

# Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal

Volume 3.3  
Autumn 2019  
ISSN 2399-8989

## Article

*Silence, Leadership and Service: A Medieval Premonstratensian Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue*

WILLIAM HYLAND 4

## Review Essays of *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*

*Truth and the Church in a Secular Age: A Reflective Review*

ANN LOADES 15

*Half-Objections and Remarks*

JEAN-YVES LACOSTE 25

*Truth*

ALISTAIR MASON 36

## Book Reviews

YAZID SAID and LEJLA DEMIRI, eds. *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Encounters through A Common Word*

Reviewed by NICHOLAS TAYLOR 41

JOSEPH VERHEYDEN and JOHN S. KLOPPENBORG, eds. *The Gospels and Their Stories in Anthropological Perspective*

Reviewed by NICHOLAS TAYLOR 43

FRANCIS MINAY. *A Summoning Half-Sensed: Poems*

Reviewed by BRIAN SMITH 44

FRANCES WARD. *Full of Character: A Christian Approach to Education for the Digital Age*

Reviewed by DAVID JASPER 45

KATHLEEN LYONS. *Mysticism and Narcissism: A Personal Reflection on Changes in Theology during My Life as a Cenacle Nun*

Reviewed by REUBEN PRESTON 47

KAREN O'DONNELL. *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary, and the Body in Trauma Theology*

Reviewed by ARMOND LÉON VAN OMMEN 50

### A special request regarding the late Professor Donald M. MacKinnon

Dr André Muller, who is working on an intellectual biography of Professor Donald M. MacKinnon (1913–94), would be very interested to hear from anyone who knew the Scottish philosophical theologian, or heard him lecture or preach, or corresponded with him, or has any information about him.

Dr Muller can be contacted via email ([mulan398@gmail.co.nz](mailto:mulan398@gmail.co.nz)) or by post (14a Arnot Ave, Clouston Park, Upper Hutt, 5018, New Zealand).

### **Enquiries**

Enquires to the Revd Dr Michael Hull  
Scottish Episcopal Institute  
21 Grosvenor Crescent  
Edinburgh EH12 5EE  
Scotland-UK  
0131 225 6357  
dos@scotland.anglican.org

### **Disclaimer**

The opinions, beliefs and viewpoints expressed by the authors in the *Scottish Episcopal Institute Journal* do not necessarily reflect the opinions, beliefs and viewpoints of the Scottish Episcopal Church, the General Synod of the Scottish Episcopal Church or the Scottish Episcopal Institute.

### **Copyright**

The author of each article published here owns his or her own words. The articles in the *Scottish Episcopal Journal* may be freely redistributed in other media and non-commercial publications as long as the article is not abridged, edited or altered in any way without the express consent of the author. A redistributed article may not be sold for profit or included in another medium or publication that is sold for profit without the express consent of the author. The articles in the *Scottish Episcopal Journal* may be included in commercial publication or other media only if prior consent for republication is received from the author. The author may request compensation for republication for commercial use.

Revised Friday 27 September 2019

# Silence, Leadership and Service: A Medieval Premonstratensian Contribution to Interreligious Dialogue<sup>1</sup>

WILLIAM HYLAND

Lecturer in Church History (University of St Andrews)

The Christian middle ages are often portrayed as a time of interreligious conflict and religious intolerance, marked by crusades, inquisitions, and the like. Without glossing over that, it is also often recognized, at least in scholarly circles, as a time of substantive exchange between Christian, Muslim and Jewish intellectuals, sometimes in person, for example in Spain, Sicily and the Holy Land, but more often through the exchange of books and ideas. This led in turn to figures such as Thomas Aquinas becoming involved in a type of dialogue with figures such as Maimonides, Avicenna and Averroes. But parallel to this intellectual interchange, the Christian middle ages were most of all a time for intense spirituality, particularly in monastic circles, where the articulation of leadership models in monastic rules, such as those of St Benedict and St Augustine, are still quite relevant today, and I will argue can play an important part in interreligious dialogue. This article will concern a twelfth century religious order, the Premonstratensians, or Norbertines, who were regular canons, that is religious who lived in community according to the ancient Rule of Saint Augustine but were more pastoral and outward looking than many of the monks had been at that time. One Premonstratensian, Anselm of Havelberg, explicitly developed ideas on ecumenical dialogue, and we will see how these, when combined with the Premonstratensian spirituality<sup>2</sup> of silence, edification and mutual service, can provide a model for those involved in interreligious dialogue today.

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is a version of a talk given at the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics Conference: 'Silence, Texts and Service: Towards a Christian, Hindu and Buddhist Dialogue', 24 September 2016, University of St Andrews.

<sup>2</sup> Essential studies of early Premonstratensian spirituality include Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century', in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 22–58; Theodore J. Antry, O. Praem. and Carol Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2007), pp. 1–28; Bernard Ardura, *The Order of Prémontré: History and Spirituality*, trans. by Edward Hagman (De Pere, WI:

Among the early disciples of Norbert of Xanten,<sup>3</sup> the founder of the Premonstratensians, was a theologian named Anselm. We know almost nothing of his early life but do know that he studied theology at Liege and, at some point, he met Norbert and became for the rest of Norbert's life one of his closest followers. In 1129 Anselm was appointed to the frontier bishopric of Havelberg in eastern Germany. During Norbert's lifetime, particularly after he was made Archbishop of Magdeburg, Anselm assisted him in his role as advisor to Emperor Lothair III. After Norbert's death in 1134, Anselm continued to serve Lothair as an advisor, and in 1136 he led a delegation to Constantinople to cement an alliance with the Byzantine emperor. While there Anselm engaged in discussions with Greek theologians, in particular a bishop named Nicetas, on some of the issues which continued to divide the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Anselm would write about these discussions later in his life. Under Emperor Frederick Barbarossa Anselm helped mediate the quarrel and arrange a treaty between the Pope and Frederick. Anselm travelled to Constantinople again as part of a German embassy, and was rewarded by being made Archbishop of Ravenna, a suitable city given his career as a diplomat and ecumenist, surrounded by the great Byzantine churches of the sixth century. He died in 1158.<sup>4</sup>

As bishop and advisor to an emperor, Anselm clearly emulated Norbert. Anselm saw Norbert not only as holy but also as a nuanced ecclesiastical statesman, who tried to keep the delicate equilibrium between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor which had emerged after decades of struggle for power over the Church. As an advisor to both pope and emperor, Norbert had walked a fine line to preserve concord despite the efforts of those on both sides who would have liked to have undermined this fragile consensus. In all of his activities Anselm took Norbert as the model of how to combine contemplation with service to the Church. Norbert's combination of the contemplative and active lives was a marked feature of the new orders of the twelfth century, of which his own Premonstratensians were an important example. Against the attacks of some conservatives who criticized

---

Paisa Publishing, 1995); Francois Petit, *The Spirituality of the Premonstratensians: The Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, trans. by Victor Szczurek (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press and Cistercian Publications, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> For a recent biography of St Norbert, see Thomas Hangrätinger, O. Praem, *Der heilige Norbert, Erzbischof und Ordengründer* (Magdeburg: Norbertus Verlag, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> A detailed overview of Anselm's life and career is provided by Jay T. Lees, *Anselm of Havelberg: Deeds Into Words in the Twelfth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

the way of life of new orders such as the Premonstratensians, Anselm composed a work known as the *Apologetic Letter*, in which he argued for the usefulness, dignity and ancient origins of the way of life of canons regular. Anselm argued that new forms of religious life are not necessarily bad for being new, just as older things are not necessarily good because they are old. As he put it:

For everything old was new at some time, and therefore is neither more or less contemptible because it was new or is new. Nor is something more or less acceptable because it is or will be old, but rather it should be acceptable to all good men because it is good and useful whether it is old or new. For there are ancient goods and new goods, ancient evils and new evils – and surely if the antiquity or novelty of evils does not deprive them of force, neither should the antiquity or novelty of good things bring them dignity.<sup>5</sup>

This idea that diversity in the life of the church could be a positive thing was developed in Anselm's book known as the *Anticimenon*, or *Controversies*.<sup>6</sup> It is due to this work that Anselm has been seen as an 'ecumenist';<sup>7</sup> not only did he wish to further understanding between groups within the Roman Catholic Church, as Norbert did, but also between the recently-estranged Catholic and Orthodox churches (from now on to be referred to as the Latins and Greeks). Anselm says he wrote this work at the request of Pope Eugenius III and his own confrères, who were asking him to explain why there was a growing variety of approaches to religious life within the Latin church, and also why there were even more differences between the Latin and Greek churches.<sup>8</sup> The work has three parts: the first a sophisticated treatment of the theology and meaning of Christian history,

---

<sup>5</sup> Translated in Theodore Antry, O. Praem., Andrew Ciferni and Carol Neel, *Norbert and Early Norbertine Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> For a translation, introduction and analysis, with excellent bibliography, see Anselm of Havelberg, *Anticimenon: On the Unity of the Faith and the Controversies with the Greeks*, trans. by Ambrose Criste, O. Praem. and Carol Neel, *Premonstratensian Texts and Studies*, 1/Cistercian Studies 232 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> For example, G. R. Evans, 'Unity and Diversity: Anselm of Havelberg as Ecumenist', in *Analecta Praemonstratensia*, 67 (1991), 42–52.

<sup>8</sup> *Anticimenon*, pp. 43–46.

while the second and third recount debates Anselm had with a Greek theologian in Constantinople.

The first part sets the tone for the debates with the Greeks by discussing the way the living power of the Holy Spirit acts in history. Why, he tells us people are asking, are there so many new things in the Church, like new religious orders? Does this mean the Catholic faith itself is changing? Anselm describes historical development from Abel to the Second Coming of Christ. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Anselm saw development since the time of Christ as positive. Beginning with the earliest Old Testament stories, Anselm shows how it is understandable, and even to be expected, that there would be a diversity of religious life as an expression of the one faith, and these diverse expressions are to be expected and not feared. From its beginnings, the Church began to spread throughout and beyond the Roman world, and expressions of Christian faith and experience were by no means uniform and identical.

The Holy Spirit remains as a teacher in the Church, continuously renewing the Church as it spreads and exists in time. For Anselm, the diverse cultural expressions of Christian experience must stay rooted in the teachings of Christ. Jesus is the unchanging ideal and model we seek. The faithful change in various ways, but the model does not. In order to maintain this fidelity to Christ, there are changes which must take place over time. The Church changes as it grows; yet that growth is contained within the unchanging Christ who is beginning and end. The Church goes through times when it must clarify teachings because of disagreements between theologians on various issues which had not been discussed in earlier ages. The Church also develops new cultural expressions due to changing circumstances, such as persecution and new peoples receiving the faith. One can think of the Church as moving both forward and in a kind of circle: forward by learning from times of persecution and theological conflict, and also in a circle by going from peace through disruption and back to peace.

Anselm sees the Church moving toward Christ through an ever-changing variety of expressions of faith. As the centuries have progressed since the coming of Christ, Christians worship one God in one faith, even when they do so in different modes of life, such as lay people, monks or canons regular, or with varieties of ritual which have developed over time in different places. History shows that the Christian faith was gradually established throughout the world, and that to regulate the life of the Church in different places, different rules and precepts came into being. This is not a sign of decay, but instead an indication of the richness of the diversity of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church. This is not a relativizing of doctrine, as Anselm believes that the Catholic faith must be one and cannot be

compromised by different customs. But once this assent on the faith is secure, pluriformity is a positive and expected sign of vitality.<sup>9</sup>

Anselm extends his image of the inspiring varieties of religious orders to include the Christian East, pointing out that the Eastern churches are not all the same in every detail. The Armenians and Syrians in turn differ from the Greeks and each other but are similarly united in the same Catholic faith. He describes Constantinople not as a city of heterodoxy, but of religious devotion and variety of Christian ways of living. The Greeks thus share both the common ground of the one faith and a variety of religious life with the West. If Latin Christians could grasp this, then many of the differences between east and west could not only be accepted but praised. The Holy Spirit is present in the church everywhere, and one of the ways the Holy Spirit enkindles enthusiasm in the church and brings about renewal in different times and places is by inspiring new forms of religious expression:

So by God's wondrous design, since from generation to generation new forms of religious life always rise, the youth of the church renews itself like the eagle's, so that it may fly the higher in contemplation, with the strength to gaze directly, unblinded, at the rays of the true sun.<sup>10</sup>

Anselm takes his readers from the beginning to the end of history, showing them that, through his revelations, God fashions them in His own image but that they are responsible for fashioning themselves in that image as well, animated by a love of each other that does not merely tolerate diversity but glories in it. He now moves to the second part of the *Anticimenon*, the debates, having asserted that Greeks and Latins have come out of and still hold the same faith in the same Christ.

While debates between Anselm and Nicetas did take place, it is not a simple transcription. Rather, Anselm the writer has crafted his presentation to point out to his Latin audience the appropriate way for Latins and Greeks to approach one another as belonging to the same family of faith. This format allows Anselm to put provocative statements in the mouth of Nicetas, subtle criticisms of some Latin positions which would otherwise be awkward for him to do.

When questioning how the Greeks could disagree with the Latins, Anselm describes them as 'very wise in the knowledge of the Scriptures'.<sup>11</sup> He also mentions thousands of Greek saints who suffered for Christ, and

---

<sup>9</sup> See Lees, *Anselm of Havelberg*, pp. 190–215.

<sup>10</sup> *Anticimenon*, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.



whose feasts are solemnly celebrated. How can Greeks be wrong on fundamental matters of the faith with so many saints and even popes in their illustrious history? Anselm acknowledges that there are differences in teaching and liturgy between the Greeks and the Latins. He also says, significantly, that there are misconceptions among the Latins about the practices and beliefs of the Greeks, with the language difference being an important barrier to mutual understanding, leading one side to attribute beliefs to the other which they really do not hold.

Anselm emphasizes that he came to the discussion not to argue, but to discover with Nicetas the common faith he believes they both share. He wants to see Latin and Greek walk the way of charity, not trying to score points in debate, but humbly seeking truth together. This is becoming harder to do. It is not just a question of language difficulty between Latin and Greek, but also mutual misunderstanding and mistrust. Both sides must fully explain what they mean by certain words, not just assuming they already know, and investigate the real meanings behind the words. In the two debates which follow, about various doctrinal and ritual points which apparently divide the two sides, Anselm the writer will shape his discussion with Nicetas to create a sense of alternating confrontation followed by a commitment to mutual understanding and reconciliation. Anselm will usually be portrayed as the 'heavy', the one who is arrogant at first, but then comes to be more respectful of Greek views. The debaters emerge as peacemakers: Anselm presents the possibility not only that misunderstandings rather than differences may be at the heart of the divisions in Christendom, but that it is the Latins – supposedly the side he will defend – who have often misunderstood the Greeks.

Anselm is making the point that when Greeks and Latins talk to each other they often become exasperated; this must be overcome. Otherwise, the attempt to understand gives way to rancorous accusations.<sup>12</sup> Nicetas asserts that the real issue is Latin arrogance; the emphasis is on the behaviour of the Latins and how they present their arguments, rather than on the contents of the arguments. The sense is that a proper presentation and attitude will go a long way toward resolving conflicts. Both sides move toward peace. Anselm significantly cites many Greek Fathers, and Nicetas significantly is pleased that Anselm cites Greek Fathers, and wants to know if he respects them and holds them to be authoritative: Anselm says:

I do not exclude, disdain, reject or judge worthy of rejection any gift of the Holy Spirit given to any faithful Christian, whether Greek, Latin, or any other race. On the contrary, I receive and

---

<sup>12</sup> Lees, *op. cit.*, pp. 243–45.

embrace with an open mind every man who speaks and writes what is true and consonant with apostolic teaching.<sup>13</sup>

The second debate ostensibly treats differences in sacramental practice, but the details of these arguments are secondary, however, to the deeper problem concerning the authority by which such disputes should be decided. Nicetas responds that there can be no reconciliation with the Latins if the Pope demands absolute obedience and conformity and argues that venerable tradition and great saints have established eastern customs. Nicetas will honour the Roman church, but it does not then mean that all things must be done as Rome does, and followed in common. In Nicetas's speech, Anselm the writer has eloquently presented Greek fears and also pointed to common ground on which to fashion a compromise. And, Nicetas asserts, even if this practice was not uniform, significantly, '[T]hey esteemed and encouraged each other mutually in peace and charity. Making no judgement against each other, they celebrated councils together as opportunities arose.'<sup>14</sup>

What about the role of the Pope in a future council? Nicetas says the Pope must not rule by *fiat*, but rather be a bishop among bishops, whose ability to settle divisive issues depends on the combination of authority and personal charisma that moves the disputants to look to him for non-partisan judgments. This points to a major issue in all ecumenical dialogue, the establishment of trust. Nicetas says that strife ought to be feared by both sides more than the difference in sacramental practice. Anselm the debater for his part is grateful to have his misconceptions and false ideas about the 'wise Greek people' put to rest. Nicetas responds that truly Latins and Greeks seem to differ not in the great things but in the smallest. The problem in differences of practice is not one of salvation, although differences do lead to misunderstandings. Both disputants together call for a universal council in the right spirit to overcome differences, something possible only if all those attending the Council imitate Jesus, a meeting where arrogance, immaturity, pride and ignorance should have no place.

We know from history that Anselm's advice was not heeded in his lifetime, but this does not take away the achievement of Anselm in this work, or the significance of what he has to say to divided Christians today, and dialogue between faith traditions. Like his mentor Norbert, Anselm embraced the role of a peacemaker. He hoped to steer conflicting forces, both within the Latin Church and between Latins and Greeks, from renewed outbreaks of divisive argument. The *Anticimennon* emphasizes that diversity

---

<sup>13</sup> *Anticimennon*, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 188.

is actually a good thing and to be expected, and even more strongly, is the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit in different times and places. Anselm calls for respectful leadership on all sides, giving each other the benefit of the doubt in holding to their traditions and formulations. He also acknowledges that serious scholarship done in charity to reach authentic and mutual comprehension is the way forward. All this calls, fundamentally, for a posture of receptivity, charity and respect.

This attitude was not advanced in a vacuum but is congruous with Anselm's vocation as a Norbertine regular canon, often described by the Latin phrase '*docere verbo et exemplo*', or 'To Teach by Word and Example'. This descriptive phrase goes back to the founding time of the Norbertines in the twelfth century, and was central to the very specific and new way the early canons regular, most prominently among them the Norbertines, described the very purpose and nature of their peculiar way of life, and in doing so differentiated themselves from the older types of monasticism prevalent up until that time. This expression articulated their self-identity and understanding what they meant by it can help us to understand how this Norbertine spirituality and heritage can be useful and beneficial to us to explain the context of Anselm's interreligious dialogue.

The environment of the twelfth century that saw the rise of the Norbertines has long been acknowledged by scholars as a crucial turning point in the history of Christian spirituality. Part of this change involved an emphasis on the humanity of Christ, his sufferings and compassion, and the need for Christians in their prayer life to make an emotional and imaginative connection and empathy with Christ, leading to an imitation of him. Along with this imitation of the compassionate Christ of the gospels came a new emphasis in the life of the clergy and ultimately the laity on responsibility and compassion toward one's neighbour.

The fact that we today take this for granted as an essential feature of Catholic Christianity, as passed on by the friars, Jesuits and the many religious movements, both male and female, which would follow this period, both Catholic and eventually Protestant, shows the depth and effectiveness of this shift. While many scholars had long noted that the new groups of regular canons such as the Norbertines must have played an important role in this new phase of Catholic life, a specific study by the scholar Caroline Walker Bynum some forty years ago took up this topic in detail and with much success.<sup>15</sup> She asked, how were communities of regular canons, including the Norbertines, different than other monastic communities, whether Benedictine, Cistercian or others? How did they articulate a notion of the Christian life, and specifically life in their own communities, in ways

---

<sup>15</sup> Walker Bynum, *op.cit.*

that were different than the monks had up until that time? Bynum asked the question how were these communities different from one another? And when she looked at the writings that monks and canons produced for internal use, formation documents for novices, commentaries on their rules, etc, she found a very important difference in the conceptualization of what community life means, which gave insight into the seismic shift in Catholic spirituality, and one which has much to do with our Norbertine ecumenist.

The canons used the phrase *Teach by word and example*, in different contexts and repeatedly, as the way to express their particular view of the religious life. Central to their view of community life was the concept of *edification*, a word that literally means 'to build up', in this case to strengthen or build up one's neighbour, whether by tending to their physical, spiritual or emotional needs. The canons emphasize that every member of the community, from the abbot down to the newest novice or the lay brothers, is both a teacher and a learner. The monks tended to emphasize that monks are primarily learners. There is a sense articulated among the canons that every member of the community, not just the abbot or even the priests, but everyone, is called upon to edify or build up their fellows by both what they say and what they do. There is an important emphasis on effective speech, and the link between conduct and speech in the process of edifying our neighbors and fellow community members.<sup>16</sup>

It is important, both for historical purposes and even more so for making applications to our own topic, to realize that the canons did not mean to apply this only, or even primarily, to official figures such as abbot or prior, or only to formal teaching moments, such as in the classroom, chapter, the pulpit, or the confessional. They certainly included these, but the concern goes far beyond this, and much deeper. Instead it is meant to refer to all interactions between canons, the day-to-day life together, the hundreds of moments, most of which are quite ordinary and undramatic, which make up life together in any community. The canons see every community member as called upon in every situation to both instruct and be instructed by what we do and what we say. They call for their fellow canons to cultivate an awareness of the effects of their own words and deeds on one another. This will lead to the formation of a very specific type of community within the abbey, and then the canons will carry this same awareness to the laity and others they encounter outside the abbey walls. Having been trained to view community a certain way, the canons then can take this awareness to teach everyone they encounter by word and example, and also to learn from those they encounter.

---

<sup>16</sup> Walker Bynum, *op. cit.*, pp. 43–46.

This assumption, that canons are responsible not only for the state of their own soul, but also for the spiritual progress and well-being of their neighbour, was a very different focus than that found among the monks at that time (let me emphasize that most monastics since have embraced these changes). And whereas monks were concerned to avoid scandalizing their fellows, they articulated more a concern about how their behaviour in the cloister and beyond would appear to God. The canons still discuss this, but as Bynum points out, there is found among the canons a new emphasis in the religious life, and indeed the Christian life, as building up of our neighbour. This was also reflected in how monks and canons of Norbert's time discussed silence and speech, and its place in community life. The monks did not stress edification or instruction by words, more specifically conversation between community members, at all. With regard to silence, canons saw silence as a preparation for fruitful and edifying discourse with other people. In contrast, monastic authors tended to see silence as a good in itself, specifically as preparation for discourse with God. Many monastic authors stressed the negative aspects of speech, something which is an opportunity to sin (gossip, complaining, etc.), and thus should be regulated and kept to a minimum. In other words, keep silent to avoid sin and to better hear God. The canons tended to stress the potential usefulness of speech. While of course acknowledging that silence is essential for discourse with God, the canons stress there is such a thing as harmful silence, which can prevent the wisdom of effective speech. For the canons, edifying speech is a cure for too much silence.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of silence is to ensure that when speech does take place between community members, it will be edifying and useful, and will not be harmful, derogatory and merely self-serving.

It is important to reiterate that this obligation was not restricted to formal moments of teaching, such as a homily during the Liturgy, or an exhortation given to novices by their abbot, or a priest to a penitent in the confessional, or some other such occasion. Instead, this injunction to teach or instruct by word and example was meant to refer to every aspect of community life. It was meant to create a climate of individual responsibility understood in a community context. Thoughtless words and selfish acts were not just bad because God was watching and would punish you and hold you responsible, but rather because they hurt and offended or misled another member of the community and hindered his or her development. And it is not just an avoidance of doing bad and hurtful things which is at the heart of this teaching. Rather, it is having a serious and conscious awareness of the positive value of our good and uplifting words and actions on those around us.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

And in the writings of early canons, they stress that this awareness is important to have in every situation. When meeting in the cloister or walking in a garden, while eating together or in a meeting together, while attending to the sick in the infirmary or praying together in church, canons were called upon to be aware of how our words and actions affect others, whether to avoid hurting them or more positively to bring them strength or joy or consolation. Every interaction is an opportunity for edification, and we are life-long learners and teachers at the same time. Whereas the monks in Norbert's time emphasized that one must shun bad behavior in order not to offend God and give scandal to our neighbour, the canons urge how one must bring your neighbour to do good by your words and examples. The canons took the idea of being a light to others beyond the personal virtue talked about by the monks and gave it a profoundly social context.

Anselm of Havelberg, a disciple of Norbert and an exemplar of this spirit, in his emphasis on the mixed life of action and contemplation, stressed the alternation between study and teaching, silence and words. Silent preparation through contemplation and awareness is necessary before useful and helpful speech and is at the heart of the Christian life.

In conclusion, this Norbertine spirituality combined with the approach toward variety and diversity in the works of the Spirit, provide I believe the foundations for interreligious dialogue. We must undertake together serious scholarly studies on the context and nuances in meaning of words we use to express spiritual realities; we must assume on a deep level that the Holy Spirit dwells and rests upon not just ourselves, but also upon our dialogue partners; we must display in our silence a posture of charity and attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit, speaking to us through others; and when we emerge from this attentive silence, to speak words and undertake actions of charity and edification. And finally, we must strive that our writings and meetings and conferences reflect all of this in our tone and content. Then we can, perhaps, fulfill the promise of the *Anticimenon*, extending it beyond the twelfth-century horizons of Anselm, in the words of Dom Bede Griffiths: 'It is no longer a question of a Christian going about to convert others to the faith, but of each one being ready to listen to the other and so to grow together in mutual understanding.'<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Found at [http://www.azquotes.com/author/5930-Bede\\_Griffiths](http://www.azquotes.com/author/5930-Bede_Griffiths).

## Review Essays of *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*

David Jasper and Jenny Wright curated a number of essays by members of the Doctrine Committee of the Faith and Order Board of the Scottish Episcopal Church as well as some other interested parties on the topic of *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*. The collected essays were printed by SCM Press in Summer 2019 and have earned favourable reviews, including one by Peter Sedgwick in the *Church Times*. The *Journal* is happy to offer three review essays by Ann Loades CBE, Jean-Yves Lacoste and Alistair Mason.

*Truth and the Church in a Secular Age: A Reflective Review*  
ANN LOADES CBE, Professor of Divinity Emerita (University of Durham)  
and Honorary Professor in the School of Divinity (University of St Andrews)

With an 'Introduction' from the editors, and an 'Afterword' from Jochen Schmidt (University of Paderborn with study at the University of Glasgow) both the editors and ten other essayists launch into a discussion of 'the idea of truth', something to be 'pursued, cared for and treasured'. We might well hope that there is more at stake in our lives than truth as 'merely' an 'idea' – and just one among many ideas. We might succinctly as it were paraphrase 'truth' as whatever merits trust, itself in jeopardy in social, political and ecclesial life. ([www.truthproject.org.uk/i-will-be-heard](http://www.truthproject.org.uk/i-will-be-heard)).

In one way or another all the contributors are members of the Scottish Episcopal Church but including only one bishop (retired). They are currently located in and around Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews, but with wide international experience and different disciplines on which to draw as a group. As members of the SEC they may be said to 'punch above their weight' in the sense that the SEC is a minority church in Scotland, and in Anglicanism. A small group may of course be an important catalyst for getting people to think about matters of concern, hopefully those well beyond ecclesial boundaries. To the extent that they identify themselves as 'Anglicans' they of course prompt questions about the extent to which they have been 'indigenized' in Scotland, which may well inhibit Scots and non-Scots alike from paying them much attention. Documents in Scotland requiring 'box-ticking' about Christian allegiance ask for Church of Scotland or 'other' - the category into which the SEC falls. And *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology* has no reference in its index to the SEC, and just one comment on the SEC:

'Nor should we overlook the witness of the small but historical Scottish Episcopal Church to a high liturgical, sacramental and Episcopalian (i.e. episcopal on principle) ecclesiology'.<sup>1</sup> Quite what this amounts to at the present time would require extensive enquiry by someone expert in sociology of religion, not least in the aftermath of the 'Columba Declaration', deemed by those who drafted it to have to do with the relationship between two Churches (of Scotland and of England), as the churches of their respective 'nations'. The latter word is a misleading fiction if ever there was one. So much for 'communion' between members of what is any case now the broken 'Communion' if we are honest. In the meantime, as a relative newcomer to the SEC I can only observe that to find 'Mass' and 'Feria' on a notice board advertising 'services' (rather than unambiguous words of 'welcome') is unhelpful, and the SEC 'signage' of episcopal mitres virtually unintelligible: in Anglicanism such head-dresses adopted in the nineteenth century and nowadays of possible significance only in theatre performance, and like some other items of male attire, unsuitable and unadaptable for women.

Ecclesial fictions, like others, require the critiques of our affairs from members of the much-overlooked SEC, though I suggest that there is a problem common to many of the essays. This arises because of the otherwise admirable inclusion not only of a short selection of 'Further Reading', but the addition of three 'Questions for discussion' relating to each essay. On the one hand this encourages reflection on the essays, but on the other hand the authors referred to in the essays may be completely unfamiliar to many readers and this may inhibit attempts to respond to the questions. There are indications of some fascinating biographical and contextual information available about some of those discussed, which would help to put them in context and show how and why a particular area of reflection mattered to them, and hence, perhaps to those who write about them as well as the readers of the essays.

There are some indications of the possibilities e.g. towards the end of Scott Robertson's illuminating essay on Wittgenstein, on how the latter learned to live with the imperative to stay in silence, and hence his understanding of 'truth' as 'a need of the soul'. To expand a little: 'What we are dealing with is a sense of the inner life and the drive to live fully', the desire to fully engage with the world, 'a sense of engagement which allows the truth to *become* true, however uncomfortable that experience may be.' Via Wittgenstein, Scott Robertson has surely identified a quite fundamental preoccupation for the writers of these essays. In addition, given reference in

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Ecclesiology*, ed. Paul Davis (Oxford: OUP, 2018), p. 253.



another essay to experiences both of the presence of the divine and the devastation of the sense of its loss, some comprehension of the lives of Simone Weil (French and Jewish) and Edith Stein (German Jewish, and a Carmelite religious who died in Auschwitz) together with Wittgenstein, could be recognized as of central importance if we are to secure any understanding of truth as distinct from lies. We may well recall the enthusiasm for National Socialism of some Anglican bishops in the UK if only to avoid such disastrous capitulation to a toxic political and religious culture in our own time.

We might then have more comprehension of John McLuckie's analysis of the interplay of 'Truth and Experience: Prayer and Ascetic Practice' concerned with 'experiential accounts of the spiritual life' as a source for theological reflection across religious traditions. The 'empathy' to which he alerts us from the work of Edith Stein could be enhanced by more biography and could be a rich though at present a much neglected resource for distinguishing between truth and lies, not least in theology and ethics alongside engagement with public life, as Simone Weil most agonizingly knew. Of course, that would require a different book, but the possibility might be kept open, given the glimpses in the essays of Scott Robertson and John McLuckie. And what would be the implication of what they say for the indefensible habit of lying to protect one's institution, or the exercise of hasty, incompetent and peremptory supposed 'justice' amidst the intricacies of what may or may not count for pastoral care? The examples given in Robert Gillies's essay on the pastoral context in which some discrimination of truth from non-truth has to be exercised could no doubt be multiplied, in some cases having light shed on them not by the church but by the media – not always or inevitably any means in the service of 'untruth'. A writer of detective story fiction comparable to P. D. James with sympathetic familiarity of Anglicanism could have a field-day with some of what is now public knowledge of abuses of the vulnerable in a variety of institutions, including the church, supposedly a paradigm institution of care, supposedly that of care for its clergy also.

So we might say that this collection of essays may assume knowledge of intellectual culture which is not familiar to the readers whose attention the authors hope to engage, which would be a state of affairs much to be regretted given the intrinsic interest and importance of that they are hoping to achieve. The avoidance of suffocation if not burial by footnoting has been achieved, but as suggested above, some enlivening information about the authors of sources would be both helpful and interesting. Also, whilst the essayists have had some lively discussion between themselves it would be helpful to know the extent – if any – to which the material has been tried out in potential groups of readers, and how they have got on or are getting on in

responding to the questions. Such discussion in any event could certainly enliven conversation in ecclesial groups during a year-long programme which could become possible, perhaps enjoying the presence of individual essayists on the occasion of discussion of their work. The book could well prove to be a welcome resource in such groups.

Finally, by way of introduction: the editors 'hope to contribute to the creating of an atmosphere of informed discussion and thought, debating out differences in love and charity'. They add that they have not attempted to impose an artificial uniformity on the book, which presumably explains why they have not attempted explicitly to group the essays into sub-sections. However, and this is a serious matter theologically, not one contributor seems to have much explicit sense of how the transcendence, immanence, diversity-in-unity expressed in Trinitarian doctrine might conceivably frame and positively enhance and support their exploration and commendation of 'truth'. If readers can cope with the intellectual culture manifest in the book, has it been assumed that an intelligible Trinitarian framework of thought could not be provided and would not be understood, notwithstanding the explicitly SEC origins of the essays? A member of the Society of Jesus reading this book could both point out the importance of Ignatian Spirituality for insight into the narratives of the Gospels, but also clear and constructive advice about how to pray the *Gloria in Excelsis*, implied even if not explored in Davies's essay on 'Liturgy as a Depository of Truth' to which this review will turn in due course.

Given the likely public appreciation of discussion of the 'science-religion' debate, it might in any case be helpful to some readers to begin with an essay by a distinguished mathematician, Eric Priest's most helpful attention to issues in the relationship of 'Sciences and Truth'. He presents a case for the recognition of the non-negotiable faith of scientists in the intelligibility of the physical universe, the provisionality of results, and the crucial importance of the humility which keeps scientists open to new possibilities. They must remain open to alternative interpretations of observations or experiments, via a very wide range of sciences and scientific methods. It is not intrinsic to the practice of science to deny the existence of 'a religious realm', and in any case, religious beliefs 'may affect the way we think about the implications (often moral) of our work and the ways we try to interact with our colleagues'. Trust in the integrity of other scientists, and 'openness, beauty, wonder, and a sense of community are key aspects that lie at the core of much science.' Sciences and the humanities – including theology – form a 'rainbow tapestry of rich diversity that is united in its search for understanding using a combination of reason and imagination'. We may add that the note of scientific work having 'moral' implications would deserve a book in itself discussing, among other things, not only the

'use' of non-human fellow-creatures, but the uses to which scientific work may be put as e.g. in military hardware, and the impact of decisions about of why funding may or may not be available because there may not be a sufficient commercial 'return', e.g. research into such conditions as cystic fibrosis.

Although the author does not say so, theologians need themselves to become 'critical realists', with much to count as 'revelation' that is as yet simply unknown. Indeed, what Priest may have put his finger on is the sheer difference between those who think (if they do) that resources for discernment are to be found only in the texts and traditions of the past, and those who both value what may be learned from past experience, but who are genuinely open to new knowledge, wheresoever and whatsoever its origins. 'Revelation' can and does mean different things, depending on context, and neither stance may be self-sufficient, let alone delivering finally conclusive comprehension. At least one reminder for one and all which emerges from reading this essay is the necessity of living with humility, with 'a way of uncertainty'. This most emphatically does not mean living with the sheer mendacity rife in public life which we can and must refuse as the essays in this collection demonstrate but living in contentment with uncertainty on the one hand, and on the other endeavouring to establish clarity where this is possible. Eric Priest might well subscribe to the view that like it or not we are responsible for constructing and reconstructing reality, as true in politics as in science, and with considerable implications for the reinvigoration of theology and its engagement with new disciplines, as the work of e.g. Bernard Lonergan proposes.<sup>2</sup> Lonergan's massive intellectual achievement is familiar to Canadians, but to date apparently unknown to UK Episcopalians wherever located.

The related essay by Michael Fuller is appropriately concerned with 'Sciences and Truths'. Notable here is his invaluable reminder that 'scientific practitioners' exercise 'practical *skill* in the pursuit of their craft: skill which has been gained through instruction, training and practice, effectively constituting an apprenticeship' which inevitably imbues an apprentice with certain values and beliefs. Such skills and training may not be identical depending on the science in focus, but will encompass 'an irreducibly subjective component', smaller in the case of the physical sciences, probably more significant in historical/social sciences, affecting both the 'harvesting of data' as well as in its careful interpretation. Data scientists have particular difficulties to deal with in extracting 'meaningful information from extremely large and heterogenous data sets'. It would be interesting to be informed about what counts as an apprenticeship both in other 'academic'

---

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (DTL, 1975).

areas and the exercise of personal responsibility in such activities as investment banking, journalism, the making of social media, its impact on political life, and, necessarily, in selection and training for ordination.

Michael Fuller draws attention to the point that disputes over competing paradigms may be resolved by 'aesthetics' e.g. 'the better of two competing understandings is often held to be the one which is the simpler of the two'. We may add: if in science, why not in theology? What counts as an aesthetic preference there? Furthermore, as in religion (when appeal is made to 'tradition') scientists simply have to trust the reports of their colleagues. Misreporting or the fabrication of results is rightly treated with the greatest severity by the scientific community, and by the social community when children suffer the dire effects of measles because parents have been thoroughly misled by a certain medical practitioner who claimed to have found a connection to autism via vaccination. Indeed, we communicate by 'narratives', and need to discriminate between them as well as spotting the points at which they coincide. Genuine exchange of narratives and perspectives 'requires flexibility, openness, goodwill, and respect on both sides, and without such an exchange a genuinely pluralist society is impossible.' Patient conversations and the capacity to listen must have priority, not necessarily as a preliminary to instruct and inform others, for the silence of the one who listens is a form of activity: 'what we *do* can be as effective in this respect as what we *say*.'

As David Jasper puts it in his own essay, 'attention to truth demands discipline, consistency and thoughtful attention beyond the final amorality of a pure pragmatics that may serve a number of highly questionable ends subject to the temptations of power', highly addictive as it is not least in ecclesial institutions as well we all know, or should know. What are the implications of the interpolation into the Nicene and Apostles' Creed of the word 'power' in association with the Holy Spirit? Appropriate manifestations of 'power' presumably have to do with 'grace', and structures that do not serve 'grace' need the attention of the equivalent of pruning shears, not the accidental reinforcement in credal affirmation which they may have received, a possibility to which attention may never have been given previously but of which ecclesial bodies are in dire need at present. 'Please', 'Thank you' and above all, 'Sorry' are primary in human interaction as the present Pope has made clear. There is much to learn from the scientific community about humility, gratitude for the work and honesty of others, and the arrogant refusal of what only others may know, but which in their generosity they transmit to the rest of us. Truth demands and enjoys the illumination of light, not the pathetic obscurity of lies and misrepresentation and what we can recognize as 'power-games'.

There are also, mercifully, resources from the Christian tradition on which we can draw. Thus Jenny Anne Wright's essay on 'Truth and Public theology' reminds us of the insistence of Donald MacKinnon of the importance of reading the news – in whatever form that now reaches us, of the importance of reflection on it and how we respond to it, with guidance from the work of Reinhold Niebuhr. She reminds us of hope for the future outside our current reality (eschatology), which in immediate terms requires 'creating and sustaining economic and political security for ourselves and our communities at whatever cost'. It is living in fear which 'allows lies and fake news to flourish in an attempt to avoid the insecurity which is created by the lack of control of human life', living with the difference between knowing what we do not know and continuously seeking for the truth on the one hand, 'and falling into either scepticism, thinking that there is no answer, or fanaticism on the other'. We need to question why we are being presented with such information as we are, 'whose perspective are we seeing and which stories of what are we unaware.' Manifestations of 'power' can be analysed and, if necessary, challenged by 'apologetics', the practice of making space for understanding, as Elaine Graham has argued, reconstruing apologetics especially by targeting what passes for 'authority'. Habits of deference (in church as well as out) clearly have to go by the board if hope is to mean anything to us.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Trevor Hart's subtle analysis of the interplay between Scripture, tradition and reason – the resources of the present, helps us to avoid the view that 'reality itself is some sort of postmodern kaleidoscope of ever shifting and infinitely malleable options' even though for the present, unitary truth eludes us. So 'when we believe that reality is broken open for us more fully by one perspective, interpretation or tradition than another, we ought not to be afraid to say so with confidence'.

Turning then to texts and traditions of the past, Nicholas Taylor provides a magisterial account of how 'the' Bible came into being. Attention to this section should disabuse readers of the view that all Christians share the same 'Scripture', with texts in the same order, and in agreed translation. The order may affect how they are 'read'; at least one major tradition includes the 'Apocrypha'; and that the Coptic Orthodox Church values as 'Scripture' texts unknown to the rest of us. There is material here for a study course in itself. In addition, we should carefully emphasize the importance of Nicholas Taylor's reference to David Parker's work. The deployment of 'digital methodologies' in textual criticism helps to establish the degree to which texts of e.g. a gospel can be demonstrated to be provisional, rather

---

<sup>3</sup> See most recently Elaine Graham, *Apologetics without Apology: Speaking God in a World Troubled by Religion* (Cascade, 2019).

than making possible ‘a single reconstructed form and authoritative form’. As David Parker points out, this new methodology and approach ‘will require modification of the use of Scripture in theological debate’.<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Taylor explores the range of the semantic range of the Hebrew root of ‘truth’ as well as in Greek-speaking Christian tradition. In sum: truth ‘denotes qualities of honour, sincerity, moral rectitude, trustworthiness, endurance, and reliability’, of which honesty is an aspect, and accuracy of statements its product.

A brief overview of ‘Anglicanism’ emerging from the Reformation era concludes with a somewhat problematical observation, that it is ‘a well-established, if nowhere explicitly articulated Anglican principle that doctrine is articulated in the liturgy of the Church’. It is difficult to comprehend what is meant by a principle being both well-established though nowhere explicitly articulated. How would we know? That apart, what the SEC amongst other Anglican churches seems to have lost is the Reformation sense of the indispensability of Psalmody for liturgy as well as for private and domestic devotion, in Scotland at least available in ‘versification’ by the mid-sixteenth century. Fortunately, that particular mark of Reformation sensibility is still splendidly evident in the Church of Scotland *Church Hymnary*.<sup>5</sup> (See also the results of Edinburgh’s Wode Psalter Project team made available to all, meaning ‘all’ including the SEC). The *Church Hymnary* begins with a major section on Psalms for singing, incorporates some of the paraphrases of the Psalms into the hymnody (drawn from across the globe), with the whole arranged in a Trinitarian, credal pattern, with a concluding section on the Holy Spirit both in the Church and in its celebrations, and a final part on ‘Doxologies and Amens’. This seems as it were out-narrates what might be meant by ‘explicit articulation’ of doctrine rather than all too familiar Anglican obscurity of a particular problem, not, in this case, justified by a sense of the ‘provisionality’ of what can be ascertained. A possible model for consideration of the principles for the articulation of doctrine in liturgy might be the 1987 Vatican II document *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*.

Two concluding comments on this particular essay: Nicholas Taylor gives no attention to the extensive work done by both Christian and Jewish feminist theologians on Scripture, despite its abundance and ready availability, which certainly raises questions about the adequacy and truth of Anglican doctrine even if articulated, the lack of which constitutes a problem in present-day society whose members rightly distrust

---

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g. *Schools of Faith*, ed. by D. Fergusson and B. McCormack (London: T&T Clark, 2019), pp. 14–21.

<sup>5</sup> *Church Hymnary*, fourth edition (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2005).

institutionalized ecclesial misogyny. The second comment is about his third question accidentally given a most unfortunate formulation as: 'Part of the Christian Bible is Scripture for others, viz. Jews. In what ways would you expect their discernment of God's truth to differ from yours?' It could be more sensible and sensitive to ask about difference in discernment by e.g. Lutherans and Roman Catholics, as well as members of the Eastern or Oriental family of Orthodox Christians to begin with. Most of us are probably ill-equipped to know what and how ecclesial differences affect discernment, and have rarely or never attended occasions, yearlong, at which this might become evident. In any case we surely cannot refer to 'Scripture for others, viz. Jews', given a) that Jesus of Nazareth was one of those 'others' whose Scriptures we have to some extent appropriated, as in the case of the Psalms; and, b) that we have neither experience nor understanding of the living reality of synagogue worship. Both ecumenism and inter-faith needs self-effacing appreciation of the styles of worship with which we are otherwise wholly unfamiliar, well before 'dialogue' or the production of 'agreed statements' which then require 'reception'. Why not focus on a question such as 'What do you believe and how do you think about Mary the mother of Jesus?' given that now we know so much more about the Jewish context which nourished Jesus into the man he became.

Steven Ballard's essay on Rudolph Otto's *Das Heilige* (strictly speaking, 'The Holy' not 'The Idea of the Holy') reminds us that it was published in one of the grimmest periods of western European history – 1917. It could well be read in the company of John McLuckie's essay in its reminder and appreciation of religious traditions which both have their origins and their continuation in times and places un-accommodating to the Christian tradition which may destroy them lived as cultural and political resources. One may indeed ask what responsibility Christianity has for such destruction in our own context if we look at its effects elsewhere. From personal experience in many journeys (and including synagogues) Otto writes of the sacred's tendency 'to induce the feeling of awe', and of its capacity to 'draw the devotee nearer' as he had personally experienced, with powerful emotion, 'and sensed as breaking in from the outside'. He endeavoured to set up an organization dedicated to universal peace and goodwill but failed to anchor his aspirations in an achievable programme for action. Nonetheless he represents an unqualified obligation 'to stand for the ethical good', never ever to be sacrificed 'to the interests of political expediency'. This essay on Otto recovers the sources of his convictions, and politics and public life apart, brings to our attention elements of worship – the 'sacred' and the question of what or how our liturgies aid or impede our experience of the 'sacred' as in the case of Otto himself.

The SEC is fortunate to retain some clergy concerned with liturgy, given its neglect in theological education, notwithstanding the intricacies of its relationship with music, most notably in Scotland distinguished by Sir James MacMillan and Professor Paul Mealor. One may say at the outset that the loss of both publicly said Morning/Evening Prayer is a serious loss, not only of the Psalms (as indicated above) but of sustainable readings of Scripture, not least that of the 'first' Testament, and with the Common Lectionary devised for eucharistic celebration in effect very largely eliminating knowledge of the Fourth Gospel. In addition, in the light of what Otto had to say about the 'sacred', the current practice of the shambles of the 'exchange of peace' mid-way through a eucharist ought to prompt the relocation of the 'exchange' to the 'dismissal' if even a minimal sense of the 'sacred' is to be sustained in a eucharist – not that every SEC congregation uses the 1982 liturgy, or is even annually reminded of why things are done in a particular way in a ceremony which may well be wholly unrecognizable as a 'celebration'. Inexplicable 'fuss', the absence of Bibles in some places, an 'English' Hymnal, no printout of relevant texts to be heard, sung, prayed, or preached on can all be experienced. It is not the case, however, that 'Episcopalians can't preach', since there are some admirable exemplars to be found, vital to helping to make John Reuben Davies's case for 'Liturgy as a Repository of Truth'.

Davies's essay reveals that the author attends to the central point of liturgy, which is 'worship of God' as distinct from liturgical studies as who does what/where/when and why in respect of a given text. It may be too much in the light of other essays in this collection to claim that liturgy is 'the' vehicle by which we both worship and encounter God, though we might want to agree that such worship and encounter is as it were learned in worship, understood as its co-ordination with the natural world, 'through God's grace', comes to reveal divine transcendence. This is not as simple as it may sound, given so much attention to 'power' rather than 'grace' – a much neglected area for reflection, which leaves 'sacrament' and 'consecration' and both corporate and personal prayer unintelligible. Since in Anglicanism we both acknowledge that a priest 'shows God to the people', as well as that 'as a royal priesthood, the whole baptized community also shows God to the world', it is indeed then a vital task for all those involved to study and understand liturgical tradition and its possible limitations, including God in the image of 'the white heterosexual male' or any attempt to employ liturgical language in the service of a particular group identity. It might be noted, however, that there is a sense in which present practice serves group identity. By locating the baptism of a child into the Eucharist, the Church has inadvertently created an experience of exclusion in two different ways. On the one hand, a regular congregation is likely not to know the Apostles' creed



used in baptism, or have any comprehension of the clause which includes ‘the communion of saints’ let alone its marvellous ambiguity of reference both to ‘persons’ (‘holy saints’ and ‘holy things’-sacraments), let alone to how this might relate to those commemorated in the SEC Calendar. The baptismal party will very likely include friends and family who have no understanding of a celebration of the Eucharist and will be unable fully to participate. Two groups, therefore, and two differing identities.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, liturgical practice requires the attention to its political and social context, explored in this collection of essays by Alison Jasper, long a distinguished member of a Critical Religion Research Group – ‘critical religion’ a phrase even less familiar to us than ‘critical realism’ though certainly one integral to the other. The point of what she does is to alert us to contestable ‘binary patterns’ by means of which it serves someone’s interest to distinguish ‘religion’ from the ‘secular’. We need to challenge those distinctions, and for the churches as well as in educational provision, pay the most serious attention to the British Academy’s analysis of *Theology and Religious Studies Provision in UK Higher Education* published in May 2019 just in advance of this collection of essays. Insofar as the churches are in part responsible for fostering religion as ‘private’, readily distinguishable from the ‘secular’, we need to take seriously its impact on education of a kind which urgently needs remedy as Alison Jasper has argued quite independently of this report. Those concerned should pay serious attention to what she has to say, as this has direct impact on the overall concern in this volume for how we may learn to distinguish truth from un-truth.

### *Half-Objections and Remarks*

JEAN-YVES LACOSTE, Life Member, Clare Hall (University of Cambridge)

Objecting is that which reviewers chiefly do in their reviews. Objecting to an anthology wherein scholars have distilled their best, though, is futile: my expertise is tiny and *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, by the way, has not been written for experts. There is always room for surface objections, of course. Here are a few I do not intend to develop. First, as one who has devoted some time to philosophy, continental and extracontinental, I find it alarming to see Wittgenstein appear as ‘the foremost philosopher of the

---

<sup>6</sup> See an international collection of essays *Liturgy with a Difference: Beyond Inclusion in the Christian Assembly*, ed. by Stephen Burns and Bryan Coles (SCM Press, 2019), on learning from the ‘marginalized’.

twentieth century'.<sup>1</sup> He is one of the greatest. A *caveat*: never turn any philosopher into 'The Philosopher'. There are lessons to learn from the fate of Aristotle in the hands of theologians. Second, I find unsatisfactory, as well, Scott Robertson's attempt at associating Wittgenstein, the man, a very remarkable character, with his philosophical achievements. Wittgenstein is a major philosophical figure, and this is enough. Cambridge legend does not make him more readable – I had a good introduction to the *Tractatus* when I was an undergraduate, but nothing biographical appeared in it – nor does it make his life more interesting (and more philosophical) than any other philosopher's life. Third, beware of hasty assertions. Alison Jasper's speaking of 'the traditional view of God's nature as rigidly fixed' and adding that 'the truth to which the church is committed theologically, can only be maintained by a commitment to constant critical challenge, imaginative thinking and rethinking, and considered practices',<sup>2</sup> is only rhetorical. Fourth, science has a lot to do with truth, and Michael Fuller say it aptly, with ideas indebted to M. Polanyi and a tone charmingly reminiscent of T. F. Torrance. It is not illegitimate to say that:

In this search for Truth, scientists today often experience beauty, wonder, mystery, humility, and a sense of being carried along on a voyage of discovery, guided by the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Some scientists have a sense of spirituality without being attracted to traditional religion. Others do not share such beliefs, but it is possible they are indeed being guided by the Holy Spirit without realizing it.<sup>3</sup>

This is idyllic. Let us take care: whoever says it is a scientist, or a philosopher of science, who is not aware (either in theory or in practise) of the influence of technology on science. In our age – the 'post-truth' age – ontology has been enriched by one more transcendental, the *utile*. To be is to be instrumental and science, in most cases, is the handmaiden of technology. Before lamenting this sad fact, we must acknowledge it. And what of this 'ultimate reality' we are told all religious traditions strive for? One of the main credentials of 'interreligious dialogue' is that religious men care about what

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott Robertson, 'Truth and Christian Theology' in *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, ed. by David Jasper and Jenny Wright (London: SCM Press, 2019), p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Alison Jasper, 'Today's Church and the Politics of Post-Truth' in *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, p. 183

<sup>3</sup> Michael Fuller, 'Sciences and Truths: A Theologian's View' in *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age* Ibid., p. 172.

is true. Probably so (but it would need some qualification). Religions, nonetheless, do not have the monopoly of the 'ultimate'. And in order to skip vague references to vague experiences, would not a dialogue with philosophers be of more use? After all, the 'death of truth' is an event in the history of the secular world, and coming to terms with it as theology has always done, with some philosophical precision, is (perhaps) the prerequisite of interreligious agreement (and disagreement) on the ultimate, the absolute and any 'religious experience'.

What I have said is not meant to criticize but, merely, to react. As a sheer reaction, it suggests that there is much material for discussion in *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age* – and this is a good thing. Discussion is more than conversation, and I let other readers discuss the questions I have shortlisted. But I have a tribute to bring to the discussion. There is room for a few marginal notes to the book. They may have some importance, only to widen (if it is possible!) the scope of an already ambitious publication.

My first remark is not theological but meta-theological. Theologians know 'what' they do, and they know as well that they need to rely (explicitly or implicitly) on a robust concept of truth. There are many such concepts, some more robust than others, some more attractive than others, but we in any case may take it for granted that theologians do not want to commit intellectual suicide and are actually using one. They are normally interested in a rich biblical concept of truth more than in the truth-value of trivial propositions, but ascertaining how and why 'snow is white' is true is not devoid of theological importance: an only theological idea of truth would put an end to all dialogue between theological and non-theological discourses. Eclecticism is certainly the better theological policy here. When it comes to using 'true', theologians have a right not to stick to a 'theory' or another, and to assume that they (a) claim to use an intelligible language and (b) know how to be intelligible to their audience when they are using 'true'. Paying too much attention to an (endless) discussion about truth would lead to (endless) prolegomena, and the theologians would have no time to do what they mean to do, *viz.* telling their audience things that they believe to be true and to have major importance. A debate on 'eternal sentences' (Bolzano's name for well-formed propositions) has a right to be almost endless. What theology wants to say, or rather is compelled to say, has some urgency. Now, an interesting point, which we cannot miss when reading *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, is precisely that theology is very often a hurried work and, more, a work that has not to be ashamed of being done in a hurry. Many happy scholars can work leisurely and wait till what they want to say is ripe. They will rush and write when the 'day' has come — Husserl wrote *Formal and Transcendental Logic* in three weeks, but he had devoted years to the problem before, and he waited till 1930 before making his ideas public.

And a comment is necessary. 'Research' is on all lips, and it is of the essence of research that it must be slow and cautious (woe to those who accept the 'publish or perish' motto!). Theology is not always a work of research. It includes much repetition, mostly learned repetition. And it is not accidental that in many cases the Church and her theologians must speak in haste. This is no fate, of course, and it must be accepted cheerfully. Philosophers may dream of a fresh start – Descartes is only the brightest case – and 'researchers' of a new contribution to knowledge. But what theologians have a duty to say is rarely epoch-making, and we must encourage those who use a mixture of old and new words to face hurriedly the challenges of the day. Radical historicism is theologically unsound, today's questions are never wholly new, and past answers, when made intelligible, are often sound. Belief in the eternal return of the same is unsound, too. Theology in any case, and even theology at its most creative best, never spells out what was wholly unsaid, and intelligent repetition, or readjustment, is always what it aims at. Theologians are meant to be scholarly equipped. A wise silence, of course, is better than hurried gossip. Keeping wisely silent, though, is no adequate tactic when facing people (a congregation or a wider audience) who desperately need words to feed their faith and their spiritual life, or to lead them to faith. The words needed and given today are very often hurried words. It is very often wise to speak in a hurry. Words on the mouth of theologians have very often a simple ambition, answering now to needs which are felt now, too. This ambition is foreign to all other scholarly fields. But theology is more than a scholarly exercise; such an ambition is perfectly respectable and, to use a theological word, charitable. Theology is a caring activity. The theologian wishes to answer verbally to the spiritual and intellectual needs of his fellow men, believers or not, and he must do it in a responsible way. Good intentions are not a sufficient condition of responsibility and theology, under all its forms, would collapse if it did not acknowledge elementary intellectual duties. It would be uncharitable not to provide a congregation or a wider audience with the words they need now to help them out of today's questions and anxieties. In the long run, much theology will prove to have been too tentative and too circumstantial: and will be of no use anymore, except to historians of theological debates. But in many cases, they will have done their duty – done in these or these days what it was right to do. Provided circumstances and a lack a critical sense do not blind the theologian as they are able to blind any man.

In the present case, circumstances may be blessed: they have helped a group of theologians to assert their rationality. 'Post-truth' was elected 'word of the year' in Germany, two years ago, and this is no more than anecdote and fuel for conversation. But the anecdote must not make us oblivious of a large-scale event, namely that the 'death of truth' is as old as

the 'death of God', and that both are ingredients of the same gospel preached by Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century. Theologians learn from their predecessors, and whereas the first articulate reactions to Nietzsche ('death of God theology' has been the most spectacular) failed to prove anything but a deep inability to face a challenge, Jasper, Wright and all authors whose voice is heard in *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age* have obviously understood which problems required which solutions; their answer(s) to today's crisis of truth are more than contributions to a conversation – conversations, after all, are things we keep going when we do not hope to turn a problem into a respectable dialogue where truth matters run deep. It would have been unwise to answer the crisis of truth with some 'theory' of truth to strengthen the claims of theological language in this post-truth situation — the situation, after all, is post-rational as well, and it would have been no good to rely on a theory to face the refusal, in many circles, of all form of *logos* and *theôria*. This refusal is of paramount importance. It is an essential ingredient of the intellectual mood of our culture. It surfaces in certain philosophical circles, it pops-up its head as well in small talk about 'true' being always 'true for me' or 'true for our community' etc, and it must be taken seriously: it reveals a lot about Western man as he is now and as theology has to take care of him. Is there a future for words which would claim to be true, or to say truthfully what things are? The theologian is expected neither to be a liar nor to miss perpetually the points at issue. He is expected also to have genuine acquaintance with what he says is true, or reveal major realities, etc. And let us add that in a post-truth age, he will not be summoned to tell his fellow men how to give a truth-value to, say, 'snow is white' or 'the cat is on the mat': we shall ask him to tell 'the' truth about this one, God, whose death is axiomatic in our post-Nietzschean culture. On the whiteness of the snow, we shall ever reach an agreement, with or without the help of theories. Theology has other ambitions. If 'true' was totally useless, how could we survive? If Tarski was right and truth was only a matter of true propositions to deal with in an only semantic way, there would be room left for a theological language, probably, but it would be totally non-standard, and we would be at a loss to guarantee its credentials. Living in a world where truth is a property of certain sentences, and where we ought to be happy to know how and why 'snow is white', is a matter of deep unease indeed. And this unease reveals that living in a post-truth age, or in an age where truth is doomed to be trivial, is very difficult for us. Theological discourse is never about snow as such, but (for instance) about man's sins becoming white as snow. This is very different. How can Western man become a competent listener again to whichever non-trivial good news the theologians claim to mediate? To answer this question, work is needed, and it is charitable work. The essays gathered in *Truth and the Church in a*

*Secular Age* must be praised for taking care of the many in a dark period of the history of truth.

One must add that in most cases, if not in all cases, we *can* speak now, hurriedly, because 'we knew it before'. Appeal to biblical semantics, to a principle of tradition flexible enough to give dining rights to new circumstances, to liturgical experience as well as to a hermeneutics of 'religious' experience, etc, what the reader has been catered for by the contributors to *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age* proves that theology has something to say to come to the help of those who worry about truth. We knew it before – but what we knew had often been obfuscated by current gossip, or it had been forgotten. In 1946, Jean Daniélou published in a French periodical an article, 'Back to the sources', which answered a very different situation (the sclerosis of neo-scholastic theology) with very similar proposals.<sup>4</sup> Back to the sources: there are three of them according to Daniélou, Scripture, liturgy and the Fathers. 'Back to the sources' meant, as an obvious implication, that much had to be rediscovered that had been forgotten. And the motto may be used, and I use it here, to stress that resources are available to those who want truth to survive its present crisis and its theological consequences. Theology uses language or languages. These are natural languages. And texts written in these languages are at the disposal of theologians, which they are to read as they ought to be read, not in an antiquarian spirit but with a view to letting them speak today as they spoke years ago – so that reading might be the source of truth-events. The philosophers who have tried to initiate a new beginning are not many, and no theologian has ever had such an ambition. The end of Modern Ages, as we make the experience of it, is undeniably more spectacular than any other end we have heard of, and we have learned, since we have decided to read Nietzsche carefully, that we are living among ruins. We can, further, use apt names instead of confusing ones such as post-modernity, secularity, etc, and admit that we are making the experience of nihilism. Theology has now to be done in the age of nihilism. But beware! Nihilism, the last period in modern culture, claims to annihilate (values and anything resting on truth and values), it claims to be the realm of non-being and untruth, but the claim must be examined, and soberly so. Must we believe, first of all, that the secular city we are living in, complete with its despair or with its lack of genuine hope, bears witness to a totally new age in the history of man? We have heard too much, in other contexts, of a God who was supposedly 'wholly other'. But what we were hearing was probably wrong and certainly inadequate — the *valde aliud* would lose its transcendence if it was not *non aliud* as well. And once we become suspicious about uses and abuses of

---

<sup>4</sup> Jean Daniélou, *Études* (1946), pp. 5–21.

otherness, we must become slightly sceptical about the claims of post-modernity and the post-truth age, *viz.* nihilism, actually to have the power which is ascribed to them. Is the crisis of truth we are in the midst of more dramatic than the challenge of truth by Greek sophists was? History, if we believe Troeltsch, is a perpetual matter of likeness and unlikeness, and there is no unlikeness there which does not rest on a certain likeness. And this being granted, let us keep in mind, if we want to associate the present disappearing of truth and the need to let old 'sources' speak afresh, that at no point of history man ever lives in a totally new world, facing totally new questions with no ready-made words to answer these questions. We may be tempted, when we are told that truth is over, to dream of some 'other beginning' after Heidegger's fashion. Ruptures are frequent in all history, of course, and hermeneutics of rupture will always be available when we try to give an account of the world as it is now, in its sheer newness or otherness. And we are wrong when we try our hand at this game. A total and definitive rupture would be apocalyptic through and through. Theology knows that the end is at hand. But it knows that it has been perpetually so since the beginning of Christianity. And it knows that living 'in the last days' is very different from an apocalyptic experience. Nihilism is a name for a period (Nietzsche, writing in 1885, said that it would last two centuries). And doing theology during this period requires some intellectual creativity, but requires as well what has always been required from theologians. Overcoming nihilism is an act of charity which a clever use of the past, both pre-modern and modern, will make most effective.

One cannot rely on good intentions only. Consequent historicism is wrong, but the world (that is, our temporal experience of the world) has a history, which is a mixture of continuity and discontinuity, and it is our intellectual duty to perceive it as a web of analogies and disanalogies. Naming a duty is easy enough, but we fulfil it painfully — and no infallibility is granted to us when we face this task. We encounter in *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age* gallant attempts at retrieving tradition: a welcome encounter. An excessive love of fashionable words crops up here and there — it is no good telling us that 'science superseded and mirrored the ontotheology of timeless truth',<sup>5</sup> or to advise us to 'abandon any hint of the absolutist and metaphysical concept of 'truth'...',<sup>6</sup> all words naming problems the philosophical community is still wrestling with, without any definitive solution at hand. Discontinuities are certainly more fascinating than continuities. But post-truth, if we take the motto too literally, it can

---

<sup>5</sup> 'The Origins of Truth in Philosophy, Theology, and Theory', David Jasper, *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, p. 28

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

blind us to the fact that we have been debating about truth for a very long time, with conflicting theories and no received view any more, and that it would be unsafe to let a new word spread alarm instead of having a good perception of the almost ancient situation it arises from. We can mourn the disappearing of any received view of truth. But in any case, a quick look at sources, biblical, patristic, etc, is almost enough to make it clear that theology is not unable to solve today's conflict of theories. To use adequately the predicate 'true', we must admit that truth is essentially linked to faithfulness. We must acknowledge, thus, that our experience of truth is human, and that we use 'true' as men and only men use it. A biblical and existential concept of truth will not put an end to the conflict of theories, nor has theology to propose it as the ground of a new theory. But it can certainly help us to find a way, which will not be 'the' way, out of a maze. The conflict of theories, as well as the existence of conflicting logics (standard, non-standard, paraconsistent...) proves to all critical eyes that the *logos* is now in a critical period of its history. I am not sure, by the way, that there must be a holy alliance of biblical approaches to truth and of philosophies of 'existence'. But I am sure that theology needs a 'rich' concept of truth, on the one hand, and that this need, on the other hand, may be satisfied with the help of extant resources. Theology (and other discourses) wants its words to be faithful to 'things', both human and divine, and theologians know what to borrow critically from philosophical inquiries into truth. They know also that since Kittel's dictionary, biblical scholars have done well to make biblical words for truth 'relevant' and to make us less dependent on 'theories'. Nicholas Taylor's essay in *TCSA* is both an introduction and a tribute to all good work biblical scholarship has done during decades. It provides the reader with first words on truth. But it may be read as a conclusion. After all, a theological *quaestio disputata de veritate* would be idle if it did not lead to a fresh reading of Scripture and its language. On truth as on many other issues, Kittel and his posterity owes something to twentieth-century German philosophy. There is no need to feel sorry.

Let me take the liberty to go one step further. Is truth given to us first of all in language or truthful use of language? It is not wise to answer with an uncritical 'yes'. There would be no truth, there is a tacit agreement among contributors to the volume, in the absence of experiences of truth and, for that matter, in the absence of human experiences of truth — speculating about divine or angelic experiences of truth would lead nowhere, except to the obvious conclusion that we are neither divine nor angelic beings, and that asking about truth is human. Now, truth is very often a property of certain sentences, or certain propositions. But is truth propositional and only propositional? It is safe not to believe it and one must learn from Husserl (it is one of his major contributions to philosophy) that truth, as an



experience of truth (as evidence) is present before we put words together, implicitly or explicitly, to give them a propositional structure. We open our eyes and see a part of the furniture of our world. We see, for instance, a red spot on a white wall. The wall and the spot, if we perceive them under normal circumstances, are certainly out there: doubt is excluded. And before we say or 'think' that the spot *is* red, or that *there is* a red spot on the wall, an experience of truth is already given to us — but in a non-predicative way. Linguistic and propositional concepts of truth, as present in certain intellectual traditions, have a tendency to become theoretical straightjackets. A totally non-linguistic concept of truth, let us be charitable, would be useless — to say it again, God does not need words, I assume the angels do not, but language is never far (from us) when we see things 'truly', because there is only a short step from seeing them to saying that they are and what they are. An only linguistic concept of truth is useless as well. We live in the world enjoying perpetual acquaintance with all sorts of things; seeing or hearing (etc) them as they are, is part and parcel of this acquaintance. We need a linguistic concept of truth: we are essentially endowed with language and language allows us to say what things are, and even allows us sometimes to 'see' things more clearly. But we must at all cost keep in mind the prelinguistic reality of truth. If we refused to admit that there is an intuitive and non-linguistic genealogy for true judgments, we would be oblivious of what we are before we spell out any true sentence, animal familiar with things, and things as they are, by right of birth.

Much more might be said which I will not say – it would be a repetition of well-known philosophical descriptions... But an addition is necessary: what I have said in few lines is strictly untheological. The 'world of life', as described by Husserl and others, is common to us all. Its population is a huge set of cats and mats (and many other kinds of things), and we live within it without any worry about truth-values. But let us not believe hastily that our ability to see cats on mats before any linguistic performance is theologically irrelevant. What we learn from Husserlian phenomenology about truth is valid always and everywhere, and this is very relevant — could Christian experience be cut from 'life'? Though it is valid, of course (there are objections, but we do not need to mention them here), it does lead us far on the path of Truth, nor does it enable us to meet the hermeneutical challenges of history. One does not learn from Husserl and his followers how to climb the Himalayas of speculation. One learns from them, nonetheless, where fruitful speculation may start. In the introduction to one of his books, Michael Dummett (a philosopher I usually disagree with more than I agree) says that what he is doing, philosophy of language and of logic, cherishes only the humble dream of providing us with a base camp for future

metaphysical ascent.<sup>7</sup> I disagree with the primacy of language: where metaphysics starts from is earlier than the experience of 'spoken' reality. But the idea of philosophy battling modestly its way, now, to make it feasible to go higher at some later stage, is very welcome and very apt to shed light on what we owe to Husserl's achievements. The 'master', so his students would call him, was not at his best when he tried his hand at metaphysical and/or theological problems. On truth, many people would say that his former pupil Heidegger said more. But a fact in the history of philosophy ought not to escape our attention: having read Husserl is an advantage to anyone wanting to have a clear idea of truth and our experience of truth. There is undeniably more about truth than can be found in Husserl's description of the world of life – but Husserl initiated a philosophical movement which survived him, and despite Heidegger it would be misleading to assume that Husserlian phenomenology is over. The concepts of 'categorical intuition' and 'antepredicative evidence' are major tools which, no doubt, may need refinement; better philosophers than I am will refine them or in some cases have already done so. At any case, one point must be stressed, and it has vital importance: no man is ever deprived of an experience of truth. Sophisticated studies of sentences claiming to be true, of our involvement in narratives endowed with revealing power, etc, are necessary. But before taking part in language games or philosophy of language, we have already a knowledge of things as truly they are. We see the cat on the mat, or the spot on the wall. These are trivial experiences of truth, of course. Nonetheless: better a trivial acquaintance with truth manifested in ordinary phenomena than thinking that we are living in a world where 'true' has become an obsolete word...

Large scale phenomena do contradict this primitive acquaintance with truth, of course. We may live in a society which seems to be abandoning truth for post-truth. Apostles of post-modernity first preach the 'destabilization of meaning' and find followers, and they preach then the deconstruction of grand stories about man and the world. Theirs is a dramatic view and not a totally wrong one: our worries about truth are not generated by post-modern authors but by something they capture which is no fancy of theirs. Theologians wrestling with the 'death of truth', so, are wrestling with the world as it is now. We must take the fact for granted. Theology must help people to survive nihilism. Is nihilism, though, powerful enough to put an end to our daily acquaintance with things? I doubt it – and I suspect no one will doubt this seriously. We see cats, mats, and other realities, in today's secular world, as one used to see them before our perception of them is unaffected by secularity and nihilism. 'There is' truth, thus, even in a post-

---

<sup>7</sup> Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (London: Duckworth, 1991), p. 16.

truth period. Truth of this sort (truth mediated by an experience of truth) can be submitted, let's use the ominous word, to intersubjective 'verification'. It will not make theological language easier – but if we go so far as acknowledging that truth is not wholly dead for us, we shall have the means to understand that there are many potential truth-events left in our world and that 'religious', 'liturgical' or 'theological' experiences may have something to do with 'truth' and 'disclosure'. It is sometimes necessary to be unkind to linguistic philosophy, a philosophy which cares mostly about cats, mats, snow and bachelors. One may be slightly unkind to Husserl's description of the 'world of life', for similar reasons: theology is interested in the extraordinary while there is nothing in this world except ordinary entities and events. This unkindness is partially unfair. After all, and to refer to Dummett again, those who hope for 'a vigorous renewal of Christian apologetics'<sup>8</sup> need a starting point, remote as it may be from grand conclusions. According to Pierre Charron, apologetics deals with 'three truths': truth about religion, truth about revelation and truth about the Church.<sup>9</sup> Neither Charron nor the systematiser of the discipline in the early nineteenth century, Drey,<sup>10</sup> were feeling the lack of any ready-made concept of truth: truth was unchallenged in their days. We need, today, whoever we are and theologians in the forefront, to make it clear that it is not hopeless to rely on truth and experiences of truth. And we can answer to this need. Truth in matters of religion, the truth of Christianity, etc, could not be communicated to man, here and now, if truth was wholly unknown to him. And as a matter of fact it is not wholly unknown. 'Great truths' and the experience of them are not wholly other than daily truth-events. 'Disclosure situations' are part and parcel of ordinary life – I. T. Ramsey's contribution<sup>11</sup> is more valuable today than it was several generations ago. From another point of view, the claim has been made by Alston that 'Christian Mystical Experience' owns the same truth-claims as sense perception<sup>12</sup> — very few people have agreed with Alston, but his is an interesting attempt at showing that there is no gap between 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary' truth. One may

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 79

<sup>9</sup> Pierre Charron, *Les trois vérités contre les athées, idolâtres, juifs, mahumétans, hérétiques* (Bordeaux: S. Millanges, 1593).

<sup>10</sup> Johann Sebastian von Drey, *Die Apogetik als Wissenschaftliche Nachweisung der Göttlichkeit des Christentums in seiner Erscheinung* (Mainz: Florian Kupferberg, 1844), I, (2).

<sup>11</sup> Ian T. Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Religious Places* (London: Macmillan, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> William. P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

be emphatic: in this post-truth age of ours, the first task of apologetics is certainly to rely on small but unobjectionable experiences which we would be at pain to deny in some way or another. All is not annihilated in the epoch of nihilism. What truth is left to us can help us to overcome nihilism.

### *Truth*

ALISTAIR MASON, Initial Ministerial Formation Coordinator for the Diocese of Aberdeen and Orkney

Here is a famous, or perhaps infamous, quotation:

So again of the virtue of truth. Truth for its own sake had never been a virtue with the Roman clergy. Father Newman informs us that it need not, and on the whole, ought not to be; that cunning is the weapon which Heaven has given to the Saints wherewith to withstand the brute male force of the wicked world which marries and is given in marriage. Whether his notion be doctrinally correct or no, it is at least historically so.

Thus, Charles Kingsley gave the pretext for Newman's *Apologia*.<sup>1</sup> A blundering attack on the honesty of our opponents is not a good idea. Some modern admirers of Newman say that his greatest skill was as a controversialist, and I find this rather sad, because the glory of the *Apologia* has almost nothing to do with proving Kingsley wrong. Once he has forgotten Kingsley, he has a true story to tell.

In this new book, *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, when I read Alison Jasper on the need to challenge 'an anachronistic obsession with demonstrating mastery and defeating – in contrast to engaging with – the opposition' I felt rightly judged. My usual sense of truth is deeply conflictual. Truth I find only interesting if it is challenged, and shared commonplaces are a waste of time. But no, I must search my soul, and look out for the politics of domination thinly concealed by a professed love of truth.

There is a passage in Newman where he contrasts a good-humoured, good-hearted working-class Irishwoman, perhaps not too clean and not too honest, with a priggish English gentleman, and we all know Newman is right and that she is nearer the kingdom of God. True insights such as these give Kingsley, however, his pretext, to which we must answer that strict honesty is a virtue, but it does not trump love.

---

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/apologia/kingsley.html> for more.

I think it was in Bruce Marshall's *Father Malachy's Miracle*, a happy book, where I found a passing reference to our St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow, where, it said, 'they worship God in a blazer', because there public school piety, the gentleman's code which of course included strict honesty, was alive and well. Trying to imagine what that must have been like, I thought of the first Provost of that cathedral (in 1906) Frederic Llewellyn Deane, who went on to be Bishop of Aberdeen and Orkney, a sprightly and indeed rather posh bishop in gaiters, always ready to make a comic speech, and a winner as 'father-in-God to the Royal Navy in northern waters' in two consecutive world wars. That style is dated, but it is part of the Scots Episcopal heritage. Good Provost Holdsworth is different (I cannot interpret the dress-code of modern Provosts) but perhaps he shares with me too conflictual an approach to finding truth. Read Alison, Kelvin.

There are twelve contributions to *Truth and the Church in a Secular Age*, or rather thirteen, because there is an afterword by Jochen Schmidt, a German friend of our church, who has read all twelve, and engages with them as an afterword should. He writes '[T]he virtue of truthfulness must be embedded in a context of other emotional and cognitive virtues.' There are wicked joys in cruel candour, but we must still long for truth. 'Longing for truth is itself a moral emotion.'

Predictably, the first article, by Nicholas Taylor, is on the Bible, 'Truth and the Biblical Tradition'. There are lots of transliterated Hebrew and Greek words and close work, but the exposition is clear, and it ends, usefully, like all the others, with questions for discussion. When he lists his main scholarly authorities, he tells us each one's ecclesiastical background. 'Their books reflect the contexts in which their professional and Christian lives connect.' That connection is needed to grasp how they understand truth. Incidentally look up his footnote 33 for a candid comment on someone we all know.

It would be dry diligence, and a reader would not persist, if I now went through the chapters in turn saying something appreciative about each. Professor Jasper, for example, is well known and always worth reading, and he knows the modern books about post-truth, and makes me ashamed of how little I have read. I thought rather I would mention who are the great modern prophets whom they choose to expound to us. These choices tell us something about the perspectives and values of the Scottish Episcopal Church now. Here is Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). There is an 'unfortunate polarity between those who study his [Wittgenstein's] work in isolation from his life and those who find his life fascinating but his work unintelligible' (a phrase in one of Scott Robertson's footnotes). Neither Vienna nor Cambridge is straightforwardly akin to Episcopal Scotland; but here is a great philosopher who found himself asking religious questions, and in this book, we meet a serious attempt to wrestle with these questions.

If we were in a seminar, I might want to argue with Scott about his willingness to dismiss fideism. Wittgenstein himself was slightly contemptuous of philosophy, but Christians who find they have a taste for contempt are likely to make fools of themselves. We should read philosophy.

We should also read Christian doctrine. Jenny Wright's chosen prophet is Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) the great American Protestant theologian, who wrote, among other things *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. The Niebuhrs (his brother was a great theologian too) were of course of German extraction. His father was in the orders of the old Prussian Union, Schleiermacher's church, which united Lutheran and Reformed, and so the Evangelical Synod of North America, to which the Niebuhrs belonged, had a double Calvinist and Lutheran tradition. Jenny is rightly interested in his political realism and the seriousness of his ethics but coming from a minority church with a distinctive blended tradition, like he did, I'm interested in his roots.

Trevor Hart writes on 'Tangling the fibres of the threefold cord: truth and the Anglican tradition'. As we all know, the threefold cord is Scripture, tradition and reason, and he takes us back to Richard Hooker (c. 1554–1600) and John Henry Newman (1801–1890) admitting frankly that *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* was written after Newman became a Roman Catholic. He raises well the great Anglican 'issues of complexity, provisionality, and the need for a broader and more integrated account of knowing'. And John Reuben Davies writes on 'Liturgy as a repository of truth', 'The church's task is more about understanding the liturgical tradition than shaping it anew in our own image; seeing it as a repository of truth, and interpreting what it says to us, rather than making it say what we want to hear.' Discuss. There are some very beautiful quotations from our liturgical tradition in this article, all of which are quite clearly repositories of truth. And it was good to be reminded of Percy Dearmer: 'A modern preacher often stands in a sweated pulpit, wearing a sweated surplice over a cassock that was not produced under fair conditions, and, holding a sweated book in one hand, with the other he points to the machine-made cross at the jerry-built altar, and appeals to the sacred principles of mutual sacrifice and love' (*The Parson's Handbook*).

As one perhaps ought to hope, the article on mysticism, John McLuckie's 'Truth and experience: prayer and ascetic practice' goes beyond simply western culture. We are in dialogue with Hinduism. But his prophet is William James (1842–1910). James was a Harvard academic, and his religious pedigree was of all things Swedenborgianism. Again, I think there is a blessing in coming from a minority religious background. John is using James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, which were the Gifford Lectures 1900-2, so there is a link with Scotland, if not with our church. I hope that

Bishop Dowden, who was a true scholar, attended. And it is good to see David Tracy cited as the expounder of James. David Tracy is an American Roman Catholic, but whenever I read him, I feel quite sure that he and I are theological brothers, though I am nothing like as good.

Steven Ballard writes on Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) and *The Idea of the Holy*, published in 1917. Otto was a German Lutheran professor at Marburg, whose concerns take us beyond Christianity. Steven did his doctoral research at Marburg on Otto, so this is expert testimony. It is also a thoroughly lucid introduction to Otto and his thought in context. Good as this is, I have read *The Idea of the Holy*, and would strongly recommend that you do too. As Erasmus used to say, *ad fontes* – go to the primary sources. And how important a sense of the holy is in our liturgy and in our lives.

I'm biased about Bob Gillies. He was my bishop, and I hear his speaking voice when I read his stories of pastoral experience. He has wonderful case studies of varying degrees of 'white' lies – this whole business of funeral eulogies! It is an engrossing article, and very properly grounded in years of experience, and it has the theologians as well, like Augustine and Aquinas, both I fear judged somewhat lax. Bishop Bob has come across some things that horrified me – look what some Christian groups get up to in footnote 25.

One of the things I used to think really impressive in the old TISEC (Theological Institute of the Scottish Episcopal Church) was that every year there were modules on Theology and Science. This was because Michael Fuller, the then Principal, had a background in science. We are a denomination with lots of graduates in the pews, many of them with degrees in the sciences. It is not absolutely certain that they forget their discipline as soon as they graduate or compartmentalize their minds. So, it is good that here, as part of the spectrum of the mind of thinking Scottish Episcopalians that we have in this book, there are two articles on Sciences and Truth. The first is a scientist's view by Professor Eric Priest, who recently edited a book with the promising title *Reason and Wonder: Why Science and Faith Need Each Other*. This is a friendly and unthreatening view of science; indeed, it gives the image of so many of the scientists we have met, very far removed from the militant 'scientism' that confronts religion as if it were a conspiracy against happiness and truth. As we look at good scientific practice, it might well give us clues on good temper, and a sense of our own boundaries, and the limitations on our certainty, that would make our theology less angry and more useful.

Michael Fuller's own article on 'Sciences and Truths: A Theologian's View', is rather less reassuring. Here is an idea from Nancy Cartwright that made me pause and think. "The realist insistence "that the laws of our best sciences are true or are approaching the truth ... [and] that they are 'few in number', 'simple' and 'all-embracing'", suggesting rather that "the laws that

are the best candidates for being literally true ... are numerous and diverse, complicated and limited in scope". We love things to be simply straightforward, and sometimes they just are not. (If everything was straightforward, we'd be Arians not Trinitarians). And I really liked Michael's stuff on narrative.

I have already mentioned Alison Jasper's article on 'Today's Church and the Politics of Post-Truth', which of all the articles was the one that I would say to people 'You must read'. Her prophets are people I confess with shame I had never heard of, Donna Haraway and Isabelle Stengers, two philosophers of science. She is looking, among other things, for a 'pattern for ongoing, non-innocent, interrogative, multispecies getting on together'. And when you have read her, you can look at each of these words and think 'Yes – now I see what she means'. That way lies the politics of truth.



## Book Reviews

YAZID SAID and LEJLA DEMIRI, eds. *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Encounters through A Common Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). ISBN 9781107134348. Xvi + 334. £63.02 (hardback); £59.89 (Kindle).

It all began with a lecture delivered by the then Pope Benedict XVI at Regensburg University in September 2006. Though relatively new to the papacy, Benedict had a well-established reputation as a theologian and ecclesiastical official and was not a noted ecumenist. In this particular lecture, which followed shortly upon the removal of Archbishop (now Cardinal) Michael Fitzgerald from President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue to a diplomatic post in Egypt, Pope Benedict quoted the fourteenth century Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologos, who, in a fictitious dialogue with “a certain Persian”, described Islam as evil, inhuman, and irrational. Quite on what basis citing this text was considered relevant or prudent was never apparent. Whatever the pope may have intended, he was widely understood to have contrasted a supposedly rational and peaceable Christian, i.e. Catholic, Europe with an inherently irrational and violent Islam. Quite apart from whether any religion can be considered rational, and on what basis, a cursory study of the history of Christian Europe does little to reinforce such a stereotype. It would not only have been Muslims who formed the impression that the pope shared the worldview of then American President George Bush. For those who heard reckless references to crusades and regime-change, and knew what its consequences had been in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine, there was an urgent need to re-establish coherent and responsible communication between the political and religious leaders of the Christian and Muslim worlds, and also a recognition that, politically and theologically, Jews and Judaism would need to be part of the engagement with others. Furthermore, the papal lecture had provoked violent attacks on minority Christian communities in some Muslim countries, where they were all too easily associated with the political and religious leaders of the western world and their hostile agenda.

While Vatican bureaucracy was predictably defensive, and right-wing European and American politicians expressed their support, responsible Muslim leaders recognised the need to establish dialogue on an intellectually and morally sound basis. Led by Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad of the Hashemite royal family, and with the support of King Abdullah, an international group of Muslim intellectuals addressed both the violence of intra-Islamic strife in parts of the Middle East, and sent an open letter to

Pope Benedict addressing issues raised by his lecture in Regensburg. This did not receive the response elementary courtesy would have required, prompting Prince Ghazi to instigate a larger and wider document, addressed not only to Pope Benedict, but to a comprehensive and open-ended list of leaders of Christian denominations. *A Common Word from Us to You*, initially signed by 138 Muslim luminaries, was published in 2007. It explored the common roots of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religions, and the shared principles enshrined in their sacred scriptures. Particular attention was drawn to Qur'an, Sura 3:64:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him).

This is understood to provide the basis of relationship between communities of the three faiths. Further texts are cited to illustrate a common tradition, and to assert the unity of God. In particular, the "love command" central to the teaching of Jesus (and to contemporary rabbis), alludes to the *shema*, a statement central to Jewish piety, and is consonant with Muslim principles.

*A Common Word* evoked responses from a variety of Christian bodies, which were overwhelmingly appreciative while also addressing outstanding concerns openly and honestly. There also ensued series academic engagement with the document and with the issues it raises. This book is an example of this. Largely the proceedings of a conference held in Cambridge to mark the tenth anniversary of *A Common Word*, this volume includes contributions from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theologians and other specialists. These include Rowan Williams, by then former Archbishop of Canterbury, who had fortuitously been in office when *A Common Word* was published, and whose response, reproduced here, is characteristically theological, prayerful, and reflective.

As well as reflecting on the events which brought about the publication of *A Common Word* and the responses it evoked, this volume includes studies of some of the outstanding issues identified. A section on the use of Scripture identifies both the potential and the challenges of a shared but also divergent and bifurcating heritage. These are each worthy of careful study but must be seen as part of a continuing and broadening process. Productive engagement between theologians of the different traditions and displays of respect and even affection among their leaders, will not address the threats to humanity posed by religiously charged and aggravated conflicts. Religious leaders, at all levels, will need to reflect on the

ways in which they teach their faith, the example they set, and the way in which they influence the lives and attitudes of their adherents.

This is a welcome and substantial contribution to scholarship, and also to honest intellectual engagement between theologians of different faiths. Its merits, however, in no way diminish the urgency of the issues it addresses.

NICHOLAS TAYLOR

Rector, St Aidan's Church (Clarkston)

JOSEPH VERHEYDEN AND JOHN S. KLOPPENBORG, eds. *The Gospels and Their Stories in Anthropological Perspective*. *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 409 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). Viii + 332 pp. ISBN 9783161563089. £155.96 (hardback).

This collection of twelve essays makes a significant contribution to an approach to the study of early Christianity which has proved fruitful, if controversial, over recent decades, but which is still in its infancy. Both editors, neither of whom is author of any of the essays, have well-established reputations in the profession, having made significant and influential contributions to historical- and tradition-critical studies of the Gospels before developing their interests in social scientific and particularly anthropological approaches to Christian origins and the interpretation of ancient Christian texts.

Contributors include senior and prominent scholars, but also doctoral students pioneering new and very particular approaches to their material. The breadth of anthropology as a discipline, and the diversity of methods and theories, as well as particular issues which apply to the study of communities reconstructed on the basis of texts rather than through fieldwork, point both to a wealth of potential and to the inevitability of pitfalls more likely to be discerned by the next generation of scholars. The studies reflect both an awareness of the provisionality of their findings and also a confidence that much can be learned through their approach to Christian origins.

The book is divided into four sections: 'Bodies, Demons, and Magic', 'Practices', 'Spaces', and 'Visions', followed by a 'Response' from a professional academic anthropologist. The 'Response' provided some useful insights into the development of the discipline, and of the sometimes-conflicting assumptions which scholars have brought to it, which relate the contributions to this volume to the academic heritage they are appropriating. The scope of studies, all addressing complex issues crucial to our understanding of the emergence of Christianity, indicate the depth of our

unfamiliarity with the world in which Jesus and his disciples lived, and the challenges to bridging the cultural gulf which separates contemporary Christians from the literature they revere as Scripture.

This is a significant contribution to the study of early Christianity and indicates ways in which our knowledge and understanding may be further developed. The challenges to past certainties may cause some discomfort, but the light that is shed on the Jesus movement and early Christianity, however tentatively, demonstrates the potential for further illumination if scholars persevere in this approach to the texts Christians read as Holy Scripture. In the meanwhile, the caution required in abstracting rules for others on the basis of the Bible ought to be apparent to all readers.

NICHOLAS TAYLOR

Rector, St Aidan's Church (Clarkston)

FRANCIS MINAY. *A Summoning Half-Sensed: Poems* (Edinburgh: Covenanters Press, 2019). xvi + 99 pp. ISBN 9791905022397. £12.95.

Francis Minay is to be congratulated on this, his first book of poems. Now retired and living in the Diocese of Moray, Ross and Caithness, he has put together a collection that evokes both periods of his past life, and his present experience.

Minay studied stained glass at Edinburgh College of Art. Poetry evoking memories of classes in that college are found in the book. One poem finds its focus in a window he designed for the Church of the Good Shepherd while he was studying in Edinburgh. Several poems evoke memories of Edinburgh in the 50s and 60s – the Caley Station and the Scott Monument. There is an *In Memoriam* of his father, who was organist at St Cuthbert's Parish Church in Edinburgh when Minay was a child.

But Minay's collection focuses on matters wider than Scotland. We find poetry concerning his first term at Westcott House (Cambridge), his visiting Aldeburgh, his honeymoon with Janie in Cornwall. We encounter places where he had worked (in addition to being stained glass advisor to the Diocese of York, Minay was for a period in his ministry chaplain to Arts and Recreation in the Dioceses of Newcastle, Durham and York). There are many poems on wildlife, and one unusual poem simply consisting of the names of steam locomotives operated by the principal British railway companies (LMS, LNER, SR, GWR). Minay gives us further insight into his work as a stained-glass artist in a poem about a window he was commissioned to design in the Diocese of York.

It is difficult to sum up the collection. It is such a very varied collection. In the *Foreword* Alan Macgillivray writes:

In *A Summoning Half-Sensed*, the reader will find a range of well-crafted pieces, appealing in many different ways and evoking many moods. There are poems of reflection and of argument; poems of memory and of immediacy; poems of love and marriage, vivid life and elegiac evocation of the dead; poems that celebrate the natural world and pay tribute to the power of art; poems of people, places and ideas. Many of Francis Minay's interests emerge clearly in the collection – trains and railways, music, birds, stained glass and painting, and walking the high hills of the North-West of Scotland, home of his retirement and of his wife Janie's maternal forebears.

And the variety to be found in the collection includes several specifically theological themes – Jacob's wrestling, Job's persistence (Minay prefers talk of 'persistence' to talking of Job's 'patience'), forgiveness and prayer.

Minay's collection deserves to be read. If one tries to read it 'through' one finds themes recurring and being developed anew in subsequent poems, but one can simply dip into it, and wherever one dips, something valuable is found. Those who encouraged Francis to publish his collection deserve our thanks.

On the back cover the publisher refers to the title of the collection – *A Summoning Half-Sensed* seeing it as poetry written by a retired priest who has tried to live with the expectations of vocation – a subject very appropriate for the *Journal* of the Institute!

BRIAN SMITH

Former Bishop of Edinburgh

FRANCES WARD. *Full of Character: A Christian Approach to Education for the Digital Age* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2019). 262 pp. ISBN 9781785923395. £16.99 (paperback).

This is a very readable and timely book by a leading Anglican cleric. It is a welcome aid for those struggling to bring up children or to teach and instruct in the digital age that is dominated by instant information at the cost of wisdom and by addiction to the electronic screen. Many people like myself struggle to keep up with younger generations who are far more technologically adept in a world of endless 'upgrades' for programmes that

are outdated, it seems, as soon as one begins to get the hang of how to use them.

This is a Christian book about education, offering an alternative to a world that is driven by SMART objectives and the accumulation of knowledge rather than the acquiring of true wisdom. In these pages, friends and family talk about the possibility of human flourishing 'within a greater sense of fullness' (p. 27), and as the book develops, Christian theology becomes more apparent and more explicit. It begins to draw together in chapter 12, on Hopefulness, and hope for true fulfillment. At this point Frances Ward starts to resonate with projects such as the theological humanism of David Klemm and William Schweiker which is also focused on the sense of human flourishing. This is a condition that is not grounded in material success achieved at all costs, or some form of measured superiority, but on fullness of 'character' that is instilled from the very beginning of our lives and requires the development of character through creative play, a sense of the importance of truth, even (and perhaps especially) when that is inconvenient, and a growth into a maturity that is recognizable as the Christian life.

In a sense there is little that is new here. Such formation from childhood has its roots in the Romanticism of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* as well as, much earlier, the Christian gospel. Nevertheless, these are lessons that need to be learnt afresh in every age, and perhaps most acutely in our own time as ecological disaster looms over a culture in which addiction to risk aversion can too often seem like burying one's head in the sand and truth is an ever more fragile commodity to be readily sacrificed on the altar of convenience and self-interest.

In her first chapter Frances Ward reminds us of the fundamental need for a sense of thankfulness, 'the parent of all virtue' (p. 49). It is on this note also that Christian worship begins and in which it is rooted in the great Eucharistic Prayer of thanksgiving. Learning to be thankful is also the beginning of finding one's being and centre not ultimately in the self but in the other – in Paul Ricoeur's resounding phrase, *soi-même comme un autre* – oneself as another. Only with this dialogical model of human being can one truly begin to *think* with an intelligence that is emotional as well as cognitive and rational: theology itself then becomes something that one finds in *thinking theologically*, rather than something that one attempts to master in dogmatic entrenchments.

There is much to be learnt, or perhaps to be reminded of, in these pages. It is a book that is 'written to provoke a deeper thoughtfulness about education' and this applies to the university and seminary as much as to the nursery and primary school. Indeed. Such education is a life-long exercise that exempts none of us in the search for integrity and human well-being.

Each chapter concludes with helpful questions and suggestions for further read and reflection, reminders that Frances Ward offers us here a book to be discussed and even argued with rather than read dogmatically and conclusively. Ultimately the idea of fulfillment – which is the subject of the final chapter 13 – is not about conclusion or certitude, but about a vision for the created world and for human being. Being full of character is not about satisfaction with the self, but about a form of self-forgetfulness that allows us a vision of a future that is to be realized and yet is already promised and present in Christ, the paradox of a realized eschatology that makes us creatures of hope even in the midst of a world that too often seems dark and for many too like a condemned cell. As myself both a parent and a teacher I heartily recommend this book and its vision as something to be reached out to and fought for in our fragile world of technology and knowledge acquired too quickly and without wisdom.

DAVID JASPER

Convener of the Doctrine Committee of the Faith and Order Board of the  
Scottish Episcopal Church and  
Professor Emeritus of Theology and Literature (University of Glasgow)

KATHLEEN LYONS. *Mysticism and Narcissism: A Personal Reflection on Changes in Theology during My Life as a Cenacle Nun* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016). 230 pp. ISBN 9781443899536. £47.99 (hardback); £34.99 (paperback).

Our journey through life as people of faith never ceases to both surprise and intrigue me at the working of the creator Spirit, sustaining and enabling us to face the changes which are thrown at us during our pilgrimage with Christ. My initial attraction to this book was Kathleen Lyons, who had a profound impact upon me as a student at the London Spirituality Centre where she was a teacher on the three-year-training course to become an Ignatian spiritual director. Her presence, as a very old nun to me in 2011, was awe inspiring as she spoke about the importance of listening in the spiritual life and affirming each of us in the room as unique and particular to God. Some of the openness and immediacy of her as a woman bubbles up through the text of the book which was still in draft form when I met her.

In the book, she details the exceptional personal narrative of a long-serving Cenacle nun during a time of particular historical significance for the Roman Catholic Church. The book's original approach is highlighted by its application of psychoanalytic theory to questions of theological and Marian

identity and relationality. It explores narcissism and mysticism within the context of religious life. It provides an excellent historical resource for the study of women's religious orders in the twentieth century. And it analyses the impact of the Second Vatican Council on the self-understanding of all women, as well as the relationship the RC Church developed with them in the light of the documents of the Council.

Lyons presents the reader with a compelling, as well as at times daunting, array of personal struggle and theological grappling as she opens up the quest of all people to be mystics in the wider church today. The quality and rigour of the theological enquiry spans the official documents and statements of the RC Church whilst also drawing insightfully on the insights of psychoanalytical sciences and how they pave the way for revealing 'new' understanding of our relational growth as the 'people of God'.

The text is structured in a fashion that draws the reader through Lyons's life and membership of the Cenacle Sisters from before the Council through the debates and proclamations of Rome, through the decades of working-out the necessary changes to spirituality and practice of the RC faith, in a community setting of celibate, vowed women. Her search for meaning and belonging as a woman in a pre-Vatican II patriarchal church, which held little, if any, role to the voice of women, is charted through personal diary-like pages as the opening of each chapter. There follows a drawing-out of the theological issues raised and addressing by them in the official teaching being propagated. So too she notes later twentieth-century insights from the sciences, as the Vatican-II worldview began to open enquiry of faith to the scrutiny and operation of the sciences in new and exciting ways, in order to posit the position of the feminine to be the actual giver of the redemptive action to the world.

This is a significant text to aid understanding of the redemptive action of Christ for all people, pulling together the feminine and the masculine aspects of Christ's role in being incarnate. It is rare to have a text which intertwines the personal struggle and the theological questions of faith and draws the reader into the pathway of questing for meaning that 'works' for the world we live in now and acknowledging the contributions of contemporary theological movements such as feminist theology and liberation theology. The quest for personal identity is pungent within the pages of Lyons's text whilst also locating that personalness in a relational setting of the 'people of God' – the baptised. The relationality is central to the theological threads she develops, and the whole theological understanding she expounds in unifying the feminine and masculine in a pre-gender identified stage of human development in the womb, making the redemptive act of Christ's Incarnation not to do with his maleness but in his being



nurtured in a womb. She presents this as setting the scene for a 'Church that is a discipleship of equals, where being a Christian will be to be a mystic'.

The chapters of the book are set in time order and chart three parts to the process of discovery that Lyons offers us: Part 1: 'From Monastic to Apostolic' is the quest of her Order to find its identity as an apostolic work for the world. It explores the change of identity of the Order as it rediscovers its founder's charism based on the Pentecost of Acts 2. Part 2: 'Contemplatives in Action' is the new and appreciated role of 'experience' in the Christian life in forming theology and seeking to discern God's promptings. Part 3: 'Everyday Mysticism' places before us the everyday life of the Christian person as a mystic in each and every day of our lives. Quoting Karl Rahner 'God of my daily drudge', mysticism, Lyons says, 'is not a special gift to Christians but is bestowed with the gift of life and accepted at Baptism'. The last chapter, 'The Marian Key', focuses the reader on Lyons's theological understanding of Mary and the power of the biblical Mary's 'Yes' to the invitation to bring salvation into the world through allowing God to incarnate God's self in her womb. These pages grapple with the role and voice of women in the RC Church and the silencing of many such voices through the centuries. The Marian theology she presents is a very active participation in the redemptive action of God through building a new relationship with humanity in the act of incarnation, locating God completely in the created order.

Being a member of the Cenacle Sisters, this identification with Mary's role in both the Incarnation and redemptive actions is a focus of her writing as the Order founded itself as based upon the Pentecost incident of Acts 2 with men and women '[...] all together in one place'. Being in relationship with other – in community (in the Church) – is foundational to the theological explorations and developments that we are offered and they realign the place of women in the Church as she recounts that 'Women who have not written the biblical stories are 'historical losers', with the result that they are marginalised when they are not omitted altogether'. The frame of view which Lyons offers in her concluding chapter places Mary's role as one for all of us to model by allowing the Incarnation to be formed in us. In her sectional subtitle 'Mary "as the air we breathe"' we are given a scene of theological understanding where Jesus and Mary are co-workers in the incarnational and redemptive work of God through the relational co-operative work of both. Christ is given to us as 'God is revealed in the mediation between human and the divine' and 'Mary mediates both human and divine to us equally with her son'. Lyons declares that the Virgin Mary is a historical example of the 'full humanity of woman'. This powerful position of Mary in choosing not to decline to help the incarnation occur, Lyons

reflects, although confessed by doctrine is not reflected in the practise of the institutional Church.

Through the chapters of the book run the themes of Ignatian Spirituality and discernment, which was much of Lyons's work in her Order in helping visitors find for themselves the promptings of the Spirit in their lives. With the value of human 'experience', now allowed in the post-Vatican-II Church, the closing paragraph remembers the ongoing male patriarchy of the Church and the experience of the times is not be attended to by the leaders as it fails to look out(side) of itself. 'A Church that does not go out of itself, sooner or later, sickens from the stale air of a closed room', said Pope Francis whilst addressing his cardinals in Rome and noted that going out may bring accidents: 'I prefer a thousand times a Church of accidents than a sick Church'. In closing, Lyons notes that both Pope Francis and Ignatius of Loyola 'lived by a transcendence of self and not by the narcissistic seductions of control, power and success'. Instead Lyons suggests that: 'we look forward to a Church that is a discipleship of equals, where being a Christian will be to be a mystic'.

REUBEN PRESTON

Rector, St Margaret's Church (Renfrew) and  
St John's Church (Johnstone)

KAREN O'DONNELL, *Broken Bodies: The Eucharist, Mary, and the Body in Trauma Theology* (SCM Press, 2018). Pp. 224. ISBN 9780334056249. £65.00 (hardback); £30.00 (paperback); £28.50 (Kindle).

Karen O'Donnell offers a theology of the eucharist through the lens of trauma. The Body of Christ is traumatised in several ways. The gathered community, as the Body of Christ, has many members who have experienced trauma. The annunciation and becoming pregnant was a traumatic experience for Mary. Trauma is also in the Godhead, as one person of the Trinity becomes a human being. Trauma studies have argued that trauma is located and remembered in the body. At the heart of the Eucharist, therefore, is a somatic memory – a body broken, a body united by that sign.

One of the contributions that O'Donnell offers to eucharistic theology is steering away from a focus on Christ's death on the cross and instead centralising what she calls the Annunciation-Incarnation event. O'Donnell explains that this encompasses all of Christ's life, but the term enables her to focus on the annunciation and the incarnation. With the annunciation the person of Mary comes into focus. With the incarnation, the focus shifts from the death of Christ to the life-giving event of Jesus' birth and the affirmation

of materiality. Or in O'Donnell's words, from death to the 'continued and creative transformation of the corporeal' (p. 187). The Eucharist is a non-identical repetition (i.e. history and novelty combined) of this 'Annunciation-Incarnation of Christ' (p. 19).

In the first part of the book, O'Donnell establishes the argument for this shift in focus. After a brief chapter on trauma and trauma theology, she demonstrates that eucharistic theologies in the early church did not always focus on Jesus' death on the cross. Instead, O'Donnell highlights other foci and metaphors, that relate to life and growth. For example, she discusses the connection Chrysostom makes between the nativity and the eucharist, and Andrew of Crete's image of dough. Furthermore, she says there is clear evidence that milk was being used in some eucharistic celebrations in the first four centuries of Christianity, and the image of mothers' milk is present in patristic writings. As such, the eucharist can be seen not (only) as a remembrance of the death of Christ on the cross, but as a non-identical repetition of the Annunciation-Incarnation event. The third chapter concludes the first part, discussing Cyril of Alexandria's theology of the unity or integrity of the body (an important theme with regard to trauma, as traumatised bodies are disintegrated). His theology is driven by the central place of the eucharist. In this way, O'Donnell says her theological moves in the next part of the book are analogous to Cyril's way of doing theology.

In part two, then, O'Donnell makes three such theological moves in three respective chapters: one on priesthood, one on sacrifice, and one on the materiality of the eucharist. The chapter on priesthood contains creative theological ideas. O'Donnell demonstrates that throughout history, in writing and art, Mary has been depicted at times as priest or even as bishop. That, in combination with Rowan Williams's description of the priesthood as 'holding open of a door into a place where damaged and confused humanity is able to move slowly into the room made available' (p. 80), makes for interesting images of the (historically male-dominated) priesthood. For example, Mary becomes an image of priesthood, hence the priest can be seen as giving birth to Christ through the eucharistic elements and nourishing the congregation through the eucharist (the image of breast milk is important again). In the chapter on sacrifice, O'Donnell replaces the notion of sacrifice as focusing on Jesus' death on the cross with mutual self-giving, seen within the Trinity, and in the Trinity's reaching out to humanity. The chapter on the materiality of the eucharist rests on a discussion of *perichoresis* as the basis for mutual indwelling of the Godhead and of God's indwelling of the material order. The penultimate chapter discusses several theological themes that might be 'ruptured' and reconstructed through the lens of trauma. A number of themes that were discussed in the book converge here in these reflections. The book closes with the chapter 'Body: A Love Story.' This chapter is

grounded in O'Donnell's own traumatic experiences of miscarriage, and from there asks the question what it means to love the body: One's own body, the church, the priestly body, the material body, Mary's body, and more.

The last chapter, with its personal note, makes clearer why trauma is at the heart of this study. A question that kept coming back to me while reading the book was: Why trauma? Most of the arguments that O'Donnell makes, can be made without using the concept of trauma. Her arguments hinge on two key notions: the category of non-identical repetition, which is helpful to emphasise both that the eucharist is embedded in a long-standing tradition and that it is always new, and therefore creative (indeed: life-giving); and the category of somatic memory. While somatic memory is crucial to understand trauma, outside the field of trauma it is a much-used concept nowadays as well. The 'rupture' that O'Donnell refers to, as a characteristic of trauma, and that she uses to break open theological themes, can also occur through other lenses than trauma. Also, the chapter that shows how the lens of trauma can help to read theology anew, is not at all points convincing (for example, the claim that trauma lies at the heart of all [seven] sacraments). That being said, at the same time this chapter contains some inspiring reflections, such as the suggestion that the liturgical structure of confession, Word, Eucharist and sending can help post-traumatic growth.

All of this is not to say that the concept of trauma is misplaced. While one might wonder whether the arguments need to be grounded in the concept of trauma, the concept is helpful, and this book is a welcome contribution to trauma theology. O'Donnell's offers some profound theological ideas. Her reflections, following Luther and Moltmann, on God taking in Jesus' death on the cross within God-self (God's womb?) as a comforting image for stillbirth and miscarriage are profound. Not only does the book contribute to trauma theology, it also suggests refreshing ways to think about the eucharist, and related themes of priesthood and sacrifice. Moving away from violent death to life-giving birth instead is a theological intuition that deserves further attention for anyone concerned with the eucharist and theology more generally. Likewise, O'Donnell's highlighting Mary as image for the priesthood, including notions such as nourishment, deserve a wide readership. In conclusion, while some of O'Donnell's arguments could be improved to be more convincing, she offers rich and refreshing possibilities to rethinking eucharistic theology, and she makes a welcome contribution to trauma theology.

ARMOND LÉON VAN OMMEN

Lecturer in the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy  
(University of Aberdeen)