

centralized authority (generalisations to which I have, in my time, contributed).

In general, however, I accept the challenge that any model of conflict inside Christianity needs to be related to the conflicts of societies of which given Churches are part. The myth was that the world was diverse and chaotic, but Christianity united and purposeful. The truth as I have tried to depict it is that *because* the world is diverse, the only thing which keeps Christianity adequate to its ever-changing context is the vigour and realism (yes, and love) of its own internal dialectic, and that that dialectic is not in necessary contradiction to its sense of purpose, if only we learn now to persist in prayer with one another.

- 1 Nicholas Lash, "Argument, Essence and Identity", *New Blackfriars* Vol 65 pp. 413—419 (October 1984) on S. Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, SPCK London, 1984
- 2 B.J.F. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London, 1971), p. 155.
- 3 *Foundations of Christian Faith* (London, 1978), p. 324.

## Deity and Domination : II

David Nicholls

*The concluding part of a paper presented at the International Symposium on Sociology and Theology, Oxford, January 1984. In the first part of this study of the relationship between the religious use of political images and concepts and their use in political rhetoric (published in January) the author focussed on the political and religious language of early seventeenth-century England.*

### III

With the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 a kind of stability returned to England; conflicts and controversies there, of course, were in the political sphere, and even a 'glorious revolution', but compared with the preceding decades a certain peace and order is evident. There was a strong desire for peace among various sections of the population, and the economic and social foundations were being established upon which was to rise the political stability of the following century. By 1688, writes J. Carswell, 'Englishmen were

becoming used to the idea of reading about their domestic politics rather than fighting about them'.<sup>45</sup> Ideas of arbitrary power were assailed and the notion of a law depending not simply on the dictate of a sovereign once more became predominant. This is particularly evident in the deist and rationalist writers of the period. God is not 'an arbitrary being', insisted Matthew Tindal, but the reasonable governor of a regulated universe.<sup>46</sup> The order, stability and rationality of 'the spacious firmament on high' provided a model for social and political relationships. It would be little less than horrid and dreadful blasphemy, declared the influential archbishop John Tillotson, 'to say that God out of his sovereign will and pleasure can do anything that contradicts the nature of God, or the essential perfections of his deity'.<sup>47</sup>

As God has designed and regulated the laws of the universe so that it maximises the 'welfare of men' (and Tindal quotes Tillotson, Boyle and Scott in his support), so the social arrangements of a free market, with human self-interest curbed and moderated by religion, would realise the general good. God does not need continually to be intervening in the affairs of the universe nor, analogically, should the 'night watchman state' interfere with social and economic processes otherwise than to maintain order and peace. Francis Bacon had already outlined the position. God consents to rule his creation by the laws of nature, he argued, so kings 'ought as rarely to put in use their supreme prerogative, as God does his power of working miracles'.<sup>48</sup> Bacon had, however, been an advocate of royal monopoly and throughout the early Stuart period, governments thought it their duty to regulate industry, wages and working conditions'. Eighteenth century governments extended Bacon's principle from the narrowly legal sphere into that of economic policy. By 1714, writes Christopher Hill, 'both society and the universe seemed to consist of competing atoms'.<sup>49</sup> These tendencies reached their apotheosis in the political theology of archdeacon William Paley of Carlisle.

The concepts and images of God and the state in the last three centuries can in certain respects be seen as reactions against the absolutism of the first part of the seventeenth century. Much modern atheism, for example, has been political in its inspiration—it is the rejection of an arbitrary tyrant. The ranter atheism of the mid-seventeenth century was clearly related to the ranters' rejection of political tyranny, though in their case it led to a political quietism rather than to revolutionary activity. The atheism of Godwin and Shelley was similarly political in origin and inspiration, as was the hypothetical atheism of J.S. Mill, expressed in his critique of Sir William Hamilton and his followers. It is again true of Proudhon, who wrote, 'The critique that I have made of the idea of God is analogous to all the critiques I have made of authority and of

property'.<sup>50</sup> Bakunin's atheism was of a similar kind. 'If God *is*' he declared, 'he is necessarily the eternal, supreme and absolute Master, and if such a Master exists, man is a slave. Now if man is a slave, neither justice, nor equality, nor fraternity, nor prosperity is possible for him'.<sup>51</sup>

My illustrious predecessor at Littlemore, John Henry Newman, stated that the christian gospel 'tends to make men contented and obedient subjects ... keeps the lower orders from outbreaks' and 'is the best guarantee for the security of private property'.<sup>52</sup> It is hardly surprising that men who were concerned about liberty and human dignity should reject the god of this religion!

Another reaction to absolutism is to be found in those who accept a kind of analogy between the divine and the human but who identify God, not with the ruler but with the ruled, not with the oppressor but with the oppressed. He is the suffering God of Kitamori, the crucified God of Moltmann.<sup>53</sup> On the dead body of one of the leaders of the Haitian resistance to the US occupation of their country from 1915 to 1934 was a handwritten prayer book which included a prayer to:

God who died,  
God who came to life again,  
God who was crucified,  
God who was hanged.<sup>54</sup>

The image of God as shepherd has often been used by christians when facing persecution and hardship. A noteworthy feature of the catacombs of the early church is the frequency that the mosaic of the good shepherd appears. In contrast it is unknown to find an ikon of Christ as the good shepherd. Generally produced in an age when the christian church was powerful, ikons tend to reflect a triumphalist ethos.

I suppose that one of the dominant concepts used both of God and the state over the past hundred years in Britain and the western world has been that of *welfare*. God is seen as all powerful, as is the state in its own sphere, but it is believed or hoped that this power will be used benevolently. Both God and the state have as their principal function the handing out of benefits. To illustrate this would take more space than I have available here and the analogy is less explicitly drawn than it was in the seventeenth century. This emphasis upon welfare must clearly be seen in the context of the growth of industrial capitalism. It became evident in the latter part of the nineteenth century that unless certain steps were taken by the state to mitigate the harsher aspects of the industrial system, unrest and ultimately revolution would ensue. The state began to take upon itself the role of a 'friendly society', while retaining the mailed fist for its more recalcitrant subjects, particularly in the colonies. The god of much British and North American theology was likewise portrayed in terms

of absolute power combined with general benevolence. He is the 'God of power and might' who is also concerned with the 'common good'. There is relatively little emphasis upon the holiness and justice of God; like the state, he is more concerned with conditioning and manipulating people than with treating them justly. Incidentally, in continental Europe—in Germany, Spain, Italy and Eastern Europe, where welfare state measures failed to ensure the peaceful continuance of capitalism and harsher measures were needed—the dominant images of both God and the state would seem to be rather different. Barthian theology is not, as Barth himself was fully aware, unrelated to political developments in the Europe of the inter-war period.

#### IV

I have been suggesting that some of the most powerful images and concepts used of God have their primary reference in political discourse. Some, but not all. One thinks particularly of the images of *shepherd*, *spouse* and *father*, whose primary reference is not political. Yet all these have been from time to time applied to earthly rulers. The emperor Charles V, among others, claimed the title of shepherd and used the text 'there shall be one shepherd and one flock' to legitimate his imperial ambition. Ancient and medieval examples could be given of the ruler's relationship to his realm being portrayed in terms of marriage. King James I told Parliament in 1603, 'I am the husband, and all the whole island is my lawful wife; I am the head and it is my body; I am the shepherd and it is my flock'.<sup>55</sup> With respect to the title 'father', Erasmus wrote:

The good prince ought to have the same attitude towards his subjects as a good *paterfamilias* towards his household—for what else is a kingdom but a great family? What is the king, if not the father to a great multitude? We have been taught by Christ our teacher that God is the unquestioned prince of all the world, and we call him 'father'.<sup>56</sup>

Even a ruthless political dictator, like François Duvalier, claimed a paternal relationship with his people and was pleased to be called 'Papa Doc'.<sup>57</sup>

It would, of course, be a mistake to see the influence always flowing one way—from the political to the religious employment of such images and concepts. Perry Miller wrote indeed of federal theology as 'the lengthened shadow of a political platform' but was careful to recognise the role which it played in the theological controversies of the day, particularly in the debates between antinomianism and arminianism.<sup>58</sup> In the development and refinement

of religious concepts it is important to emphasise the dialectic at the level of theological ideas as well as the relationship of these developments to the political structures of the day. Furthermore, religious conceptions may play a significant role in influencing the course of political history. In the USA, for example, one could argue that liberal theology, with its God of caring and concern, predated any widespread acceptance of the idea of a welfare state in that country. This theology (or rather the effects which it had on popular religion) helped to mould the context within which Franklin Roosevelt was able to introduce the welfare legislation of the thirties.

Again it would be wrong to see the use of these analogies always as 'ideologies' calculated to reinforce the status quo. As Peter Brown has pointed out:

Christian writers did not mindlessly create a mirror in Heaven that reflected, in rosy tints, the hard facts of patronage and *prepotenza* that they had come to take for granted on the late Roman earth. The role of replication in late antiquity was subtly different: it enabled the Christian communities, by projecting a structure of clearly defined relationships onto the unseen world, to ask questions about the quality of relationships in their own society.

These projections, he goes on, allowed them to engage in muffled debates on the nature of power in their own world, and to examine in the light of ideal relationships with ideal figures, the relation between power, mercy and justice as practiced around them.<sup>59</sup>

It would thus be wrong to see the concepts and images of divine and human domination as 'derivations' (to use the term of Pareto)—that is mere functions of the economic relations prevailing at the time. While it is necessary to explain such concepts and images with reference to the historical context in which they emerge as predominant, once they become current they frequently assume a life of their own. Attempts to account for these concepts and images simply as determined by the political, economic or other social conditions have almost always come to grief. Breasted's dictum 'monotheism was but imperialism in religion' is untenable.<sup>60</sup>

A further point in conclusion. A recognition of the power of analogy should make political philosophers and historical theologians critical of the images used both of God and of the state. If men reject the image of God as an arbitrary tyrant, as being inconsistent with christian revelation, then they might be led on to question ideas of political sovereignty—the mythical notion that there must be somewhere in every state an absolute and arbitrary authority.<sup>61</sup> It is, incidentally, this disastrous idea—shared by Mrs Thatcher and General Galtieri—which was the principal cause of the war between

## Britain and Argentina over the Falkland (Malvenas) Islands.

In addition to such a theological critique of political concepts it is possible to think of a political critique of divine images of authority. Examples of such are to be found in the writings of Walter Rauschenbusch and other United States theologians. While historians must recognise the power of analogical thinking, theologians should be aware of its limitations. Analogy should not blind them to the univocal relationship between God and the state; the transcendence of God constitutes an ultimate limit on the pretensions of civil government. Analogy must be controlled by the univocal relationship.

- 45 J.H. Plumb, *The Growth of Political Stability in England, 1675—1725*, London 1967; and J. Carswell, *From Revolution to Revolution: England 1688—1776*, London 1973, p. 29
- 46 *Christianity as Old as Creation*, London 1730, i, p. 9.
- 47 J. Tillotson, *Sermons*, London 1700, vi, p. 216.
- 48 *Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning*, quoted in Weston & Greenberg, *Subjects and Sovereigns*, p. 12. M.C. Jacob has illuminating things to say on these matters in *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689—1720*, Hassocks, Sussex 1976.
- 49 C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, London 1981 ed., pp. 22 & 3.
- 50 Proudhon à l'abbé X, 22 janvier 1849, in *Oeuvres complètes de P-J Proudhon*, Paris, i, 1923, p. 375n.
- 51 G.P. Maximoff ed., *The Political Philosophy of Bakunin*, New York, 1964, p. 62.
- 52 *Sermons on Subjects of the Day*, London, 1873, p. 273.
- 53 K. Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, London, 1958; J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, London 1974.
- 54 Quoted in David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 297.
- 55 Frances Yates, *Asirea, the Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century*, Harmondsworth, 1977, p. 26; Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, pp. 214f.
- 56 *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516), L.K. Brown ed., New York 1936, pp. 170—1.
- 57 On the Haitian dictator's use of supernatural images see David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, pp. 232f.
- 58 Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, p. 413.
- 59 Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, London, 1981, p. 63.
- 60 J. Breasted, *The Dawn of Conscience*, New York, 1934, p. 275.
- 61 For a discussion of this issue, see David Nicholls, *The Pluralist State*, London, 1975, pp. 36f.