Ministry of the Word or Comedy and Philology

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1. *Topicality*

Early in December 1986, I was siting in Charlottesville, Virginia, minding my own business (which is to say that I was on sabbatical leave) when a letter arrived from John Coventry, asking me to address this year's conference of the Association on the topic of 'ministry of the word'.

I agreed, and almost at once began to regret having done so. The topic seemed so vast, so comprehensive, so obviously central to every aspect of Christian speech and action, that I did not know where to begin. So I turned to the dictionaries, and got a bit of a shock. The *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* has only one entry under 'ministry', and that is 'ministre des sacrements'. Ah well, that was back in 1929, in the dark ages before Vatican II. Things would be better in the bright new postconciliar world, a world which had witnessed the proclamation of a dogmatic constitution entitled 'Dei Verbum'. Well, perhaps, but not *much* better. *Sacramentum Mundi* (1969) has *no* entries under 'ministry', and the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia,* published in 1967, has *one,* which reads '*ministry, Protestant*'.

Perhaps we should not make too much of this. It is, after all, perfectly possible that, gathered under other heads and quite compatible descriptions, our Catholic self-understanding has still been permeated by a sense of all our discipleship, all our prayer and compassion, all our disciplined distinctiveness, being set at the service of the word, the *diaconia tou logou*. Possible, but I somehow doubt it, because it was not simply the *ministry* of the word which had largely ceased to figure in our Catholic vocabulary. As Karl Rahner pointed out, in 1960, commenting on the absence from Denziger of a section on 'the Word of God', the very doctrine of God's Word had almost disappeared from view.[1] All that we were left with in its place, as shadow or caricature, was an obsessive insistence on the authority of those who saw it as their duty to protect some valuable information which God had once provided for the human race. It was as if the guide-book to some great library had been

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1987.tb01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

replaced by a pamphlet giving details of the burglar-alarm system.

Be that as it may, what I want to do in this paper is to try so to reflect on what 'ministry of the word' might mean as to focus our discussion on two topics of absolutely central significance for the mission and ministry of the Church in what I am most reluctant to call 'Mrs Thatcher's Britain'. Although it will take us some little time to get there, these two topics will be: firstly, the cultural and political responsibilities of a community which seriously supposed its identity to be that of a ministry of the word; and, secondly, arising from this, some reflections on the plight of preaching and adult catechesis in contemporary British Catholicism.

2. *Yes Minister*

Let me begin at the beginning, with that phrase in the sixth chapter of Acts, *'diaconia tou logou'* (6, 4), which Miles Coverdale translated as 'the ministracion of the worde of God'. To what manner of ministration, 'diaconate', or service, does the text refer? My impression is that, by the beginning of the Christian era, a word which originally had meant simply 'waiting at table' had broadened to cover all kinds of personal service and supervision; from footman to chairman, perhaps. According to some authorities, the phrase in Acts echoes or reflects the original meaning, thus suggesting that 'word-service' is a kind of 'food-service'; that those who supervise the 'conversation' that is Christianity are administrators of God's nourishment of his people.[2]

We cannot, of course, discover from the Acts of the Apostles how *we* might most appropriately arrange and institutionalise, today, the various tasks which it is our duty, as Christians, to perform. Nevertheless, that original context, in Acts, of the notion of 'ministry of the word' may serve to remind us of how important it is not to *dissociate* meaning from feeding, conversing from caring, announcing from enacting. Here, as elsewhere, the slogan might be: distinctions are usually necessary, dichotomies are invariably disastrous. 'Ministry of the word', I shall shortly be arguing, is primarily to be understood not as the name of one of the things that some of us are supposed to be doing, but rather as one way of understanding who it is, as Christians, that we are, and what, in everything we do and undergo, we are required continually to become.

The analogy drawn, in Acts, between table-ministry and word-ministry, is not, however, without its inconvenience. 'Ministry of tables' (see 6, 2) suggests supervision or governance of the community's feeding arrangements, in somewhat the same way as 'ministry of transport' suggests supervision or governance of docks and railways. But it would surely be blasphemous to suppose that the Word of God could be subject to human governance or control?

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1987.tb01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

Blasphemous, or just plain arrogant. Modern liberalism (whether Catholic or Protestant), sensitive to the damage done by inquisitors and ayatollahs (especially Christian ayatollahs!), tends to be quite properly suspicious of those who confidently thunder 'Thus saith the Lord'. And yet, simply to surrender the ground to liberal modesty would be to admit that we have only opinions to offer. And I do not see why other people should find hope in my opinions.

The problem might not be so intractable if 'word of God' referred to some message which God had given to us or to some information about him which we had somehow managed to acquire. On a classical Christian account of these matters, however, God's Word is neither message from nor information concerning him. It is, quite simply, the incomprehensible mystery of God himself as he has met us and as we, in the light of that meeting, understand him to be. The Word of God is that still wisdom of which all worlds and spaces, all storms and cities, all friendships and families, are particular, transient expressions; that wisdom which found definitive flesh and voice in Nazareth and Gethsemane. The more one thinks about it, the more obvious it *seems* to be that no human being could be *theotokos*, could produce or give utterance to *this* Word.

No twentieth century theologian, I suppose, has sought more strenuously to get the priorities right, in these matters, than did Karl Barth. He insisted that human beings could not possibly *will,* or *decide,* or *claim,* to proclaim the Word of God. And in this he was surely correct.

And yet it seems, in God's providence, *necessary* (and therefore possible) that God's Word should be proclaimed; that there should be words and deeds which appropriately declare: 'Thus saith the Lord'. The clue (according to Barth) lies in the fact that what it *means* to be 'Church' is to have been given the commission, and permission, to do the impossible thing: to proclaim God's Word. There *is* a decision that we have to take. It is not, however, a decision as to whether or not to proclaim the Word of God, but a decision as to whether or not to acknowledge, to accept, the commission that has been given to us.[3]

In other words, the possibility of exercising a 'ministry of the word' is a function of our grace-given obedience, our acknowledgement that we have been enabled, commissioned, thus to serve. That is why I earlier made indirect mention of Mary, the *theotokos*, of whom it was said 'concepit prius in fide quam in carne', that she bore the Word in faith 'before' bearing it in flesh. And I entitled this section 'Yes Minister' partly because our ministry (which simply *is* our human and Christian existence) *consists* in our obedience to the Word by which we are borne and partly because what, as Christians, we are thereby established to be are people who embody or bear witness to God's 'Yes' to his world.

Through the 'Yes' of our obedience we are made ministers of God's life-giving, reconciling, liberating, 'Yes' to his creation.

3. *Christianity as Philology*

But is this true of all of us, or is it only true of some, of a minority set apart for just such ministry? We still have not, I think, quite exorcised the clericalist suspicion that recognizing *all* Christian existence to be ministry somehow deprives those whom we call 'ministers' of their *raison d'être*. Yet no-one infers, from the fact that we call some people 'civil servants', that *only* these people perform a service, or serve the *civitas*. And only the most career-crazed bureaucrat would suppose belonging to the civil service to be the real or fundamental form of ministry in our society, in relation to which all other kinds of service were only indirectly or metaphorically so called.

In the Church, as in the wider society, there are all sorts of special tasks that need to be performed, and sometimes it is sensible to allocate these tasks to particular groups of people. Such tasks require description, and the names we choose to summarise the description may *also* refer (and hence more fundamentally refer) to some general feature or function of the Church. This is the case, for example, with such notions as 'priesthood' and 'teachership' and these, in turn, derive their Christian sense from our understanding of their applicability to the Church's Lord.[4]

In other words, the proper order of interpretative derivation is *always* Christ—Church—office. Let us, by all means, describe some officers or functionaries in the Church as 'ministers of word and sacrament' but, if this description is not most dangerously to mislead both them and us, it is important that their function be performed and understood in proper subordination to that more fundamental ministry of the word which is the very *existence* of a people set apart to minister to God's promise for all mankind. And it is with 'ministry of the word' in this latter, more basic, sense that I am principally concerned in this paper.

We are, by God's grace, made ministers of his Word, ministers of his *one* Word, ministers of the Word that he *is,* of the Word whose 'ec-static' utterance makes and heals all worlds.

It follows that the image of the library (which I briefly used earlier) is doubly misleading. It is misleading, firstly, because God's Word is always utterance, happening, act. It is (to borrow a distinction from neighbouring territory) discourse, not just language. Language can be locked in libraries, whereas discourse—language-in-act, language-in-use—can only be uttered or attended to.

The second reason why the image of a library is misleading is because libraries are repositories of many objects, lots of words. But God has not many things to say, just one: himself. 'God', said Karl Rahner, 'does not say all sorts of things to men, and his words are not a miscellany of

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1987.tb01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

disconnected subjects. In the last resort he utters only one thing, which is himself as eternal salvation in the Spirit of the incarnate Logos'.[5]

God's oneness or simpleness is not, of course, without distinction: distinctions indicated in the threefold pattern of the creed and given formal expression in the doctrine of God's Trinity. Our faith is in one God whom we triply know and in relation to whom we say three things. On this vast subject, the only point I wish to make at present is that, in our attempts to think things through, to make some Christian sense of all our circumstance, we do better to take the three articles of the creed as three ways in which one single story may be told rather than as three chapters or stages in that story.

Creation, redemption, sanctification: my suggestion is that, instead of thinking of God as doing three things—first making a world, then sorting out the mess that we made of it, then bringing the newly ordered world into his presence—we should think of three aspects of God's one work, one deed. But, of course, whichever the aspect with which, on any particular occasion, we decide to work, *under* that aspect it is the *whole* story that requires to be considered.

Thus, for example, my present topic is 'ministry of the word'. But, in order to speak of God as word, as utterance, it is also necessary at the same time to speak of God as utterer and as enactment of the utterance that he is. To *think* as a Christian is to try to understand the stellar spaces, the arrangements of micro-organisms and DNA molecules, the history of Tibet, the operation of economic markets, toothache, King Lear, the CIA, and grandma's cooking—or, as Aquinas put it, 'all things'—in relation to that uttering, utterance and enactment of God which they express and represent. To *act* as a Christian is to work with, to alter or, if need be, to endure all things in conformity with that understanding.

God's utterance is, to use a fashionable philosophical idiom, performative. The story of the world, as Christianly told under the aspect of word or logos, is the story of God's utterance of a world as a place for his indwelling. This is the story of the world as told in relation to God the promiser, God the promise, and God the achievement of the promise.

To tell the story of the world this way, and to try to act in conformity with this narrative and its implications, is to set a very high value indeed on the proper use of words. Even after so brief a sketch of what is at issue in the claim that all Christian existence and activity is required to be *diaconia tou logou, ministerium verbi,* service of the word, it should therefore come as no surprise to find Père Chenu insisting that the theologian is first of all a 'philologist'.[6]

This is a marvellously provocative claim because, for most of us, 'philology' conjures up images of elderly gentlemen, innocent of ordinary human intercourse, lovingly dusting down volumes of no possible use or interest to anyone except themselves. But, of course, the point of the

suggestion is to turn the prejudice of pedantry on its head. Commissioned as ministers of God's redemptive Word, we are required, in politics and in private life, in work and play, in commerce and scholarship, to practise and foster that philology, that word-caring, that meticulous and conscientious concern for the quality of conversation and the truthfulness of memory, which is the first casualty of sin. The Church, accordingly, is or should be a school of philology, an academy of word-care.

4. *A Comprehensive Grammar School*

It is, unfortunately often supposed that the Church is a 'religious' institution. Consider the disadvantage of this view. When bishops talk about religion, they rarely have anything interesting to say. And when they say something interesting, they get rapped over the knuckles for not talking about religion. We might call this the Hailsham predicament.

Religion, it seems generally to be supposed, refreshes the parts that Mrs. Thatcher cannot reach. But it is not easy to specify what these parts, these 'spiritual' parts, might be. If I were to make my own list of serious spiritual problems confronting this country, it would include: regional disparity of housing costs, insider dealing, the collapse of manufacturing industry, the banking system's influence on the Third World, private schools, AIDS, child-abuse, and Rupert Murdoch. But this is hardly a menu of 'religious' difficulties!

Most of the things that we do and say and undergo have little or nothing to do with 'religion' or, at least, with what nearly everyone now takes the term 'religion' to mean. Whereas there is *no* area of life that lies outside the scope of a good education, a genuinely comprehensive education. Therefore, it may be helpful to think of the Church as a school, a comprehensive school. And because it is a school of philology, an academy of word-care, it therefore is or needs to be a comprehensive *grammar* school!

It is, I hope, already clear that this view of the matter has political as well as theological presuppositions and implications. To be a little more precise, it expresses a view of the relationship between Christianity and the social order which will be strenuously resisted by those in whose *political* interest it is to insist that Christianity confine itself to 'religious' issues. But the ministry of the word admits of no such demarcatory stipulation.

Let me go back, for a moment, to the beginning. In the beginning was the Word. It is clear from the book of Genesis that God makes by speaking: 'God said "Let there be light" and there was light'. It therefore follows that God's world makes sense.

To say that God's world makes sense is to say *two* things. Firstly, it is to insist, against the darker and more anarchic 'constructivisms' of modern thought, that such sense as there is to things, such plot or order or intelligibility, is not simply placed there by the impudence of our

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imagination but is, more deeply, given and bestowed in the very fabric of things. It follows that the ministry of the word is a service of discernment, of attending to and learning from the meanings that there are.

But, secondly, to say that the world *makes* sense is also to acknowledge (this time, *with* the grain of the modern mind) that sense and meaning have a history, that they are products and processes, and that human beings (as the world's word-bearers) contribute enormously both to the making and enrichment of sense and also to its impoverishment and destruction. Dante and Einstein deepen the meaning of the world, whereas war destroys not only matter but meaning. It follows that the ministry of the word is a service, not only of discernment and discovery, but also of sustenance, construction, and repair.

God's Word makes and heals, not some things, or some kinds of thing ('spiritual' things, for example), but all things. God's Word makes and heals the world. It therefore follows that *all* words, all areas of discourse and discovery, of debate and design, are matter for our ministry. But, if *everything* is grist to the Christian mill, what then becomes of the distinctiveness of Christianity?

Christianity, I have suggested, is a school, an academy of word-care. The distinctiveness of Christianity arises from the fact that our schooling occurs at a particular place: namely, on the road to Emmaus. It is on that road and in that company that the pedagogy of Christian discipleship takes place. It is what we learn on the road to Emmaus, and the manner in which we learn it, which furnish us with criteria of speech and action appropriate for the exercise of our ministry on all *other* roads—from Fleet Street to Wall Street. Or, to put it another way, learning to be a Christian is a matter of discovering every road to be the way to Emmaus.

It is, of course, also necessary to insist that, as the recent report *Changing Britain,* prepared for the Church of England's Board of Social Responsibility, puts it: 'There is no such thing as a pure undiluted witness to the Gospel, uninfluenced by the context in which it is made'. From which it follows, according to this report, that 'it is foolish to imagine that the churches in Britain could in some sense stand over against the rest of British society, and address it as if they did not share its problems. This study has been written from within the problems'.[7]

It is good to have this reassurance. Without it, one might have thought that only people quite *outside* the pain and degradation, the slow rotting of dignity and energy in the long-term unemployed, the spreading stranglehold of centralised control in the name of individual liberty, the structured gratification of the crudest forms of financial self-interest, the dangerous demoralisation of nurses and teachers, the attempts made to reduce health and education, so far as possible, to the status of commodities, the tribal reassurance which the well-healed receive through the systematic misdescription of the causes of poverty, the energy

expended in sustaining the illusion that somebody could *win* a nuclear war—one might have thought that only people writing 'outside' these problems could have produced, in the summer of 1987, such impeccably well-mannered and dispassionate observations concerning the recovery of 'balance' and the nurturing of common values in 'changing Britain'. If British Christians cannot see that this is a time in which word-care requires the risks of anger and the accents of Amos, then I fear that there is never likely to be such a time—not, at least, until it is much too late.

Anger, of course, can only serve the redemptive purposes of the Word when tempered and purified of self-indulgence. But then *all* appropriate uses of language call for discipline and precision. It is sheer philistinism to suppose that only academics and intellectuals care or need to care about the uses of language.

Where the private realm is concerned, we have not yet lost sight of this. We know how difficult it is to 'say the right thing' in forgiveness or apology, in affection or anger, in description or enumeration, and we *work* at our discourse accordingly. It is, perhaps, one test of civilisation that the quality of *public* discourse is just as carefully nurtured. But, by this test, we are increasingly relapsing into barbarism. Nor, of course, does the decadence of public discourse leave the private realm long unaffected.

Consider, for example, 'our great British press', as recently described in the *Tablet* by a former assistant editor of the *Daily Mirror*. He spoke of the 'squalid, one-sided, often ludicrously and crudely unbalanced reporting and coverage of national life', of the 'overall cultural dishonesty' of the national press, and of the dangers to democracy in increasing 'sameness of content' and 'lack of editorial courage'. Nor, as he made quite clear, was it only the tabloids that he had in mind.[8]

The problem of the press has far-reaching economic, political, ethical, legal, and educational ramifications. And although it has, for the most part, little or nothing directly to do with 'religion', it is, quite certainly, among the graver spiritual problems of our time. It can therefore serve as a convenient illustration of the *kind* of issue to which, as a community commissioned to the ministry of God's creative and redemptive Word, we might be expected to devote much time, energy, study and organisation. My guess, however, is that it was *not* the kind of issue which came immediately to mind when you noticed that the programme included a paper on the ministry of the word.

5. *The Catechist as Comedian*

Christian existence, construed as ministry of the word, is *laborious* —because word-care requires unremittingly painstaking attention to detail. Word-care (in Christian hands, *all* word-care) is reverence or prayerfulness, and prayer, as Enda McDonagh has said, 'is undoubtedly one of the fine things which "since Adam's fall needs much labouring" '[9]

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-2005.1987.tb01285.x Published online by Cambridge University Press

But where will such labour be *learnt*, if not in the day to-day life of that school of philology which is, or should be, the Christian church? And yet, for all the lip-service paid to the importance of adult catechetics, very little seems actually to be going on (in terms of either ideas or organisation) which might facilitate the continuing theological education, in every parish in this country, of ordinary Catholic men and women.

By theological education, here, I mean education in that 'primary theology' which is each person's wrestling with the attentiveness to the Word of God in all the circumstances of their daily living. As Enda McDonagh brings out excellently, in the essay to which I referred just now, theological education in this sense (what I have been calling education in word-care) occurs in the interplay between prayer, and poetry, and politics. It is a quite practical matter, the pattern of whose pedagogy, as Joseph Cardijn knew and as 'basic Christian communities' throughout the world have recently been rediscovering, is 'See—judge—act'.

Who is going to train the kinds of guides and teachers which such pedagogy requires? Not, or at least not directly, the universities, because 'secondary' or academic theology meets different requirements and operates with different criteria of what would constitute a job well done. Let me risk a parable of the differences I have in mind.

As a general rule, to which the exceptions are probably fewer than we might think, jokes are always arguments. But telling a joke is by no means the same thing as telling the *argument* of the joke. In fact, if you resort to spelling out the argument, you've killed the joke.[10]

Jesus taught in parables. Catechetics, like preaching, is a matter of telling jokes, though we must not forget that jesters are tragic figures, and that the centrepoint of divine comedy is the Cross of Christ. Some academic theologians, trained in the indispensable but subordinate business of working out, historically or philosophically, the argument of the joke, are also competent as Christian comedians, but the majority, I rather think, are not.

I mentioned preaching. There can be few more conclusive proofs of the extent to which Catholic Christianity is currently *not* understood to be 'ministry of the word' (in spite, incidentally, of the admirable sixth chapter of *Dei Verbum*) than the poor quality of most preaching. (In my experience, Catholics who deeply disagree about almost everything else nearly always agree, with some passion, about the poverty of preaching.)

On this sad fact, two comments. In the first place, much Sunday preaching is infected with untruthfulness. I do not mean that preachers lie to, or deliberately mislead, their congregations. By and large, this is not, I think, the case. I mean that they simply do not much care what they say. How do I know this? Because good speech, apt and accurate

and truthful speech about things that really matter to the speaker, calls for the labour of craftsmanship. And with word-caring, as with wood-carving, the lack of such labour is not difficult to detect.

In the second place, the language of too many sermons hovers in some no-man's-land—far from particular fact, event, and need—born of collusion between, on the one hand, an indolent biblical fundamentalism and, on the other, abstract evocation of feeling or equally abstract exhortation to virtue. What is missing is, firstly, the particular *facts*, both ugly and beautiful, which surround us on every side and, secondly, the words that might enable us to interpret these facts in the light of the Gospel. It is amazing how seldom one feels, at the end of the sermon, that anything has actually been *said*. This is a plea, not for 'relevance', but for honesty and hard work.

As Catholics, we hear much talk of 'magisterium' but receive very little teaching. My plea to the bishops would be that they take their responsibility for teachership much more seriously, and this in two directions. Where the world behind them, or over their shoulder, is concerned, it is surely their duty to correct the widespread, erroneous, and dangerous impression that whatever is said by the Pope, or by a Roman congregation, thereby constitutes the teaching of the Catholic Church. And, in front of them, if the plight of preaching and primary theological education is anything like as serious as I believe it to be, then it is surely a function of episcopal 'magisterium' to stimulate and coordinate the necessary transformations of structure, education, imagination and understanding.

6. *The Rest is Silence*

I must, at this point, apologise to those of you who have been irritated by my decision to touch lightly on a wide range of topics related to my theme rather than develop any one of them in depth and detail. I did so in the belief that, since mine was to be the opening paper at our conference, I would probably serve discussion better by casting my net fairly widely.

I have sketched an account of what 'ministry of the word' might mean which has (in my opinion) two rather important things going for it. First, it is an account of Christian existence, as ministry of the word, which operates at a much more basic level than that at which distinctions are (quite properly) drawn between being a Christian and being a Christian commissioned by the community to perform a particular kind of service *within* the community.

Secondly, it is an account of Christian existence, as ministry of the word, which owes nothing to those *dualisms* of matter and spirit, secular and sacred, culture and religion, which—however useful they may be to some of the friends and some of the enemies of some of the things that

count as 'religion'—render it quite impossible to give a coherent account of what it might mean for human beings to serve God's word incarnate.

To construe Christian existence as ministry of the *word* is not, of course, to see it as something that is likely to be of particular interest to what the *Guardian* calls 'the chattering classes'. It may, in fact, be just as well that those of the chattering classes who take an interest in these things at all seem much more interested in religion than in Christianity.

Incidentally, with human beings, as with other apes, chattering is often an indication of fearfulness (as a talkative person, I should know!) It is, however, not *many* words, but words well used, words *cared* for, that we need, in order to be able, with *such* use of words, to hear beyond them, into silence.

Whether or not, as Christian philologists, we do our work well, faithfully execute our commission, is to be judged by the extent to which we help ourselves and other people to cope with the silence, to *bear* the silence, the sometimes empty-seeming, sometimes awe-inspiring, sometimes torturing darkness of God's utterance.

Let me try to unpack that remark a little, with reference to the last scene of Hamlet.

'The rest is silence', Hamlet says. And dies. There is nothing more to be said or done. Not, at any rate, by him. He is now dead. The action has ceased. The soliloquies are stopped. The rest is *silence*.

For Hamlet, perhaps, but not for Denmark, or for us. Immediately (though first heard off-stage a moment before) on comes Fortinbras with his army, flags flying, drums beating, pipes playing. And, as if this were not noise enough, Fortinbras gives an order: 'Go, bid the soldiers shoot'. Bang. Curtain. End of play.

But, of course, I have omitted something. Between Hamlet's death and Fortinbras's arrival, Horatio mourns his friend. 'Now cracks a noble heart;—good night, sweet prince; And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest'. Thy *rest*? Is *that* what Hamlet meant? Did his words, 'the rest is silence', echo the irony or tension in the word from the Cross: 'tetelestai', 'consummatum est', 'it is finished'? And, if so, what are we then to make of Fortinbras's instruction, which ends the play? Is 'bid the soldiers shoot', giving the *last* word to destructive clamour, some kind of blasphemous contradiction, or despairing denial, of that 'consummatum est', the *rest* is silence?

Perhaps, and that is certainly one of the options open to us—especially if we set, behind Shakespeare's text and the image of Calvary, the further filter of the silence of nuclear winter. It is, I think, quite *possible* to read the logic of this last scene as a logic of despair.

But we should remember that, in contrast to Hamlet's torturing uncertainties, his chaos-pregnant introspection, Fortinbras stands for stability, continuity, and order. 'Bid the soldiers shoot'. Perhaps, with

Hamlet's dying words in mind, we can read this last line as setting a question, a protest, a *plea:* can continuity, stability and order, making sense of things, *really* only be sustained in this way, through gunfire? Or are there, however fragile, other possibilities, possibilities which would (as it were) leave *Hamlet* with the last word? This does, at least, seem also to be an *option,* a way of taking the world. And it is, surely, the fostering and sustaining of this arduous but undespairing option which it is the duty of God's philologists to serve.

The purpose of word-care, I said, is to help people to bear the silence, both to body and to *hear* the silence. For we are, in fact, already surrounded by, borne by, breathed by, uttered by, that silence to which Karl Rahner once said: 'Then will begin the great silence in which you alone resound, you who are Word from eternity to eternity'.[11] And *this* silence *is* rest.

1 See Karl Rahner, 'The Word and the Eucharist', *Theological Investigations IV. More Recent Writings,* tr. Kevin Smyth (London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1966), p. 255.

2 See A.M. Farrer, 'The Ministry in the New Testament', in *The Apostolic Ministry. Essays on the History and the Doctrine of Episcopacy,* ed. Kenneth E. Kirk (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1946), p. 138; Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, Michigan, W.B. Eerdman, 1964), p. 87; Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a Human Face* (London, SCM Press, 1985), pp. 72—73.

3 See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics. I/1,* tr. G.T. Thompson (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1936), pp. 56—58. This passage is, somewhat surprisingly, one of only two places in all twelve volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* in which Acts 6, 4 is discussed.

4 Anyone wishing to discover why that formulation is somewhat unwieldly should consult Robert Murray's illuminating study of 'Christianity's "Yes" to Priesthood', in *The Christian Priesthood,* ed. Nicholas Lash and Joseph Rhymer (London, Darton Longman and Todd, 1970), pp. 18—43.

5 Rahner, 'The Word and the Eucharist', p. 278.

6 'Le théologien est d'abord un philologue; les techniques auxquelles il se livre sont l'invention de son "amour des mots", le moyen de sa fidelité à leur mystère', M.-D. Chenu, 'Vocabulaire Biblique et Vocabulaire Théologique,' in *La Parole de Dieu I. La Foi dans l'Intelligence* (Paris, Editions du Cerf, 1964), p. 186; this essay was first published in 1952.

7 *Changing Britain. Social Diversity and Moral Unity* (London, Church House Publishing, 1987), p. 64.

8 Geoffrey Goodman, 'Our Great British Press', *The Tablet,* 13 June 1987, pp. 629—630.

9 Enda McDonagh, 'Prayer, Poetry and Politics', in *Language, Meaning and God. Essays in Honour of Herbert McCabe, O.P.,* ed. Brian Davies (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), p. 234. The quotation is from W.B. Yeats's poem 'Adam's Curse'.

10 Cf. Thomas F. Green, 'Learning Without Metaphor', in *Metaphor and Thought,* ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 464—466.

11 Quoted by Herbert Vorgrimler, *Understanding Karl Rahner. An Introduction to his Life and Thought,* tr. John Bowden (London, SCM Press, 1986), p. 139.