

HEALING OF THE CHURCH

LUTHER AND SOLITUDE

In BRAINWAVES report BW/010, 'Healing of the Nation', I suggested that one of the principal differences between the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches lies in the fact that Protestantism was born without a contemplative dimension; and I attributed this to Luther's own aversion to contemplative prayer. In this paper, which forms the sequel, I want to explore this issue and its effects in greater depth, and to consider how greater mutual understanding can be brought about between these two branches of the Church.

We need to understand first, why was Luther so averse to contemplation? I find the explanation in Roland Bainton's very sympathetic biography, *Here I Stand*. Bainton makes it plain that *Luther was a chronic depressive*.

Luther felt that his depressions were necessary. At the same time they were dreadful and by all means and in every way to be avoided and overcome. His whole life was a struggle against them, a fight for faith....Sometimes he would engage in direct encounter with the Devil....[B]ut it is noteworthy that what the Devil says to Luther is only what one says to oneself in moments of introspection, and...only the minor difficulties were referred to the Devil. In all the major encounters, God himself was the assailant.' (*Here I Stand*, 283)

Bainton reports his advice on avoiding such attacks.

Shun solitude. "Eve got into trouble when she walked in the garden alone. I have my worst temptations when I am by myself." (284-5)

He found respite in faith, in the Bible, in company and conviviality, in anger, and in the love of his wife Katie; but emphatically not in fasting (285). Ronald Blythe similarly reports Luther's counsel against the solitary life of the desert:

Such terrors were to be there for many of [Jesus'] desert-dwelling followers and Martin Luther understood them so well that he warned off Christians from what he regarded as fiend-infested desolate regions. 'The devils are in woods, in waters, in wildernesses, and in dark pooly places, ready to hunt and prejudice people.' (*Divine Landscapes*, 196).

What do we make of this? Here is a man in pursuit of God, but when he endeavours to get alone with Him in prayer, he is assaulted most fearfully from within his own psyche. Those who have had such an experience even for a short time will know just how frightening this can be. To struggle thus for a lifetime must be unimaginably dreadful. Small wonder then that he could not cope with his own company. In an age that knew very little of the workings of the human mind, and nothing at all of brain chemistry, of the unconscious, or of psychotherapy, the only framework he had with which to understand and grapple with his problem was the naive one of God (for good experiences) versus the

Devil (for bad ones) - and even then he confused the two.

I suggest that we have here, in Luther's battle with depression, in his inadequate model of his own inner workings and consequent horror of solitude, a primary source of the Reformation antipathy towards contemplative prayer. He was scarcely in a position to recommend the practice enjoined by Jesus as fundamental,

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.' (Matthew 6:6 TNIV)

The consequences of this have been great.

CONSEQUENCES

In following Luther, Protestants, right up till the present day, have tended very much to ignore contemplation as a channel of personal knowledge of God and have consequently elevated scripture as the primary, even the sole, source of such knowledge - hence the Reformers' watchword *sola scriptura*. Let me illustrate this from Dr Francis Schaeffer, an analyst to whose writings I am personally indebted as a highly articulate representative of the Reformed tradition in the late twentieth century.

First, let us consider his penetrating book on epistemology, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. The only evidence Schaeffer gives that God is not silent is the Bible. However all this proves is that He *used not* to be silent. Again, in *Escape from Reason*, when he wants to illustrate how God speaks directly to individuals, his examples are Moses and Paul (89-90). There is no suggestion that God continued to address individuals personally after the New Testament was complete - as, for instance, in the famous episode when in 1206 He instructed St Francis to 'Rebuild my Church'. By contrast, the Bible itself records how God revealed himself to the patriarchs before even a word of the Bible was written; and tells us repeatedly that God does not change.¹

Second, for Schaeffer, God's true self-revelation in the Bible is essentially propositional.² He is distinctly unhappy about the notion 'that what matters is not setting out to prove or disprove propositions; what matters is an encounter with Jesus.'³ He would have had little time therefore for his contemporary, the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, probably the most prolific and influential contemplative of his day, whose experience of God could be very far from propositional, as illustrated in Annex A. This would lose us someone who on any reckoning was an exceedingly great man. I do not think any Christians can afford to be so dismissive of others from whom we could be learning.

¹ E.g Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8.

² See for instance *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, Appendix I, 'Is Propositional Revelation Nonsense?', 90-4.

³ *Escape from Reason*, 76.

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Third, let us consider the very heartbeat of Schaeffer's most famous work, *The God Who Is There*, upon which he insists:

...the classical basis of antithesis. So, if anything was true, the opposite was false. In morality, if one thing was right, its opposite was wrong. This little formula, 'A is not non-A', is the first move in classical logic. (13 cf. 47)

And here he is being absolutely true to the Reformers. In one blow he abolishes *mystery* and all mysticism. Reason is supreme. Religion is what can be *proved*.⁴ Not so, however, according to another prominent evangelical of his generation, Dr J. I. Packer, writing about divine sovereignty and human responsibility:

All theological topics contain pitfalls for the unwary, for God's truth is never quite what man would have expected; and our present subject is more treacherous than most. This is because in thinking it through we have to deal with an *antinomy* in the biblical revelation, and in such circumstances our finite, fallen minds are more than ordinarily apt to go astray.

What is an antinomy?...It is an *apparent* incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antinomy exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable. There are cogent reasons for believing each of them; each rests on clear and solid evidence; but it is a mystery to you how they can be squared with each other. You see how each must be true on its own; but you do not see how they can both be true together. (*Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 18-9)

Packer cites as an example the wave/particle duality in physics.

My wife Barbara has long held that the test of true religion, which distinguishes it from the cults, is this ability to handle paradox. How should one do so? Packer, who himself distinguishes between paradox and antinomy, continues:

What should one do, then, with an antinomy? Accept it for what it is, and learn to live with it. Refuse to regard the apparent inconsistency as real; put down the semblance of contradiction to the deficiency of your own understanding; think of the two principles as, not rival alternatives, but, in some way that at present you do not grasp, complementary to each other. Be careful, therefore, not to set them at loggerheads, nor to make deductions from either that would cut across the other....Use each within the limits of its own sphere of reference....Note what connections exist between the two truths and their two frames of reference, and teach yourself to think of reality in a way that provides for their peaceful coexistence, remembering that reality itself has proved actually to contain them both....This, as I understand it, is how modern physics deals with the problem of light, and this is how Christians have to deal with the antinomies of biblical teaching. (21-2)

We find a neat application of this in the peacemaking of my ancestor, the Revd Charles Simeon of Cambridge, in his handling of the contemporary dispute between the Calvinists and the Arminians - essentially the subject of Packer's book. Both sides, he maintained, were right in what they affirmed (on their own territory) and wrong in what they denied (on their opponents'). The truth was to be found not in either extreme, nor in the middle, but in both extremes.

⁴ Cf. Article VI in the Book of Common Prayer:

'Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought necessary to salvation.'

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Schaeffer saw classical logic as the basis of Christian thinking. If however we extrapolate from Packer, Christianity is founded not upon logic but upon *mystery*, one facet of which is the coming together of apparent opposites which are beyond our comprehension. We can behold, we can contemplate, we can worship, we can be enveloped and we can have our minds transfigured⁵ - but we can never, ever fully understand. As even the super-intelligent Paul put it,

Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:2-3 TNIV cf. 3:18, 10:12)

I have argued elsewhere that Paul himself had a deep and transforming experience of the mystery of God during his two year confinement in the prison of Caesarea (Acts 24:27), which is reflected in the prominence given to mystery in his letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians written there.⁶ This raises the possibility that some of the misunderstandings between Christians may result not from capitulation to superstition or dogmatism by one party or the other, but from different experiences of God's *mystery*. This is the mystery of which A. W. Tozer wrote,

Worship is to feel in your heart and express in some appropriate manner a humbling but delightful sense of admiring awe and astonished wonder and overpowering love in the presence of that most ancient Mystery, that majesty which philosophers call the First Cause but which we call Our Father Which Art in Heaven. (*The Worship-Driven Life*, 8)

I am going to suggest that at the heart of the New Testament lies a paradox and duality which, though not as perplexing as an antimony, will nevertheless benefit from the charitable and conciliatory approach suggested by Dr Packer.

THE TWO GOSPELS

In a caricature of Church history which is often passed on with other Reformation traditions today, it is alleged that Catholics believe - or believed - in a 'gospel' of salvation by works, whereas Protestants believe in a gospel of salvation by faith alone, *sola fide*. Here is a distinction easily grasped. The Protestant view is then demonstrated by reference to, most commonly, Romans chapters 3 to 8.⁷ This

⁵ See Romans 12:1-2, where we are commanded to present our bodies to God in order to have our minds transformed. 'Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.' I see in this an excellent description of contemplative prayer in which our fundamental problem, that as sinners our *thinking* has gone wrong (Romans 1:21,28), is rectified through the personal salvation which Paul has explained in the preceding chapters. From now on we are to discover God's will by learning to *think* about it under the guidance of the Spirit (cf. John 16:13, 1 John 2:20,27). As the Chinese evangelical Watchman Nee put it, 'But the man who is spiritual knows how to stand still. He can stand before God in worship while God makes known to him His will.' Hence the Bible is not so much a closed book as an open door. It is not there to do our thinking for us but *to teach us how to think*; a fishing rod not a fish. Note that the word 'transformed', *metamorphousthe*, in Romans 12:2 is cognate to that used to describe Jesus at His transfiguration (Mark 9:2).

⁶ See *The Three Gospels*, 215-20, 236, 251.

⁷ Romans 2, which teaches that at the Last Judgement 'God "will repay everyone according to what they have done"' (v.6), and that He will give eternal life to those who do good (vv.7,10), tends to be ignored on such occasions. That the Last Judgement will be carried out in terms of what people have *done* is the consistent teaching of scripture, as in Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46 on the sheep and the goats; and Revelation 20:12-3. Justification by faith is the process by which salvation

view of Catholicism becomes problematical the moment one opens any of the great classical texts of Catholic mysticism, such as de Caussade's writings on self-abandonment,⁸ whose very breath is faith in Jesus. I wish to propose an alternative reconstruction.

For the term gospel, *euangelion*, 'good news', a message (as opposed to a book), has *two distinct meanings* in the New Testament. There is of course the gospel of the forgiveness of sins through the atoning blood of Christ, that we find expounded particularly in Paul's letters to the Romans and the Galatians. But there is also another 'good news', preached by Jesus and variously called in the Synoptic Gospels 'the good news of God' (Mark 1:14), 'the good news of the kingdom' (Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 24:14), and 'the good news of the kingdom of God' (Luke 4:43, 8:1, 16:16). This is not a message about His own atoning death, which by common consent He only began to discuss privately with the disciples after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:31 and parallels), and even then He was not understood. Of what then did this consist? Mark gives us a brief summary:

'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' (Mark 1:15 TNIV)

The good news that Jesus preached was the proximity of the kingdom of God.

What is so good about the 'good news' of the imminent kingdom of Matthew 4:23? After a few verses defining Jesus' audience (4:23-5), Matthew gives us in three chapters (5-7) the content of Jesus' early teaching, commonly designated the Sermon on the Mount.⁹ Launching in with the Beatitudes, Jesus proclaims some really tremendous news for all manner of people, especially the unfortunates. For the poor in spirit (or, in Luke's version, simply, the poor, 6:20), for those who mourn, for the meek, those who long for righteousness or are persecuted for it, for the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers - the news is just terrific. God thinks they are fantastic!¹⁰ So much so that he has a special place for them in His coming kingdom, which is in fact 'at hand'! And, as we learn later, when it comes about, those at the bottom of the heap are going to end up on top, and vice versa (Matthew 19:30, 20:16), very much as foretold in the Song of Mary (Luke 1:46-55). To the Jew this would mean the coming at last of the age when

is received *in this life* - as by Abraham in Galatians 3 - those who so receive it being exempt from the Last Judgement (John 5:24). Note that exclusivism - the doctrine that heaven is reserved exclusively for those who are card-carrying Christians at the instant of death - reduces the Last Judgement to the status of a rubber stamp upon an already determined verdict. This view finds no support whatever in the New Testament, which sees the Last Judgement as a momentous unravelling of human history when God brings to light people's deepest secrets and motivations (Romans 2:16). St Paul actually forbids us to make such judgements prematurely, before that Day (1 Corinthians 4:5; cf. Jesus' parable of the weeds, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43).

⁸ Or, for instance, *The Cloud of Unknowing*; Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*; Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*.

⁹ I have argued elsewhere that the Sermon on the Mount probably represents the earliest written record of Jesus, having been originally collated by the Apostle Matthew in Aramaic c.44 before its later inclusion, translated into Greek, in our First Gospel (*The Three Gospels*, Chapter 4, 'The Genesis of Matthew', 103-32).

¹⁰ This I take it is the reason why Jesus pronounces them *makarioi*, 'blessed'.

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the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:9 TNIV;cf. Habakkuk 2:14).

For this we are to petition God whenever we pray (Matthew 6:10). It is hard to imagine anything that the majority of His audience would find more exciting.

There are therefore two items of good news in the New Testament: the forgiveness of sins and the advent of the kingdom. How do they relate to each other? Both include a command to repent. And we find both at the outset, in the teaching of John the Baptist. Famously, John preached a 'baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). But according to Matthew, he also proclaimed the imminence of the kingdom (3:1). Jesus at the start of His ministry (c.AD 30-1¹¹) adopted the latter and made it the central thrust of His preaching (e.g. Matthew 4:17, 12:28, 24:14). In chapter after chapter of (especially) the Synoptic Gospels, the kingdom of God (or in Matthew, of heaven) is the central topic of his parables and discourses. He even made it the message of the Twelve during their trial mission (Matthew 10:7); and of the seventy during theirs (Luke 10:9). He gave his envoys on these occasions very clear briefs: they were to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, drive out demons, and to proclaim the kingdom (Matthew 10:7-8; Luke 9:1-2; 10:9; cf. Mark 6:12-3) - but apparently never, to forgive sins, which in the common understanding was God's prerogative (Mark 2:7). And while Jesus Himself frequently forgave the sins of individual penitents and taught in parables about the forgiveness of God, He did not in instructing His disciples before His Passion assign to the forgiveness of sins the prominence He gave it afterwards.

For at the Last Supper we see a momentous change. Ever since the Caesarea Philippi episode, Jesus has been drip-feeding the disciples with talk of His forthcoming crucifixion. Initially, He gave no timescale or location and no explanation (Mark 8:31, 9:31). On the third time, He indicated the occasion (when they reached Jerusalem, their next destination, Mark 10:33-4), but still gave no explanation. Then, before they reached Jericho, came the first hint:

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Mark 10:45 TNIV)

Now, at the Last Supper (Thursday 2 April 33), Jesus knows that His hour has come (John 13:1, 17:1 cf. Mark 14:41). His death is not only inevitable, but now necessarily imminent, in that none of the interested parties can any longer postpone it (Mark 14:1-2). The machine has been fully wound up, and must unwind. And so, suddenly, the rules and dynamics change. For the first time, in the graphic context of the Passover meal, Jesus gives explicitly the *reason* why He has to die: His own blood is to be 'poured out for many' (Mark 14:24) 'for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28). Then on Easter evening in the upper room - His sacrifice complete - again for the first time ever, He authorises the disciples to forgive sins (John 20:23). That is, the divine prerogative can now be shared.

¹¹ For the dates in this paper see my *The Three Gospels*, Appendix 1, 'New Testament Chronology', 283-302.

Subsequently He ordains that

repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47 TNIV)

By doing so He reunited the two messages of the Baptist. From now on the forgiveness of sins is a central plank in the gospel platform, where it remains for the rest of the New Testament. But *there is no suggestion that this was to be at the expense of the proclamation of the kingdom*, which the apostles including Paul continued faithfully to herald for as long as we can trace them in Luke's record.¹² On this Jesus insisted:

And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 TNIV)

And with the exception of the epistles of John, the kingdom recurs as a central concept in all the major components of the New Testament.¹³ How the early Church combined both the messages of forgiveness and of the coming kingdom is well illustrated by Peter's address at Solomon's Colonnade, soon after Pentecost 33:

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you - even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. (Acts 3:19-21 TNIV)

We have therefore two distinct bundles of good news in the New Testament, both with impeccable credentials and both instituted by Jesus. There is good news for the world in the coming of the kingdom, and good news for the individual about the forgiveness of sins through His death and resurrection. The life and theology of the kingdom were the subject of much of Jesus' teaching during His lifetime. But of the theology of His death, as we have seen, He gave but few hints before the Last Supper. However before departing He explained that there was much else that He was not able to teach them, which the Holy Spirit would make good on His coming. (John 14:25, 15:26, 16:12-5) And so in due course the nuts and bolts of personal salvation by faith in Jesus' redeeming blood were indeed revealed to the Church, principally through the newcomer Paul c.34-6, who recorded the revelations made to him, most notably in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians, which were probably penned in Corinth later on, in early 57.

This new doctrine is the gospel that Paul was preaching on his First Missionary Journey (spring 47 - autumn 48; Acts 13:1-14:28), whose reverberations worried the Church in Jerusalem.¹⁴ The focus of contention was the admission of Gentiles to the Church on account of their faith alone,

¹² E.g. Acts 1:3, 8:12, 14:22, 19:8, 20:25, 28:23,31.

¹³ E.g. Romans 14:17; 1 Corinthians 4:20, 6:9-10, 15:24,50; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 1:13, 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Timothy 4:1,18; Hebrews 1:8, 12:28; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 1:9, 5:10, 11:15, 12:10).

¹⁴ This is probably the context of the letter of James, written it would seem at this time; cf. Robinson *Redating*, 138).

without the need for circumcision. Paul was called to account at the Council of Jerusalem (late 48; Acts 15 and probably Galatians 2:1-10¹⁵) and was vindicated on the intervention of Peter, who had himself a few years earlier been primed to admit Gentiles into the Church (Acts 10-11). From then on salvation by faith alone became part of the authentic Christian message, but never at the expense of the ultimate goal, the establishment of the kingdom.

However, this was later to lead to confusion. The Reformation exploded into life when Luther rediscovered the gospel of salvation by faith as taught by Paul; and today his descendant Protestants, charged perhaps by Paul's own injunction at Galatians 1:8,¹⁶ recognise no other gospel. For the Catholic, on the other hand, the term 'gospel' has a wider meaning, including also the life and teaching of Jesus. How many battles have been fought, and how much ink - not to mention blood - has been spilled because neither side has realised that the term 'gospel' has two quite different but equally authentic and well-attested meanings! It is unfortunate that Luther, who rediscovered the good news of forgiveness, did not go on to discover that of the kingdom. It is a message one does not often hear today.

For the emphases and dynamics of the two messages are in places different. So for instance when Paul was asked by his jailor in Philippi what he must do to be saved, he replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household.' (Acts 16:31, mid-49; cf. Peter at 2:38-9, Pentecost 33¹⁷). By contrast, Jesus himself, on being asked an equivalent question by a lawyer, replied with the parable of the good Samaritan, concluding, 'Go and do likewise' (Luke 10:25-37). Today's evangelist, giving such an answer, would in some Protestant quarters find himself damned for preaching a gospel of 'good works'. Somewhere here, I suspect, lies the origin of the hideous caricature described at the start of this section.

We have then a paradox - two distinct gospel messages under one name - and will be well served by Packer's advice on antinomies. Accordingly, we are not at liberty to play off one against the other. The early Church saw fit to include both epistles and gospels in the New Testament, and we may not backtrack. Nor can we ignore the distinction by glibly identifying the kingdom with the Church, as has often been done by Christians of all traditions. Jesus never told us to preach that 'the Church is at hand'! Rather, we should perhaps be like those 'scribes' whom Jesus spoke of as 'instructed about the kingdom of heaven' who are 'like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.' (Matthew 13:52) On any particular occasion they are well placed to judge which of the two is more appropriate.

¹⁵ See *The Three Gospels*, 288-91, 308-9.

¹⁶ Anyone whose conscience is particularly troubled by this could perhaps console themselves with the thought that Jesus outranks any angel (Hebrews 1)!

¹⁷ That grace extends to the household of believers as a unit is a recurring theme of Luke in Acts (e.g. 2:39; 11:14; 16:15; 16:31-4; 18:8; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:16).

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How do the two relate? On my understanding Jesus was sent by His Father to reconquer chaotic planet earth, which had fallen into the wrong hands, and to return it to God with order fully restored (1 Corinthians 15:24-8). Jesus' strategy at His first coming was to establish, train and equip a body of followers, to whom He delegated that very same task: 'As the Father has sent me, I also am sending you.' (John 20:21 cf. 17:18) When He comes again we the Church are to surrender to Him authority - such as we then possess - over the recaptured planet, which He will in turn, after completing the reconquest, duly give back to God. This process of recovering the planet, as I see it, is all of a piece with the establishment of the kingdom. So I read Paul, concluding his great treatise on personal salvation:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:19-21 TNIV)

If so, then the Church is tasked not just with propagating itself - the usual Reformation view - but also with proclaiming and preparing for the kingdom. This is why Jesus made the gospel of the kingdom His own launching-point.

I find this view strongly supported by Lesslie Newbigin's masterful seventh chapter, 'The Logic of Election' in his book *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, all of which repays study:

To be chosen, to be elect, therefore does not mean that the elect are the saved and the rest are the lost. To be elect in Christ Jesus, and there is no other election, means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God's saving purpose for his whole world, to be the sign and the agent and the firstfruit of his blessed kingdom which is for all. (86-7)

This, Newbigin explains, is the logic behind Paul's statement,

For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all (Romans 11:32 TNIV),

which he carefully distinguishes from a doctrine of universal salvation. However, some two millennia later, and nearly five hundred years on from the Reformation, the kingdom has still not yet come, the world is facing unparalleled ecological disaster and the only force on earth capable of rectifying it is crippled by its perpetuated historical divisions. Roman Catholics and Reformation Protestants view each other with the same suspicion and hostility that Jewish and Gentile Christians held for each other in the early days of the New Testament Church. ('We have the truth.' 'God revealed Himself to our forbears; the other lot must conform to our standards before we will have anything to do with them'; and so forth.) Both sides insist that the other must first remove the speck from its eye before they will deal with the plank in their own. And meanwhile the world perishes.

We might do better to recognise that there are at least two different types of believer. There

are those who respond most readily to the teaching of Jesus about the kingdom, as found in the gospels. Consciously or unconsciously - for instance by deeds of mercy - they are paving the way for the kingdom. We may call them the '(good) Samaritans'. And there are others whose motivation is to proclaim the forgiveness of sins as taught particularly in the letters of Paul. We may call these the 'evangelists'. And a certain amount of name-calling goes on between the two. The Samaritans often see the evangelists as 'fanatics' or 'hot-gospellers', meaning in practice that they don't get their teaching from Jesus. The evangelists have been known to describe the Samaritans as 'unsound' or 'unbiblical', meaning in practice that they don't get their teaching from Paul. However once it is realised that God's agenda includes both the saving of individual souls and the reconquest of the planet, each type may begin to understand, and think more charitably of, the other. The need today is for a healing of the gulf between these two groups of Christians, very much like that between Gentiles and Jews described in Ephesians 2:14-8, whom Jesus by His death moulded into one. Of this Paul writes,

His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. (Ephesians 2:15 TNIV)

There is therefore hope for the Church.

THE WAY AHEAD

How then do we set about the healing of the Church? I have three suggestions.

First, we need to recognise that God is concerned both for the growth of the Church and for the broader kingdom for which the Church exists; and that as Sovereign He shares His concern for both with His children as He pleases. It is not for any of us to despise any whose callings and instincts are different from our own; and in particular those who most naturally serve whichever good news is not our own primary interest. God needs the whole of His Church, and He needs it to be united. (1 Corinthians 12:12-26; Romans 14:4; Acts 10:15; John 17) Further, such recognition is not conditional upon the other side making the first move.

Second, we Protestants especially need to immerse, or reimmerse, ourselves in the teaching of Jesus - not Luther, not even Paul, but Jesus. We need to abandon any form of Reformation faith in which we get our salvation from Jesus and our doctrine solely from Paul.¹⁸ Steve Chalke, in *The Lost Message of Jesus*, has given us some pointers. All of us need to go further.

Third, in the light of Jesus' teaching, besides proclaiming God's truth, we should be *thinking* very hard (cf. n.5) about the nature and essential features of God's kingdom (cf. pp.5-6), and how these features might begin to arise from within the world as we know it today. To do this we need to

¹⁸ *Solo Paulo?*

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exercise the renewed mind of which Paul speaks in Romans 12:2. As Paul himself put it,

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - *think about such things*. (Philippians 4:8 TNIV; emphasis added)

This is our job. As such, we are to become instruments of God's creativity. To which end, as Vernon White has argued in his most thoughtful paper 'Re-Enchanting the World', we need to rediscover the *mystery* of God as encountered in the medieval mystical tradition - for him, the early strand, that of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, the unknown author of the late fifth century. 'Out of this doctrine of the mystery of God,' he tells us, 'the world too is re-enchanted.' (353)

In such ways the mystical tradition could be a profoundly unifying force for the Church in its practice and theology. It is something the Church needs for its own nourishment. Even more important, the Church needs it to feed the world's hunger. There is this hunger in the world to re-enchant the world, and only a Church which recognizes that enchantment more in its own life will be able to feed this world. (354)

We are looking here for a God who calls us ever deeper into encounter with Himself but who ultimately lies beyond description. I see this as a fruit of contemplative prayer. That is our role in the partnership. God's, is to bring about the kingdom.

For His is the kingdom, the power and the glory.

Martin Mosse,
January 2009.

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ANNEX A

From a letter from Thomas Merton to Daniel J. Berrigan (Jesuit priest involved in the peace movement) dated March 10th 1962:

I am not sure I know what you mean about the Benedictine approach in prayer. If you mean liturgical...but I think you do not. Maybe you do. If you mean the Cassian-like desert solitary stuff, this is Benedictine in its way, Cistercian in its way, I don't know what it is. But really it is Oriental and when seen in an Oriental context, I think such objections as you may have to it, vanish. There is an absolute need for the solitary, bare, dark, beyond-concept, beyond-thought, beyond-feeling type of prayer. Not of course for everybody. But unless that dimension is there in the Church somewhere, the whole caboodle lacks life and light and intelligence. It is a kind of hidden, secret, unknown stabilizer, and a compass too. About this I have no hesitations and no doubts, because it is my vocation; about one's own vocation, after it has been tested and continues to be tested, one can say in humility that he knows. Knows what? That it is willed by God, insofar as in it one feels the hand of God pressing down on him. Unmistakably....

From Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love: Letters on Religious Experience and Social Concerns* ed. by William H. Shannon (London: Collins (Flame), 1990).

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