The Unity of Christian Truth

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Theological pluralism has been pressed upon us with increasing enthusiasm over the past twenty years. It has been seen as the only appropriate response to the cultural fragmentation of our world, and also as the continuation of what has in fact been the nature of theological discourse from the first[1]. We had been too easily misled, by a harmonizing biblical exegesis on the one hand, and a Denzinger-based version of doctrinal history on the other, into supposing that the articulation of what is believed by Christians to be true about God and the world naturally falls into a pattern of tidily unified correlations. The pendulum has now swung a fair way towards the opposite pole from this. Contemporary New Testament study insists on the sharp conflicts between different strands of primitive Christian understanding and practice[2], and doctrinal history is more disposed to emphasise contingent, non-theological factors at work in the definition of 'orthodoxy' at various points, with the half-hidden and disturbing inference to be drawn that there may have been no strictly *theological* criteria immediately available to discriminate among varieties of 'Christianity' (if we can indeed go on using that one simple word ...)[3].

It is not surprising, then, that in one way or another the question is continually raised of the limits of pluralism—or, rather less starkly, of how pluralism avoids becoming 'repressive tolerance'[4], an intellectually idle and morally frivolous prohibition against raising uncomfortable questions about Christian truth. Pluralism as a strategy *can* (though it need not) collude with privatising, voluntarist versions of belief ('Well, this is what makes sense to *me*'), and so can look like a betrayal of what most Christians would still see as a central affair in their commitment—the conviction that there is a common hope and a common vocation for human beings, such that the welfare or salvation of one section of humanity cannot be imagined as wholly different from or irrelevant to that of the rest of the race (or the rest of the planet, for that matter).

If we *do* believe that this is built in to the way we talk about salvation, we have a good *prima facie* case for saying that not everything and anything is compatible with Christian theology. This ought to be obvious: if there is nothing Christian theology cannot say, there is no way of using the term 'Christian theology' as an intelligible description. The very potent liberal reluctance to say that something is an inadmissible or incomprehensible move in theological talk has, however, sometimes left an

85

impression that such talk is answerable to nothing but this or that theologian's sense of his or her own inner integrity. We need to say that it is, after all, possible to be a bad, silly, or mistaken theologian. (It is when we know what a mistake is—in *any* sort of discourse—that we know we are responsible to something other than individual taste or will; if you want to know what sort of truth-claims a certain discourse is making, ask what, if anything, it means by a mistake and how it identifies it.) But, given this, how do we articulate limits and criteria? 'Christian truth' is an expression pointing to some integrity and coherence in corporate Christian talk and action; how does this claimed integrity and coherence function critically in the concrete processes of that talk and action?

In his recent book on *The Logic of Theology*[5], Dietrich Ritschl sets out the two main strategies theology has tended to deploy in answering these questions. We can construct 'monothematic' theologies, in which unity (and thus critical self-appropriation) is bound to a single focal theme or doctrinal nexus; or we can attempt to list and summarise the topics which a coherent theology ought to deal with, and to display their interdependence (what Ritschl, following German Protestant convention, calls the *loci* method—the allocation of a *locus* within an overall classificatory scheme to particular and 'partial' themes).

Thus, on the first approach, theological discourse is answerable to a single point of judgment: for Luther, justification by faith alone, for a modern liberation theologian, the hermeneutical privilege of the poor. Two of the theological giants of the century, Barth and Rahner, can both be seen as, in some sense,'monothematic' in intent—if not always in practice. For Barth, the sovereign liberty of God manifested in the bare fact that speech about God is made possible and authorised in a Godless world, the world where, by definition, God is not—this is the touchstone of theological integrity, the unifying perception. For Rahner, in sharp contrast, the unifying theme is the pre-conceptual apprehension, underlying human knowing, of the unlimited field in which that knowing operates; and from this anthropological starting-point, a vision of grace and nature, Christology and ecclesiology unfolds with impressive consistency.

The second approach is that of medieval theology—commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, the great *Summae* of the thirteenth century—and of most theology, Protestant and Catholic, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Because twentieth-century essays in this encyclopaedic mode are far more self-conscious than earlier instances about their methodological options, they stand much closer to the monothematic style. Thus the systematic essays of Tillich, Weber, Macquarrie, and comparable writers, or the ambitious project of Pannenberg, are manifestly controlled by the author's decision to adopt organising principles over and above—say—the shape of the creeds alone, or the traditional order of dogmatic 'treatises'. What still sets them apart

86

from clearly monothematic treatments is the claim to produce a map of the whole territory, displaying an ordered relation between topics, while at the same time allowing these topics a relative autonomy sufficient to justify their treatment as quasi-independent areas of enquiry within an overarching process of reflection.

Ritschl indicates the serious problems faced by both these accounts. 'Monothematic' theologies are all very well so long as they do not set themselves up as exclusive paradigms. History brings necessary shifts in theological perspective, so that what appears urgent and immediate in one context will recede in another. While there may be no way of articulating a theology wholly concerned with matters of 'lasting importance' alone (a theology free from history), the method of theology requires some means of holding open the wider question of what it is that is more than momentary or 'occasional' in theology, what might connect monothematic visions in a critical and fruitful relation to one another. In other words, and going a little beyond Ritschl's terminology, monothematic theology on its own secures unity only in its own immediate context, so that that unity has to be constructed afresh in a different context: and therefore, paradoxically, this kind of approach leads to a plurality of systems with no principles for relating their organising perspectives, an untrammelled pluralism. Moreover, the monothematic approach may not only encourage 'the formation of closed systems'[6] in a general way, but foster an irreconcilable and illimitable multiplicity of such systems in competition or hostility.

And as for the project of encyclopaedic doctrinal surveys, this, as Ritschl notes, has two major weaknesses. It distorts biblical and traditional discussions by lifting material from its original context to serve a generalised exposition of some isolated theme; and it seeks an essentially illusory permanence, another closed system, incapable of responding to 'prophetic interruption'[7]. Thus, in its claim to do justice to the wholeness of the Christian heritage, this approach erodes the concreteness of that heritage. To quarry Augustine or Calvin for arguments on specific topics, while amputating the historical and polemical setting of those arguments, is to risk a bland homogenisation of the past, indeed, a refusal to see it *as* the past; and so, in refusing to acknowledge that there is a genuinely 'occasional' aspect to theology, it condemns itself to an abstract generality far from the actual mode in which the tradition took shape.

But if these two most obviously available ways of articulating the unity of Christian claims will not do, are we doomed to a theological world of private taste and non-communicating options about 'style'—a theological mirror of the cultural situation of our age?[8]

Ritschl points that there are simple intuitive tests we can perform to find out whether we really believe in such a picture: he invites us[9] to consider what would *stop* us from describing certain statements ('Only morally perfect people can become members of the Church', 'One should

87

kill all severely handicapped newborn children', and so on) as correct or even possible moves in Christian talk—which is essentially a form of the question which I touched on earlier, about what counts as a mistake. The process of answering this question uncovers for us 'regulative statements' or 'implicit axioms'[10] at work in our discourse: what our actual commitments are in the process of testing the integrity and intelligibility of our language. This is helpful in reminding us of the practical oddity, if not unintelligibility, of an unqualified pluralism; it leaves open, however, the question of how these axioms may be grasped as composing any sort of unity themselves. It is possible to say—as I think Ritschl implies—that awareness of 'implicit axioms' is a sort of regulative *moment* in theology, which points to a wholeness of perspective in fact unattainable from any historical standpoint. The unity of Christian discourse can only *show itself* in this oblique way, as axioms emerge to light. This seems to me to be quite right as far as it goes; but I think more can be said about what *positively* conditions the search for some articulation of this elusive unity. Ritschl himself turns to this in the second main section of his work; while acknowledging my debt to his discussion, I want to suggest a slightly different way in which the issue might be tackled.

With Ritschl, I believe (as I have already indicated) that 'the conception of the unity of humanity, which has a theological basis, calls for the venture of an overall view'[11]. What I have called 'the conviction that there is a common hope and a common vocation for human beings' is more than just a pious sentiment. To belong to the community of Christian belief at all is to assume that the pattern of relation between persons and between humanity and God which is displayed as gift and possibility in the Church is open to humanity at large, and to act on that assumption in respect both of the internal structures and of the external policy of the Church. Christian belief involves exposure to what the New Testament calls 'the judgment of this world', and its corporate articulation and living out claims to be a mediation of that judgment to the nations, and a mediation also of the hope that lies in and beyond the judgment. In other words, the *fact* of a community committed to mission, to inclusiveness, to calling human persons and society to account, is the source of the question about the unity of Christian truth.

If we were content to say that there is *no* challenge the Christian community may put to secularity or to other purportedly religious discourses, we should be saying that it is possible to imagine irreconcilable human ends and goods, between which there is no communication; and this would very much lessen the pressure to clarify what it is to suppose that Christian truth is 'one'. Likewise, if we were free to say that all or most conceptions of the human vocation developed by earlier Christian generations were *fundamentally* misconceived or superseded, and that we were authorised to re-imagine the shape of Christian humanity from scratch, we should again be settling for a plurality of contingent projects,
88

radically vulnerable to the distortions of history, with no inherent critical elements to keep them in motion and dialogue: the 'salvation' of the medieval peasant and of the twentieth century bourgeois would operate in mutually inaccessible frames of reference. There could be no engagement, critical or affirming, between them; only the blanket dismissal modernity is usually happy to pronounce. If this is problematic in the contemporary context, the same holds across the historical divide.

The focal problem here is not simply that this makes it difficult to talk about 'a' Christian community in any more than a rather formal and boring sense, but that it makes it difficult to talk about *God*. If 'God' is a conceptual tool for the supposedly advanced moral consciousness of an age, or if the word designates an object with a history (i.e. a pattern of involvement with uncontrolled contingencies), the problem is substantially reduced; but this simply begs the question of whether this can strictly be called talk about God at all. The meaning of 'God' as displayed in the history of Israel and the Church has to do with the historical realities of transformation or renewal of such scope that they only be ascribed to an agency free from the conditions of historical contingency, and one that challenges rather than endorses what claim to be the heights of moral and spiritual attainment. And it is out of this meaning of 'God' that there gradually develops the fully-articulated doctrine of God characteristic of patristic and medieval theology: the unconditioned act of self-diffusion and self-sharing upon which all things depend—with the important corollary that this act is 'simple', it is what it is without the admixture of elements or constraints from beyond itself, and so is entirely at one with itself, consistent and faithful.

You do not have to hold this view in its full-blown and explicit form for the underlying picture of God involved to pose questions about the unity of religious discourse in a tradition. If there is one God, the acts of that God should, *prima facie,* be consistent; the community established by the divine action should have some unifying points of reference; and reflective speech of that community should in some way articulate the divine consistency, or, at the very least, be able to deal with and contain what seems to make for fragmentation. Thus the canon of Hebrew Scripture can itself be read both as an effort to articulate the deepening sense of the oneness of God's act (Deutero-Isaiah's brilliant fusion of creation mythology with the Exodus tradition and the experience of return from exile is probably the most striking instance) and as the perception of that oneness in and through the *overcoming* of the dramatic ruptures in Israel's history—the beginning and the end of the monarchy, the schism between the kingdoms, the destruction of the first temple, the exile. The unity of God's action, of the community itself and of the community's speech, has to be constructed in the reworking of narrative, law and 'prophecy', the interweaving of new layers[12]; and this labour is enabled by that fundamental self-interpretation without which the community of

89

Israel would not exist, the conviction of an origin in the *call* of God, undetermined by any worldly factors, and a constitution by the covenanted promise of God.

Precisely this is what is at work also in the relation of the New Testament writings to this canon. The activity of God in Jesus is linked up with the unity of creation, covenant, exodus and restoration: what *is* and is *done* in Jesus is assimilated to these acts.[13] Consequently, the unity of the Christian *ekklesia* with Israel must be affirmed; and, at the same time, some account must be given of why the manifest and bitter separation between Church and synagogue, and the manifest rejection of Jesus by those to whom the interpretation of israel's tradition formally belonged, did not constitute a fragmenting of the unity of God's act. What is clear in the New Testament is not that there can be a single systematic resolution to all this, but that these issues have a necessarily high priority, given the sort of thing the Church is and the sort of thing its talking about God is. And if the New Testament is less a set of theological conclusions than a set of generative models for how to do Christian thinking[14], our own consideration of how we should speak of the unity of doctrinal language must be shaped by the methods displayed in these writings.

In Old and New Testaments alike, unity is evidently articulated through *analogy*: diverse events, persons, patterns of behaviour are reconstructed in writing and in the editing processes of canonical formation[15] so as to manifest a shared form, a family resemblance. This works in a particularly interesting way when Christian writers claim for their own the heroes of the Jewish scriptures, so that these figures become resources for the self-understanding of the ordinary Christian convert. What is—or should be—happening in the life of the believer is given graspable shape by referring it to the story of Abraham, as in Romans. Hebrews gives us a long catalogue of Jewish saints re-imagined as paradigms of the 'hope for things unseen', the venturing beyond the easy and familiar, that is being enjoined upon the letter's recipients. To put it as simply as possible: the *roles* Christians can take on are the roles created and enacted by the fathers of Jewish faith[16]. A central aspect of establishing the unity of the God of the covenant and the God of Jesus is establishing the continuity, the analogical relation, between the role that a Christian may stand in before the God of Jesus and the role of an Abraham or Moses before the God of Israel: this life *now* can have *that* kind of structure. Indeed, the very identifying of a present community's relation to God in virtue of its faithfulness to Jesus as a 'covenant' licenses the filling-out of this general analogical move by applying it to individuals in both covenantal orders. And this construction by analogy of a community's relation to God is a process already at work in the Jewish Scriptures—in the Law's various levels of redaction, in which the present community under instruction is imagined as Israel in the desert, in the literary reappropriation of archaic prophetic idiom[17], in the effective

90

assimilation of Babylonian to Egyptian captivity—so that Jewish Scripture's *method* is itself an analogue for what is being done in the New Testament.

If, in the Bible, the unity of Jewish and of Christian discourse is understood as required by a commitment to the unity of God, and if the unity of God is in turn understood and articulated in terms of the unity or continuity of the possible forms that human life, individual or corporate, may take before God, we have a possible lead in considering the problem of the unity of our discourse today. Rush Rhees wrote that 'The question whether we are still talking about God now, or whether we are really worshipping God now, cannot be settled by referring to any object'.[18] How, then, is it settled? On the evidence of Jewish and Christian Scripture, it is settled by considering the compatibility and coherence of the roles made available, the patterns of life opened up in the speech that witnesses to the foundational events of the Jewish and Christian communities. 'Is it the same God?' is a question not to be answered apart from the question, 'Is it the same hope?' or 'Is it the same pattern of holy life?'.

If this is right, what most significantly threatens unity is the existence of incompatible models of Christian (or Jewish) humanity. This may take the form already mentioned, of assuming that my salvation can go forward in a way that does not affect and is not affected by the question of salvation's accessibility for some other person or group: the refusal to see what is so central to Paul's vision of the *ekklesia*—the recognition that I do not go to heaven except in relation to those I serve and am served by in the Body of Christ, that what is given to me or to us is given for the whole. When forms of Christian discourse can be identified as systematically ignoring or trivialising this—especially, in our age, by racial or sexual exclusivity—they must be seen as fragmenting the perception of God's unity. But awareness of this distortion or fragmentation can also encourage us to look with anachronistic severity at some past styles of Christian sanctity; a commitment to the unity of God's action should at least give us reason to spend time asking what points of 'analogy' may exist with what we take for granted as the pattern of holiness now—and how our present accounts of it may be questionable and partial[19].

In other words, the search for a *theological* unity in what we say involves a high degree of sustained conversation with the history of Christian ethics and spirituality (in its full historical complexity and ambiguity)—with the history of how the vocation of human beings is imagined by Christians. And in reading the texts of faith in the context of the sacramental action of the community, we are reminded of what is, in fact, a significant aspect of all reading of texts: we are not the first or the only readers. We read *as* we perform identifiably similar actions to those performed by other readers, re-presenting a single story which is believed to be the point of focus for all our analogies—what interprets and is

91

interpreted by the life of the new community, and thus connects 'new' and 'old' worlds. What makes the process of the Christian analogising of sanctity possible at all is the unifying 'form' of Jesus' life, death and resurrection seen as the point upon which the analogical lines of Hebrew narrative converge.

Why not, then, simply answer the question about unity by saying this? By saying that Christian truth is unified by its reference to the one figure of Jesus Christ? Formally, this would be true enough; but it would tell us too little. As it stands, it would run two different sorts of risk. It could reduce the range of Christian ethics and spirituality to a mechanical obedience to or imitation of Jesus of Nazareth as a clearly identifiable and characterisable historical figure; or else, if it took with appropriate seriousness the challenges to this picture from historical and literary criticism of the gospels, it would evacuate the idea of 'reference' to Jesus of nearly all positive agreed content.

The Christological issues here are of great complexity, but it ought to be clear that the options of an historical exemplar and an historical cypher should not exhaust the range of possibilities. I would prefer to say that the figure of Christ acts as a unifying point precisely in and through an attention to the varieties of Christian humanity. Being in the Church at all takes it for granted that there is a history of corporate belief which witnesses to the action of the one God; and the events around Jesus, especially the cross and resurrection, are the hinge connecting one part of this story (the covenant with Israel) with another (us). How this connection is made without appearing to rob Israel as it now exists of its history is a question of some obvious gravity, which needs a lot more reflection. But from the standpoint of the Church we can at least say that the events around Jesus make possible those new modes of human being spoken of, symbolised and enacted in the Church, and the appropriation and transformation of Jewish paradigms in a radically different context. To explore the continuities of Christian patterns of holiness is to explore the *effect* of Jesus, living, dying and rising; and it is inevitable that the tradition about Jesus is re-read and re-worked so that it will make sense of these lived patterns as they evolve. We constantly return to imagine the life of Jesus in a way that will help us to understand how it sets up a continuous pattern of human living before God. Who Jesus is must be (and can only be) grasped in the light of what Christian humanity is; but that Christian humanity is centrally characterised by the acknowledgment of dependence on a gift realised in the history of Jesus. It refuses to claim the right of self-definition or self-constitution.

Thus we become able to say what is, theologically speaking, at work in Jesus by tracing the continuities of Christian holiness, not simply in comparative biography, but in what Christian language in and out of worship offers as possibilities for the shaping of a life Godward: in more conventional theological language, we identify what it is to be a child of

92

God, given a share in the liberty of God, and identify in Jesus the formal, the material and the efficient cause of there being such a pattern in human lives. This is not to suppose that theological considerations can provide us with bits of otherwise inaccessible biographical information; since the embodiment of divine sonship is not a *feature* of the life of Jesus among others, an additional piece of straightforwardly verifiable fact about this human being's human life, the confession of Jesus as incarnate Son of God does not *of itself* specify any particular biographical facts.[20] Yet equally this does not leave us to construct unchecked mythical fantasies: the bare facts of Jesus' Jewishness, his perceived role as a prophet, and the nature of his death set boundaries to what can be said of him—as they also set boundaries to what can be said about Christian humanity.

The knowledge of Jesus' identity as 'Son' or 'Word' in history is not something to be read off from a supposedly neutral record, nor, on the other hand, is it some kind of abstract projection of transcendental significance on to an historical void. It is realised in the process by which the memory of Jesus and the humanity of the Church give shape and definition to each other, so that the 'memory' of Jesus is never simply the recollection of a distant individual, and the 'humanity' of the Church is never simply an optimistic moral project. This definitive interaction, which is what sacraments and the reading of Scripture are supposed to be about, is the context in which we speak of the agency of the one God as witness and interpreter, as the Holy Spirit. And it is worth recalling Vladimir Lossky's account of the Spirit as that which realises in the endless diversity of human lives the set of renewed human possibilities opened up by the work of Christ.[21]

The unity of Christian truth is perceivable to the extent that we can perceive a unity in Christian holiness, the unity anchored in the form of Christ, in the enfleshment of God's eternal act of complete response to the complete self-gift we call 'God the Father'. The limits of Christian truth are perceivable as we engage in the hard work of spelling out the human meanings, the hopes and possibilities, carried in this or that theological utterance. Before applying either the test of consistency with a 'monothematic' principle or the test of immediate conceptual compatibility with an encyclopaedic or systematic exposition, we should ask whether a Christian utterance does or does not conserve the possibility of the kind of analogy I have been sketching: does it presuppose and serve the conviction that the lives of men and women are open to the horizons indicated by those models of 'Christian humanity' which the Church's history has developed around the focal sign of Jesus' living and dying? Does it—to recall the terminology used earlier—continue to offer intelligible roles for the living out of new creation? Does it conserve a hope for shared, unrestricted human renewal/liberation/salvation?

If we come at the question of theological unity from this perspective, a number of further implications appear. First of all, we can come to

93

recognise both of the methods described by Ritschl as possible *styles* of theologising, while denying that either has any final privilege over the other, or over any other: there are internal pressures in theological language urging it to organise itself around this or that theme, or to display its overall conceptual and systematic shape, but this does not mean that theology *must* decide on every occasion to be monothematically or systematically determined (if it were otherwise, the greater part of the history of theology would be ruled out of order).[22]

Second, we are or should be kept attentive to the location of theology in the Church, understood as a community whose corporate activity seeks and hopes to be taken up in God's activity as characterised in the foundational record of Israel and Jesus—i.e. understood not merely as a cultic institution, though it is worship and reflective prayer that witness to and deepen the immersion of human acting in God's.

And third: when theological unity or coherence looks most threatened, the problem is likely to be an underlying anxiety or confusion about the characterisation of God's activity—and thus about the nature of holiness. Such confusion is caused by uncertainty about how to read the Bible in a post-critical age, by intensified awareness of challenges to the Christian model from other persuasive accounts of human wholeness, by the sense of a lack of focus or integrity in how the Church as an institution behaves—in short, by all kinds of factors endemic in the situation of the Church at the present time.

Attempts to speak of the unity of Christian discourse which ignore these factors will fail to address the central issue. The vision of unity in our context, and perhaps in every Christian context, is more likely to emerge by way of a newly critical and constructive reading of Scripture—the revived 'analogical' skills of a base community, the profound hermeneutic of parable, much discussed in the USA in recent years, the whole process of claiming the Bible as a *source* of critique. And it is also more likely to emerge by way of the demanding and sometimes alarming conversations that must be pursued in our society about what human beings and societies may hope for; and by candid engagement with the Church's liability to treat its unity as an end in itself not much related to its honesty. All the time, though, we must remember that none of this makes any sense without some confidence in the possibility of the reality of our own transformation in Christ, the confidence that can be nurtured only by the disciplines of praise and of silence.

1   See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination. Christian Theology and Culture of Pluralism*, pp. 448—9, for an observation on this.
2   Raymond Brown's work on the distinctive contours of Johannine Christianity should be mentioned; and for an extreme recent example of the emphasis on the diversities of early Christianities, see Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence. Mark and Christian Origins*, Philadelphia 1988, esp. the first section.
3   On the various factors at work in determining early Christian orthodoxy, see E.P.

Sanders (ed.), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition,* vol I: *The Shaping of Christianity in* the *Second and Third Centuries,* London 1980, and the forthcoming volume of essays in honour of Henry Chadwick edited by R. Williams, *The Making of Orthodoxy,* Cambridge 1989.

4   See Tracy, op.cit. p. 449, and the final chapter of his more recent *Plurality and Ambiguity. Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope,* London 1987.

5   London 1986.

6   Ibid. p. 111.

7   Ibid. p. 92.

8   On the dominance of style in a late capitalist environment, see Bryan Turner, *Religion and Social Theory,* London 1983.

9   Op. cit. p. 93.

10   Op. cit. pp. 108ff. For a general discussion of the notion of an 'implicit axiom' in various kinds of discourse, see Ritschl's essay, 'Die Erfahrung der Wahrheit. Die Steuerung von Denken und Handeln durch Implizite Axiome', *Konzepte, Ökumene, Medizin, Ethik. Gesammelte Aufsätze,* Munich 1986, pp. 147—166.

11   *The Logic of Theology,* p. 202. C.P.R. Williams, 'What is Catholic Orthodoxy?' (pp. 11—25 in *Essays Catholic and Radical,* ed. K. Leech and R. Williams, London 1983), p. 15.

12   See the excellent study of canonical formation and its significance by James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon,* Philadelphia 1972.

13   Apart from the way in which language appropriated to the Torah as the principle of creation is used of Jesus in some strands of the New Testament (notably the beginning of Colossians), there has been some speculation about whether the symbolic significance of the *Aqedah,* the 'sacrifice' of Isaac, related in rabbinic traditions to creation and Exodus, was early transferred to the death of Jesus. See R. Williams, *Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Roots of a Metaphor,* Nottingham 1983, for a brief introduction to this question.

14   See note 13 above.

15   J.A. Sanders, op. cit.; and, for a wider discussion of the varieties of 'canonical criticism', James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism,* Oxford 1983.

16   On the appropriating of roles, see A.C. Thiselton, 'Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory', (pp. 45—78 in *Believing in the Church. The Corporate Nature of Faith,* the Report of the Church of England Doctrine Commission, London 1981), pp. 65—6.

17   See John Barton, *Oracles of God,* London 1986, on this interpretation of the 'classical' prophetic literature.

18   Rush Rhees, *Without Answers,* London 1969, p. 131.

19   In this respect, of course, the project of theological analogy exercised on the narratives of Christian life is as much a matter of mutual critical address as any other variety of hermeneutics.

20   I take this to be the force of Eamon Duffy's remark that 'the divinity of Jesus is not a "fact" about him', in 'The Philosophers and the China Shop', *New Blackfriars* October 1988, p. 449; and I am not quite clear why Professor Dummett ('What Chance for Ecumenism?' *New Blackfriars* December 1988, pp. 541—2) takes this so much *in malam partem.* The whole point of Chalcedonian Christology as developed in the doctrinal tradition seems to be the denial that divinity is a characterisation among others of the human nature of Jesus, either an additional feature or a substitute for some human lack.

21   Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church,* London and Cambridge 1957, ch. 8, esp. pp. 166—7.

22   Ch. 16 of Nicholas Lash's recent *Easter in Ordinary. Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowing of God,* London 1988, has some salutary things to say about the necessary co-existence of plurality in theological idiom and integrity in witness (see p. 266 in particular).