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Book Reviews
Building the bridge from academic theology to Christian mission

Clark H. Pinnock

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Bi-polar theology

Ideally, Christian theology will always be striving in a balanced way to integrate the two poles of its ellipse, God’s revelation and the world of human existence. We will be attempting to correlate, as Tillich said, the truth of the Word with the questions people are asking today.1 We want to view everything around us in the perspective provided by the gospel. Theology is truly exciting and has a real cutting edge when it is effecting a transformation of contemporary reality. Revelation can only do people any positive good if it is understood, and to be understood it must be phrased in intelligible terms. Standing between, as we do, the world of the biblical text and the world of today, we have to build bridges across the divide for the sake of teaching today’s generation for Christ.2

In all forms of classical Christianity it would go without saying that this work of translation whereby the gospel is rendered into modern speech and categories would be done in a posture of complete faithfulness to the Word of God. We would be trying to clarify the truth of the Bible without changing its meaning in the slightest way. The fourth mark of the church in the Nicene creed, apostolicity, signifies the commitment to the cognitive substance of apostolic teaching enshrined in the New Testament.3 It was always just assumed that the revelation pole of the theological ellipse yields valid truth and information about God’s person and will for us to which we ought to be submissive. In this context there would be a major challenge to be hermeneutical: how can we convey the truth given in the biblical culture to people living in the modern situation? There would be absolutely no thought of demythologising the message to make it more acceptable. It would be a matter of clarifying normative truth to assist with understanding. Theology was conservative with respect to the Word pole, and contemporary only with respect to the modern setting and the problems of communication.


The sword and the trowel

But all of this has radically changed in our day. No longer can we take the revelation pole for granted when building our bridges. Like Timothy, we live in an age when we have to guard the gospel because false teachers are out to change it (2 Tim. 1:14-21; 2:4-3:4). One has to guard the substance of the truth at the same time as trying to make good the communication. It reminds me of Nehemiah and his colleagues who had to hold a sword in one hand while building with the other because of the danger of attack from their enemies. Needless to say, these circumstances make it harder to get on with the building.

I have reference of course to what we call religious liberalism, which is more dedicated to transforming than to translating the Christian message. If one surveys the history of dogmatic theology, one cannot fail to notice that a major shift took place with Kant and Schleiermacher which dropped out the objective truth content of the gospel and substituted for it some form of human reason or experience.4 Biblical doctrine was no longer regarded as infallible or even essential to Christianity. Apostolic teaching was shoved aside as the touchstone of catholic continuity and replaced by a vague continuity of spirit or life stance. Of course doctrine was not dropped altogether, but it was seen to be the expression of man’s self-understanding and not revealed truth. What was now taken to be crucial was human experience or perhaps philosophical reasoning. No longer was revelation seen to involve authoritative content; instead it was taken to be an experience which throws up different intellectual and moral patterns which are themselves human in origin and authority.5

The result has been a great transformation of classical theology. Think of Bultmann or Tillich or Robinson. And with the transformation of course there has also occurred a great assimilation of the church into secular modernity. It has reached the point where it is hard to distinguish what some theologians are saying from what the humanists declare.6


In defence of the faith
It would be nice if the liberals would listen to Stott’s impotent question, ‘Why can we not be biblical as well as contemporary?’ But we must not be naive about the situation; for what we face is, in many cases at least, a determined decision not to submit to biblical teaching as an essential element in theology and a stubborn insistence to follow human wisdom instead. What we have to do therefore is to make a strong stand and say that true Christianity is a religion wedded to biblical substance and not malleable and formless. How then can we support such a conviction?

In supporting the belief in the indispensability of biblical content in a truly Christian theology, it is not necessary to exaggerate the point. Revelation surely involves more than propositional truth. The acts of God, as revealed in the way of life, are all important. But it is impossible to deny that doctrine is part of divine revelation according to the New Testament, and that it is of decisive importance in the Christian’s life. A Christian who is not a Christian in thought and deed is not a Christian.

Building bridges
But the other side of the coin is crucially important too. It is essential that we relate God’s inoffensive Word to the ever-changing human situation. We seek relevance as well as truth in evangelical theology. Just as the Lord spoke to us in the modalties of human speech and in his incarnation took to our flesh upon himself, so we are summoned to communicate the Word of God in a manner which is intelligible and challenging to our hearers. What God has given in the gospel can always be freshly understood and applied. His Word can never be exhausted and proves able to be related effectively to every new circumstance. It is as true today as it was, as John said, but even newer (1 Jn 2:7-8). Let me offer a few suggestions to help us all ground the Word in the world.

First, we must needs be prayerful and conscious of our dependence upon the Spirit of God. Liberal theology and preaching has been far too much the product of merely human comment upon God’s Word. It has been a human performance, not an event of the Word breaking out in the heart of a hearer. The proclamation of the Word is still the prime task. Two things are going on in the act of proclamation. One is the Word, and the other is the preacher’s thoughts. If theology and preaching are to be the Word for today, as Barth was so concerned to say, then it will have to be done in a spirit of humbly waiting upon God. This was the concern which led Barth to emphasize (no doubt, overemphasize) the freedom of the Word of God, and the power to produce effect in relation to the present in the present day. Evangelicals might say, what is crucial is the exposition of the Bible under the unction of the Spirit. While the Spirit’s Word is often grounded in the world. The factors which will guarantee this are not in our hands or under our control. We depend upon the promise of God to honour his Word and preserve his people.

Paul referred to this when he prayed for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:17). God has given us the Spirit precisely to lead and guide us as the mind and will of the Lord. As we yield our lives and our thoughts to the guidance of the Spirit, we will be aware of the things of God and direction in discipleship flowing out of a vital relationship with him. We can expect to receive guidance as to the significance of biblical texts for our situation and time. This is an aspect of what was meant by the promise that the Spirit would lead us into all truth. God’s presence in the life of his people is this just wisdom by intuition and guesswork. This is God’s promise, and all of his promises prove true.

Second, we have to be clear about why we want to build the bridge. Is it in order to float an idea no-one else thought of? Is it to make the gospel easier to accept than it actually is? Is it to establish how clever we are? Theology in the New Testament was missionary theology. Its rationale and driving force was the reaching of the nations for Jesus the Christ. Paul wanted to convert Greeks and Romans to the Jewish Messiah, and had to think how to communicate an originally Jewish gospel to them. He was not trying to write a definitive systematic theology for all time. He longed to see the nations saved and baptized. Theology was channeled down the track of the great commission. Is that true of our theology?

We can also learn from Paul how to go about the task of building bridges. For instance, he was not content with those who actually claimed to ‘be all things to all men’ (1 Cor. 9:22). Evidently he was prepared to go a very long way to identify himself with the needs of his audience in order to get through to them. Short of perversion, the gospel of Paul was willing to cross over cultural barriers and express himself in terms people could understand. For the sake of the gospel, Paul was willing to take some liberty with truth and often painful transition. This is surely the kind of flexibility and elasticity of approach which ought to characterize us also, if we are serious about effective contextualization.

Third, there is a place for human wisdom. Paul told Timothy to think over what he said to him (2 Tim. 2:7) and to teach these things. It is important to reclaim the Bible and in relation to our modern audience.

In relation to the Bible we must take care to understand the message which God has given us in its text. It is the image of God. It is the pattern of the human person in all that he or she may be. But in order to recover its meaning, whether theological or ethical or practical, we will need to engage with the world as it is. We cannot contain the gospel in the context of isolated, artificial, or non-sectarian groups who are not turning away from the Bible but rather implementing it. Of course it would not be right to dogmatize about our own personal opinions. But it is right to


see John M. Kelsey points this out in The Use of Scripture in Reformed Theology. The five points are: 1. ‘To know what we mean’ (p. 186), 2. ‘To make plain’ (p. 201), 3. ‘To proclaim the Word’ (p. 210), 4. ‘To fashion’ (p. 223), 5. ‘To correct’ (p. 230).

see Bernard Ramm, After Fundamentalism, The Failure of Evangelical Theology (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983). This position is a paradigm for evangelical theology today. Ch. 4 deals with preaching according to Barth.

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The effect of this tragic development upon theological building has been marked. First, it has meant that classical Christians (evangelicals as well as others) have been forced to put a lot of time and effort into defending the truth of the faith. While there is no need necessarily, this delayed more constructive activity. Second, because of the atrocities which have been done in the name of the gospel by the liberals, classical Christians have become nervous about the whole operation. It has forced us into a defensive and suspicious posture because we want no part in gospel twisting.

Stott, Between Two Worlds, p. 144

1 The choice of biblical references in the New Testament message in the face of a new and challenging culture, so that they were not distorting the gospel as Harnack charged but following the lines indicated in the original revelation


5 The great passion of Donald McGavran’s life has been to remind the church that its task is to call people out of darkness into God’s great light. His latest book is The World’s Need of Christ In All Nations (New York: Baker Book House, 1983).

6 This characteristic in Paul, see Richard N. Longenecker, Paul’s Apostle of Liberty (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), ch. 10.
The effect of this tragic development upon theological building has been profound. First, it means that classical Christians (evangelicals as well as others) have been forced to put a lot of time and effort into defending themselves against their enemies. This, in turn, has delayed or destroyed the very acts of love and charity that are necessary, this delayed more constructive activity. Second, because of the atrocities which have been done in the name of the gospel by the liberals, classical Christians have become nervous about the whole operation. It has forced us into a defensive and suspicious posture because we want no part in gospel twisting.

In defence of the faith

It would be nice if the liberals would listen to Stott’s important question: “Why can we not be biblical as well as contemporary?” But we must not be naive about the situation; for what we face is, in many cases at least, a determined decision not to submit to biblical teaching as an essential element in theology and a stubborn insistence to follow human wisdom instead. What we have to do therefore is to make a strong stand and say that true Christianity is a religion wedded to biblical substance and not malleable and formless. How then can we support such a conviction?

In supporting our belief in the indispensability of biblical content in a truly Christian theology, it is not necessary to exaggerate the point. Revelation surely involves more than propositional truth. The acts of God, in other words, are not all important. But it is impossible to deny that doctrine is part of divine revelation according to the New Testament. It is not something that takes place in a vacuum. It is not that revelation is subjective in any way.

Building bridges

But the other side of the coin is crucially important too. It is essential that we relate God’s infallible Word to the ever-changing human situation. We seek relevance as well as truth in evangelical theology. Just as the Lord spoke to us in the modalities of human speech and in his incarnation to our flesh upon himself, so we are summoned to communicate the Word of God in a manner which is intelligible and challenging to our hearers. What God has given in the gospel can always be freshly understood and applied. His Word can never be exhausted and proves able to relate effectively to every circumstance. This is why the New Testament says as old, as John said, but even new (1 Jn 2:7-8). Let me offer a few suggestions to help us all ground the Word in the world.

First, we must needs be prayerful and conscious of our dependence upon the Spirit of God. Liberal thelogy and preaching has been far too much the product of merely human comment upon God’s Word. It has been a human performance, not an event of the Word breaking out in the lives of men in a fresh way. Ministers and church leaders have to be open to the Word of God. If theology and preaching are to be the Word for today, as Barth was so concerned to say, then it will have to be done in a spirit of humbly waiting upon God. This was the concern which led Barth to emphasize (no doubt, overemphasize) the freedom of the Word of God to possess power to produce life in relation to the present in the day.

Evangelicals might say, what is crucial is the exposition of the Bible under the union of the Spirit and the Spirit, the Spirit of the Word that has settled in the world. The factors which will guarantee this are not in our hands or under our control. We depend upon the promise of God to honour his Word and preserve his people.

Paul referred to this when he prayed for a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (Eph. 1:17). God has given us the Spirit precisely to lead and guide us as the mind and will of the Lord. As we yield our lives to this leading, God will show us all the things of God and direction in discipleship flowing out of a vital relationship with him. We can expect to receive guidance as to the significance of biblical texts for our situation and time. This is an aspect of what was meant by the promise that the Spirit would lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13). It is not that the meanings of the words of the Spirit or the metaphors are to be sought. The metaphores are to be found in the Word, and when the metaphores are sought in the Word, they must be found in a correct interpretation of the Word of God.

Second, we have to be clear about why we want to build the bridge. Is it to make the gospel easier to accept than it actually is? Is it to establish how clever we are? Theology in the New Testament was missionary theology. Its rationale and driving force was the reaching of the nations for Jesus the Christ. Paul wanted to convert Greeks and Romans to the Jewish Messiah, and had to think how to communicate an originally Jewish gospel to them. He was not trying to write a definitive systematic theology for all time. He longed to see the nations saved and baptized. Theology was channelled down the track of the great commission. Is that true of our theology?

We can also learn from Paul how to go about the task of building the bridge. He was not thinking of a method which actually claimed to be ‘all things to all men’ (1 Cor. 9:22). Evidently he was prepared to go a very long way to identify his method of preaching. In order to get through to them. Short of perversion of the gospel, Paul was willing to cross over cultural barriers and express himself in terms people could understand. For the sake of God’s transforming message and for the sake of the gospel as a whole, he was willing to endure the effects of wear and often painful transition. This is surely the kind of flexibility and elasticity of approach which ought to characterize us. If we are serious about effective contextualizing.

Third, there is a place for human wisdom. Paul told Timothy to think over what he said to him (2 Tim. 2:7) and to be able to answer any question to the Bible and in relation to our modern audience.

In relation to the Bible we must take care to understand the message which God has given us in it. The text is God’s word, not a book which has something else whatever that may be. But in order to recover its meaning, whether theological or ethical or practical, we will have to do something that is a difficult thing to do. We have to try to distinguish what is permanent and applicable to us in it, as over against what is merely traditional opinion or what is of mainly local significance. This will involve a never-ending struggle to understand the text and to interpret it in the light of the whole of redemptive history. For example, for me means to be binding on us and which are only part of the Hebrew way of expressing the truths which the New Testament and the Christ made known. In relation to what the Zealots or the Pharisees were saying? What did Paul mean by his difficult remarks about all the old Jewish laws? It seems that the metaphors are to be sought in the Word, and when the metaphors are found in the Word, they must be found in a correct interpretation of the Word of God.

In relation to the modern audience we have to search for points of contact within their cultural setting. We need the wisdom of which Proverbs so often speaks to locate the cultural issues and forms in which the biblical message can have the same impact it had originally. That means we will have to be informed about the cultural situation, both our own and that of our audience, if we hope to make the bridge a successful one.

When we do that we will always find that the situation throws up questions to which the gospel provides good answers. For this to happen it is necessary that we become familiar with the frame of reference of the intended hearers. As a result we will become able to translate biblical truths into a dynamically equivalent way.

As we penetrate deeper into the Bible and deeper into the cultural setting we are aiming at, effective communication is impossible in any way violating the substance of Scripture, we will find it impossible to preach the gospel with relevance and power.

The modern theological discussion is full of examples of what can be done. Some of it is unrelated because the Scripture is not being used as a frame of reference. Some are floundering about. Christianity is being equated with Marxism, process philosophy, and self-fulfillment ideology. The Christian message can only protect itself against. But some of the work is by no means biblical and foolish. It is profound and proper to ask as Rahner does how the fullness of man’s nature and life. It is right to ask what God requires of us in a nuclear age. It is stirring to point to the biblical theme of hope in a world which has become bleak. There is a new, in a sense in history as Moltmann does. It is appropriate to bring biblical values to bear upon the slaughter of millions. We have to ask questions about what the Bible says about mammon and violence and power. The Bible speaks to all the people today in ways we are not turning away from the Bible but rather implementing of it. Of course it would not be right to dogmatise about our own personal opinions. But it is right to

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5 See J. H. Kelso points out this in The Use of Scripture in Recent Theology. See also the essays of Paul Kent, p. 63, pp. 171-92.
7 Thomas, ‘The meaning of the Old Testament’ as a paradigm for evangelical theology today. Ch. 4 deals with preaching according to Barth.
In conclusion, a bridge has two ends, and needs to be securely grounded in both. As evangelicals, along with classical Christians of every kind historically, we want to be found faithful, even if the West is losing its grasp of it in the modern world. May God give us a great company of those who will bridge the chasm between the doctrine of God and the modern situation by being both bold in the Scriptures and relevant in their contemporary circumstances.

The Greek doctrine of divine apatheia

The idea of divine impassibility (apatheia) was a Greek philosophical inheritance in early Christian theology. The great Hellenistic Jewish theologian Philo had already prepared the way for this by making apatheia a prominent feature of his picture of God, while Karl Barth asserted, though without extensive discussion, that God can suffer, as a necessary implication of God's self-revelation in Christ and his cross.

In Germany, Emil Brunner was prepared to abandon the philosophical dogma of the divine impassibility for the sake of coming to a clearer understanding of God, which Carl Barth asserted, though without extensive discussion, that God can suffer, as a necessary implication of God's self-revelation in Christ and his cross.

The Japanese Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his letter from prison, made his tantalizingly brief but suggestive remarks about God's weakness and passion. In the modern world of age of apathy, some Continental Catholic theologians, including the rather conservative Jean Galot, have also attempted to speak of God's suffering. But especially Jürgen Moltmann has expounded a theology of divine suffering in The Crucified God, and more recently again in The Trinity and the World Crisis, in a new understanding of divine suffering.

Theologians have continued the tradition.

During this century, however, the idea of divine suffering has appeared in many other theological traditions, with very little influence from England. The Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno developed a doctrine of the infinite sorrow of God. The Russian theologian Nikolai Berdyaev vigorously rejected impassibility in favour of a doctrine of 'tragedy' within the divine. The Japanese Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his letter from prison, made his tantalizingly brief but suggestive remarks about God's weakness and passion. In the modern world of age of apathy, some Continental Catholic theologians, including the rather conservative Jean Galot, have also attempted to speak of God's suffering. But especially Jürgen Moltmann has expounded a theology of divine suffering in The Crucified God, and more recently again in The Trinity and the World Crisis, in a new understanding of divine suffering.

The Suffering of God in Modern Theology

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'Only the suffering God can help':
divine passibility in modern theology

Richard Bauckham

The author is lecturer in theology at Manchester University.

In 1917 H. M. Relton made a judgment which has turned out to be remarkably far-sighted: 'There are many indications that the doctrine of the suffering God is going to play a very prominent part in the theology of the age in which we live.' The idea that God cannot suffer, accepted virtually as axiomatic in Christian theology from the early Greek Fathers until the nineteenth century, has in this century been progressively abandoned. For once, English theology can claim to have pioneered a major theological development: from about 1890 onwards, a steady stream of English theologians, whose theological approaches differ considerably in other respects, have agreed in advocating, with more or less emphasis, a doctrine of divine suffering. A peak of interest in the subject is indicated by J. K. Mozley's important study, The Impassibility of God (1926), which was commissioned by the Archbishops' Doctrine Commission in 1924 and which itself tells the story of English theological interest in the suffering of God up to 1924. Since then, a large number of English theologians have continued the tradition.

During this century, however, the idea of divine suffering has appeared in many other theological traditions, with very little influence from England. The Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno developed a doctrine of the infinite sorrow of God. The Russian theologian Nicolas Berdyaev vigorously rejected impassibility in favour of a doctrine of 'tragedy' within the divine life. The Japanese Lutheran theologian Kazoh


6Moltmann's doctrine of divine suffering was first developed apparently in ignorance of the English tradition, of which he later became aware from Mozley's book; see The Trinity and the Kingdom of God (ET: London: SCM Press, 1981), pp. 30-6. He admits: 'In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was English theology which carried on the theological discussion about God's passibility. Continental theology passed it by unheedingly' (p. 30).


Kitamori published his famous and ground-breaking book *Theology of the Pain of God in 1946.* Other Asian theologians have subsequently followed him in emphasizing the divine suffering. For them, as for James Cone’s black theology, God’s suffering is a necessary part of his solidarity with the oppressed. American process theology, following A. N. Whitehead’s oft-quoted characterization of God as ‘the fellow-sufferer who understands’, has readily incorporated God’s suffering into its reformulation of theism which makes much of God’s receptivity to the world.

In Germany, Emil Brunner was prepared to abandon the philosophical dogma of the divine impassibility for the sake of a more biblical concept of God, while Karl Barth asserted, though without extensive discussion, that God can suffer, as a necessary implication of God’s self-revelation in Christ and his cross. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his letters from prison, made his tantalizingly brief but suggestive remarks about God’s weakness and suffering in ‘the world come of age’. Some Continental Catholic theologians, including the rather conservative Jean Galot, have also attempted to speak of God’s suffering. But especially Jürgen Moltmann has expounded a theology of divine suffering in *The Crucified God*, and more recently again in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God.* For Moltmann, the divine suffering is closely related not only to the theodicy problem and the cross, but also to the trinitarian nature of God.

In the rest of this article we shall first examine the basis of traditional theology’s refusal to attribute suffering to God, and then attempt to isolate and discuss the various contributory factors in the widespread modern acceptance of a doctrine of divine passibility.

**The Greek doctrine of divine ‘apathia’**

The idea of divine impassibility (apathia) was a Greek philosophical inheritance in early Christian theology. The great Hellenistic Jewish theologian Philo had already prepared the way for this by making *apathia* a prominent feature of his understanding of the God of Israel, and virtually all the Christian Fathers took it for granted, viewing with suspicion any theological tendency which might threaten the essential impassibility of the divine nature.

To say that God is incapable of suffering does not really convey the full meaning of *apathia*. Nor does the English word ‘apathy’ help very much, but reflection on the connexions between the English words ‘impassibility’, ‘passion’, and ‘passive’, could bring us somewhere near the implications of *apathia*, *pathos* and *pathein* (paschein). For the Greeks, God cannot be passive; he cannot be affected by something else; he cannot (in the broad sense) ‘suffer’ (paschein), because he is absolutely self-sufficient, self-determining and independent.

*Pathos*, which the divine *apathia* excludes, means both ‘suffering’, in our sense of pain or calamity, and also ‘passion’, in the sense of emotion, whether pleasurable or painful. The connecting thought is passivity. Suffering is what comes upon one, against one’s will. It is something of which one is a passive victim. Thus suffering is a mark of weakness and God is necessarily above suffering. But, for the Greeks, one is also passive when one is moved by the passions or emotions. To be moved by desire or fear or anger is to be affected by something outside the self, instead of being self-determining. Again this is weakness and so God must be devoid of emotion. To suffer or to feel is to be *subject* to pain or emotion and the things that cause them. God cannot be subject to anything.

The divine impassibility is also closely connected with other aspects of the Greek understanding of God. Suffering is connected with time, change and matter, which are features of this material world of becoming. But God is eternal in the sense of atemporal. He is also, of course, incorporeal. He is absolute, fully actualized perfection, and therefore simply is eternally what he is.


He cannot change because any change (even change which he wills rather than change imposed on him from outside) could only be change for the worse. Since he is self-sufficient, he cannot be changed. Since he is perfect, he cannot change himself.21 Thus suffering and emotion are both incompatible with the nature of a God who never becomes, but is. Whereas for many modern minds this idea of God is unattractively 'static' (always a pejorative word in modern theology), for the Greek mind it was an attractive ideal of stability. God's benevolent will cannot be swayed by passion and his eternal blessedness is unassailable.

Although the general tendency of the Greek view of God was to remove him from any contact with the world, as adopted into Christian theology it did not mean that God was 'apathetic' in the modern sense. The Fathers have no doubt of God's love for the world, but his love is his benevolent attitude and activity, not a feeling, and not a relationship in which he can be affected by what he loves. Tensions in the patristic doctrine of God arose especially in the attempt to reconcile the immutability and impassibility of God with the Fathers' belief in a real incarnation of God in Christ and in the real sufferings of Christ, to both of which they held tenaciously as Christian theologians, in spite of the problems created by their Greek philosophical presuppositions about the divine nature. If the Fathers are to be criticized, it is not, of course, for the necessary attempt to make some connexion between the biblical God and the God of Greek philosophy, but for the insufficiently critical nature of their reconciliation of the two.22 They retain the most important features of the biblical God, but do not allow these features sufficient scope for calling in question the philosophical notion of divine nature.

A few of the Fathers seem to have moved rather timidly towards the idea that, although God cannot be thought to suffer unwillingly or out of any lack in himself, he could be conceived as free to undergo suffering voluntarily for the sake of human salvation.23 But the majority of the Fathers, even though constrained by Alexandrian Christology to attribute the sufferings of Jesus to the Logos, can do so only by a paradox (Cyril's 'he suffered impassibly'; Gregory of Nazianzus' the suffering of him who could not suffer24), which usually means that the Logos, though aware of the sufferings of his human nature, is unaffected by them.25

A further implication of the doctrine of divine apatheia is very important: it had as its corollary apatheia as a human ideal. This occurs in varying degrees and forms in the Greek philosophical schools and in the Fathers, but the general Greek tendency was to see essential human nature as self-determining reason, which as such resembles God. Ideally the emotions ought to be subject to the reason, but in fact through them the flesh and the material world are able to influence and sway the reason, resulting in sin and suffering. Hence the Greek religious ideal of becoming like God is to attain, as far as possible, to the divine apatheia.26 It should be noted that, although there is an anti-anthropomorphic motive in this tradition of thinking about God, there is also a sense in which the idea of divine apatheia is, in its own way, thoroughly anthropomorphic. It conceives God in the image of pure reason, abstracted from the human body and from the emotional aspects of human psychology, and it does so because this pure reason is what the Greek thinker himself aspires to be.

It is important to notice that most modern advocates of divine passibility recognize elements of truth in the patristic doctrine of divine apatheia.27 At its best, the notion of divine and human apatheia as a moral ideal suggested moral constancy, in which the will is able to maintain its loving purpose without being deflected. God's love is 'apathetic' in the sense that it is free, generous, and self-giving, not a 'need-love' dominated by self-seeking desires and anxieties.28 Moreover, it is true that God cannot be subject to suffering against his will, but that is not to say that he may not voluntarily expose himself to suffering.29 As Moltmann points out, the Fathers made the mistake of recognizing only two alternatives: 'either essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful subjection to suffering. But there is a third form of suffering — the voluntary laying oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by him; that is to say, the suffering of passionate love.'30

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23 Cf. especially Gregory Thaumaturgus' treatise on divine impassibility, summarized and quoted in Mozley, Impassibility, pp. 63-72; and comments in C. E. Gunton, Yesterday and Today: A Study of Continuities in Christology (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), p. 95; McLelland, God, pp. 141-2. Gregory anticipates Barth's view that God is 'not his own prisoner', i.e. his impassible nature cannot be a constraint on his freedom. But Gregory still seems to think that the wholly voluntary 'suffering' of God in Christ is not experienced as suffering, i.e. it is not unpleasant in any way, since he triumphs over his sufferings in the act of suffering them. Cf. also the much less reflective comments of Ignatius, Pol. 3:2; Eph. 7:2; Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3:16:6.
24 Theol. Or. 4:5
25 On the problem of impassibility in patristic Christology, see W. Elert, Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie (Berlin: Lutheresches Verlagshaus, 1957); Gunton, Yesterday, pp. 94-6.
26 On the meaning of Cyril's paradox, see F. M. Young, 'A Reconsideration of Alexandrian Christology', JEH 22 (1971), pp. 112-3.
27 On this theme in Clement of Alexandria, see McLelland, God, pp. 78-92.
29 Moltmann, Crucified God, pp. 269-70.
30 Cf. Mozley, Impassibility, pp. 145, 152, 153, 163; Bransett, Suffering, p. 12; Galot, Dieu, pp. 154-5.
31 Trinity, p. 23.
Factors in the modern doctrine of divine possibility:

1. Context

It is certainly no accident that modern concern with the question of divine suffering has frequently arisen out of situations in which human suffering was acute. The English theological tradition on this issue seems to have received considerable impetus from the First World War, which raised the problem of suffering for a generation of theologians recovering from nineteenth-century optimism. Kitamori’s *Theology of the Pain of God* was published in Japan soon after Hiroshima. ‘We are living in an age of God and pain,’ he wrote, ‘the world today seems to be stretched out under pain.’ It was in his Nazi prison cell that Bonhoeffer reflected that ‘only the suffering God can help’. Moltmann’s theology of the crucified God has its earliest origin in his experience as a prisoner of war, and eventually took the form of an attempt at a ‘theology after Auschwitz’. The black theologian James Cone is thinking especially of the history of oppression of American blacks when he writes of God’s identification with the suffering world.

A context of human suffering cannot itself sufficiently account for a doctrine of divine suffering. After all, the patristic doctrine of divine impassibility flourished in the great era of Christian martyrdom. There have been a whole variety of ways of relating God to human suffering. A doctrine of divine impassibility can encourage men and women to rise above suffering in the hope of attaining the unshakable blessedness of God, and in fact the martyrs were often seen as realising the ideal of *apatheia* in triumphing over pain. However, it could be said that the sheer scale of innocent and involuntary human suffering in our century has posed the problem of suffering in a way which makes a doctrine of divine suffering very attractive (see section 5 below).

2. The God of the prophets

A strong trend in modern theology has been towards the emancipation of the biblical understanding of God from the categories imposed on it by the influence of Greek philosophical theism, in particular the attributes of immutability and impassibility, which are by no means easy to reconcile with the biblical God’s involvement with his people in their history.

As far as Old Testament theology goes, the Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel has been particularly influential. Originally in his 1936 dissertation and later in his major work *The Prophets*, he developed from the Old Testament prophets a theology of the divine *pathos*. From his own background in kabbalistic and Hasidic Judaism, Heschel was able to recognize in the prophets a quite different understanding of God from that of the Greeks, and in deliberate opposition to the doctrine of divine *apatheia* he used the word *pathos* to describe God’s concern for and involvement in the world. The ‘anthropopathisms’ of the Old Testament, in which God is represented as emotionally involved with and responding to his people, are not to be set aside as rather crude ways of speaking of God which are not really appropriate to the reality of God, but should be seen as a central hermeneutical key to the prophetic theology. The most exalted idea applied to God is not infinite wisdom, infinite power, but infinite concern.

Heschel is even prepared to say that the divine *pathos* shows that ‘God is in need of man’. He is not, it should be noted, guilty of the kind of naive dismissal of philosophical theism for which biblical theologians can sometimes be criticized. His account of the doctrine of divine *apatheia* is no caricature, but a serious and indeed illuminating treatment. Although the difference between Greek and Hebrew thought is a theme which has been much abused in biblical theology, Heschel’s case for significant differences at this point is a good one.

God’s suffering, of course, is an aspect of his *pathos*. He is disappointed and distressed by his people’s faithlessness; he is pained and offended by their lack of response to his love; he grieves over his people even when he must be angry with them (Jer. 31:30; Hos. 11:8-9); and because of his concern for them he himself suffers with them in their sufferings (Is. 63:9). It is a merit of Heschel’s exposition of the prophets that he finds the note of divine sorrow and suffering not only in the obvious proof-texts (cited above), but in many parts of the prophetic oracles. He also finds the divine *pathos* reflected in the *pathos* of the prophets themselves. The prophets, by *sympathy* with the divine *pathos*, are themselves intimately involved in God’s con-

2. P. 137. (The original Japanese work appeared in 1946.) *Cf.*, however, England (ed.), *Living Theology*, p. 34, for other Japanese theologians’ criticism of the book as showing ‘little awareness of the suffering known by many of his fellow Japanese’.

7. For a moving modern example of the same thought, see Kim Malte-Brun’s words quoted in Woolcombe, *art. cit.*, 146-7.

15. For earlier use of the more obvious texts to support divine passibility, see, e.g., Bushnell, *Vicarious Sacrifice*, p. 31.
17. Note especially Hosea (pp. 49-56) and Jeremiah (pp. 114-27).
cern for his people.⁴⁸ Thus just as divine apatheia had its anthropological corollary, so does divine pathos: ‘The ideal state of the Stoic sage is apathy, the ideal state of the prophets is sympathy.’⁴⁹

Finally, Heschel’s treatment of the problem of ‘anthropopathy’ is of interest.⁵⁰ The Old Testament itself recognizes that God is not to be compared with humanity (Nu. 23:19; 1 Sa. 15:29; Is. 40:18; 55:8-9), but this does not mean that language about divine emotions is mere anthropopathism, not to be taken seriously. Rather, it means that, in Heschel’s adaptation of Isaiah 55:8-9: ‘My pathos is not your pathos. . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My pathos than your pathos.’⁵¹

Heschel’s views have been followed by other Old Testament theologians,⁵² and have also been taken up enthusiastically by Moltmann.⁵³ Another major exponent of divine suffering for whom the Old Testament prophets played a major role is Kitamori. For him Jeremiah 31:20 was of particular significance, because it ‘literally agrees with the truth of the cross’,⁵⁴ i.e. it expresses the pain of God’s love for those who reject his love, the pain which ‘reflects his will to love the object of his wrath’.⁵⁵

3. The God of personal love
In modern theology it has often been said that if God is personal love, analogous to human personal love, then he must be open to the suffering which a relationship of love can bring. Traditional theology understood God’s love as a one-way relationship in which God exercises purely active benevolence towards the world, but cannot be affected by the objects of his love, but this picture of the passive benevolent despot⁵⁶ has tended to give way to pictures drawn from more intimate human relationships⁵⁷ in which a love which is unaffected by the beloved seems unworthy to be called love,⁵⁸ even if the term is applied analogically to God. The point that if

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⁴⁸ Prophets, ch. 18.
⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 258.
⁵⁰ Ibid., ch. 15.
⁵¹ Ibid., p. 276.
⁵⁴ Kitamori, Pain, p. 59; cf. also p. 156.
⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 21.
⁵⁶ For the political overtones of the traditional view (God as absolute monarch), see Studdert-Kennedy, quoted in Mozeley, Impassibility, p. 139. It could also be argued that there are sexist overtones: the purely active god of traditional theology is a masculine God, from whom the more ‘feminine’ characteristics of receptivity and capacity for suffering have been excluded.
⁵⁷ For this development as characteristic of nineteenth-century atonement theology, and related to divine passibility, see especially Dillistone, Atonement, ch. 6.
⁵⁸ Cf. Jenkins, Glory, pp. 106-7, on God as compassionate rather than condescending.
he suffers the conflict of love and wrath within him. In the victory of his love over his wrath God's pain mediates his love to sinners.  

The analogy of the suffering of human personal love can lead not only in the direction of the theology of the cross, but also to a trinitarian interpretation of the divine suffering: 'To us the bitterest pain imaginable is that of a father allowing his son to suffer and die. Therefore God spoke his ultimate word, "God suffers pain," by using the father-son relationship.'

4. The crucified God
The cross is the point at which every genuinely Christian theology has found itself obliged to speak in some way of the suffering of God, even if, as often in traditional theology, the statement is highly qualified.

The English tradition has made much of the cross as the central revelation of God's nature, and therefore of the sufferings of Christ on the cross as revealing the divine passibility. The cross is the expression in this world of the suffering in the eternal heart of God. In this respect, the tradition stems from the American theologian Horace Bushnell who, in a famous passage, frequently quoted in the literature, wrote: 'It is as if there were a cross unseen, standing on its undiscovered hill, far back in the ages, out of which were sounding always, just the same deep voice of suffering love and patience, that was heard by mortal ears from the sacred hill of Calvary.' One of Bushnell's English followers, C. A. Dismore, continued the thought: 'there was a cross in the heart of God before there was one planted on the green hill outside of Jerusalem. And now that the cross of wood has been taken down, the one in the heart of God abides, and it will remain so long as there is one sinful soul for whom to suffer.'

It should be noted that this view of the historical sufferings of Jesus as a kind of temporal revelation of eternal truth is not necessarily tied to incarnational Christology, but can be adopted by writers, such as H. R. Rashdall and Frances Young, who do not see the sufferings of Jesus as actually experienced by God as his own human sufferings (as in orthodox Christology), but see the divine suffering revealed by the human suffering of Jesus.

Writers in the tradition of Luther's *theologia crucis*, such as Kitamori and Moltmann, are more inclined to emphasize the cross as not just an illustration of the divine suffering, but itself the decisive event of divine suffering, without confining God's suffering to the cross. Although he does not establish the point very clearly, it appears that for Moltmann this is so because the cross is not just a revelation of the divine sympathy for those who suffer, but an act of divine solidarity with the godless and the godforsaken, in which the Son of God actually enters their situation of godforsakenness. Only as the godforsaken man Jesus and as the Father of the godforsaken man Jesus, could God suffer in the way that he did in the event of the cross. It is important to establish this point if a theology of divine suffering is not to have the effect of reducing the cross to a mere illustration of what God suffers throughout history. Further clarification is still needed as to how the cross, understood in this way as a unique event of divine suffering, relates to God's suffering at other times.

Traditional theology, afraid of the ancient 'patri-passion' heresy, confined the suffering of the cross to the Son, but in recent theology writers as diverse as Barth, Kitamori, Galot, and Moltmann have affirmed that the Father also, in his love for the Son, must be understood to suffer in the event of the cross. For Moltmann, this is essential to his understanding of the cross as the event which necessitates trinitarian language about God, and to his claim that 'we can only talk about God's suffering in trinitarian terms'. For Moltmann, the cross is the event of God's love for the godless, in which the Father forsooks his Son and delivers him to death. The surrender of the Son to death is the action of both the Father and the Son, and in the suffering of the Son both the Father and the Son suffer, though in different ways. The Son suffers abandonment by the Father as he dies; the Father suffers in grief the death of the Son. 'The grief of the Father is just as important as the death of the Son.' But the painful gulf of separation between Father and Son is still spanned by their love, and so the Holy Spirit is the powerful love which proceeds from this event to reach godforsaken human beings. Essential to Moltmann's position is the view that the cross is an event of suffering internal to God's own trinitarian being. It therefore determines the Christian doctrine of God, and also makes possible Moltmann's treatment of the theodicy problem (see below), in which he sees the whole history of human suffering taken by the cross within God's own trinitarian history.

5. Divine suffering and theodicy
It is part of the character of the specially modern awareness of the problem of suffering that any attempt to justify human suffering, in all its enormity, is ruled out. An authentic human response to suffering must always

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64 Kitamori, Pain, passim, especially ch. 10. Cf. also Lee, *God Suffers for us*, pp. 15-17.
65 Kitamori, Pain, p. 47. The point has a special Japanese appeal, see p. 135. See further below, on Moltmann.
70 In J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, pp. 36-7.
72 CD IV/2, p. 357.
73 Pain, p. 115.
74 *Dieu*, ch. 2.
75 The New Testament does not speak in so many words of the Father's suffering in the cross, but arguably implies it in Rom. 8:32; see Moltmann, *Crucified God*, pp. 242-3.
76 *Crucified God*, p. 207.
77 *Trinity*, p. 25.
78 *Crucified God*, p. 243.
79 Moltmann's trinitarian interpretation of the cross is found in *Crucified God*, pp. 240-9, and with some further reflection in *Trinity*, pp. 75-83.
retain an element of protest against suffering which cannot be justified. Hence the autocratic God of absolute power who simply presides over this suffering world and cannot himself be reached by suffering appears a cosmic monster. It seems possible to justify God ("theodicy") only if he too suffers. "The only credible theology for Auschwitz is one that makes God an inmate of the place."

Though this is a widespread motive for reflection on divine suffering, again it is Moltmann in _The Crucified God_ who has made this the central feature of his approach to the issue and focused it on the cross. He sees the theology of the crucified God as opening a way forward in relation to the problem of suffering, beyond the unsatisfactory alternatives of "metaphysical theism", with its impassible God, and "protest atheism", with its rebellion against a world in which innocent suffering happens. Theism cannot explain suffering without justifying it, but nor can atheism keep its protest against suffering without the longing for God's righteousness in the world. The crucified God, however, shares in the suffering of the world, and in Jesus' dying question he himself takes up humanity's protest against suffering and the open question of God's righteousness in the world. Thus for the sufferer God is not just the incomprehensible God who inflicts suffering, but 'the human God, who cries with him and intercedes for him with his cross where man in his torment is dumb'. God himself maintains the protest against suffering.

However, if God were only 'the fellow-sufferer who understands' (Whitehead), it is arguable that the problem of suffering would be, not alleviated, but aggravated. It is no consolation to the sufferer to know that God is as much a helpless victim of evil as he is himself. In answer to this, Moltmann can argue, first, that the divine solidarity with sufferers does help in that it transforms the character of suffering: it heals the deepest pain in human suffering, which is godforsakenness. But secondly, and characteristically, Moltmann will not isolate the cross from the resurrection: 'Without the resurrection, the cross really is quite simply a tragedy and nothing more than that.' The resurrection is God's promise of liberation from suffering for all those with whom Christ is identified in his cross, the godless and the godforsaken. In the cross all human suffering is taken within God's own 'trinitarian history' in hope for the joy of God's eschatological future. God is vulnerable, takes suffering and death on himself in order to heal, to liberate and to confer new life. The history of God's suffering in the passion of the Son and the sighings of the Spirit serves the history of God's joy in the Spirit and his completed felicity at the end. That is the ultimate goal of God's history of suffering in the world.' The message of divine suffering would be no gospel without the message of the divine victory over suffering.

**Conclusion**

It seems increasingly obvious that the Greek philosophical inheritance in traditional theology was adopted without the necessary critical effect of the central Christian insight into the divine nature: the love of God revealed in the cross of Christ. For the Greeks, suffering implied deficiency of being, weakness, subjection, instability. But the cross shows us a God who suffers out of the fullness of his being because he is love. He does not suffer against his will, but willingly undertakes to suffer with and for those he loves. His suffering does not deflect him from his purpose, but accomplishes his purpose. His transcendence does not keep him aloof from the world, but as transcendent love appears in the depth of his self-sacrificing involvement in the world. Finally, if Christians know anything about God from the cross, it is that 'the weakness of God is stronger than men' (1 Cor. 1:25). The cross does not make God a helpless victim of evil, but is the secret of his power and his triumph over evil. This is why 'only the suffering God can help'.

The anthropological corollary is, as always, important. The man or woman who lives within the _pathos_ of the crucified God becomes capable of real love, which is concerned for others, sensitive to their suffering, ready for the pain of loving the unlovable, vulnerable to sorrow and hurt as well as open to joy and pleasure. If a cold and invulnerable self-sufficiency is not the divine ideal, it is a foolish idolatry to make it the human ideal.

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87 _Crucified God_, p. 278.
89 Bonhoeffer, _Letters_, p. 361.
90 _Cf. Moltmann, _Experiment_, pp. 69-84.
91 In my thinking about the subject of this article, I have been helped not only by the books referred to, but also by Dr Paul S. Fiddes' lectures on 'The Suffering of God', given as the Whitley Lectures for 1980, at the Northern Baptist College, Manchester. These lectures, when published, will be a very important contribution to the subject.
retain an element of protest against suffering which cannot be justified. Hence the autocratic God of absolute power who simply presides over this suffering world and calls on all who are reached by suffering to appear a cosmic monster. It seems possible to justify God (theodicy) only if he too suffers. "The only credible theology for Auschwitz is one that makes God an innate part of the place." 9

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Conclusions
It seems increasingly obvious that the Greek philosophical inheritance in traditional theology was adopted without the necessary critical effect of the central Christian insight into the divine nature: the love of God revealed in the cross of Christ. For the Greeks, suffering implied deficiency of being, weakness, subjection, instability. But the cross shows us a God who suffers out of the fullness of his being because he is love. He does not suffer against his will, but willingly undertakes to suffer with and for those he loves. His suffering does not define him from his purpose, but accomplishes his purpose. His transcendence does not keep him aloof from the world, but as transcendent love appears in the depth of his self-sacrificing involvement in the world. Finally, if Christians know anything about God from the cross, it is that 'the weakness of God is stronger than men' (1 Cor. 1:25). This is the victory of the lordship of the cross, a phenomenological approach to religion (though there are of course many related areas of interest in this approach) nor with another area of academic growth, the development of philosophical categories and concepts in biblical interpretation.

It has been said that philosophy is essentially about those children's questions which society conditions us to ignore in adulthood. Certainly philosophy is about big questions, ultimate questions: Who am I? What is life? What is death? Is there any sense to human existence? Is there a transcendent power governing all? What is good? What is bad? What is the relationship between individual and society? It may appear that much modern philosophy, with its clinical concern to analyse concepts and linguistic rules, has deserted these big questions. But those who feel a sense of disillusionment with modern philosophy for this reason may be making a judgment which, in overall terms, is unfounded. Continuing the usefulness of J.S. Fides' lectures on 'The Suffering of God', given as the Whitley Lectures for 1980, at the Northern Baptist College, Manchester. These lectures, when published, will be a very important contribution to the subject.

1Crucified God, p. 278.
2Crucified God, p. 278.
5See also P. Schilling, God and Human Anguish (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), pp. 10-11.
6Crucified God, pp. 219-227.
7Nino Boccio, Letters, p. 361.
8Cf. Moltmann, Experiments, pp. 69-84.
9In my thinking about the subject of this article, I have been helped by P. T. Oord (Ord, p. 255). Particularly helpful in this regard are Prof. P. S. Fiddes' lectures on 'The Suffering of God', given as the Whitley Lectures for 1980, at the Northern Baptist College, Manchester. These lectures, when published, will be a very important contribution to the subject.
10Experiences, p. 53.
Aquinas through Locke, Newman, Kierkegaard and others. Yet these questions are also implicit in much of the twentieth-century debate about the nature of religious language.

Religious language: anthropomorphism and analogy
Perhaps the best place to start here is with the question of anthropomorphism. Most of the words which we use to describe God and his relationship to man are words which we usually use to describe human actions, attitudes and roles: king, shepherd, judge, potter, organ, redeemed. The question thus arises: how can we speak of God thus without making him human — without making God in our own image? Since the Middle Ages, many theologians have wanted to approach the problem of anthropomorphism through the concept of analogy (though treatments of analogy differ significantly from one theology to the next. Indeed the approach to analogy in a modern Protestant such as Pannenberg has theological presuppositions which are so different from the Augustinian or Thomistic approach that we effectively end up with a rival doctrine.) 3

Take the following two statements: (a) God loves us. (b) Dad loves Tom.

To put it in very bald terms, traditional doctrines of analogy declare that love in (a) does not have exactly the same meaning as love in (b), for that would create the risk of confusing the two. Yet love in (a) does not have exactly the same sense as love in (b), for there is a fundamental analogy between the meanings: a fundamental analogy between God’s love for us and a father’s love for his children. In this sense analogy is usually regarded as the closest thing to anthropomorphism on the one hand and emptiness on the other.

This of course still leaves us with a great many questions unanswered. Exactly how is God’s love ‘like’ human love? How is it different? If questions such as this are left unanswered, theological language must for ever remain imprecise. There are also crucial theological issues at stake here. How can we talk about the infinite in terms of finite? How can we avoid the analogy of meaning entail a real analogy of being between man and God? Traditional Catholic thought has been less anxious about this. Some theologians argue on the ground of incarnation and the divine image. But some modern Protestant theologians have drawn back here because they believe that this way of thinking violates the transcendence — the ‘holy otherness’ — of God.

Logical positivism and responses to it

The need to respond to the central question of anthropomorphism opens up a great many issues. One of these

If we accept that there is a fundamental analogy between the meaning of words when they are used in relation to other words for the same concept (say of love), then does it not follow that we can never, in principle, be falsified by our experience of the world. These statements do not inform us about the nature of the religious language we are using. If no one ever encounters the truth, then it is not the case that we can ever falsify any statement about love. Consequently, the epistemological complaint of the positivists is that the talk of believers is just not as consistent as it should be in this respect. Thus A. J. Ayer makes his basic charge against the use of analogical language in God: ‘We accuse them of disobeying the rules which govern the significant use of language.’ 4

Experience. There are of course many meaningful statements about the world which do not have the distinctive concept of love. (Here therefore the doctrine of analogy is substantially watered down; reduced to a theory of metaphor.) Or, put exactly the same point in a much more generalized way: Christian religion is an autonomous, self-governing mode of talk (or discourse) about the objects of religious reality, with its own distinctive and internal criteria of meaning, intelligibility, reality and truth. If you want to understand what is meaningful, what is rational (what counts as a reason), what is true (what is the truth, the real), then you must look within Christianity. You must look and see.

We observe how believers actually use words in ordinary discourse to express religious concepts. They sometimes immune to criticism from external criteria, invaluable to attack and rebuttal by reference to any non-religious standards of truth, meaning and rationality. And of course, exactly the same token it also becomes insusceptible to confirmation from any sources outside of its own distinctive set of propositions and dogmas. In short, the possibility of rational dialogue with unbelief is ‘logically’ precluded.

I do not need to point out that this motivation to render Christian belief immune (that is, immune to principle) to all external criticism — to make it a total epistemological island — already finds its place in a good deal of Christian thought and apologetic. But once again, I am not in the least bit concerned about what is going on here. Any positions which imply a variety of different rationalities (which isolate the ‘truth’, say, of Christian belief from any rationality — or any discourse from that of another) are highly relativistic. They repudiate the notion of ‘the truth’ and replace it with the notion of ‘the true’; and the notion of ‘the true’ there being a way of deciding between the approaches on rational grounds.

Now of course relativism is both a serious and a contemporary doctrine. Many see it as the appropriate cultural response to the social needs of the pluralist society. But if the student is to adopt an isolationist understanding of the faith — and the weakening of the doctrine of analogy has been a necessary step towards that — then he must understand fully the relativistic and the theological implications of what he is doing.

I have taken up such a large proportion of this article on these areas because I believe that they are the very heartlands of the discipline. The relationships between presupposition and proof, presupposition and evidence, revelation and historical event, doctrine and experience: our understandings here constitute an essential part and parcel of the theoretical foundations of our theology. Always be dodging these questions is to be interested in the superficial structures of the discipline. Let us be clear, it is theology as an academic discipline which we are considering here. I am not saying that these profound questions are any less important and significant, nor any less pervasive and辄ed over by every person who grasps a pen or whatever. But I am saying that they cannot be ignored by the serious student of theology.


Aquinas through Locke, Newman, Klarekegaard and many others. These questions are also implicit in much of the twentieth-century debate about the nature of religious language.

Religious language: anthropomorphism and analogy
Perhaps the best place to start here is with the question of anthropomorphism. Most of the words which we use to describe God and his relationship to man are words which we usually use to describe human actions, attitudes and roles: king, shepherd, judge, potter, source, redeemer. The question thus arise: how can we speak of God thus without making him human—without making God in our own image? Since the eleventh century, many theologians have wanted to approach the problem of anthropomorphism through the concept of analogy (though treatments of analogy differ significantly from one theologian to the next. Indeed the approach to analogy in a modern Protestant such as Pannenberg has theological presuppositions which are so different from the theses of Thomas Aquinas that we effectively end up with a rival doctrine.)

Take the following two statements: (a) God loves us. (b) Dad loves Tom.

To put it in very bald terms, traditional doctrines of analogy declare that love in (a) does not have exactly the same meaning as love in (b), for that would create the real danger of emptying theology of meaning altogether. Rather it is said that while love in (a) does not have exactly the same sense as love in (b), there is a fundamental analogy between their meanings: a fundamental analogy between God's love for us and a father's love for his children. In this sense analogy is usually regarded as a kind of anthropomorphism on the one hand and emptiness on the other.

This of course still leaves us with a great many questions unanswered. Exactly how is God's love 'like' human love? Does this mean that is it? If questions such as this are left unanswered, theological language must for ever remain imprecise. There are also crucial theological issues at stake here. How can we talk about the infinite in terms of the finite? How can we avoid the analogy of meaning entail a real analogy of being between man and God? Traditional Catholic thought has been hesitant to address this point on the ground of incarnation and the divine image. But some modern Protestant theologians have drawn back here because they believe that this way of thinking violates the transcendence—the 'holy otherness'—of God.

Logical positivism and responses to it
The need to respond to the central question of anthropomorphism opens up a great many issues. One of these relates to the critique of religious language made by the logical positivists. Some of the major philosophers would suggest that one type of such statements is:

\[ 2 \rightarrow 3 \ \text{or} \ 2 \rightarrow 4 \]

"All triangles have three sides."

If we accept that there is a fundamental analogy between the meaning of words when they are used of people (words like love, care, answer, etc.) and the meaning of words when they are used of God, then does not consistency urge that these words follow the same linguistic rules in their religious usages as in their non-religious usages? The nagging complaint of the positivists is that the talk of believers is just not as consistent as it should be in this respect. Thus A. J. Ayer makes his basic charge against the use of 'God' language as:

"We accuse them of disobeying the rules which govern the significant use of language."

Anthony Floyd's equally famous attack reaches its emotional, if not intellectual, climax in the following words:

Someone tells us that God loves us as a father loves his children. We are reassured. But then we see a child dying of inoperable cancer of the throat. His earthly father is driven frantic in his efforts to help, but his Heavenly Father reveals no such obvious concern for his creation. God's love is 'not a merely human love' or it is 'an insurmountable love,' perhaps—and we realize that such sufferings are quite compatible with the truth of the assertion that 'God loves us as a father (but, of course . . .)'. We are reassured again. But then perhaps we ask: what is this assurance of God's (appropriately qualified) love worth, what is this apparent guarantee really a guarantee against? Just what were the means not only of asserting the truth but also (logically and rightly) to entitle us to say 'God does not love us as an only child'? And if then we are put to the succeeding symposiums the single central question, 'What would we have to occur or to have occurred to invalidate the truth of, or the existence of, God?'

It is not very difficult to see the point being made here. The force of much of our Christian proclamation requires that we should not be able to give a full and genuine account of God's love and the love of a father for his child. But, against this, there seems in practice, to be a qualitative difference between the rules governing the use of 'love' in religious usages, and those which govern its use in person-to-person talk. Thus 'Dad's love' is only affirmed if something specific is intended, and if other states of affairs obtain it is unequivocally denied. But God's love appears to be different to this. For the proposition 'God is love' is affirmed by believers to be true, what happens in the case of 'Dad's love' is that it is supposed to be compatible with all possible experimental (experienceable) states of affairs.

If we generalize from this single example, we come to wonder whether there is a part of religious language which is not religious language. They want to suggest that all statements which are genuinely of factual significance are univocal in form and that religious language is never the case. Rather, they say, discourse: whether actually true or false) are statements which can in principle stand or fall in relation to experience. There are of course many meaningful statements which are otherwise meaningless for us. Some philosophers would suggest that one type of such statements is:

\[ 2 \rightarrow 2 \ \text{or} \ 2 \rightarrow 4 \]

"All triangles have three sides."

Here, it is suggested, are examples of statements which are consistent with these rules of analogy but which can never, in principle, be falsified by our experience of the world. These statements do not inform us about the natural or religious realities under any circumstances. Rather, they are a mode of classification and order with which we impose onto reality. Thus the central question which all logical positivism urges upon Christian theology is: Are the religious truths of God a person, an inner state (inner states of consciousness), or a form of the empirical ? Or are they more like the latter class (truths/doctrines which we impose onto experience) ? Or do we ultimately need a much more sophisticated network of distinctions and categories to make a satisfying response here?

The student should not duct these first order questions or dismiss them as irrelevant. For they challenge us with problems concerning our faith, our beliefs, what we cherish and proclaim: ones which can enhance and enrich our spirituality and promote Christian growth and maturity. Thus another example here might be: Is the proposition (suitably theologically qualified), God always answers our prayers, (a) a truth derived from experience (and not to falsification by experience), or (b) a doctrinal truth which we impose on our daily experience, or (c) ?

This makes the issue clear. We are in final terms here being asked to make judgments about the inter-relation between belief and experience. This may be true in the formation of Christian belief, and about the inter-relationship between belief and experience in our ongoing day-to-day lives.

A great variety of responses have been made to the prohbits of the positivists. In response, we should, I believe, be searching for understandings of religious language which are characterized by full intellectual integrity, and which also do justice to biblical self-understandings. Perhaps it is pertinent to reflect here that in the Scriptures, 'word' and 'explanation' sometimes preceede experience and are to be imposed onto it— to be used to interpret and order it (e.g. the prophetic warning, "Therefore, O Israel, you will be driven from your sanctuary") or the establishment of the Messiah and the kingdom). But sometimes 'word' is apparently made logically dependent upon experience (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:3-19).

One of the most sustained and serious responses to the positivist challenge is that of Karl Barth. Ludwig Wittgenstein.4 Certain philosophers now want to argue that it is not the case that uniform linguistic rules are formulated here, it is that we are obeying, in the case of religious language, has its own distinctive concepts governed by its own distinctive linguistic rules. Thus it is that

We are talking here of 'creative applications' of Wittgenstein's work. These are comparable with the famous, works devoted to speculations within the philosophy of religion. Probably the most well-known text here is D. Z. Phillips, The Concept of Prayer (London: KKP, 1965).

The concept of love is misunderstood by believers when they talk about 'God's love'. But we are only confusing the one distinctive concept of love. (Here therefore the doctrine of analogy is substantially watered down: reduced to a theory of vagueness and vagaries.) Or, to put exactly the same point in a much more generalized way: Christian religion is an autonomous, self-governing mode of talk (or discourse) about spiritual reality, with its own distinctive and internal criteria of meaning, intelligibility, reality and truth. If you want to understand what is meaningful, what is rational (what counts as a reason), what is true (what counts as reality), then you must look within Christianity. You must look and see. You must observe how believers actually use words in ordinary life. You must observe how religious language immune to criticism from external criteria, innervable to attack and rebuttal by reference to any non-religious standards of truth, meaning and rationality. And of course, by exactly the same token it also becomes insusceptible to confirmation from any sources outside of its own distinctive horizons and dimensions. In short the possibility of rational dialogue with unbelief is logically precluded.

I do not need to point out that this motivation to render Christian belief immune (that is, immune in principle) to all external criticism— to make it a total epistemological island—already finds its place in a good deal of Christian thought and apologize. But once again we are left with the question of how we are going on here. Any positions which imply a variety of different rationalities (which isolate the 'truth', say, of science from the 'truth' of scripture) as if from that of another) are highly relativistic. They repudiate the notion of 'truth' and replace it with the notion of perspectivism (or 'truth', 'there being no way of deciding between the approaches on rational grounds.

Now of course relativism is both a serious and a contemporary doctrine. Many see it as the appropriate cultural response to the social needs of the pluralist society. But if the student is to adopt an isolationist understanding of the faith —and the weakening of the doctrine of the incarnation and the divine image from that of another) are highly relativistic. They repudiate the notion of 'truth' and replace it with the notion of perspectivism (or 'truth', 'there being no way of deciding between the approaches on rational grounds.

I have taken up such a large proportion of this article on these areas because I believe that they are the very heart of the discipline. The relationships between presupposition and proof, presupposition and evidence, revelation and historical event, doctrine and experience: our understandings here constitute an essential part of the theoretical foundations of our theology. Always to be dodging these questions is to be interested in the superficial and ultimately make a point. Let us be clear, it is theology as an academic discipline which we are considering here. I am not saying that these profound questions should not be engaged with and agonized over by every person who grasps a pew . . . or whatever. But I am saying that they cannot be ignored by the serious student of theology.

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4. Ludwig Wittgenstein.
Arguments for the existence of God

It is also the case that our judgments in these areas will determine our approaches to many other questions within philosophy of religion itself. This is obviously true, for example, with the area of study which most students will meet at some point in their syllabuses: arguments for the existence of God. Thus those who hold to the relativistic position outlined above view the notion of the existence of God as evidence/proof for a particular world-view (which here means 'for the existence of God') as, in principle, misconceived. This position entails that all arguments for divine existence must, even if they are not deficient in other ways, be ultimately based on presuppositions which are essentially religious in character, such as (it is alleged) the existence of order in the universe or the intelligibility of existence (of being) itself. In stark contrast, those who argue for the existence of God (or who wish to commend the claims of Christianity to unbelievers on rational grounds, and other than by 'merely' appealing to its internal consistency) are batting on a different sort of 'wicket' altogether. They are, at least implicitly, assuming that there is a common human rationality, one which in final terms transcends different world-views and the sorts of distinction which exist, for example, between religious and scientific approaches. And they are arguing that within the boundary of this common human rationality there are certain points of concord which are, in fact, indefinable in experience, and which are best exemplified by the claims of Christianity to the truth of revelation.

A variety of other examples could be furnished here. Take for instance the question of evidence for the miraculous. Is rational belief in the miraculous dependent upon the prior belief in a particular miracle, or is there an independent evidence for miraculous occurrences? Obviously much will depend on how one has defined miracle in the first place. In his excellent book on the subject, Swinburne discusses both of these approaches to the question of evidence, as well as the prior subject of definition-the latter being a concept which itself raises many highly significant issues, from the nature of scien-
tific law to the psychosomatic dimension of human health.

The problem of evil

The final example to be given here concerns a problem which in some form or another is the undeniable facts of evil and suffering responsible with a God of omnipotent love?

We need not deny that there will always be some degree of mystery here: that God's ways and thoughts are never fully open and comprehensible to finite intel-
lectuals. But we cannot I think, affirm that God's love is totally mysterious, for then we would find ourselves faced with the serious question, How is a love which is totally mysterious different from no love at all?

In orthodox terms, the intellectual challenge implicit in the problem of evil has to be approached other than intellectually as well - it is to give some defence of the claim that, even given a world such as this, there is an essentially religious presupposition that God is a father's tender love towards his children. To concede that God's love is wholly inescapable, or to affirm that it is qualitatively different to any form of human love, is to deny the concept of analogy; and thus to denude our preaching of its biblically rooted force - and to leave the notion of divine love hopelessly vague and vacuous. Once more the concept of analogy would have been reduced to family resemblance. The obli-
gation upon us is to so expound and upack 'the faith' that the Abba Father of the gospel is no empty, unintel-
ligible and cruel jibe in the face of human anguish and hurt.

Thus a familiar pattern has emerged once more. The extent to which we are willing to defend analogy - or something logically akin - will always determine our basic philosophical and epistemological approaches: whether we are talking about our approach to relativism and the nature of truth or to the problem of evil.

Conclusion

In this article, I have deliberately emphasized the more epistemological aspects of the philosophy of religion. I have done this because it is often here that students find it most difficult to find their way about and to make links with other parts of their studies and with their daily walk with God. But whatever aspects of the philosophy of religion we are rethinking with, I hope to suggest one further, and much more general reason, why the student should not just see his philosophy as a distraction from the rest of his Christian life. From the viewpoint of the whole of the ecclesiastical doctrine. It was said at the very start of this article that philosophy expresses a concern for the most ultimate questions of human existence, the ones which are so often conditions to ignore. What we should never forget is that philosophy expresses a concern for ultimate questions also. And yet there can be argument that even within theology (though it is perhaps rarer at a post-
graduate level than at the undergraduate one) to become so immersed in highly specific questions of biblical interpretation and closely to forget the philosophy that we lose sight of theology as having to do with big questions. An ongoing commitment to the issues of philosophy of religion and philosophical theology is as healthy an antidote to this as one can have.

Talking points: The charismatic movement

Anne Mather

This article is a brief descriptive survey introducing some of the issues and ideas raised by the charismatic movement. The author is on the staff of the Universities of Canterbury College and Bristol, and has a BA in Classics and a PhD at University College of North Wales on Theology of the Charismatic Movement in Britain from 1964 to the Present Day.

The charismatic movement has made its presence felt throughout the church. This new emphasis upon the experience of the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 became a recognizable movement in established denominational churches in the early 1960s. Like its predecessor classical Pentecostalism, 1 'Neo-Pentecostalism' also stressed a definite, tangible experience of the Holy Spirit present in the gathering, often presented as an experience separate and distinct from conversion. The majority of Neo-Pentecostals, how-
ever, remained within the established denominations unlike their forerunners, and only with the inception of the house churches in the 1960s was there any mass exodus. As the charismatic movement developed, 2 signi-
ificant theological differences with classical Pente-
costalism also emerged and the distinction between the two movements became more and more apparent. The charismatic movement increasingly embraced a variety of doctrines concerning such central issues as the baptism in the Spirit, and the birth of the Catholic charis-
mas. As a result of this further theological interpre-
tation spotlighted this development. Not only was the charismatic movement accused of having a nebulous and inconsistent theology, but concern was also expressed that Neo-Pentecostals had come to emphasize an ex-
périence without major attention to belief and doctrine and were thereby differing from the traditional ecclesiastical doctrine. But what is this experience which has grown rise to so much discussion both within and outside the movement? Baptism in the Spirit (also known as baptism by the Spirit) is the spiritual initiation of the Christian and is an experience of infilling and empowering by the Holy Spirit which transforms a person's life, an occurrence for which Acts gives several examples, notably Acts 8:15-17 and Acts 10:44-46. As well as being an inner working of the Holy Spirit, baptism in the Spirit is also identified as a manifestation into the realm which can be seen or heard. It is often accompanied by physical manifestations such as great heat, the sensation of a current of power passing through the body, a feeling of intense joy, sometimes the healing of a physical ail-
ment, and often a language or prophetic gift. In addition there is a vivid awareness of the immediate presence of God, and many find that their baptism in the Spirit marks a turning point in which they take on a greater concern with spiritual matters and deeper Chris-
tian commitment.

However, though such important and far-reaching benefits are claimed for the baptism in the Spirit, participants in the charismatic movement still find it necessary to engage in apologists in order to convince their critics that baptism in the Spirit is a scriptural phenomenon which is intended for Chris-
tians in every age. They are very much aware that church history, in which the concept of the charismatic experience weight heavily against their case, and charismatic points firmly instead to the instances of baptism in the Spirit recorded in Acts. As a counter to the common claim that the baptism was written for historical and not doctrinal purposes, they assert that the practice of the apostles is vital to an understanding of spiritual gifts as they are presented in the New Testament. Thus it is hoped that because apostolic practice cannot contradict apostolic doctrine. The argument is refuted that Christians should seek the baptism in the Spirit since there is no com-
demand to do so in the epistles. The apostle Paul assumed that every true Christian had been baptized in water (Rom 6:3-5) as a sign of baptism in the Spirit, and the Supper (1 Cor 1:171), yet nowhere does he command them to do so. This is because it automatically happened. Likewise, there are no commands to seek the baptism in the Spirit, but the writer to the Hebrews indicates that Christian initiation and the writers of the epistles would have assumed that everyone had received the power of the Holy Spirit. The biblical framework for the experience is normally carefully explained to a person seeking the baptism.

Classical Pentecostalism has always pointed to speak-
ing in tongues as the 'initial evidence' that an individual has received baptism in the Spirit. However, many parti-

cipants in the charismatic movement have found this emphasis unhelpful and they agree that the baptism in the Spirit is not a temporary experience which every person baptized in the Spirit is able to speak in tongues nor that they should expect to do so. Denial that tongues is the initial evidence of baptism in the Spirit does not constitute a rejection of glossolalia as a mani-
festation of the Holy Spirit, but rather a rejection of what is frequently referred to as 'the law of tongues'. Evidence for a description of the benefits of the baptism in the Spirit, see also in Gibbons, Noel, and Stoughton, The Dawn of the Spirit (Kingstown, 1971). For a presentation of the 'charismatic line through church history, see Michael Harper, As The Begins-
ap, Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), and for developments in many Britain in the 1960s, see Michael Harper, None Can Guess (Hodder and Stoughton, 1971).