

(vii) *The suffering servant with the song of indescribable joy and triumph in Jesus Christ*

The church that is launched into this situation in history is the suffering servant, the church under the cross, and to all outward appearances the weak and helpless, the despised and downtrodden church, but it is also the church of the victorious king. The shout of a king is in its midst! A new song is in its mouth, the song of final and complete triumph, a song of indescribable joy and confidence in Jesus Christ. The apostles of this church were essentially the ambassadors of the king of kings, sent into all the world as heralds of the new era, already inaugurated, and soon to be revealed. They were eye witnesses of the resurrection,¹¹² of the fact that the last day had already dawned, and they were heralds of its coming in power. That is why the *kérygma* of the New Testament is eschatological through and through, because it is exultant with the glad news of the kingdom.

Epilogue:

THE RECONCILIATION OF MIND

A Theological Meditation upon the Teaching of St Paul¹

In Christ all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.

Colossians 1.19-22

I appeal to you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12.1-2

Alienation in mind – the difficulty of the ‘unbaptised reason’ of ancient and modern culture

In these statements, St Paul stressed the fact that we are alienated or estranged in our minds, and indeed are hostile in mind to God. This is

¹ Reprinted, with the addition of headings, by kind permission from *Theology in the Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Thomas W. Gillespie*, ed. Wallace M. Alston Jr., pp. 196-204 (© 2000 Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan – all rights reserved). Torrance's essay here encapsulates a number of themes central to his lectures and theology, in particular the rationality of faith in Jesus Christ, the profound transformation necessary in the unbaptised human reason in order to know the truth of God in Christ, and the need for the church to attempt to evangelise the very foundations of human thought and culture so that the gospel may be better able to take root in them. As an epilogue it also helps to give a more personal glimpse into the nature, challenge and task of theology as he saw it.

¹¹² Acts 1.22, 2.32, 3.13, 5.32, 10.41; cf. Luke 1.2; 2 Peter 1.16.

a basic New Testament conception which was deeply resented by the rational culture of the ancient classical world of Greece and Rome, and which the rational culture of the medieval world and the rational, philosophical, and scientific culture of our modern world have found very difficult to accept. This applies not least to 'evangelical Christianity' today, which on the whole still seems to work with what may be called an 'unbaptised reason', for it does not seem to have thought through sufficiently the transformation of human reason in the light of the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. Hence the *mind* of the church and the *mind* of society are not inwardly formed by the gospel – they remain basically unevangelised. The reason for this is that we have not taken seriously this New Testament emphasis that the mind of man is alienated at its very root. It is in the human mind that sin is entrenched, and so it is right there, the gospel tells us, that we require to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and to be healed and reconciled to God.

The reality of mind in the human person

According to the teaching of the bible, man has been created in mind as well as body out of nothing. We must not forget that a creaturely human mind has 'being'. This is a fact which, interestingly, our neurologists, brain-scientists and psychiatrists have been coming to recognise. Some of them speak of the mind as constituting a 'fifth dimension', and others refer to the 'ontology of mind'. The mind is ontologically real – it has being. What they do not often recognise, however, is that it is deep in this mental being that our humanity is twisted and distorted, and indeed, to use Old Testament language echoed here by St Paul, is 'desperately wicked'.² We do not find in St Paul, any more than in the Old Testament, any body/soul or body/mind dualism, for as James Denney used to express it, a human person is the body of their soul and the soul of their body, or the body of their mind and the mind of their body, a unitary whole. It is as such that man has fallen and become alienated from God, and as such needs to be redeemed.

The need for healing in the ontological depths of our human mind and being

Now the mind of a human being constitutes what the Greeks called the *hēgemonikon* or the governing principle, for it is the mind that governs or directs our behaviour as human beings. Thus where modern

² Jer 17.9

people tend to refer to the will as the determining factor in human behaviour, the Greek fathers traced everything back to the mind. It is a mistake to think that because they laid this emphasis upon the mind as the governing element in human nature they were not interested in the will and did not therefore stress the freedom of the will as modern people do. The Greek fathers realised, however, as perhaps few people do today that although we may have freewill, we are not at all free to escape from our self-will. That is why they put their finger on the twisted state of affairs in the depths of the human mind. It is in the heart of our mental reality which governs and controls all our thinking and culture that we have become estranged from the truth and hostile to God. And it is right there, in the ontological depths of the human mind, that we desperately need to be redeemed and healed.

Apollinarianism: the replacement of human mind by divine mind in Jesus

As I have indicated, the rational culture of the ancient classical world found this very difficult to accept, so that inevitably difficult problems arose whenever the gospel began to take root and find expression in Greek life and thought. Thus we find cropping up fairly early within the church an insidious heresy that came to be known as 'Apollinarianism'. It took its name from Apollinaris, a very clever theologian, who refused to believe that in his incarnation, the Son of God took upon himself our alienated, twisted mind because it was in that mind that sin had become rooted and entrenched. If Jesus had taken our alienated mind upon himself, so argued Apollinaris, he must have been a sinner, in fact an original sinner. And so he held that the Son of God became incarnate in our human existence in such a way that in Jesus, the human mind was displaced by the divine mind. It was therefore some sort of neutral humanity that the Son of God assumed, and not the actual humanity in which we sinners all share.

The agonising struggle of Jesus in his atoning reconciliation of the human mind to God

However, the fathers of the church found this conception of the incarnation to be evangelically and soteriologically deficient. If at that point, in the heart of our mental being, we are not redeemed and cleansed by the blood of Christ then we are not really saved at all. If in the fundamental controlling principle of our human mind, we are untouched by the incarnation and the atonement, then we are no better

off than the pagan Greeks. And so the Christian church insisted that we must take very seriously the fact that in the incarnation, the holy Son of God assumed our fallen, enslaved human nature, our twisted, distorted, bent mind, *but* that in assuming it right from the very beginning, our Lord converted it, healed it, and sanctified it in himself. In taking from us our fallen human nature upon himself, instead of sinning in it as we all do, Jesus condemned sin in our carnal mind,³ and was himself wholly without sin.⁴ And so by living out a life of perfect holiness and purity in his mind, he sanctified and healed our human mind in the whole course of his incarnate and redemptive life from his birth to his crucifixion. He carried our mind into the very depths of his agonising and atoning struggle on the cross – he descended into the hell of the utmost wickedness and dereliction of the human mind under the judgment of God, in order to lay hold upon the very root of our sin and to redeem us from its stranglehold upon us. Yes, it was not only our actual sins, but it was original sin and original guilt that the Son of God took upon himself in incarnation and atonement, in order to heal, convert, and sanctify the human mind in himself and reconcile it to God.

Irenaeus: Jesus' assumption and conversion of leprous humanity and diseased mind

There is extant a fragment of a second-century theologian, Irenaeus, which I like to think of in this connection. In it there seems to be a suggestion that the incarnation may be understood in the light of the incident recorded in the gospel when Jesus touched a leper, and, instead of becoming leprous himself, he healed the leper.⁵ In the western world today one hardly ever comes across a leper. I used to pass a leper colony when I went to school every day as a boy in China. That was long ago, but I have never forgotten the horrible emaciation of face and hand and limb in leprous flesh. If I sense what Irenaeus had in mind in that tantalising fragment, it was that Jesus had taken what Irenaeus spoke of as our leprous humanity upon himself, but that instead of becoming a leper himself, he healed and transformed our 'leprous' human nature

³ Cf. Rom 8.3-4ff.

⁴ 2 Cor 5.24; Heb 4.15.

⁵ Mark 1.40-42.

and restored it to be like the flesh of a newborn child.⁶ But let us not forget that it was our diseased *mind* that our Lord assumed for our sakes. In assuming it, however, far from sinning himself or being estranged and alienated from the Father, even when he penetrated into the fearful depths of our alienation – 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'⁷ – he converted it from the very bottom of our disobedient human being, from the roots of our estranged mental existence, into perfect oneness with the mind of God – 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.'⁸ In the epistle to the Colossians, as in the epistle to the Ephesians, St Paul thought of that atoning reconciliation as embracing heaven as well as earth, for all things invisible as well as visible need to be cleansed by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God and even be renewed in 'the spirit of our mind'.⁹ Reconciliation in Christ applies to the invisible mental life of human being!

The patristic principle that what Jesus did not assume in his incarnation has not been saved

It was in order to conserve this biblical teaching that great patristic theologians in the early church enunciated as a fundamental principle, *The unassumed is the unhealed* (Gregory of Nazianzus), or *'What Christ has not assumed has not been saved'* (Cyril of Alexandria). They reckoned that the church would be soteriologically and evangelically deficient if it refused to take seriously that Christ took our fallen mind upon himself in order to redeem and save it. That is a truth which I first learned from my beloved Edinburgh teacher, H.R. Mackintosh, who had himself been profoundly influenced by the christology of these Greek fathers. But it was only when I studied Karl Barth's account of this doctrine that its truth broke in upon my mind in a quite unforgettable way. I refer to that section in the *Church Dogmatics* 1.2 where Barth expounded the mystery of the virgin birth.¹⁰ Overwhelmed by the immense significance of what our Lord had done all for our

⁶ Cf. 2 Kings 5.14 (5.1-14).

⁷ Mark 15.34 (Matt 27.46).

⁸ Luke 23.46.

⁹ Cf. Col 1.15-20; Eph 1.9-10, 4.23 ('the spirit of your mind', τὸ πνευματικὸν τοῦ νοῦς ἡμῶν).

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 1/2, Eng. trans. T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1956, pp. 172-202.

sakes and in our place, I fell to the ground on my knees trembling in awe and wonder at the sheer miracle of God's grace in the birth, life, and passion of Jesus – the miracle that foul, wicked, depraved humanity twisted in upon itself, had been appropriated from us by the Son of God, and been cleansed, changed, redeemed, and sanctified in him.

Karl Barth and the evangelisation of human reason through the gospel

There we have to do with the inner heart of evangelical theology – the transforming of the human mind in such a way that it is no longer conformed to the patterns of this world but brought through renewal into conformity to Christ, through the communion of our mind with the mind of God in him, and its assimilation to the holiness and truth of God incarnate in Jesus. That is far from being easy, but it is something which fidelity to the gospel will not allow us to avoid. It was because Karl Barth, for example, took this so seriously that he spent so much of his life thinking out in the light of God's self-revelation in Christ what the renewal of the human mind means, and what knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus implies for the transformation of reason, intelligibility, and objectivity in Christian theology. Karl Barth was above all an evangelical theologian who spent his life in evangelising the human reason, whereas the great majority of Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians still operate, I am afraid, with an unregenerated and unbaptised reason, and thus avoid the agonising experience of working out conformity to Christ in the ontological depths of their minds.

The restructuring of human hands for the piano

Sometimes the inner conflict in which people find themselves can be very sharp, as I learned as soon as I began to teach Christian theology, so that I regularly made a point of alerting students to what was involved. I used to tell them about a friend of mine who went up to Basel to study music when I went there to study theology with Karl Barth. In those years before the war, there were two of the world's greatest musicians in Basel, Adolf Busch and Rudolf Serkin – it was with the latter that my friend Edgar wanted to take piano lessons. Serkin looked at his hands and asked how old he was. When he said that he was twenty-seven, Serkin shook his head and told him that he was too old for him to take on, and declined to enrol him. But Edgar hung about and when Serkin found that he had an unusually keen 'understanding for music', he sent him to a friend in Salzburg who gave him exercises for six months on end, until the muscular

functioning of his hands was transformed. I recall his talking to me afterwards about the drawn-out pain and agony of that experience. But it had been worth it, for when the muscles in his hands had been sufficiently restructured, Serkin at last took him on – and in due course Edgar became a distinguished musician, and indeed a composer, himself.

The restructuring of the human mind in theology through the truth of the gospel

In recounting that story to my young students I used to say to them, 'Something similar may well happen to you in these classes, for as you let the truth of the gospel have its way with you, you will find the very shape and structure of your mind beginning to change.' That is indeed what the gospel is about, a *metanoia*, a radical repentant rethinking of everything before the face of Jesus Christ. No better account of theological method has been given than that which Jesus gave to his disciples when he said: 'If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'¹¹ That is what repentant rethinking means: you cannot separate evangelical theology from that profound experience of the radical changing and transforming of your mind that comes through dying and rising with Christ.

The struggle between the structure of our natural reason and the mind of Christ

There often came a point in my classes when I felt that the students wanted to throw their books at me, as the inner struggle between the gospel and the frame of mind they brought to it became intense. Let us make no mistake about it: divine revelation conflicts sharply with the structure of our natural reason, with the secular patterns of thought that have already become established in our minds through the twist of our ingrained mental alienation from God. We cannot become true theologians without the agonising experience of profound change in the mental structure of our innermost being.

'Let this mind be in you (*touto phroneite*)' as St Paul wrote to the Philippians, 'which was also in Christ Jesus'.¹² The early Greek fathers

¹¹ Mark 8.34

¹² Phil 2.5 KJV.

gave a great deal of thought to that injunction. They cultivated what they called 'the apostolic mind' (*phronēma apostolikon*), for it was only through the mind of the apostles embodied in the holy scriptures that the church could be imbued with the mind of Christ (*phronēma Christou*) himself. That is precisely what a faithful theology is about, the assimilation of the mind of the church to the self-revelation of the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.

Conformity to the mind of Christ: theology and the evangelisation of human mind and culture

Thus a regular question raised by Christian theologians, concealed behind all the great debates in the early centuries, was whether they were really thinking *worthily* of God in accordance with the mind of Christ Jesus as it has been imprinted by the Holy Spirit in the apostolic foundation of the church and expressed in the apostolic scriptures. All through those early centuries as the gospel was carried from end to end of the Mediterranean world, Christian theology played a major role in the evangelising of nation after nation, for it was only as the mind and culture of people were brought into conformity to the mind of Christ that the church could put down permanent roots in the soil of humanity. As in the New Testament, preaching and teaching (*kérygma* and *didachē*) were always interwoven with each other, so in the remarkable growth and expansion of the church after New Testament times, theological and evangelising activity always functioned inseparably together. By its intrinsic nature an evangelical theology is an evangelising theology, for it is concerned with the winning and transforming of the human mind through conformity to the mind of Christ Jesus – not simply the minds of individual human beings but the mind of human society and culture in which individual human beings exist.

The challenge of evangelising society and its roots as well as individuals

What does this have to say to us today about what we call 'evangelical Christianity'? We have been concerned with evangelising men, women and children as individual human beings, calling for repentance and personal decision for Christ as Lord and saviour, and rightly so. But have we been concerned with the evangelising of the mind of the society in which these people live? If not, how can a Christian church put down roots in an unevangelised society and remain genuinely

Christian? I believe this is where evangelical Christianity today has failed terribly. By and large, as far as I can see, even the mind of the church, let alone the mind of society, is still secular in that it shares the mind of the secular society within which it exists. We have Christian people, but do we really have a *Christian* church? We have people who profess to believe in Christ as Lord and saviour, but do we have a church that is so imbued with the mind of Christ that its members individually and as a community think *instinctively* in a Christian way?

The need and importance of developing a theological instinct

I have been wonderfully blessed with a mother and a wife who have a profoundly Christian, and indeed a remarkably theological, *instinct*. My mother had little academic training in theology, but her life and her understanding were so tuned in to the mind of Christ that she knew at once where the truth lay and was quick to discern any deviation from it. This is also very true of my dear wife, who is imbued with an unerring *theological instinct*, evident again and again in her reaction to ideas put forward by preachers or teachers. At the end of the day that was the test I used to put to my students, as I read their essays and examinations or listened to them in the chapel.¹³ 'Has this person a genuinely theological instinct or not? Is his or her thinking spontaneously and naturally governed by the mind of Christ?' That is much more important than being theologically learned, much more important than being able to offer a formal academic account of some doctrine or historic debate in the church. What really counts in the end is whether a person's mind is radically transformed by Christ and so spiritually attuned to the mind of Christ, that he or she thinks instinctively from the depths of their mental being in a way worthy of God.

Thinking in accordance with the nature of God: theology and not mythology

As Athanasius used to insist, we must learn to think strictly 'in accordance with the nature' (*kata physin*) of God the Father as he is made known to us through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, that is, in an essentially godly way (*eusebōs*). To think like that from a centre in God himself, in accordance with his essential nature revealed in the incarnate Son, is, he claimed, what *theologia* strictly is. If any one does

¹³ The daily prayers in New College chapel led by a student or member of staff after morning lectures and before lunch.

not think in that way, but thinks from a centre in oneself, governed by the devising of one's own reason, then one is bound to think of him in an unworthy or irreligious way (*asebōs*) – which Athanasius designated *mythologia*. Either you think from out of a mind centred in God through union with the mind of the Lord Jesus, or you think from out of a mind centred in yourself, alienated from God and inwardly hostile to the truth incarnate in the Lord Jesus, that is, in a way that is finally governed by the unregenerate and unbaptised reason.

The transformation of the mind in theology is impossible without daily prayer through Christ

The transformation of the human mind and its renewal through assimilation to the mind of Christ is something that has to go on throughout the whole of our life – it is a never-ending discipleship in repentant rethinking as we take up the cross and follow Christ. That is why we cannot be theologians without incessant prayer in offering ourselves daily to God through the reconciling and atoning mediation of Christ; and that is also why we cannot be evangelists without being theologians whose minds are constantly schooled in obedience to Christ. It is after all with our minds that we worship God and it is only with our minds that we can preach the gospel and evangelise the world. Is that not, in part at least, what St Paul was concerned with in the two verses from the twelfth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, 'I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship (*logikē latreia*). [By *logikē latreia*, however, St Paul meant not just spiritual but *rational* worship.] Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.'¹⁴

The interrelation of mind, body and worship in the development of a theological instinct

Notice the distinctive way in which St Paul interrelated the renewing of the mind with the offering of the body as a living sacrifice and with rational worship. It is not with disembodied minds that we have to do here, but with the created unity of mind and body in which the human self is constituted. While stress may be laid upon the transformation

of the mind and its assimilation to Christ, it is the whole human self that is involved. The transformation the apostle called for is so deep that it evokes out of the rational self an instinctive judgment about what is good, acceptable and perfect before God. That is to say, in the way I have been expressing it, we are called to be transformed in such a profound way that there develops within the depths of our rational being a theological instinct in virtue of which we are able to make true theological judgments. Without such a theological instinct we are little more than people with secular minds loosely clothed with a Christian profession. A genuine *theological instinct* of the kind St Paul has in view cannot be gained apart from a constant self-offering in rational worship to God, for it is through that inner relation between prayer and the transforming renewal of our minds, that we may be so tuned in to God that we fulfil our service in the rational way acceptable to him.

Tuning in to the mind of God incarnate in Jesus so that the gospel may transform society

In his scientific autobiography, Werner Heisenberg tells us that again and again when the mathematics of quantum theory proved to be as difficult as they were intricate, he would go away for three or four weeks at a time to play the piano or the violin in order, as he put it, to tune in to the 'Central Order' – the name he used in that context for God. When his whole being was tuned in to that Central Order he would come back to find his mathematical equations working out more easily. It is something similar that happens in theological activity. Through study of the holy scriptures, through meditation and prayer we tune in to the mind of God incarnate in Jesus Christ, the source of all rationality until our own minds, healed, renewed, and sanctified in him, are instinct with his truth – then it is that we may preach and teach the gospel, and find it transforming the lives and minds of people and the society to which they belong.

¹⁴ Rom 12.1-2.



Torrance at his desk, reading E.H. Hutten, *The Ideas of Physics*



The Duke of Edinburgh presenting the Templeton Prize to T.F. Torrance on 21st March 1978 at Buckingham Palace

ATONEMENT

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