

1. Man was made to be a responsive creature, open to God and his neighbour - a bipolar creature, made in the image of God. He doesn't merely react to his environment like an animal or vegetable. His humanum is his capacity to respond rationally and objectively in terms of what is Other than himself, and his self-consciousness (like shyness) is his awareness of himself as an object for an other. This bi-polar relationship is expressed in biblical terms of covenant, love, trust, communion, knowledge, sonship to a Father. Negatively it is expressed by guilt and estrangement with the answer of forgiveness and reconciliation. The promise of his humanity finds its fulfilment in Christ and is realised through Christ.

2. The coming of Jesus Christ is not only the coming of God as God to give Himself to men, to evoke a response from men. It is also the coming of God as man to make for men that response which we fail to make. Jesus Christ as Mediator represents God to man and man to God in His own Person as the "Mediator of the New Covenant", so that we witness an inner bipolarity in His Person. God and man are made one in the God-man (at-one-ment or reconciliation) so that Jesus Christ is both the self-giving God and the responding Man, the commanding God and the obedient Man, the sanctifying God and the sanctified Man, the Judge of all the earth and the Man judged for us, the Truth and the faithful Witness to the Truth.

Thus a Christian theology of response begins by pointing to the One True Man, who alone is true to the Truth; the One True Son of the Father, who alone lives a life of unbroken love and trust and communion with God, and who, in our name and on our behalf, has made the One perfect Response to the Father, which alone is acceptable to God for all men, for all nations, for all times. In Him and through Him, God fulfils His purposes for men, of bringing many sons to glory, to live a life of love and trust and communion. So a New Testament writer calls Jesus the "Amen, the faithful and true witness" - the One who in our humanity has said Amen to all God's purposes for man.

This God-given Response from man to God is normative for our response - normative for our worship and communion and trust and knowledge. But it is not merely normative, a pattern for us to follow, it is also constitutive in the sense that by grace - and this is the meaning of grace - His Life is our life; His Righteousness, our righteousness; His Self-offering for us, our self-offering; His Death for us, our death; His Resurrection, our resurrection; His eternal prayers and intercession on our behalf, our prayers and intercession, so that our response now becomes one of faith, union with Christ and participation in Christ through the Spirit, for we know that our response and our prayers are accepted and heard "for Jesus' sake". Our response is the gift of the Spirit whereby we too can pray "Abba Father" as we are renewed in the image of God.

3. So understood, our response to God is therefore a response to a Response, our "amen" to the One true Amen made by Christ to the Father on our behalf, a response/

Progeny of Father Theology  
Seminary

response of faith and love to Him who for us is the One true faithful, loving Son. It is the exercise of the gift of sonship whereby, through the Spirit, we are given to share the Son's communion with the Father, and with the Son to call God "Father".

4. The realisation of the capacity to respond must therefore be interpreted both teleologically and eschatologically - teleologically in that it is the fulfilment of the telos of creation, eschatologically in that it is achieved in and through "participation" by moritificatio and vivificatio, death and resurrection, in a life of union with Christ. Such an understanding lies at the heart of our understanding both of the Christian life and of the Sacraments.

5. Much Protestantism and western religion tends to become in practice unitarian by stressing God and man as the two poles of an I-Thou relationship of transcendence and response, without taking seriously the doctrine of the Mediator and the vicarious humanity of Christ, and therefore has no adequate doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ, or of sacraments as sacraments of the One Sacrament, who is Christ. Consequently, we conceive of worship as standing in the immediacy of God's presence, where we sing our psalms to God and offer our prayers - but what is the place of Jesus Christ in worship, praise and intercession? We either short-circuit Him, or at best see Him as the Pattern of worship and Christian living. So in Pelagian fashion, we are so preoccupied with our worship, our prayers, our needs, our self-offering, that our anthropological starting point can blind us from seeing our worship and prayers and self-offering as the gift of participation in the intercession of Christ. Or worse, it can even lead us to interpreting the "meaning" of Christ purely in pragmatic terms of "utility", "relevance to human need" and to a "using" of the Gospel to solve the problems of man or to sacralise the status quo. In Bonhoeffer's phrase, we give priority to the How? question over the Who? question. Perhaps we need to recover more of the theology of the Epistle to the Hebrews with its presentation of Christ as the Mediator, the High Priest, who alone for us fulfils the dikaiōmata tēs latreias, God's ordinances of worship and service, in whose self-offering and mission we are given to share by the Spirit. Faith, understood in Trinitarian terms as our response to the Father, through the Son, in the communion of the Spirit, means a mediated immediacy.

6. In a theology of response so interpreted, there must be no divorce of knowing and being, because we must not separate revelation and reconciliation. We can only know the Father and live in communion with the Father, be forgiven and united to Christ, who shares His sonship with us. Thus the response of faith is both cognitive and moral. The "amen" of faith to Christ and His Cross is at once a response of recognition and penitence, the acknowledgement of the love of God and our humble submission to the verdict of guilty, for we can only accept forgiveness in repentance.

7. This means that in Christian theology there must be no divorce of Verification from Justification, for they are one in the gift of grace, and it is the sin of human pride to want verification without justification. We are summoned by God to make a true response to His approach of love in Jesus Christ, a response of the mind as well as of heart and will. But who can make a true response to God and think truly about the ineffable nature of God and behave truly? Justification means that God freely and graciously accepts us, not for what we are in ourselves, but for what we are in Christ, who in our humanity has made for us the One True Response of mind and heart and will, that we might be reconciled in heart and in mind (Coll. 1:21). Our response, therefore, both in thinking and moral behaviour, should be unified in our total response to Jesus Christ. We are summoned to be true to Christ, both in our statements about Him, and our total witness to Him in life, so that both in our thinking and living we seek to conform to the truth as it is in Jesus, "being true in love", alētheuontes en agapē (Eph. 4:15, 20, 21f.). Our statements like our actions, therefore, should have the character of witness to the Truth which transcends them, and should not be isolated either from the Reality denoted or the person of the witness.

Truth on such an understanding has different levels, each of which must be understood in terms of personal relationships; and a Christian understanding of Verification must be so interpreted. God who is Truth has made His truth known to men in and through Jesus Christ, and yet at the same time given us One who in our humanity and from our human side has made the one true response (witness) to the Truth, in virtue of which He is for us the Way, the Truth and the Life and apart from whom we cannot come to a true knowledge of the Father. That Response to the Truth is thus normative for us as we seek to make true statements about God and to be true to God. This is why we make a distinction between the Truth and our formulations of the truth, and refuse in nominalist fashion to identify our formulations of the truth with the Truth. The Spirit promised to the Church leads her into all truth, not by enabling her to make infallible statements or definitions, but to make faithful declarations of the Truth as it is in Christ. This does not exonerate the Church from careful, painful, exegetical, historical, theological enquiry, but is a reminder that we must not limit truth to the truth of statements, isolate truths from the living Truth, not act as though we have some independent criterion of truth, in virtue of which we can seek verification without justification - seek the truth without being true to Christ. To know Christ is to be a Christian.

8. A Christian doctrine of response must be interpreted negatively as well as positively. Man's response to Jesus was one of rejection and crucifixion. The Cross discovers to us our untruth, our inability to respond and incapacity to make a true response. If righteousness could have come by the law, says the Apostle, then Christ died in vain. Conversely, we thus judge that if Christ died for all then were all dead, and in need of the life-giving Spirit.

But any such negative evaluation of man's capacity to respond must be interpreted/

interpreted in the light of Jesus and His Cross, as a corollary of grace. We cannot or should not begin with a priori denials of man's capacity to respond, to seek empirical justification of any doctrine of "total inability" to "total perversity". This would be to speak slanderously of man's humanum - a failure to acknowledge that the "good works" of the atheist are the gift of God. But nevertheless on a posteriori grounds, we are led to make certain negative evaluations, in seeing man with his history and culture and religion under the judgement of the Cross, and in need of grace. In the light of the necessity for incarnation and atonement, as the act of God doing for men what man cannot do, we see man's inability. Because salvation means regeneration by death and resurrection, which are total categories, we see man in total need of renewal: in body, mind and spirit. In such terms, we speak about sola gratia, sola fide - that God gives us what He demands, and we cannot add to grace as though there is something which Christ has left undone. What is required of us is a total response to that Perfect Response which alone meets all God's requirements from sinful man.