

T.F. Torrance Virtual Firbush Retreat, 23-25 September, 2021

Session 5 – Robert Walker: *Torrance on the Trinity, science and the nature of reason*. For a fuller amplification of many of the points behind this topic, see the paper below given to the Retreat at Firbush in June 2018. The section on the nature of reason and intelligibility is particularly relevant, but the rest of the paper is also important in outlining the central contours of all Torrance's theology

T.F. Torrance and the Incarnation of the Word – Robert T. Walker

An address at Firbush, 13-15 June, 2018

'What can music and theology learn from each other?' How might Torrance answer? Very fortunately that's Jeremy's question. But here we can look at Torrance theology to see what kind of framework it could provide for the question and for the wider relation between theology and other subjects.

A. INCARNATION: GOD IN THE FLESH, IS NOW FLESH HIMSELF The incarnation of the Word is the Eternal Word becoming flesh. The eternal Word who brought the whole universe into being out of nothing, himself became one of the creatures in that creation, a full blooded physical human being of bones, flesh and a beating, breathing heart. He who is not physical word, became physical word and speech and everything that being human involves. The incarnation is God in the flesh *as flesh*. The creator who to human mind and senses is invisible, inaudible, intangible, unknowable, is now all of these things in the flesh. There could not be a more logically impossible juxtaposition. The eternal Word is not just in this body, but **IS** this body, **THIS** body, Jesus Christ. The one who is and remains forever the eternal Word **IS** now and **FOREVER WILL BE** this man Jesus Christ.

THE RELATION BETWEEN THE ETERNAL WORD AND THE BODILYNESS OF JESUS? What is the relation between the two, between the eternal Word and the utter embodiedness of Jesus? The answer to this question gives us the basic answer to the question of the relation of theology to other subjects.

THE STARK OLD TESTAMENT JUXTAPOSITION OF GOD AND BODILY CREATURELINESS The same juxtaposition of God who is 'Spirit' and of bodily creatureliness runs right through the Old Testament and is at its starkest in the New. God walks in the garden in the cool of the day but God as we know has no hands and feet, Jesus walks in Galilee and does have hands and feet. What is the relation between what is essentially unknowable to human mind and senses and what is creaturely knowable? What is the relation between what is logically beyond human knowing and not physical, and creaturely reality which is purely physical, created by God out of nothing and not God?

IMPLICATIONS OF CREATION OUT OF NOTHING FOR KNOWING OF GOD The fact that we have been brought into being out of nothing, and not out of God, has radical implications for our knowledge of God. It means that we are not divine in any way, that we have not emanated from him in any way, or have any 'spark of the divine in us, but have been brought into being out of nothing, as an entirely new reality alongside God, with our own nature, type of reality and order. There is no inherent connection between us and God, other than that of creation out of nothing, no umbilical cord of being or knowledge. This means that we cannot look at God to see what we are like for we are a new reality alongside him with our own nature, and in fact we cannot even look at God, for he exists on an entirely different level, if we can put it that way. He brought us into being out of nothing, and we cannot go through nothing to reach God. As physical, creaturely beings we can only think in creaturely terms.

HOW CAN CREATURELY LANGUAGE SPEAK OF GOD? How then can we use creaturely language, drawn from creaturely images, to speak of God. That of course is precisely what the bible, the written history of Israel, the Old and New Testament, and above all Jesus himself does do. The Old Testament uses the starkest physical images to talk of God. We are his sheep and he is our shepherd. He found Israel naked, clothed her, loved her and wooed her tenderly. He sends out his arrows against his enemies, even wakes up suddenly from a drunken sleep to smite them. The Old Testament has no qualms whatsoever in speaking of God and speaking to him in bold and arresting creaturely images.

THE BIBLE HAS NO NON-CREATURELY LANGUAGE TO SPEAK OF GOD

Yet the Old Testament knows that God is not as we are. He is not mortal body as we are. Our *nephesh*, the Hebrew word for soul, gets weak and dies just as the body does. In fact in Hebrew thought the *nephesh* is the

breath and life of the body and so when it dies, we die and are no more, no more memory, never again to enjoy the light of life and praise God, but he is not like that. He is God from everlasting to everlasting. The Old Testament knows that God is not physical as we are, but it has no non-physical language to talk about him. The closest it can come is to say he is ruach, wind, a physical image, and it uses the nature of wind as intangible and dynamic, or of life itself as human breath, to point to what God is. We simply cannot speak of God other than in creaturely, physical imagery. How then can the bible speak truly of God at all?

ONLY GOD CAN SPEAK OF GOD - FOR NOTHING LESS THAN GOD CAN MAKE GOD KNOWN

The answer of course is that it is entirely the action of God. Since we can only know creaturely reality, God himself 'comes down' and in creaturely language, backed up by creaturely event, makes HIMSELF known to us and the record of that is the creaturely word and text of the Old and New Testament. The further question then arises, if creaturely language and images as such are inappropriate for God who is not creaturely, which creaturely language and images might be possible and how would they have to be understood if they are to apply truly to God?

GOD ALONE CHOOSES AND CAN MOULD CREATURELY IMAGES TO SPEAK OF HIM

The biblical answer is that God alone can choose the creaturely languages and images he can use to be made to speak of him and he alone can instruct the creaturely mind in their use. And even then it is only when God himself speaks through them that they can become fit instruments for his disclosure. In the Old Testament all knowledge of God, all appropriate language, images and expressions used to speak of him, the means of all appropriate worship, are all given and prescribed by God. And the record of the Old Testament is the record of the long tension in the history of Israel between the God given appropriate way of knowing and worshipping him and the desire of the natural human mind to worship and think of him in the creaturely images and ways of our own choosing.

The radical difference between biblical creaturely language of God and non-biblical

The biblical way stresses the radical difference between Creator and creaturely and therefore the necessity for the careful choice and adaptation of creaturely language and images. The natural human mind loses all radical difference between God and creaturely and ends up worshipping a god constructed out of and clothed in purely creaturely images.

GOD'S SELF-REVELATION IN CHRIST THROUGH HIS MOULDED CREATURELY WORD

In the biblical way, God himself has moulded the creaturely word and text of Old and New Testament and speaks through it, and now in and through it we come, through the Spirit, to hear, recognise and know the eternal Word in, behind, and only through the creaturely words. What then is the relation between the eternal living Word and the written word and how do we come to know and recognise the authentic Word of God in the written? The New Testament answer is, 'only through Jesus Christ himself, in and through his Spirit'.

TORRANCE AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE INCARNATION FOR ALL KNOWING OF GOD

Few people, if any, have done more here than TF Torrance to explore the full meaning and implications of the incarnation of the Word and what it means for the way we come to know God, read the bible and worship him, and indeed know creaturely reality truly in its God given distinction from Him.

BRIEF OUTLINE OF TORRANCE AND HIS THEOLOGY

1913 - 2007 – pastor, army padre, professor at New College 1950-79 – best known as a heavyweight theologian and pioneer of the relation between theology and science – half Anglican, half Presbyterian – Anglican mother, Presbyterian father – Q to Bishop of Bristol, 'who was that anglo-catholic you had preaching to us?' - Rowan Williams' commendation - well versed in so many fields, very hard to categorise him, easy to miscategorise and often radically misunderstood

MYTHS ABOUT TFT- many myths about Torrance

Didn't believe in the bible as the word of God, impossible to understand, only for theologians, overestimated the incarnation, underestimated the atonement, universalist, no place for human faith, no doctrine of the Spirit, far too Christocentric, far too Reformed, not Reformed enough, dangerous.

WHY SO MANY MYTHS? – failure to understand his thought as a whole - interpreting it in terms of a different framework and so failing to see it offers a deeper, richer understanding of 'the appearances'

TORRANCE'S SYNTHETIC THEOLOGY

Brings together so many different insights and strands of thought from the history of theology, the fathers, Anselm, the Reformers, Kierkegaard, Barth, modern biblical understanding in a new whole. How categorise it? In many ways, can't. His thought is very systematic, but not a system – can identify distinctive features.

B. DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF TF TORRANCE

(1) STEEPED IN THE BIBLE AND BIBLICAL THOUGHT FORMS

TF absolutely did believe in the bible as the word of God - people find it very difficult to appreciate just how steeped he was in it, not just in the English, Hebrew and Greek texts but perhaps even more importantly in the biblical thought forms and how the writers thought. Steeped in the bible from birth. Can't over emphasise that. His published Incarnation and Atonement lectures are an extended, profound commentary on the bible.

(2) CHRISTOCENTRIC KEY TO SCRIPTURE

Apart from his biblical basis, but as the supreme consequence of it, Torrance' theology is radically Christocentric and therefore Trinitarian, for one cannot know Jesus the Son of the Father without knowing the Father, and one cannot know either except through the Spirit. All knowledge of God is through Christ, for he is the only image of God, the goal of all the scriptures, but to know him IS to know the eternal Father, in the eternal Word and Son, through the Spirit. Jesus is the reality of God himself speaking through the scriptures, the living Word known in and through the written word, himself the key to understanding it.

The distinction between theological statement and the reality of God: Christ the key to Torrance

Crucial to Torrance's theology is the distinction between all language and statements about God, even those of scripture, and the reality of God himself. The bible is the word of God but not in the way the eternal Word is. The bible and all theological statements point beyond themselves to the living Word and reality of God, and it is only in Christ the living Word that they are all held together and have their meaning. Torrance's theology therefore can only really begin to be grasped when it is seen as a whole locked together in Christ himself. Torrance theology is systematic but not a system because it points to and is held together in Jesus Christ and he is not a system but a living reality. One cannot grasp the theology without knowing Christ.

(3) DYNAMIC, DEVELOPMENTAL AND RECEPTIVE CONCEPT OF REASON

If the single most distinctive feature of Torrance is his Christocentric focus and consistency in endeavouring to let the centrality of Christ shape and reshape all Christian theology, one of the next most characteristic features of his thought must be his concept of reason as essentially receptive and dynamic. In contrast to the classic enlightenment view which sees reason in *substantival* terms as *a power we have and which we use to understand nature*, Torrance sees reason in *functional* terms as *a receptive capacity for the inherent intelligibility of the universe*. Where the classic view thinks of 'the light of reason', of reason as a torch we shine out on the universe enabling us to distinguish truth from falsehood, Torrance sees it as the raw capacity to respond to objective realities in ways appropriate to them.

Rather than seeing reason as *a light we bring TO the universe*, Torrance sees it much more as a latent capacity of openness to *the inherent intelligibility of the universe impressing itself ON US*. The first sees reason as essentially *something we bring to the universe*, the second as rather *something the universe impresses on us* and creates in us by its inherent structure, order and intelligibility.

Of course, if there was no capacity of latent intelligence in the human mind it would not be able to understand the inherent order and intelligibility in the universe and so the whole process is *not just a one way but a two way, developmental process*. The capacity to understand the universe is itself developed in us by our being open to and coming to understand the inherent structures of order endemic in the universe itself. It is only as we come to grasp the orderly intelligibility inherent in the universe and understand it, that the gift of understanding the universe is created and developed in us.

THE INTELLIGIBILITY OF THE UNIVERSE THE FOUNDATION OF RATIONALITY

Our rationality, as we think of it, is the ability developed in us to consciously understand the profound if wordless rationality already in the universe. Our human rationality is thus reflective of and dependent on the prior type of rationality or intelligibility on which it is built.

The very word intelligible comes from the Latin root *intus legere*, to read into, i.e. *to penetrate into something so as to be able to read it and understand it*. When we speak today of reading into something, we think of reading a meaning into something, of someone reading their own meaning, for example, into

something which is not actually in it and so the phrase becomes one of importing a meaning into something which it does not actually have. The Latin root is the opposite: it is being able to read the meaning, order or structure embedded in the object itself, and so an object's intelligibility means its inherent 'readability', its ability to be read and understood.

Our *human rationality is necessarily built on the astonishing intelligibility embedded deep in the universe* and endemic throughout it, just as science is discovering more and more. And a great deal of our rationality is simply developing the ability to read the universe and then argue from what we discover of its nature to what will happen. Our rationality is thus fundamentally dependent on the manifold innate order and intelligibility of the universe, but it is a capacity which we *at once develop for ourselves* in our response to that intelligibility as we attempt to understand it and which is *at the same time created in us* by it in our engagement with it. It is fundamentally a two-way process, of increasing understanding leading to increasing discovery & vice-versa.

REASON AS ESSENTIALLY OBEDIENCE

At its very root, reason or rationality is basically obedience, alert attentiveness to the precise nature of the other, openness to what it actually is and acknowledgement of it in what it is. It is the willingness to refrain from imposing our thoughts on it or on what it should be, and the willingness instead to let it impose its own nature, order and intelligibility on us.

In so doing, we are of course endeavouring to understand it and form *our own* understanding of it, but we are endeavouring to understand it *as it is*, in a way that is faithful to it. Reason and rationality should thus be the growing capacity to be obedient to the other in faithful understanding.

REASON AS 'THE CAPACITY FOR OBJECTIVITY'

In the words of John Macmurray, often quoted by TF Torrance here, reason in the widest sense is 'the capacity for objectivity', the capacity to respond to the nature of the other in ways that are appropriate to it. Reason in this sense is an affair of the whole person and not confined to the mind alone, for just as thoughts can be thoroughly irrational, so feelings can be profoundly rational. Thus rather than linking rationality to the mind and irrationality to feeling, we should think of the *response of the whole person* to the nature of the object and of *the object as the determining arbiter of rationality*. Responses appropriate to its nature are rational, responses not appropriate to its nature are not rational.

THE 'OBJECT' THE ARBITER OF RATIONALITY

It is therefore not our reason or rationality which is the primary factor, but the object and the nature of the object (or subject), whatever it may be, inanimate or living, plants or animals, other people or God himself. It is the object which is the arbiter of rationality, the decisive factor determining whether and to what extent the response to it is rational. Reason and rationality are thus measured by the adequacy and appropriateness of their response to the object or subject of encounter.

THE WHOLE SELF INVOLVED IN RATIONALITY

It is important that the whole self be involved in rationality. As human beings, we are profoundly unitary in nature and it is impossible to separate body from mind, or the 'physical' from the 'spiritual', thought from the astonishingly complex physical activity of the brain. We are born and grow, live and act, think and feel, run and sing, play music and worship God as whole beings. And the more we act and respond as whole beings to the nature of the other, the truer is our response. If the other is another person, then the ultimate rationality is love, if it is God then the most appropriate and only adequate response to his nature revealed as love and utter faithfulness is trust (faith) and reciprocal love.

It is ultimately only here for Torrance, in relations with God, that rationality is put to its ultimate test and challenge, and *rationality is never more rational than when it begins to be made truly rational in encounter with God*, when it learns to be obedient to the source of all rationality, goodness, constancy and intelligibility which he is. 'The fool has said in his heart there is no God.'

THE EXTREME DISCIPLINE IN ALL RATIONALITY

There is an extreme discipline involved in all rationality if we are to be rigorously faithful to the nature of the object or wider discipline we are involved in, be it science, art, music or theology, especially if it means forsaking cherished opinions and altering our very selves to make a more appropriate response to the object or subject. At the same time, there is commitment, love and joy, for real engagement with the other involves love and a commitment of the whole self as we cannot really investigate a subject or be true to it without

love, and in discovery of and faithfulness to the other there is joy. There must also be a willingness for repentant rethinking as we allow our reason and understanding to be continually changed and deepened in order to be more appropriate to the other. Such repentant rethinking can be difficult and painful, but again there is the joy of deeper discovery and closer ‘cognitive union’ with the subject. A good part of the extreme discipline and joy involved in discovery stems from the fact that *the intelligibility which God himself is, reflected so wonderfully by the universe in its depths, is never on the surface but deep & only discovered by patient, painstaking, fascinating and (for theology prayerful) enquiry.* To sum up, ***the basic principle behind all rationality and objectivity must be the appropriateness of the response to the nature of the object,*** approaching God as God, creaturely reality as creaturely reality, human being as personal human being.

C. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTOLOGY

For Torrance Christology is the key to all our human thought about God and must provide the basic pattern for all Christian understanding. It is difficult to overplay its significance. Even though technical at times, and difficult in part, Christology has a crucial role to play in guiding, renewing and reforming church thinking.

(1) THE PERSON OF CHRIST – one person, at once true God and true man, two distinct natures

It is of fundamentally critical importance that Jesus Christ is ***true God AND true man***, for only ***GOD*** can save man, but it is ***MAN*** who has to be saved and so ***GOD HAS BECOME MAN***, but it is equally important that he is ***ONE PERSON, one Jesus Christ***, not two (a God Jesus AND a man Jesus) for ***only God acting AS MAN can truly be man*** to receive and work out our salvation in his own humanity for us. Therefore there can only be one Jesus Christ, ***who in the unbreakable union of divine and human nature in his one person, is himself our living union with God***, our risen salvation, God for ever with us, for us in our very humanity, ***sharing with us through the Spirit his actual risen life and all he is for us in his humanity.*** To sum up:

- (i)** Jesus Christ is ***one person***, one indivisible person whose incarnation can never be undone in all eternity.
- (ii)** Jesus Christ is ***God and man***, such that he who is God the Son is now also man, ***one person, two natures.***
- (iii)** Positively, the reality of Jesus Christ must simply be recognised, its ***how*** is the miracle of the incarnation
- (iv)** Negatively, the reality of Jesus Christ is to be ***safeguarded by eliminating false ways*** of conceiving the how: He is one person in two natures ***‘without confusion, change, division or separation’***. In other words, there is no confusion between the two natures, no change in either (nor of one into the other), no division and no separation between them. In union, each remains what they are, true divinity, true humanity, in perpetuity.

(2) THE PERSON OF CHRIST THE BASIC PATTERN for all theology and Christian thinking

Very early on in his career, Torrance came to see that the way that God has dealt with us in Christ provides the basic pattern for all the ways that he interacts with us and with creation. In Christ there a ‘hypostatic union’ (***a union in one person***) of God and man. Other than in Christ, there is no such union between Creator and creature, between the living Word and scripture, or between God and us, or between God and creation or physical reality in any way. But just as in Christ the two natures were united ‘without confusion, change, division or separation’, so God and creaturely reality are related together, without any confusion between them, change in either (or of either into the other), dualistic division or separation between them.

(3) THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTOLOGY APPLIED to relations between God and creaturely reality

- (i)** There can be no confusion between God and creaturely reality (no mixing of one with the other, or absorption of one into the other, or infiltration of one by the other. Each retains its own distinct integrity.
- (ii)** There can be no change in either (or of either into the other). Each remain what they are, fully and unalterably God or fully and unalterably creaturely reality.

(iii) There can be no dualistic division between them, for the creaturely remains upheld in its relation to God.

(iv) There can be no dualistic separation between them in time, for the relation remains upheld in perpetuity.

(4) CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RELATION BETWEEN GOD AND ALL CREATURELY REALITY

(i) The God-given distinctiveness of creaturely reality from him: creation out of nothing means that creaturely reality is established in its own integrity alongside God.

It means that the creaturely is not God and never will be, but retains its own distinctive nature and order.

There can therefore be ***no confusion between God and creaturely reality.*** God is God and must be known as God. Creaturely reality is creaturely reality and must be known as such. Because creaturely reality is not God, we cannot look at God to see what it is like, but must look at it itself, investigating it out of itself which is the task of science. Empirical science is a direct implication of the doctrine of creation out of nothing.

(ii) The integrity of creation: that the creaturely is given its own reality, integrity and order alongside God, means, **a)** there can be ***no change in either God or creaturely reality in all relations between them.*** In his eternal love and faithfulness, God maintains the creaturely in its reality over against him.

b) All the myriad ways we enjoy, investigate and harness creaturely reality for different purposes must be in terms of the nature of the creaturely realities we are involved with, in terms of their own principles, structure and logic. In all we do in creation, the creaturely remains creaturely. In its continual dependence on God for its very being, its relation to its Creator does not, must not and cannot alter its creaturely status. It is not deified in any way, but remains creaturely, however close the relation. Thus in all we do in creation, ***creaturely reality must be enjoyed and engaged with in terms of its own principles and logic as creaturely and not infinite or divine in any way.***

(iii) The unbreakable duality of the relation between Creator and creaturely: creation out of nothing means that without any inherent being of its own, creaturely reality is not only brought into being as a new reality established in its own integrity alongside God, but ***maintained in being in essential relation to God*** in his continual loving upholding of it in its integrity. There can therefore be no dualistic division or separation of any kind between God and creature, but an unbreakable relation of duality between them. In contrast to ***dualism, the rigid, artificial, conceptual holding apart of two realities which should be in relation, a duality signifies two sides, aspects or entities which should be held together and essentially in relation***

The twofold duality of the Creator-creaturely relation: in the nature of the case, there is a twofold duality (not dualism) in the relation between Creator and creature.

a) The basic duality in the Creator-creature relation is ***the conjunction of total creaturely dependence on, AND yet relative independence from, the Creator.*** At one and the same time, the creature is totally dependent on God and yet has its own genuine reality and relative independence.

b) The fact of two realities, without any logically demonstrable connection between them, existing side by side, at very different levels, both of them known, means ***we have to think on two levels at once, the level of our creaturely reality and on the level of God, or rather the level of God in his self-revelation to us.*** Both of these are creaturely levels, and yet on the level of revelation in Christ we are lifted up and beyond our natural capacities to know God while still remaining fully creaturely.

Just as we know the reality of God and of the created universe, and similarly the reality of Jesus as fully God and fully man, ***without being able in either case to state or understand logically the 'how' of the relation between them,*** so we have to live thoroughly in the creaturely world, enjoying and exploring the miracle of its reality to the full and at the same time the wonder of God in his self-revelation to us. In knowing both at once and holding them together, we know them in the light of each other and so each more fully in the light of their inter-related glory.

(5) THE RELATION BETWEEN THEOLOGY AND OTHER DISCIPLINES

Theology is a creaturely discipline and therefore shares much with other disciplines, not least the basic principle of rationality and objectivity, the principle of being governed by the nature of the object, but theology is also unique in that here, in the midst of the creaturely world, it has to do with God and has to make its appropriate response to his self-revelation in Christ.

Theology as a living participation in the risen Christ's actual human knowledge of God: just as the real meaning and basis of faith is that it is a participation in Christ's human faith, and the church's proclamation is a participation in the self-proclamation of Christ himself through the word of the church, so theology is a participation in the mind of Christ, learning in the Spirit to partake with him, through him and in him of his human understanding of God. If in Christ we have God in person in Christ, 'for in him all the fullness of deity dwells [dwelt] bodily' in this creaturely world, then in theology, fallible and provisional as it is as a human discipline, we have to do directly with God. ***Theology is not talk about God, but a living knowing of God himself. It is a living participation, through the Spirit, prayer, study of the word and worship, in the risen Christ's actual human knowledge of God.***

The unique and fruitful perspective of theology: theology remains a creaturely discipline and creaturely knowledge of God, but in so far as it is a living theology sharing in Jesus' own human knowing of God, theology has a unique perspective to offer and share with other disciplines which can enrich and deepen them and has been ***immensely fruitful historically,*** above all perhaps in science, but also for example in literature, music, art and architecture.

The indispensable place of theology among the human disciplines: if Christian faith is the salt of the earth, then theology as the discipline tasked with understanding the faith is the salt among creaturely disciplines. Just as Christian faith is centred on Christ, so theology is centred on systematic Christology as the unique window on God opening up creaturely knowledge to the life giving perspective on its Creator without which all human life and knowledge inevitably turns on itself and begins to stagnate and run dry. ‘Where there is no vision the people perish.’

The indispensable place of the other human disciplines: humankind has been told to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and be benevolent stewards of its richness (‘dominion’ as intended). In creation, God lavished on the earth riches upon riches, teeming possibilities of sustenance, trade, architecture, culture and knowledge and saw it was all very good. In what we do, in all our work and leisure, earning daily bread and enjoying creation, in the ‘know how’ of artisanship and professional life, the skills of all creaturely disciplines from gardening to playing a symphony, we are fulfilling part of our natural human calling. Each discipline is an essential part of the mosaic of human creatureliness to be treasured as a unique skill to be inherited, enjoyed, developed and passed on. Yet how often can so many of them lose their sparkle and become routine, even drudgery?

The essential if unrecognised relation between theology and the other human disciplines: there is an essential and inalienable relation between theology and all other creaturely disciplines even if unrecognised and discounted by the other disciplines. Yet though it may appear as ‘foolishness’ to the secular mind it remains the ‘wisdom of God’ and it is important to remember that Jesus Christ for Paul is the hidden, profound wisdom of God unveiled in the ‘foolishness’ of the cross. The Christology which appears foolishness to unconverted reason is, to the reason open to being ‘true to its object’, ***the profound logic of God opening a window to the light of the Creator and the healing of human reason.*** The wisdom of Christ, however, ***cannot be argued*** to the unconverted reason for argument *per se* can never convince, only the ***patient presentation in preaching and unfolding in the Spirit*** of the truth and logic of Christ in the gospel.

Recapturing the stark biblical juxtaposition of God and creaturely reality: for this to happen, it is critical that the stark biblical juxtaposition of God and creaturely reality be recaptured, for only so can we regain the deep biblical sense of the living God himself acting in our midst in the concrete realities of space and time. And for this we have to have both God himself in all his Godness AND ourselves in all our bodily creatureliness and both in direct juxtaposition. ***The reality of the living God and of bodily creatureliness go essentially hand in hand, with the full reality and goodness of bodily creatureliness known only in relation to that of its Creator.*** It is only when we know God himself, who is not bodily and not creaturely, that we can truly know ourselves as thoroughly both; and it is only when, in the light of God we know ourselves as creaturely, that we can then know God more truly as God and Creator.

Recapturing the juxtaposition of God and creaturely fulfilled in the incarnation: the biblical juxtaposition of God and creaturely is at its absolute starkest in the incarnation. Here we come to see that the Old Testament juxtaposition should not be understood as primitive or accidental, but as the providential foreshadowing of what was ***so astonishingly fulfilled in the incarnation.*** In the one person of Jesus (incarnate, crucified and now risen), we see ***not only ‘all the fullness of deity’ but of the creaturely also*** in the permanent establishment of bodily human reality in the new creation. God and creaturely reality are inseparable, never to be dualistically divided, but distinct and not to be confused with the other. There is no stating the ‘how’ of the juxtaposition, only the recognition of its reality and the living of it out.

Living out the juxtaposition: doing all we do to the glory of God and with all our might. The juxtaposition cannot be achieved from the creaturely side: it can only be created, established and maintained by God. It is achieved and given to us in Christ. Finding ourselves re-established in him as creaturely before God, we can only receive the juxtaposition and learn to live it out. With him, in him and through him, we learn to do all we do to the glory of God and to do it with all our might. In all we do, no matter how menial or routine, we need therefore to do it as unto God, and in so doing we learn to rediscover the joy and goodness before him of all creaturely life, of all creaturely skills, disciplines and hobbies.

Living out the juxtaposition between theology and the other creaturely disciplines: knowing God and being creaturely, theology and the other creaturely skills or disciplines belong essentially together and should be held together. There is a pressing need for the rediscovery of true theology and Christology, but also of the God given goodness and creatureliness of all human skills and disciplines. It is in both together that we learn

what it means to be his human creatures and once again, both should be done as to God and with all our might. Throughout, ***twin guidelines underpin the relation between theology and other disciplines:***

(i) the ‘Chalcedonian adverbs’, ‘without confusion, change, division or separation’:

a) as already seen, all human disciplines, including theology, are creaturely and therefore involved in the duality of the creaturely to Creator relation encapsulated in the Chalcedonian formula where knowledge of God at once illuminates all creaturely reality and at the same time enhances it in its integrity as creaturely and not divine. All creaturely disciplines therefore continue to be thoroughly creaturely and subject to the principles behind the particular nature of each and every creaturely reality.

b) it is tempting to give creaturely knowledge of God, and theology in particular, a special status allowing it not just to inform and illuminate creaturely realities but affect the very nature and principles of creaturely reality. That would be at once bad theology and bad creaturely knowledge, contrary to the Chalcedonian adverbs: Christ remained true God and true man, ‘without confusion, change...’ etc. It is at this point that we have the second guideline.

(ii) The creaturely formula of ‘objectivity’ and appropriate ‘rationality’: every creaturely discipline has to be subject to the principle of ‘rationality’, of being true to the nature of its particular object and responding appropriately to it. It would be wrong to take principles specific to theology and impose them on other subjects, just as it would be wrong to take principles specific to and true in other fields of knowledge and attempt to impose them on theology. Each discipline needs to be at once open to illumination from other disciplines but careful to be strictly true to its own subject matter. A great deal of work needs to be done here to help all disciplines be true to the twin guidelines of Chalcedon and ‘appropriate rationality’.

Important note: the twin guiding principles (of Chalcedon & appropriate ‘rationality’) are not *a priori*, applied in advance, but ***only discovered and formulated through careful reflection on the way that actual knowledge has arisen.*** Only then can they be usefully applied *a posteriori* to guide and aid further discovery.

D. SOME SERIOUS QUESTIONS

When the stark biblical juxtaposition is lost, of God’s direct action in history, God in the flesh in Jesus, then he inevitably becomes distant and unreal, and an attempt has to be made to connect him to creaturely reality again. But creaturely reality has also suffered, for it has lost some of its stark creatureliness and corporeality.

In that situation of falsely perceived distance (itself a violation of ‘without division or separation’) between God and earthly reality, there are two basic options, either (i) to bring God back to earth, as in idolatry, and all forms of divine immanentism or pantheism (a violation of ‘without confusion or change’), or (ii) to lift the creature up to God in any kind of deification (again a violation of ‘without confusion, or change’). If the latter is the main emphasis, (for it is rarely either completely one or completely the other, as the movement in one direction can never fully cancel out the perceived distance and requires to be balanced out by a movement in the opposite direction) then the basic problem behind it is one of deism and of abstraction.

The problem of wispy abstraction: bereft of the immediate presence of the living God with us in time and space, we are forced to think of him in abstract terms and distant from us, as the infinite, the absolute, the ground of being, even as the unknowable, nameless one or as the fully deistic God who created the world and set it in motion to run on its lines according to the laws of nature and who watches from afar. We are also forced to wonder how we can approach him and knowing he is not physical as we are, we think of him as ‘spirit’ in a non-physical sense and begin to use abstract, non-physical language (so we think) to speak of him. Thinking of him as ‘spirit’ we begin to talk of him in spiritual terms and to develop our own spirituality as a ladder to him. In fact we have no other choice. Bereft of the living reality of God we can only turn inwards to our supposedly spiritual being, immersed in our own psychology and floundering about in the morass of spirituality, prey to the siren promises of an ever deeper and richer consciousness.

The wisdom of the bible: in its wisdom, the bible knows no such way. It never speaks of spirituality but only of the living God and it knows that we can never construct a way of our own choosing to bring us back to God. It knows that we cannot construct a language to speak truly of him and that only he can do that. It speaks of him in stark, physical language because that is how God spoke to them. It knows that God is not physical, but that using non-physical language of God does not bring him any nearer or us closer, for all human language is just as anthropomorphic. It has the wisdom to know that in fact the opposite is the case, because the stark incongruity of stark biblical language about God makes it all the more obvious that he is

not these things but that he is nevertheless with us in the midst of the same immediate stark realities of daily life.

Concluding thoughts and tentative questions

In conclusion and in the light of the points made in this paper several comments and questions arise:

(1) All churches need to understand the rationale of the stark biblical juxtaposition of God and creaturely so astonishingly fulfilled in the incarnation and do all they can to recover it in doctrine, life and practice.

(2) To what extent, and in what ways, do not all churches suffer from ***a degree of deism*** in thinking and from human attempts to attempt correct it which run ***counter to the ‘without confusion or change’*** of Chalcedon?

(3) In particular, to what extent, can a latent dualism lie surprisingly behind some forms of emphasis on the Spirit or on the bible itself as the word God?

To what extent, for example, can some emphases on the Spirit be an attempt to overcome a dualism between us and God by stressing a living experience of the Spirit which not only separates the Spirit from Christ but ***confuses God and the creaturely (the Spirit and our spirit) overlooking the work of the Spirit*** in establishing the the creaturely ***after the pattern of Christ***, God and man but ‘without confusion or change’.

To what extent also, can some emphases on the bible as the word of God be an attempt to overcome a similar dualism between us and God by conflating God and the bible, bringing God to earth as it were, ***wedding God, scripture and human reason together*** in a way that undermines the integrity of each (compromising the ‘without confusion or change’) and ***fails to see the full significance of Christ’s divinity & substitutionary, representative humanity, the one Word & Son of God?***

To what extent do not all human attempts to overcome any kind of dualism behind God and creature, God and humankind, fail to see that:

(i) the creaturely is made to have ***its own distinct reality***, for ever different from God but for ever upheld by God and existing in relation to him, ‘without confusion or change’, in a duality that is not a dualism.

(ii) It is ***only in Jesus Christ***, in this man alone, in his one person, that dualism (a rigid, axiomatic, artificial, mentally conceived distancing of two realities) of God and man is defeated and the reality of their duality upheld.

Any human attempt to heal the rift between God and man from either direction (God down to man or man up to God) that bypasses the person of Christ is doomed to failure. ***It is only in the ‘hypostatic union’ of God and man in the person of Christ, that genuine communion of man with God can be established and has been ‘without confusion, change, division or separation’.***