within the phenomenal*. With a reference to Husserl's 'appresentation', in which the phenomenological method is applied to the existence of other human beings with considerable difficulty, he tells us that he sees 'gift', like 'otherness', from a philosophical or phenomenological point of view as 'impossibilities' but impossibilities which are nevertheless there and which need to be thought and which indeed we *desire* to think.<sup>61</sup> Ultimately, for Derrida, the sole imprint of revelation which is authentically retrievable by the phenomenological method is desire for transcendence or, as he puts it in *Sauf le nom*, desire for the N/name.<sup>62</sup>

We can summarize the debate in the following way. Marion wants to affirm that the religious experience of the world as 'excess' and divine gift falls legitimately within the phenomenological method. Derrida, who himself is a pupil of Husserl's philosophy, points out to Marion that in using the term 'intuition' about an excess, he is in effect breaking the rules of the phenomenological method. Transcendence may be in the world, for the Christian Marion, but it cannot be of the world, since that would make it an object. Since the word 'intuition'—as a precise term of Husserlian phenomenology—can only refer to objects in the world, Marion is committing a category error in using it of an excess which is beyond the object, even if it is, in Marion's view, implied by it.

<sup>60</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 57–61.

<sup>61</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 75–6.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Sauf le nom', in Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 35–85.

Derrida also launches a robust defence of Husserlian ‘givenness’ as a fundamentally neutral term. To read a Christian givenness, suggestive of God and creation, into Husserl’s term is to take liberties with it, according to Derrida. The structure of giver, giving, and gift is an economic structure, and so always within the world. It is relational and so discursive. Husserlian ‘givenness’, on the other hand, is neutral and not at all part of the human world of specific meanings. Marion’s response—to the effect that only one of the triad of giver, gift, and giving need be present (thus avoiding the question of an economic order of exchange and relations)—does not fully address the point. Derrida has identified that what Marion is doing is choosing to interpret Husserlian ‘givenness’ in a particular way through the associations of this particular word. Derrida points out that these associations are only incidental and that a word such as *khôra* (his own borrowing from Plato) says what Husserlian ‘givenness’ says, but without any linguistic associations which might bring it into line with the Christian creation as ‘gift’.

This is a fascinating exchange since it is clear that Derrida is by no means opposed to religion but only to Marion’s use of philosophy to bring religion and religious experience into the domain of Husserlian phenomenology or reason. Derrida has himself written on the subject of the ‘gift’ but believes that we can only speak phenomenologically about the gift when we recognize that it is, from the point of view of Husserlian phenomenology, an impossibility: an impossibility that is nevertheless there and so demands to be thought, impossibly, and also to be *desired*. Through the gift, we desire what we cannot think. Our desire therefore, which is already structured as a religious desire and so as a form of religious subjectivity, is what phenomenology can engage with. But it cannot grasp that to which desire points. The fulfilment of that desire would always be, for Derrida, beyond the grasp of philosophy, where this is being used with full integrity, as Derrida wishes to use it.

The division between Marion and Derrida then lies in the fact that Marion refuses to acknowledge this impossibility to think what we may desire. He wants to affirm that *revelation* can appear within reason, as an excess or transcendence. For Derrida, only the self who desires God can appear in reason and not God himself, who as non-object always escapes and always will escape phenomenological categories. While Derrida speaks of transcendence in terms of disappearance and absence, Marion speaks of revelation as that which can appear phenomenologically since, when all is said and done, it presents to what he wants to call Husserlian ‘intuition’. But this is a use of the term which, as Derrida carefully points out, is in fact at odds with and indeed irreconcilable with Husserl’s own usage.

On Marion’s own account, he uses the word ‘intuition’ for our perception of the excess or transcendence of the saturated phenomenon because he wishes to find a place for religious experience in the common experience of humanity, which phenomenology takes as its concern. This is the deeply Christian

instinct that religious experience must have fundamental meaning, and not only second-order or 'cultural' meaning. But there are shades here of Jacobi. In contrast with Levinas therefore, Marion wants to argue that the religious does not break the phenomenal. Rather, it emerges from within it, as an 'excess' or point of saturation: as a transcendence which is precisely *within the phenomenal*. Marion's use of the term 'intuition', however challenging, is a clear statement of his commitment not to allow the phenomenal to be purely 'a point of departure' for religious transcendence, as Levinas has it, but rather to keep transcendence within the phenomenal, as 'transfiguration'. In defence of his position, and in response to Derrida's own personal openness concerning his deepest motivations as a thinker, Marion refers to the religious phenomena of Eucharist and Transfiguration, with the plea that these should be taken seriously as lying within the realm of authentic human experience.<sup>63</sup> This determination to keep transcendence within the phenomenal appropriately reflects Marion's commitment to the incarnational character of orthodox Christian belief.

### The Pathos of Phenomenology

To a surprising degree, Marion and Derrida are united in their concern with the question of how Abrahamic revelation can be thought. How is it to be approached *rationally*? They are divided, however, by the fact that Derrida wants to stress the integrity of phenomenological reason, believing that religious revelation cannot be accommodated rationally in its own terms but can only be traced as a prompting within human subjectivity. But at one point Derrida indicates a new and seemingly quite different trajectory which will in fact be more strongly represented in his later work. He affirms almost in passing the great importance of the Abrahamic religions and, while he is as yet unresolved as to how this is to be approached, he confesses nevertheless that it concerns 'ethics and politics' and a 'place of resistance [which] is also the condition for a universal politics, for the possibility of crossing the borders of our common context—European, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and philosophical'.<sup>64</sup>

Marion's pathos, however, is of a different kind. He wishes to integrate what he feels or indeed knows to have a fundamental and not a derived truth in his own Christian experience. With great openness, he responds to Derrida's critique with the words that there is a genuine *human* experience in Transfiguration and Eucharist. For Marion, to say simply that this experience cannot be thought would be to undermine its integrity as *religious* experience. Marion's yearning, or pathos, is for a way in which he can integrate the

<sup>63</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 68–9.

<sup>64</sup> Caputo and Scanlon, *The Gift*, 76–7.



Transfiguration of Christ and the Eucharist with a robustly phenomenological reasoning. Marion is reluctant to accept what Derrida seems reconciled to. The cause of Marion's pathos can be said to lie in the Husserlian phenomenological method itself, which is cognitive while the Eucharist, for instance, is Spirit-filled and transformational. In taking the Transfiguration as his object, which is a phenomenon given prior to the 'pouring out' of the Spirit, Marion is using a Husserlian analytical method which will always struggle to take account of the transformational nature of the divine disclosure in Jesus Christ. Transfiguration has to be taken together with the resurrection and glorification of Christ, as dynamic transformations, and Eucharist is fundamentally grounded in the transformation of the Eucharistic elements by a living Christ who is himself transformed.

What this deeply interesting exchange between Marion and Derrida further reveals is the extent to which Derrida lacks Marion's apologetical motivations. He sees the limits of the phenomenological method and retains the right to reposition himself with respect to it. At the end of his life, he gathers some of these thoughts and begins to develop the principles he expressed in the debate with Marion, to the effect that freedom, Abrahamic faiths, and politics are at the centre of his concern. In the very late text, *Islam and the West*, Derrida began to put flesh on those ideas and argued for 'a new form of alliance between individuals and peoples in love with justice,' urging—in strikingly non-phenomenological terms—that we should 'always choose life and endlessly assert survival'.<sup>65</sup> It seems that Derrida identifies in the Abrahamic religions (together with the 'Greek' inheritance, also a feature of the ancient world) precisely a combination or non-opposition between 'politics and religion, nature and culture, public and private'.<sup>66</sup> He counters the view that Westernized 'reason' can fill the vacuum that comes from an opposition between these things and argues in contrast for a new encounter between Islam and the West. Above all, Derrida's imagination is captured by the possibility of 'a democracy to come,' based in complex and multilateral forms of dialogue and universalist values of plural civilization. Here Derrida is identifying a human universalism of critical and open democracy which is tied neither to nation state nor to territory or religion.<sup>67</sup> His critique is aimed also principally against what he calls 'scientism,' or the dominance of scientific 'knowledge'. He comments: 'One must be for scientific knowledge, as far as possible, not for scientism. But we must know also that the moment of decision, the moment of opening up, does not come out of knowledge. It is a leap that must be made by each person wherever he or she is and in the unique

<sup>65</sup> Mustapha Chérif, *Islam and the West: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), Kindle edition, 11–12.

<sup>66</sup> Chérif, *Islam and the West*, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Chérif, *Islam and the West*, 42–4.

situation in which he or she happens to be. Between knowledge and responsibility there is an abyss.<sup>68</sup>

How can we capture this transition in late Derrida from a phenomenologically based analytic to one which specifically points to social transformations, linked with the global forms of Abrahamic religions with their emphasis on community and love, in close association with the traditional Western values of political and personal freedom and critique? Or indeed this movement from a perspective which can only recognize in Husserlian 'appresentation' the 'miraculous' character of the presence of the other, to a different perspective which presumes the fundamental primacy of proximity through religion, history and land? Derrida is a thinker in whose long life two ages can seem to coexist. The first is a liberationist, anti-metaphysical, anti-totalitarian cast of thought, whose primary critique is aimed at Heidegger, while the second seems to be a strongly social and political though also universalist frame of thinking which distinctively belongs to the highly pluralistic and globalizing world of today. Something has changed in society, and it is to his credit that Jacques Derrida, whose name is so deeply to be associated with the former age, could name this change as leading finally to a critique of both knowledge and decision: a critique indeed of human judgment and of human personhood 'in the unique situation in which he or she happens to be.'<sup>69</sup>

### Christian Philosophy Today

The primary structure of Christian theology is that of the Creator and the creature, and the nature of their relation as worked out in history. There is a strong case for the view that a Christian philosophy also has to sit within this general framework. It is not difficult to see that there has been a recurrent trend in Christian philosophy or philosophical theology to include the diverse elements of the human within our higher order reflection. In the modern period, we can see this in a particularly clear way for instance in the Catholic insistence on including an 'incarnational' or material element within post-Kantian philosophy or phenomenology, against the background of science, as in the case of Maréchal and Maritain as well as Bergson, and through a Thomist metaphysics as in the case of Edith Stein and Karol Wojtyła. It is characteristic too of the work of Bernard Lonergan, Karl Rahner and, in a different way, Hans Urs von Balthasar. This is a lineage in which there is a concern with human freedom and rich accounts of the human in the face of a deterministic scientism. There is a bold attempt here to hold human transcendence together with our materiality.

<sup>68</sup> Chérif, *Islam and the West*, 73.

<sup>69</sup> Chérif, *Islam and the West*, 73.

There are strong Christian traditions of thought which see the deepening life of the creature before the Creator, through Christian revelation, as involving the greater unity of the self. As we enter more deeply into our own creaturely humanity, we find ourselves before the *unum necessarium* (as Kierkegaard has it<sup>70</sup>). We are integrated within ourselves and united among ourselves in the increase of faith. To this extent, therefore, Alasdair MacIntyre is right when he says that contemporary Christian philosophy needs to focus on ‘what it is to be a human being’.<sup>71</sup> He continues that such an account ‘would present human beings—and not just philosophers—as themselves engaged in trying to give just such an account of themselves, as trying to understand what it is that they are doing in trying to achieve understanding, a kind of understanding that will enable us to distinguish what it is worth caring about a very great deal from what it is worth caring about a good deal less, and both from what it is not worth caring about at all.’ He adds: ‘but it would need to integrate into its detailed treatments of such topics as the limits of scientific explanation, the body-soul-mind relationship, the acquisition of self-knowledge and the overcoming of self-deception, and the social dimensions of human activity and enquiry, insights, analyses and arguments [...]’.<sup>72</sup>

In the contemporary scientific age, such an approach to philosophy will surely have to be grounded in the human act itself, and in the kind of reflexivity within the act that constitutes our deepest freedom as a human freedom of becoming. For us today, the deliberate movement of the act also constitutes a place of intersection between who we are subject *in* the world and who we are as part *of* the world. We cannot finally separate those two moments in terms of material causation and of our capacity to be, at such points in time and space, human material cause for others. The integrity of the act as the fullest form of our human self-expression in history also offers a critical criterion of human life: how do we act, when, and for whom? It offers us a critical vantage point on how and when we reason, ‘in the unique situation in which he or she happens to be’ (as Derrida has it). And so also of how we are present to ourselves, as embodied creatures in the here and now of our encounter with the complex real in our caring for others. This in turn offers us the possibility of reflecting upon how and in which ways we are brought before our own freedom in the moment of acting itself. This may itself prove to be ultimately a social question, since it is in the freedom of our acts that what we do is most infectious and desired by all. We do not control that freedom, though we can destroy it. It is spontaneity itself. This is the luminosity of human intelligence which is always

<sup>70</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, ‘Purity of Heart is to Will one Thing’, in Kierkegaard, *Upbuilding Discourses in Various Spirits*, Kierkegaard’s Writings XV, transl. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>71</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities* (London: Continuum, 2009), 177.

<sup>72</sup> MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 177–8.

more than the materiality we are, and which is itself the permeability and the transformability of the world in us, as we commit to the other in complexity, resilience and joy. In this form of our self-understanding then, Christian philosophy of the mind–body relation, based on the unity of the self in the free, loving act, turns out to be not only a ‘scientific’ philosophy but also a ‘political’ one.

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## Christian Politics

### *Universalism and Communion*

In so far as theology is about personal and social transformation, it must also be political. What is at stake, therefore, in the loving act in the name of Christ is the nature of the society in which we live. There are particular reasons for associating the loving act, in which Christ acts in us through the Holy Spirit, with Christ in his universality and so also with his Lordship and the coming of the Kingdom. Following Hilary of Poitiers, there is in fact a sense in which we can say that in the loving act we ourselves *become* the Kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> This is what we mean by the newness of world which is the approach of New Creation. The encounter with the commissioning and universal Christ marks not just a change in us or a change in the world, but means most fundamentally that we are now in the world in a new way: we are in a new world. It is through the Holy Spirit that our senses become attuned to this newness of world, from which we drawn life and meaning.

It is this newness of world that St Paul brings to expression in the description of his encounter with the commissioning and exalted Christ on the road to Damascus. As we have stressed throughout, this is the fully transformed embodiment of Christ and is, as such, his embodied state also for us. Although what St Paul describes is revelation, we share with him this encounter with Christ according to his universality. And as we suggested at the outset of this book, it may well be that it is under the pressure of pluralism and relativism that Christ according to his universality is coming into theological view again. It may be that it is of this Christ that we have a special need today if our Christian witness in today's globalizing world is to be grounded in its own proper theological integrity. In our world, we can no longer grasp Christ just

<sup>1</sup> Hilary of Poitiers, *De Trinitate*, XI, 39.

in the 'who', but must also turn towards him in the 'where'. We must learn to discern him theologically in new places and ways.

But if the return of the exalted Christ as the 'universal' Christ becomes increasingly important in a globalizing age, what might the political implications of this be? What kind of political theory might St Paul's account of his encounter with the 'universal' Christ on the road to Damascus offer us? It is important that we recognize in the first place just how political St Paul himself believes this encounter to have been and the extent also to which he understands the shape of that new politics to be distinctively one of a new universalism. We are speaking here not only of a particular set of ideas which are traceable in him, but also of the historical realization of these ideas in the contours of his own historical life. We have to recognize also, for instance, that St Paul stands before us, in this narrative, not only as someone who has had a certain experience, and who conceives of the world in a certain way. He is present to us also as someone in whom the transformational power of God in Christ is itself realized and performed. In a brilliant moment of encounter and illumination, St Paul was himself called from violent opposition to the Christian Church to the station or condition of being a core Christian missionary. This is not merely something to be recorded and remembered. It is also a moment in time that is key for our own self-understanding. Whether we see modernity in terms of the rise of Protestantism, as a dialogue between 'Athens and Jerusalem', or indeed as a post-Christian world reflecting a distinctively Western inheritance of 'inwardness', the transformation that St Paul underwent on his way to Damascus is nevertheless a pivotal historical event in the formation of each version of modernity. There has to be a sense, therefore, that the question of the political meaning of St Paul's own vision and life is also a question about who we are today, living as we do in a world that has been profoundly shaped by his own personal, historical life.

## ST PAUL IN THE MODERN PERIOD

We are familiar enough in Christian theology with the revised understanding of our Christian roots in the context of first-century Judaism which has taken place through the Pauline 'new perspective'. At the same time there has never been so much interest in this enigmatic figure from the past among non-religious philosophers as there is today. In the main, he has been identified as someone who is concerned with a certain social and political universalism. This is an appeal which has extended far beyond the Christian constituency, involving both religious and non-religious thinkers.

## Stanislas Breton

This rediscovery of a universalist St Paul began with the publication in 1988 of *A Radical Philosophy of St Paul* by Stanislas Breton (a Passionist Father), who first identified the strangeness of St Paul in philosophical tradition and perceived the extent to which something altogether new emerged in him which has continuing relevance for today.<sup>2</sup> At the centre of Breton's analysis is St Paul's experience of 'world' as 'opening'. As a person who was integrally embedded in three cultures (a Hebrew speaking Jew, from the Greek city of Tarsus, and a Roman citizen), St Paul's historical experience was the overcoming of the limits of all these cultures, or 'territories', through his extensive and open-ended sea-travel.<sup>3</sup> This practice of 'universalism' was grounded in his reception of Christ, and was thus also extended along an infinite horizon as 'cosmic'. Along with this emphasis on 'universalism', Breton also understood St Paul's own conversion to be grounded in a very radical experience of 'contingency' and the 'ontological density of a being of exception'.<sup>4</sup> At the centre of this 'contingency', however, is a 'logic of relation' which transcends the grammar of the first and third person. St Paul's sense of Christ 'could not have been anything but the perseverance within his very flesh of the flash that caused him to fall to the ground on the road to Damascus'.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, St Paul understands that contingency to be itself bound up with a very radical form of freedom.<sup>6</sup> Liberation and freedom are at the centre of Christ's role as 'mediator'.<sup>7</sup> This is not the setting aside of 'contingency' then, but rather the discovery that 'grace' is its 'religious form'.<sup>8</sup>

Breton portrays a St Paul who is 'captured' by freedom, which is paradoxically most intensively to be found in the release from 'slavery' through becoming one with or entering into the free servitude of Christ himself as self-offering for the creation. This is a very different kind of freedom from the freedom of the philosophers, in that it is not presupposed prior to faith as a negotiation with 'reason', but is given in faith: as freedom from law and works. Nor is it, Breton argues, a freedom that can be inserted within a general philosophy of the act, as Thomas Aquinas has it. It is a freedom that has the visible character of 'love' and 'obedience', which 'is less the satisfaction of an order one has been given than a listening to the other and an availability to all without condition'.<sup>9</sup> What Stanislas Breton identifies here then is the outline of a new 'universalist' mode of human existence, which is grounded

<sup>2</sup> Stanislas Breton, *A Radical Philosophy of St Paul*, transl. Joseph N. Balan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 97–9.

<sup>5</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 77.

<sup>7</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 80–95.

<sup>9</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 93–5.

<sup>4</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 77, 45–6.

<sup>6</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 44, 148–9.

<sup>8</sup> Breton, *Radical Philosophy*, 92.

in the sense of a 'second-person' encounter with a human presence who is himself identified with a new conception and experience of what it is to be in the world. St Paul's missionary journeying across the boundaries which divided humanity in his own time—in terms both of the Hebrew-, Greek-, and Latin-speaking worlds, but also in terms of social and economic divisions of slave and freeman—was itself the manifestation and realization of this universalist relation with Christ in concrete and material forms. If we tend to see Christianity today as incurably particularist in its Westernization and, as such, intrinsically part of the pluralist diversity of modern humanity, then at its point of origin, as this is visible in St Paul, it was in effect demonstrably inclusivist and specifically universalist in a way that contested the more hegemonic 'universalism' or 'exclusivism' of Greek-speaking culture, Jewish religious tradition, or the Roman *imperium*.<sup>10</sup>

### Jacob Taubes

We gain further important insights into the inclusivist universalism of St Paul in a second early study of St Paul by the Jewish scholar Jacob Taubes entitled *The Political Theology of Paul* (1993).<sup>11</sup> Taubes is more engaged with the question of Paul's messianism than Breton, and he bases his argument paramountly on Romans. Taubes assumes that the Letter to the Romans is framed in such a way as to contest the sovereignty of Caesar, which is at the centre of the Roman *imperium*. He sees this as an outrightly political letter, therefore, which claims a counter-authority leading to a different kind of sociality from that offered either by the supra-ethnic *imperium* or by the close-knit community of observant Jews.<sup>12</sup> Taubes agrees with Breton here: the notion of world or 'cosmos' is radically refigured in Paul in a way which opens up new 'universalist' spaces to be inhabited and traversed. This new universalism is at the centre of Paul's vision, mission, and life.

At its heart, however, the new universalism is a contestation of 'law' itself, for Taubes. Law—whether Roman or Jewish—epitomizes the *limits* of the universal: it presents a positivism that obstructs the 'logic' of the new times or imminent coming of the Kingdom. In contrast with law, Paul posits a new order of 'faith'. This incorporates elements of law within it, most notably 'obedience', but otherwise signals a far higher degree of integration of love and knowledge, reason and will. Here the extended articulation of precepts of action or 'legal

<sup>10</sup> St Paul does not in effect have the word 'Christian' at all.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, transl. Dana Hollander (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004). Taubes doesn't in fact refer to Breton's previous work.

<sup>12</sup> Bruno Bauer, *Christus und die Caesaren* (Berlin: E. Grosser, 1877) (quoted in Taubes, *Political Theology*, 16, see also 119).



codes' became compressed by the time of Jesus into the privileging of the dual commandment: 'You shall love your Lord with all your strength and your soul and your might' and 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'.<sup>13</sup> Faith as *pistis* is rational but scandalizes discursive reasoning, as it does legalistic reasoning. Taubes describes faith in this sense of radical trust as 'the centre of messianic logic'.<sup>14</sup>

Taubes's reading of Romans offers a powerful account of St Paul as founder of a new people, and therefore as being self-consciously in competition with Moses, the first founder of Israel. The politics of this new universalism is driven by the *pneuma* of the messianic age, transgressing boundaries and combining societies in a new solidarity of faith, which is the Church. This is an embodied reality therefore, one in which—for Taubes—Paul actually comes to contest the transcendence of the dual commandment, with its implicit separation of God and world (and despite the fact that this goes back to Jesus himself), by preferring the single commandment to love our neighbour as ourselves.<sup>15</sup> Taubes takes this as an argument for an immanent framework of messianic expectation, in which 'fleshliness' is being redefined in a way that removes it from any of the possible developments of a Spirit–flesh opposition that we find later, and particularly in modern tradition. This new universalism is one which, for Taubes, finds its fullest expression in the Christian ideal that we should 'love our enemy'.<sup>16</sup> He argues that there is here, for Paul, a transformational, messianic logic of '*pneuma* as a force that transforms a people and transforms a text'.<sup>17</sup>

And it is here that something very specific comes into view in Taubes's reading of Paul. Taubes is concerned throughout to stress the extent to which Paul operates not with a conception of 'deeds' but rather of 'election'. He recalls Paul at Romans 9.14–6 (in which Paul quotes Exod 19): 'What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses: "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion". So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy'.<sup>18</sup> This emphasis upon divine sovereignty further allows Taubes to read Paul as a political figure through the lens of the theorist Carl Schmidt, whose account of 'sovereign power' in the state of exception is critical for understanding the role of the state in the contemporary world.<sup>19</sup> Real political power rests with those who can enforce a 'state of exception' which can suspend law itself, or which can proclaim itself through a radical reshaping of law. This more political reading makes it possible to see Paul as specifically

<sup>13</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 52–3.

<sup>14</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 52–3.

<sup>16</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 45.

<sup>18</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 48–9.

<sup>19</sup> Carl Schmidt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

contesting the primacy of Caesar, and so also challenging the hegemonic 'universalism' of the Roman *imperium* through an emphasis on election rather than deeds.<sup>20</sup> This reading of St Paul, which acknowledges the role of 'sovereign power' as envisaged in Carl Schmidt's theory of the state, has to be an outrightly messianic one. The manifestation of divine power in the present is outrightly futural, and so cannot be accommodated except as eschatological disruption. As such we cannot fail to recall the proximity of Taubes's reading at this point to the thought of the Jewish, Marxist theorist Walter Benjamin, and especially to his 'Theologico-Political Fragment', to which Taubes also dedicates much consideration.<sup>21</sup> Taubes places Benjamin in extreme proximity to Paul's political messianism and argues that we can find in Paul's Letter to the Romans implicitly the same 'world politics as nihilism' that is a central theme in Benjamin's own political writings.<sup>22</sup>

### Summary

Both Breton and Taubes approach St Paul from a religious point of view, but there are also evident differences between them beyond those which we can ordinarily associate with one being a Christian and the other a Jew. Taubes offers an altogether more political reading of St Paul, while the focus for Breton centres on participation of the self in Christ, or Christ's indwelling, through faith. But we also find here extensive convergence. In the first place both stress the central place of freedom in St Paul. This is apparent not only in the 'freedom of faith' but also in the irreducible primacy of election (which Taubes sees as enabling the Pauline vision of the ultimate unity of Jews, Jewish Christians, and Gentile converts, recorded at Gal 3.28<sup>23</sup>). Both place great emphasis upon the 'messianic' or 'revelatory' disclosure of Christ as radically contingent in the sense that this breaks with law, expectation, and systematized reason; even with temporality itself in its ordered sequencing of cause and effect. Drawing upon the thought of Carl Schmitt, Taubes reads the messianic as the 'state of exception', which in juristic terms indicates sovereignty: the sheer contingency of the radical disclosure of the Damascus road (from the human point of view) is itself indicative of the authority of the Creator within the creation. But, as Breton observes, this contingency is for St Paul (and so for us too) also grace which becomes formative of new life. Where Taubes has the edge, however, is in his grasp of just how political the messianic is in the context of St Paul, in the sense that it concerns the formation of a new kind of 'universalist' community,

<sup>20</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 16. On Taubes's contact with Carl Schmidt, see 2–3.

<sup>21</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 70–6.

<sup>22</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 72.

<sup>23</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 81–2.

which is sharply at odds with both traditional Judaism and Roman *imperium*. This is a matter not just of political ideas but, far more fundamentally, concerns the creation of a new society (which Christians think of as the Church). What we see in Taubes's reading is just how visceral this sense of community is in St Paul, since he sees himself as being directly in competition with Moses as 'Father' of Judaism. By placing Moses as 'coming after' Abraham, Paul is able to place himself alongside Moses and so lays claim to be the foundation of a new Israel. The immanence which Taubes notes in St Paul, and of which he strongly approves, is a reflection of this sense of solidarity, which is as transgressive and as 'universalist' as it is also grounded in the 'seed' of Abraham. It is in Taubes too that acute questions of identity arise, in the light of the messianic universalism. What kind of identities are attached to the new universalist political order? Here Taubes coins the phrase 'negative political theology' in order to point to the identity vacuum which attends the new Christian universalism, which is neither 'Jewish' nor 'Roman'.<sup>24</sup>

### Georgio Agamben

Our third thinker to write seminal on St Paul was Georgio Agamben who in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* developed a powerful and influential analytic of the distinction between what he called *bios* (or the organized political life of the 'citizen') and *zōē* (or the 'bare life' of basic human needs, vulnerabilities, and dependencies).<sup>25</sup> The needs of the latter are addressed by the social organization of the former as the person, whose own vulnerability is constituted as 'bare life', takes on the identity and rights of a citizen. At the centre of Agamben's critique is the fact that those human beings who fall outside the domain of *bios*, or who—for whatever reason—are judged not to be protected by a citizen's rights, are stripped of all defence and are rendered infinitely vulnerable before state power or state neglect. Agamben identifies here the same process which Carl Schmitt called the 'state or condition of exception', which refers to the capacity of state powers to suspend the rule of law through legal dispensation. State legality entails the right to suspend the functioning of law, and so casts out those who as 'bare life' are no longer represented within the legal framework. Agamben identifies the concentration camp, which was notoriously set up under a 'state of emergency or exception', as the paradigm case of modern social reality by which the rule of law was

<sup>24</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 121–2. This never quite becomes the critique that Daniel Boyarin levels at St Paul and which is contested by John David Dawson in his *Christian Figural Reading and the Fashioning of Identity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> Georgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

legally suspended with the result that millions of people could be persecuted and killed. Agamben also cites cases of the widespread abuse and neglect of international refugees who are stripped of their legal identity of the *bios* and fall between legislative territories.

In *The Time that Remains*, which is dedicated to Jacob Taubes, Agamben argues for a different kind of 'state of exception' from that which underlies fascism. He argues in particular for a refusal of the triumphal march of progress through a focus upon the victims of the forward march of history, just as 'the angel of history' in Benjamin's text *The Concept of History* walks backwards towards the future, arms outstretched to the victims left behind. Agamben connects Benjamin's 'angelic' 'real state of emergency', which disrupts a linear view of history as all-conquering progress, with the Pauline *kairos*. He argues that messianic time, for Paul, is 'contracted' *chronos*, or 'the short time that remains', and contrasts this with linear time with its dangerous pretensions of power and progress. The messianic in particular conveys the sense of a temporality which is more an 'event' than something which is integrated into a discursive sequence of cause and event. Agamben captures this distinction between *kairos* (messianic time) and *chronos* (ordinary time) very well when he adapts the thinking of Gustave Guillaume in order to argue that the tension between *chronos* (ordinary time) and *kairos* (messianic time) is the result of the fact that the latter is non-representational.<sup>26</sup> It cannot be imaged as time, except indirectly.

Here we are close to the distinction between thinking on the one hand and life on the other: a distinction which is critical for philosophy. Life is always at some level immediate and prior to thinking; thinking always comes after. This is why the concept of 'event' has entered Western philosophy as a term which recognizes this immediacy of experience which always escapes thinking and yet is always a fundamental possibility in human life.<sup>27</sup> The reception of St Paul in contemporary philosophy is in no small degree the identification in his messianic thinking of an alternative conceptual tradition to the one of progress and linearity which has predominated in our Greek and classical inheritance. This is a tradition which precisely identifies and 'experiences' the 'event' as Pauline *kairos* time, in which *chronos* is contracted in such a way as to become a manner of living in the light of the event: messianically in fact. So powerful has representational thinking become in our modern culture, and so all-embracing, that our modern philosophical mind is haunted by the sense that its accomplishments are also nothing other than a sequence of hollow

<sup>26</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), especially 65–7.

<sup>27</sup> For Heidegger on the 'event', see *Contributions to Philosophy: Of the Event*, transl. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2012).

victories. If life lies deeper than thought, thought will always mask it and, in masking life, conceal the very truth which is the condition of its authenticity.

Agamben offers us the intriguing recognition that a different kind of relation between thinking and living is posited in the work of St Paul, which he recognizes in terms analogous to those developed by Benjamin in his writings on history, where elements of a distinctively Jewish experience of time combine with a Marxist revolutionary dialectic. Agamben is more sympathetic to traditional religion than either Alain Badiou or Slavoj Žižek<sup>28</sup> and allows more space to the religious integrity of St Paul in his ‘despolatio Aegyptorium’. Importantly he is more directly focused upon the parameters within which a transformation of the self can take place, through the engagement of radical ethical action. Here we can welcome the possibility of reciprocal learning between Christian theology and contemporary philosophy.

### Alain Badiou

Our final thinker, Alain Badiou, stands within this same conjunction of Marxism (or Maoism in his case), the messianic, and the ‘event’. For Badiou, St Paul is a seminal thinker of the Western tradition who is ‘the poet-thinker of the event’.<sup>29</sup> He understands St Paul’s importance to lie in the secular domain and to be constituted by his response to the ‘event’ as something wholly ‘aleatory’ or contingent, without, however, compromising the ‘theme of freedom’.<sup>30</sup> Badiou separates entirely the religious dimensions of St Paul’s understanding of the ‘event’ from the force of the event itself as this constitutes St Paul in his new, universalist subjectivity. Badiou understands that subjectivity not only to be ‘suspended to an event whose only “proof” lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject’ but also to be essentially ‘without identity’ by which it can be defined and restricted. This is nevertheless a subjectivity that is structured as law, but ‘a law without support’.<sup>31</sup>

Badiou admires St Paul for ‘subtracting truth from the communitarian grasp, be it that of a people, a city, an empire, a territory, or a social class’.<sup>32</sup> He identifies him as a significant counterbalance to what he sees as the corrosive and self-defeating relativism in which universalism and truth are today submerged. In his own time, St Paul challenged the mock universalisms predicated upon the Roman Empire, Roman and Jewish law, the Jewish nation, and

<sup>28</sup> Žižek writes on St Paul in John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 74–99.

<sup>29</sup> Alain Badiou, *St Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 5.

Greek culture. Above all, he understands St Paul's 'subjective' universalism to challenge today the 'monetary abstraction' of our capitalist society, which 'has absolutely no difficulty accommodating the kaleidoscope of communitarianisms'.<sup>33</sup> Badiou sees the 'global logic of capitalism' and the calculation of law with respect to its own particular interests, whether racial, national, or social, as imposing the rule of 'an abstract homogenization' which entirely fails to acknowledge the 'uncountable infinity constituted by a single human life'.<sup>34</sup> He reads this as the human truth of the individual which is a 'truth procedure' which 'interrupts repetition and can, therefore, not be supported by an abstract permanence proper to a unity of the count'. But 'if every truth erupts as singular', then it is also the case that 'its singularity is immediately universalisable' since 'universalizable singularity necessarily breaks with identitarian singularity'.<sup>35</sup> The achievement for St Paul is precisely his 'mobilizing a universal singularity both against the prevailing abstractions (legal then, economic now), and against communitarian or particularist protest'.<sup>36</sup> For Badiou, truth is always singular and so at odds with the repetition of law, just as it is 'diagonal relative to every communitarian subset'.<sup>37</sup> It is entirely 'subjective' and 'testifies to a conviction relative to the event' and is itself 'a process', involving 'conviction', 'love', and 'certainty', rather than 'an illumination'.<sup>38</sup>

## THEOLOGY, POLITICS, AND ST PAUL

As is clear from the above discussions, there is a very deep interest today in the universalist tradition which St Paul can be taken to represent, which preserves particularity but in a way that points to an overcoming of the great human divides: our ethnic, national, and religious identities but also our legal, linguistic, and geographical ones. And living prior to the formation of a properly discernible 'Christian' identity (St Paul is as much the father of this identity as its servant), his universalism is deeply shaped by the particular form of an individual human life. We have to see this widespread interest in St Paul in modern philosophy as a function of our globalizing world, in which powerful collectivism of shared interests and identities are present on the one hand, but also relativism, factionalism, and disassociation. Above all, we inherit a global space which has been thoroughly dominated by Western sciences and technologies which are universalist in their application on the one hand, but also by strongly language- and culture-centred, and so communitarian, understandings of the human on the other. The meanings of the former are extrinsic and universal, whereas the meanings of the latter are intrinsic and point away from the

<sup>33</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 9–10.

<sup>37</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Badiou, *St Paul*, 14–15.

universal. In other words, we tend to understand the world and can make *use* of it in ways that are *objective* and have the same application anywhere, whereas we tend to make *sense* of the world as human beings in ways that are *subjective* whether collectively or individually so, and are therefore irreducibly particular. Here, once again, we can see the influence of a deep-seated dualism. But the *political* effects of this dualism are clear. In today's highly organized, complex, and collectivist society, which is dominated by large-scale movements of capital, it is precisely the human individual in his or her particularity which is put at risk. One of the chief reasons for this is that it has not proved possible to represent him or her *globally*, in his or her own embodied particularity, in ways that can counter the tendency for the individual as 'singularity' to be represented purely statistically and in ways that efface or 'subtract' our human truth as 'an uncountable infinity' (in Badiou's phrase), which it most essentially is.

In a globalizing world of collectivist imagery, massive digital reproduction, and hugely complex forms of organization, communication, and exchange, the representation of the human life in its personal and embodied particularity has become peculiarly difficult. It is in general only as a statistic, an anomaly, or as a figure who inhabits a private, personal, or domestic space, which is not at all a properly social and political one, that the human appears. Representation is power and the power of representation is in the hands of elites who through education and experience, as well as gender and race, are likely to reflect the values of an extrinsic 'observer' self in their judgments. The confident reduction of complexity is a universal human tendency, but those who are most highly tutored in its technology and thinking are likely to be those who are relatively unencumbered in their human commitments. The global space is a *transactional* space, in which through language and communications, through economy and capital, and through technology, human beings pursue common goals and ends, and a common flourishing. But the kind of identity that we associate with the extended global and, above all, its associated reasoning, is very much of a disembodied kind. Knowledge about the world, judgments we make about how we think the world is, as these are embedded in our professional and consumer cultures and in our technologies of everyday life, inevitably place us outside our own here and now, and bring into focus the observer capacities of the human. The computer screen allows us to participate in a whole-scale, global reduction of the complexity of the real in a way that we have to make an effort to recall that we are in the here and now in the first place and have to be constantly reminded by software (which we ignore) that our online transactions are actually real transactions with real people and with legally enforceable parameters.

But our human life in terms of who we want to be, and in terms of the ways in which we shape our life and make it our own, is based not on the 'observer' self but rather upon our 'agent' self, with responsibilities and face-to-face relationships. Our 'agent' self reasons in practical and embodied ways. Here we

come to judgment about what to do in a way that allows something of who we are to be at stake. Within the 'agent' self there is also the possibility of the 'ethical' self, with his or her particular form of 'open' judgment as 'finality of non-resolution.' It is in the more radical self-staking of our 'ethical' self that we take risks for others and build solidarity and community. It is in our 'ethical' self that we experience the possibility of our own authenticity and unity as our subjectivity, with its powers of decision and discernment, comes to be integrated within our embodiment. This integration of who we are as mind and who we are as body is marked by a passage into the awareness and acceptance of our own vulnerability, contingency, and mortality, which only comes about through the recognition and acceptance of the proximity of the other. The substance of human life is somewhat at odds, in the fundamental terms of our mind-body relation and the way that we are in the world as creatures who reason, will, and feel, with the higher level cultural representations of who we are in our practices as we seek to manage the expectations of such higher level cultural representations.

We are not arguing against technology here or against globalization. We are noting that the key failure to find a way of giving global representation to what is most characteristically, organically, and intimately human about us is also a failure of human integration precisely at the point of its most comprehensive social—or global—reproduction and representation. It is difficult not to read Agamben and Badiou as exactly pointing to just such a human deficit in the 'universal' and to see their fascination with St Paul as pointing in some quite unexpected way to the possibility of a different kind of universalism: and a different kind of global representation. But what exactly is the universalism that we can see in St Paul? And what contribution to the formation of a new, 'universalist', political self-understanding can the distinctively theological reading of Pauline sociality make that we have undertaken here?

### A Christian Political Theory of the Universal Self

We have to note first of course the paradox that a Christian reading of St Paul is already particularist today in a way that was not so clearly the case in St Paul's own time. St Paul was still at the point of creating a universalism by himself transgressing the boundaries that divided humanity of the day. We, however, inherit a 'ready-made' universalism, as it were, which is markedly particularist and institutional in its characteristics. In the first place then we need to identify the historical processes, rather than just their products, which come into view for us in the figure of St Paul.

We have stressed throughout that it is the *exalted* Jesus, who St Paul encounters, which means to say Jesus according to his transformed humanity. Jesus was raised by the Father and the Spirit in his total self-offering for us. He lives



then according to the purity of the *humanum* as living act, in which Jesus freely offers his own embodied freedom of life for the sake of the other. In this particular embodied communicative act, it is his own bodily life that becomes both its content and meaning, through being freely offered in a moment of personal decision.<sup>39</sup> What distinguishes this act from all other acts is the Father's will that the whole of the creation should be renewed in the free activity and permeability of this one small part of it: namely in the person of Jesus Christ himself as both body and mind, choosing to act in loving response to the presence of the Father. As a loving act, this free death entailed the total integration of his subjectivity within his mortal embodiment in this free self-offering to the point of death. By the Creator's election, as Father, Son, and Spirit, of the creation itself *in him*, his body becomes the Spirit-filled source-point of New Creation. This now radiates from his body and is communicated in all places, within us and throughout the world, by the life of the Holy Spirit. The role of the Spirit here is transformative: it acts upon materiality in a way that enlivens it and brings it into the service of the Creator. The Holy Spirit acts in and through our bodies, and in the unparalleled complexity of our brains, to shape our human consciousness in the light of the continuing life of Jesus himself, who is now made present to us in and through the Spirit. The same Spirit acts within the material causal flow of the world to bring history itself into the service of the Creator. The loving human act in us, in the name of Christ, marks the point of the greatest integration, therefore, since this is not just the point at which who we are as mind is made one with who we are as matter but the work of the Spirit in us, perfecting our human freedom to act, comes together with the work of the Spirit as providence in the world. By drawing us to become human material cause for the sake of the other, the Spirit integrates us also into the life and body of Christ himself, as raised from the dead and as irreversibly transformed by Father and Spirit. St Paul describes a situation in which we become in him: in a structure of mutual indwelling, as our body follows his, and our understanding is shaped by his understanding. This is the astonishing transformation that is at the heart of Christian Easter belief: that he lives and that the world is changed in him, and that the Spirit communicates this reality to us and conforms us to it.

A Pauline politics is first and foremost a form of communion therefore: it is a way of being in solidarity together, as Church, in the power of the Spirit. A Christian identity remains the overcoming of difference in the light of an ever deeper solidarity and sociality which we can call communion. But this is very evidently a Christian account of things and not a form of universality that most would recognize as such. It leaves us then with a series of questions.

<sup>39</sup> Matt 26.39.

Firstly, what does a Christian political theory look like in practice and, secondly, how does it relate to the secular or non-Christian realm?

## CHRISTIAN POLITICS

For us to enter our own creatureliness when we come into the presence of the Creator through situational encounter in diverse ways with the commissioning Christ is for us to be called into a new unity of body and mind. If Christ is present to us at that moment precisely as one in whom the disjunction between body and mind has been overcome with irreversible implications for the whole of the creation, then the Spirit brings us into conformity with him through inspiring in us, in parallel with and in imitation or following of him, the same integration of who we are as mind and who we are as body. That is a deep integration that can only come about through our capacity to offer our own embodied life (as time and attention) to another. 'Body' in this very deep and hidden sense only comes into our possession as something we offer to another. It is through self-offering that we are most truly in our own here and now and so are—as creature—most in the creation. God wants us to be true to our creatureliness by receiving his creation as we do when we allow ourselves to be placed more deeply within it, through the work of the Spirit and in our following of Jesus which is discipleship.

Where Taubes is exactly right is in his identification that the enactment of love towards another human being necessarily demands my acceptance of my own state of dependency and so of need.<sup>40</sup> Who I am as subject and who I am as body cannot integrate unless I become aware and accepting of my own state of dependency on others, in contingency and vulnerability. In the loving act, I have to recognize my own proximity with others, who are already proximate to me, before I recognize and receive this fact. For my dependency and need reflect the way I am in the world as a mortal and contingent human being, in the causal flow; the loving act is an opportunity to recognize and to affirm my own human truth. Every attempt I make to bring that causal flow under my own control is likely to distance me from life. It is only in my ethical judgments that I embrace life, by embracing the unconditional openness of my reasoning and willing, which follows from being in the world. At this point, a second insight which is critical in Taubes comes to the fore. Taubes quotes St Paul at Romans 8.31–9.5, where he emphasizes the role of divine election in the messianic.<sup>41</sup> It

<sup>40</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 56 (I am translating 'Zugeständnis' here as 'recognition' rather than 'admission': Jacob Taubes, *Die Politische Theologie des Paulus* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993), 78).

<sup>41</sup> Taubes, *Political Theology*, 28–38.

is the power of the Creator God present in hiddenness within the creation that transforms the real. And for St Paul, this is not an abstract God but a visceral one who is himself proximate to us in Jesus Christ and in the other. *Pneuma* is the transformative power of life that enlivens our material life, through act and text (and we might add sacrament). It is not subjectivity that reigns here, but subjectivity is profoundly shaped by the recognition of divine power and election even in the 'thick' density of our own material space and time.

This means that at the heart of St Paul's politics is an immoderate *trust* in space and time as the medium of communication of divine truth. This is a truth too great ever to be grasped, except by living within it. It is a truth that we can experience as something that fills us, but of which we can see no limit. It is this lived experience of truth in the living out of the meaning of discipleship that the ground of a Christian politics of *resilience* is found and of *hope*. In Christian discipleship we freely choose to trust a power that is greater than our own lives, and freely allow ourselves to be shaped by it over time. We do not live politically by our own power but only by the power of the Creator who is so proximately present to us in Jesus Christ. And so we do not, indeed cannot, trust our own power to change by becoming someone new through our acts. But since we only share in his power reversibly (being still subject to space and time), we also know that we can never come into possession of the *irreversible* transformation in Jesus Christ, but are rather possessed by it. His presence in that transformed state must be at the centre of our historical life. We have to say, therefore, that a Christian politics is not only one of resilience and hope, but also of *repentance*. In authentic Christian political life, a power is felt which is not our own power but that of the Creator. For this reason there are always grounds for appropriate collaboration with secular politics where it pulls in the same direction. Christian politics on the ground is not triumphalistic but always a labour and always, with others, a task in the making.

### Politics of Protest

And perhaps for this reason too, a Christian politics always needs to be a politics of protest. That is a theme that begins theologically with the disruptive presence to St Paul of the risen Christ who speaks on behalf of the Church in Damascus. Jesus puts himself bodily 'in the way' of St Paul, disruptively, as living bodies do. Protest begins when we put our own bodies somewhere where others do not want us to be. It is a form of disruption therefore. Protest need not be violent. Indeed in its most powerful forms it is always peaceful, but also disruptive. The removal of unwanted bodies in places they are not supposed to be will often call for state intervention and, at that point, the possibility of violence emerges. Part of the energy of political protest in this disruptive sense

comes from the fact that it can lay bear to public view the nature of 'sovereign power' within the state: the moral character indeed of the state we have built up or which we allow it to be, as a political community. Where Christian protest is disruptive in the sense that Christ disrupts St Paul on the road to Damascus, then it is also a contestation of the ultimacy of any temporal power.

But secondly on the road to Damascus, Jesus speaks on behalf of the Church in Damascus. We can say that he allows their voices to speak through him. A Christian politics of protest must also embody this principle. The Church must always speak in society for those who cannot speak for themselves. This is a fundamental part of our embodiment in Christ: that we speak for the other, or more properly that we allow the marginalized, impoverished, or oppressed to find voice through or in us. We can bring their situation and interests, their need, to the attention of the broader society. Moreover, this must be a 'speaking for' which inclusively addresses the common needs of people, whatever their beliefs. This too needs a certain kind of Christian speaking, but a political 'speaking for' arises from the nature of Jesus' own disruptive body which is wholly inclusive in its universality. This is a function of the Church as compassionate and 'open' society: a communion that turns outward, projecting the solidarity of this new sociality beyond its own specific boundaries. It is in its compassionate, and therefore active commitment to the marginalized, the poor, and dispossessed, that the Church shows that its own identity is grounded properly in communion, and is thus a sharing in the body of Christ, rather than being what it might otherwise be: an ultimately superficial form of ecclesial collectivism.

### Politics of Listening

The exercising of power in the Church, through the different systems of governance in the Churches or even at the level of the individual parish, needs always to be grounded in the proper nature of the Church as 'communion'. In other words, such moments of teaching need to communicate more than just words. They need to communicate also a life-orientation in Jesus Christ: a way of being *in* Christ. Otherwise, this cannot properly be *Christian* communication. The communication of Christian conceptual truth in an alien 'body language' cannot but foster confusion and incomprehension, for though it may give expression to what is formally the case, it will always fail to give expression to how this truth is to be *received* in a life lived and so how it is to become meaningful, as lived faith must always be meaningful. In its internal exercising of power, the Church can communicate the content of faith in a way that accords wholly, partially, or not at all with the *meaning* of faith. The manner of the exercising of this power, as 'body language', can under worst circumstances actually undermine the communication of faith which is integral to Christian culture. It

can set the concepts of faith at odds with their Christian or ecclesial reception, through a refusal or incapacity to perform the Eucharistic hermeneutic of communion in the moment of authoritative communication. The ecclesiality of the Church as universal sign of salvation is always a potential to be actualized in every moment of the exercising of power. This is an argument then for a *listening* Church, which is not the same thing as a 'democratic' Church but points straightforwardly to Church as communion. This is Church as it can give visible expression in and for the world of the 'shared embodiment' that we have with one another through Christ and so also projectively with many others outside our own Christian community. Again it is the process of listening, and of listening to the authentic experience of others, which marks the difference between the Church functioning as a collectivism and functioning as a communion. Leadership also requires such listening in order to maintain the trust of those who are to be led. Leaders must in themselves embody the very principles that they represent. This becomes acutely the case in the Christian Church where Jesus himself is our leader and where Christian leadership must itself be exercised in him as deep and open forms of listening and learning.

### Politics of Giving

At the centre of an analysis of economy and communion has to be the question of how our financial transactions can be made subject to genuine principles of human exchange and value as these are established within healthy communities for the good of all, even within the globalized contexts of political economy in which we have to function today. We can draw an analogy between transactional exchange as economy and the semiotic exchange of language. Money and words are both forms of materiality which are taken to represent something else (each has its own version of an 'exchange value'). Words stand for concepts, or power of communication; money stands for goods or purchasing power. Their transactional character means that they can also both be transformational. Each can become the way in which we continue, or neglect, a relationship. How we use our money and how we use our words can substantially define our relationships, and who we are within the relationship, at the point of their use.

Moreover, just as we can see language as being either material form or abstract system, in the same way we can see economic exchange as the exchange of material goods or as part of an abstracted system of equivalent values. This suggests that the closer economics is to materiality, the more it will reflect productive bodily labour and the more personal it will be in the sense that there will be something of the self at stake in it. Just as language can become a transactional form that reflects attentiveness to the other and self-offering, in the same way economic exchange can take on this form of personal expressivity

and engagement, as in the gratuitousness of the 'gift' for instance, or the free exchange of barter (in which each is free to give or not to give).

The greatest point of approximation of economics to community comes perhaps in the holding of goods in common and the renunciation of private property. This is often not practical in the context of ordinary life, although it is common enough in religious communities and in some degree within families. But a Christian conception of the economics of communion need not exist entirely in separation from the more general economic structures of society. We can see this in the economic principles and practices advocated by Stephano Zamagni and Luigino Bruni as the 'Economy of Communion'. According to this programme, businesses are privately owned but are dedicated to community values, which find expression in a threefold use of profits: distribution to the poor within the local community, resources for developing a 'culture of giving', and re-investment into the business. These point to the principles of trust, systemic giving, and mutual engagement and recognition.<sup>42</sup> Here too the emphasis must be upon inclusivity as building trust through communion and the sharing of goods.

## ST PAUL AND UNIVERSALISM

At the heart of Badiou's critique is his view that the absence of an authentic universalism leaves a vacuum which can only be filled with global capital and competing collectivisms, each trying to gain the upper hand. Our question then is the following: if we find in St Paul a distinctively theological universalism, based upon the exalted Christ who can be everywhere present in his particularity or identifiability, can we then also find in him a universalism which is more than a sophisticated or concealed form of Christian particularism? In other words, can our theology also help us to address Badiou's critique, which is a penetrating, indeed profound, critique of the absence of a global or universal representation of human beings as irreducible particularity or as 'universal singularity' (to use Badiou's term)?

Against the background of a 'second scientific revolution', we have developed a theology of the living Christ as *act* or as one who acts. Jesus is raised in the act of his self-offering, which is the fullest realization of his created

<sup>42</sup> Lorna Gold, *New Financial Horizons: The Emergence of an Economy of Communion* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2010), especially 81–102. See also Luigino Bruni, 'Toward an Economic Rationality "Capable of Communion"', in L. Bruni (ed.), *The Economy of Communion: Toward a Multi-Dimensional Economic Culture* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2002), 41–67, for a discussion of the underlying rationality of the Economy of Communion, reflecting 'universalism', a 'relational dimension', an 'expressive rationality' (of ideal values), and an emphasis on 'reciprocity'.

humanity. He is raised in his greatest obedience to the Father and his greatest integration as creature who is both body and mind. If Christ is raised in his free dying for us, then he is raised too in his own freest act, and the living Christ is present to us in this form or truth of his acting. This in turn grounds the human response of faith as one which is based upon a repeated pattern of such reciprocal acts of self-offering love, by which we are conformed to him through the Spirit and are made one with his intentionality for the world. In this way we become ourselves instruments of his act, as this is elected by God to be the form and truth of his exalted life.

Through a renewed reception of the doctrine of the exalted Christ as the commissioning Christ of history, the incarnation once again becomes historical in the sense of being an unfolding in history (without, however, presupposing change in God), and we can set the incarnation within a more deeply Trinitarian account of God's intervention in history. Specifically, the free and saving death of Christ for us is itself the work of all three divine Persons. It is the point of the greatest unity of the Trinitarian missions in the world, according to the *homoousion*, and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost and New Creation both flow from it. It is precisely in the Trinitarian unity of Christ's saving death that material causation itself, and its fallenness, is reprimed, and the earth made new.

But in a parallel way we can say that the response of the disciple to the divine commissioning through the presence of the exalted Christ in history is also an outrightly Trinitarian event. Here the body of the disciple, which in the loving act in Christ's name becomes itself material cause put into the spiritual service of the divine, is the site of a deeply Trinitarian work in history. The life of the Holy Spirit, the body of the Son, and the majesty of the Father, combine in the transformation of the disciple in the loving act, and so also in the transformation of the world.

What we see here in terms of anthropology, therefore, is a close symmetry between the *humanum* of Jesus himself and the *humanum* of the disciple as one who follows him, within a Trinitarian doctrine of the creation. We can see the structure of the humanity of Christ in the Gospel record, as he receives the power of the Spirit in his life and responds through an effort of the will to the Father's imperative of love. But in the form of his exalted embodiment, as St Paul describes it, his humanity which remains in his identifiability as Jesus, is nevertheless made strange. This body has an unfamiliar 'spiritual' ontology in St Paul's description of it and its effects. But since the *humanum* of Jesus is the ground of the human shape of Christian discipleship, the structure of the *humanum* of Jesus can also perhaps be discerned here, in its *imitatio*. The question for us at this point then is this: can we also identify an account of the human in this reciprocal relation between Lord and servant which does *not* depend upon Trinity and creation for its persuasive power? Can we identify a structure of the human according to its own intrinsic authenticity?

## Creatureliness and Truth

It is in the theological concept of 'creatureliness' that we might find a bridge between a theological and a secular reading of St Paul's universalism. If we think of ourselves as creatures of a Creator God, according to the theological order, then these terms imply that we find ourselves in a world of God's making. The acceptance of this premise (i.e. that there is a God and that God is Creator) has implications for our humanity, which is to say for our own self-understanding as human beings. We can see ourselves as separate from the material world, for instance, surmising that we are called to regency over the created order, and that we are to be good 'stewards' or 'managers' of the creation of which we are a conscious and self-directed part. Or we can hold that we are more fundamentally in the world through our embodied life than we are through our mind alone and that it is the task of human life, therefore, to learn to live in the world as God's creation more deeply and authentically. This carries with it the obligation to live as subject in ways that are more fully integrated with who we are as matter. In this way, we can look to discover our distinctively human freedom more deeply within the material order itself, which is to say more deeply within the causal flow as one thing leads to another. This again is to prioritize the intelligent and deliberate act, when we allow who we are as mind and who we are as matter to come most closely together, in loving responsibility. To act in this way, however, has further obligations with respect to how we can relate to our own contingency, vulnerability, and finally mortality. A subjectivity which is to integrate with embodiment will need to become aware of these basic truths. To allow them space is not to *resolve* them of course. As we have seen, the kind of judgment that comes into play in our acts when, through our ethical commitments, we have to learn to accept the complexity of the real as the place in which we must nevertheless continue to function as reasoning, willing, and feeling beings is itself a 'finality of *non-resolution*.' We have to accept our own truth, without resolving or reducing it.

We can speak of this then in creaturely terms and so theologically. We can say that the right realization of our humanity is indeed the active acceptance of our creatureliness through our ethical acts, when we have to accept our ownmost limits and possibilities as human material cause. Our ethical promptings will then be recognizable as divine command. We can also identify this integration of body and mind in the creature as being dynamic and communicative, and we can argue that the ways in which we share language and goods, as well as beliefs and divine commands, represent the deepening of the Trinitarian missions and are the means by which the communion of the Church is built up, within and beyond its borders. Indeed, we can go further and can understand the presence of Christ among us as being the presence of one in whom mind and body in their creatureliness are so perfectly integrated, and the freedom of



humanity perfectly realized in its permeability to the divine, precisely because God elected the mind and matter of *this* human being to be also Wisdom and world. God chose to act in him, and to do so cosmically. His presence among us, as his body the Church, is the presence at the centre of our community of God's primary, historical, communicative act. We are in him as he is in us.

But we can also speak of this quite differently. Taubes captures this possibility wonderfully well when he summarizes St Paul's theology as simply: 'love is the recognition of my own need'.<sup>43</sup> He glosses this with the words: 'the point in Paul is that even in perfection I am not an I but we are a we' and 'this means: there is need even in perfection itself'.<sup>44</sup> Taubes then draws a comparison with 2 Corinthians 12.10, though only with the phrase 'your power is made perfect in your weakness' (cf. 2 Cor 12.10: 'Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong'). What Taubes grasps here then is love as human authenticity and truth since it is through love that we are obliged to accept our own interdependent embodiment. We are obliged to accept the risk, potential culpability, and our open-ended self-objectification through the deliberate historical act, undertaken for the other whose perspective on life I can only ever construct for myself imprecisely. As Taubes implies, this is not a new state of interdependence but rather the admission or recognition of the state of vulnerability and interdependence which is already the condition of the mortal human being who is obliged to act for the other, out of care for the other. Here, then, it seems we are close to a genuine human universalism based paradoxically in the particularity of the human body (vulnerability is always *my* vulnerability; mortality, *my* mortality; and so forth).

### A Global Representation of Human Particularity

We are nowhere more particular than where we act in a way that recognizes the claim of love upon us, as the realization of our creaturely interdependence. And we are nowhere more socially transformative. The more considered the movement that constitutes the act, and the more it is an expression of who we are as person, in the integrity of our own judgment in the here and now, the more we can say that we are truly *present* in our act. This is a peculiarly historical form of personal presence and it is one too that is always potentially socially transformative since it makes concrete and explicit what is most commonly and universally human about us as persons: our interdependence and our shared vulnerability in the flow of history.

<sup>43</sup> See note 40 above.

<sup>44</sup> This retranslates the original 'Das heisst. Die Bedürftigkeit ist in der Perfektion selber' (Taubes, *Politische Theologie*, 78).

It is in this making present of our truth as embodied, in the deliberate act (which may also be a communicative act through language), that we can grasp the outline of a universal human structure. This resides not in the higher level social and cultural differences which make us irreducibly diverse as a species (always to be defined in opposition to others), but more deeply in the body itself as the medium of our communication. It does not matter in which language we speak: what matters is the extent to which we can bring our human embodiment as the mode of our own historical truth into the communication itself as the medium of communication or the medium of the expression and extension of meaning. It is the medium rather than the message which has the potential to come directly to expression as something which is given or offered, and it is this moment of self-offering within communication and the sharing of meaning which is universally recognizable as the offering of our live embodiment for another. In Chapter 7, we have explored what we understand today about our own fundamental human biology, in the face-to-face, and have identified the same structure of reasoning, willing, and empathetic feeling that accompanies the free, loving act. This allows us to read religious communicative practices, where these are grounded in the loving act of Christian discipleship, and the loving act itself as a free and deliberate mirroring of our basic neurobiology, which may in turn explain why religious communities build such powerful forms of solidarity over time and space, and become effectively world or 'global' forms of life.

### Christianity as Spiritual 'Technology'

But along with the argument that Christianity (presumably together with other world religions) has learned to access our neurobiology culturally in particular ways which allow us to project the intimacy and bonding power of the face-to-face into a universal horizon (in principle, to include everybody), we have also argued that religion and science may not be so far apart with respect to what it is to live in a fine-tuned world. Science observes and analyses the fine-tuning or comprehensibility of the material world; if it could not do so, we could not have science. This shows that our human minds are capable of grasping and reflecting back the fine-tuning of the universe as observer. Why can it not be then that we can also think within the fine-tuning of the universe as agents, if only we learn to access the fine-tuning of the universe within ourselves, namely in the human brain, which has been called 'the most complex system so far encountered anywhere in the universe'?<sup>45</sup> Why should religion, and Christianity perhaps in particular, not be such a form of life which is grounded through asceticism and

<sup>45</sup> Adam Zeman, *Portrait of the Brain* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 1.

practice in just this capacity of the human mind to access fine-tuning from within, as agent, just as we know we can access it from without, as observer?

But we need to point to the criteria of how we might recognize human actions which are 'within' fine-tuning from those who are 'outside' it? Not all that is done in the name of religion is good, and those outside religions (or outside our religion) have the right to know that we will not act *irrationally*. We have been at pains throughout this book to show that Christian acts do not exhibit a reduced or incomplete rationality but can actually be defined in terms of the fullness of their reasoning as we attempt to reason to the very best of our ability, but do so within the overwhelming complexity of the real. This is not 'irrationality'; it is arguably the supreme form of our rationality.

But we have to have criteria by which to judge whether Christianity 'works' or not, and these need to be as objective as we can make them. It is not enough to talk simply about the coming of the 'Kingdom of God' if we want to speak to those far beyond our community. We must find another kind of language.

The language I propose here is that of 'technology'. Technology and science are very closely linked. If the modern age is founded in a scientific revolution, then this came about more through the advent of new technologies than it did through pure scientific advances. It is technology that brings scientific breakthroughs into the realm of our own embodied life. Very few of us can follow the detailed arguments and assessment of data in scientific research papers or the lofty mathematics of ground-breaking papers in physics and astronomy. For some decades now a good deal of resistance and scepticism with respect to science as such has been evident in popular culture, and not just in popular culture. It is difficult not to feel that it is the success of technology which has led to us becoming so quickly a 'scientific' age. It is legitimate then to ask to what extent Christianity is like a 'technology' which evidences to us the viability or authority of the knowledge which informs it?

And, if we take technology to be primarily judged by the extent to which it 'works', the parallel may be a close one. After all, St Paul is an individual who somewhat against the odds sought to change the world in which he lived in a way and to an extent that few others have ever attempted. If we ask ourselves soberly to what extent we think he succeeded in his vision of challenging the great edifices of universalizing law, ethnicity, culture, and *imperium*, we would have to say that his success was extraordinary. It is simply not possible to attribute this to the man himself, except in the smallest possible way. This success can only have flowed from the fact that he lived with the 'grain of the universe', as Stanley Hauerwas has it, or learned to flourish with the 'divine Wisdom', as David Ford has it.<sup>46</sup> He thus played a crucial role in developing a way of life,

<sup>46</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2001); David Ford, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

founded upon the 'event' in Christ, which involved the most basic elements of his humanity coming into a new configuration. This in turn meant that it was something that could be observed and imitated by other human beings. They in turn could pass it on to others, and so again and again, and so also to us. It comes as a 'gift' from the person of Christ himself, as wounded and glorified: a gift in the receiving of which is the commitment to its communication.

# Conclusion

## *The Returning Body*

For all its convictions and certainties, theology still happens in time. In more historical terms we can say that theology always has its own environment: a context in which theologians must make sense of what they do, of the world and the faith of which it is the reflexive expression. This environment is not something we choose for ourselves. It is rather the particular combination of factors in which theology must survive, but over which it has little if any control.

This environment itself changes, sometimes unpredictably so. And when it does, we are left with a host of properties which evolved in order that we should survive in the past as a self-reflexive, self-organizing community of faith in a turbulent and unpredictable world, to which we nevertheless owe profound commitments of love and engagement. The ways in which we make sense of ourselves are historically determined, even though we know that at the centre of our faith is the recognition that what we believe in must itself be timeless and so somehow 'above' history. Christian faith is always firstly a response to a divine rather than a human initiative. At the heart of the profession of our faith is the conviction that in its risen life the *body* of Jesus must be more than historical, where history means only that he lived and died, leaving a memory among his people, the Church. It must also be 'historical' in another sense, as meaning that this has become what the early Church said it was, namely the source of a new history.

During the classical period of Christianity, the Church understood this in terms of Christ's 'heavenly session', whereby the risen Christ sits to the right hand of the Father in heaven. This perfectly matches a particular 'environment' or way of viewing the world which was characteristic of ancient times. Far from being the naïve belief system which we associate today with the imagination of the child, it was in fact a remarkably sophisticated and consistent account of how the world is, based upon the senses or how we perceived the world around us. It was a worldview that had much to do with explaining the movement of the stars and planets at night, which were more dominant in the ancient Middle East and Mediterranean skies than elsewhere (the Egyptian pyramids remind us today of the ancient power of the night sky to shape a whole environment on earth). When he published his revolutionary

new astronomy, which placed the sun and not the earth at the centre of the solar system, Copernicus was said by his protectors to be simply trying to 'save the phenomena' or simply to predict the movements of the heavenly bodies. This was something purely 'theoretical' then. But when the first scientific revolution came of age in Galileo, it did so because, through his new telescopes, it became possible for us actually to see for ourselves how the world really is. Simply seeing is more powerful than any argument. Since no one could 'see' the heavenly Christ through any telescope, it became reasonable to think that this was 'metaphor': at worst error and at best a cultural image for explaining the inexplicable. This 'metaphorization' of the exaltation of Christ took it out of the immediacy of our own spatio-temporal experience and placed it within culture itself. It ceased to be about the mysterious presence of Christ at the heart of our own historical experience, in ourselves and in others: inalienably a part of our own world of space and time. It became now the *image* of a mystery, or indeed a *mysterious* image, perhaps even an eccentric one which came over time to be consigned to the waste bin of our cultural history.

It turned out then that even here, where we conceptualize and imagine the body of Jesus himself, who—as incarnate Lord—is both in and 'above' what we ordinarily mean by history, that we were as Church still part of a particular environment which was inevitably subject to irresistible change. Even our conceptualization of Christ as 'timeless' turned out to be one which was itself 'in time'. The paradox then is that technologies today, whose more remote origins lie in the earlier phase of scientific discovery, are once again allowing us to see the world in a new way. We are growing accustomed to the traces of the Higgs Boson particle seen through the Large Hadron Collider or, more directly and dramatically still, the images of the most ancient beginnings of the universe received through the Hubble and Kepler telescopes.

There is in principle no reason why the discovery that our conceptualization of the risen and living Christ—as seated at the right hand of God in heaven—was itself provisional should have prevented us from developing a new and more up-to-date account of how we can understand what the Christian Church meant by its ancient cosmological formulations. But in practice that did not happen: the challenge of the authority of the new scientific empiricism was simply too great (calling into question the viability of Scripture itself). Only singular theological minds such as that of John Calvin saw that the important thing here was not to allow scientific change to bend or suppress Christian doctrine. Calvin held to the non-negotiability of a living Christ, fully human and fully divine, whose saving flesh we receive in the Eucharist, wherever heaven might now turn out to be. It is only, as we have argued here, with the rise of a second scientific revolution, which is now finally pushing out the dualist and reductionist Newtonianism from the popular mind, that the possibility of a theological reformulation of the meaning of the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ begins to seem both necessary and possible. Other factors

of course are in play here: globalization and pluralism, and the great gulf that at times seems to separate the academy from the real needs of the disciple Church, leading to divisions between practical and systematic theology. In the complexity of our communications and systems, we are also frequently at a loss about what we mean by our human freedom, responsibility, and agency. And just about everywhere there are deep questions about how religions and society should combine.

Theology, and perhaps Christian theology above all, finds itself in a very privileged position at a key juncture in the evolution of our common history. The reason for this is simple. It was the Christian religion in particular (though we must not forget also Judaism) in the Western world, which, of all the world religions, sustained the greatest impact of the advent of modern Western science. Since Christianity—like other world religions—is itself a cosmological thought form, and is constituted in no small degree by religious practices that arose under an ancient cosmology, this impact was not inconsiderable. The very deep changes, which came about over a period of centuries, constitute the modern theological tradition that we inherit today. Our understanding of faith today is very different from that of the medieval peasant, but it is different too from that of the sophisticated scholastic.

It is this constitutive experience of historical and specifically cosmological change, at the very heart of our thinking, which gives Christian theology today such a potentially valuable perspective for humanity. Scientific change, communicated in radically new technologies, is the dominant characteristic of modern Western culture, and modern Western technological culture is at the core of our contemporary global community. Whatever dramatic shifts in world economic power are on the horizon, such technologies are generally new for the non-Western world. It is in our Western historical culture that the best resources lie for *understanding* global change therefore, driven as it is by a new technological and scientific worldview, where we can work productively with non-Western partners.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, if Enlightenment means anything, it must also contain within itself the human capacity for self-understanding *in time*. If the dramatic advent of the scientific age in the early modern period seemed simply to be the correction of ancient error by modern truth, we now know that it was not so simple. The ‘modern truth’ turned out to be incomplete too, and in some ways the ancient model, with its insistence on the integration of the mind and body, body and world, was closer to what for us is now the authoritative account. We cannot simply regard our own second scientific revolution today as being the replacement of error with truth: we have to see it rather in evolutionary

<sup>1</sup> Yang Huilin, ‘Scriptural Reasoning and the Hermeneutical Circle’, *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture* 30 (December 2013); Oliver Davies, ‘China and the West: Encounter, Theology and the Hermeneutics of History’, *Journal for the Study of Christian Culture* 30 (December 2013).

terms. As creatures who are both matter and mind, body and subjectivity, we are also inevitably historical animals in a very special sense, since what we think matter is (and this changes over time) actually determines who we are, and how we are self-aware as embodied subject in a material world. In times of change, there can be no more valuable self-understanding than our own self-understanding as historical therefore: or how as human beings we are *in* history.

It turns out then that the re-reception of the doctrine of the exaltation of Christ, which is to say of his living humanity, may be closely bound in with an evolution in our own self-understanding as human beings. This would seem to be as it should be. We are nevertheless left with the question that appears as the title of this Conclusion: why is the exalted body of Jesus 'returning'? We have been guided throughout this book by the 'where' question: where is Jesus Christ in the crowded spaces of our turbulent world? This is a question which itself constitutes an orientation and reorientation towards the world in a certain way. Its value is in the asking, and its answering is always in a fullness that prevents closure and the following curving back upon the subject which has been so deep seated in our modern theological culture and life. It is not the subject that is finally the meaning of the question, but Christ himself who lays claim to the subject in ways that fulfil us precisely as creature: as God's creation, made for him, and for the reception of his living, commissioning life.

To ask the question 'why is the exalted body of Christ returning' then is not to pose a question about ourselves but rather about him. This is not just another mode of enquiry. It is rather the fundamental recognition that history itself, for the Christian view, must itself be in him. Christ himself, living and exalted, must be the real meaning of history: its certainty and depth, its promise and fulfilment. We can better understand today that he calls us to himself not just in history but also *through* history. More deeply than 'world', history is to name the place of causation and where we too can become human material cause for another. It is in our enacted love that he comes to meet us, one whose own act is saving; as one who goes before.





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