

# A Contradiction: The Structure of Christian Thought

A response to Daphne Hampson's  
*Christian Contradictions: The Structures of  
Lutheran and Catholic Thought and After  
Christianity*.<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This is an attempt to respond to the challenging questions put to Christianity by Daphne Hampson, in particular in her book *Christian Contradictions*, but also with some reference to her earlier book *After Christianity*. The book, its structure of argument and its manner of debate raise far-reaching questions for contemporary scholarship. As I want to show in this paper, and not just in reference to Daphne Hampson, I believe these questions to be about how contemporary theological scholarship is being conducted, and how it situates itself with respect to the traditions with which it is engaging and of which it is a part. The questions I am raising in other words, could be raised with the same force and in the same way about much that is currently going into print. My concern about this book is that it exhibits a tendency common in so much contemporary systematic theology: a failure to attend to or understand with sufficient gravity or seriousness the philosophical issues that underlie the practice of theology.

I first met the author when she was just beginning research on *Christian Contradictions*, when in 1997 she was on sabbatical and I was a doctoral student in Cambridge. In 1997 she asked me to undertake a review of her book *After Christianity*, and although I read the text several times, I felt I was not then equipped to respond to its central questions and contentions. This article is therefore an attempt to do now what I could not then do. In November of 2002 both Hampson and the Editor of this journal asked me if I would review

<sup>1</sup> Hampson, D.: *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001; *After Christianity*, London, SCM Press, 1996. In the text I shall refer to page references in each with the prefixes *CC* and *AC*.

*Christian Contradictions* and I reluctantly agreed. Reluctantly, because I am not a specialist in Luther (by any stretch of the imagination), and only tangentially interested in the questions that Hampson's work concerns. What follows therefore is *not* an evaluation of Luther, it is rather, an individual Catholic theologian's response to Hampson's challenge to (especially, but not exclusively Catholic) Christianity represented in these two books, mainly the newer.

I find Hampson's claim that "I find I am closer to 'Catholicism', but it is a Catholicism shorn of revelation" (CC223) an astonishing one. Hampson argues that a principal difference between Catholicism and Lutheranism is that for Catholics, ethics leads to theology, for Lutherans, it is the other way around. This paper is in many ways really a consideration of her question: "How central is revelation to Catholicism?" (CC223). It is because elsewhere she is able to answer it by arguing, for instance, that for Catholics "there is such a thing as natural law, evident from creation (quite apart from revelation)" (CC86) and that "Catholicism is able to be what it is through making revelation inessential" (CC242) that I want to respond.<sup>2</sup>

After providing a brief summary of *Christian Contradictions*, I want to take its most central arguments, to show in each case that Catholicism is closer to Lutheranism than she realises, and that the gulf that is to be found lies between her and fundamental orthodox Christian positions. In doing this I stress that it is far beyond my expertise to propose ways of overcoming the divisions between Catholics and Protestants. The only 'Luther' I can seriously discuss is the one Hampson presents. In this I am substantially assisted by her own method in her book. Hampson sets out by arguing that Catholics simply do not grasp the Lutheran 'paradigm': these two rival understandings are fundamentally different structurings of Christian faith. Hampson focuses on "the Catholic failure to comprehend Luther [which] seems to persist in all times and be a constant among all schools of Catholics" (CC97). This is similar to a claim Hampson made at a seminar in Cambridge in 1997, when she asserted that the 'Aristotelianism' of Catholics made us simply incapable of understanding Luther. She is in earnest that we

<sup>2</sup> Hampson at times demonstrates a shaky understanding of Catholic fundamentals. Thus, for instance, it is not true that "the Latin Mass is a sacrifice which it is possible for the human to bring to God" (CC94): the sacrifice of the Mass is strictly and only the sacrifice of Christ Jesus on the cross: there is no other sacrifice which the human could bring to God save the single, perfect, sacrifice of His divine Son. Similarly she insists that "an indulgence is a remission of punishment still due in purgatory for sins after absolution" (CC88). An indulgence is a remission of the need to do earthly penance for sins that have in any case been forgiven: the references to days in indulgences until the very recent period were to the number of days' (earthly) penance they fulfilled. This is a recognition that even though we may be forgiven our sins, the wrong we have done has effects for which restitution is due and over which justice has a claim. The only reference to purgatory is that if we have done insufficient penance for our sins by the time of death, this must still in some way be fulfilled – as much for the sake of what it takes to lead us into perfection as for satisfaction of God's desire to punish.

should overcome our incomprehension: more than once she asks “what it might mean to bring together some of the strengths of a Catholic and a Lutheran position?” (CC144). Hampson believes she is laying out *structures* – there is a structure to each thought-form, which constitutes a *system* (very much her word) in each case. The clear inference on which the whole book is based, is that this system will replicate itself in each instance – i.e. every Catholic thinks in one way, every Lutheran in another.

It will be enough for me to show, therefore, not that there are Catholics who do not understand Luther – of these I am sure there are plenty (and vice versa), but rather that because the claims she makes for the novelty of Luther’s positions, and the paradigmatically different structuring of Luther’s thought actually have precedents in Catholic tradition, this gulf is other than she claims it to be. I am uninterested in evaluating Trent’s success or otherwise at understanding Luther – that is a task for Church historians and ecumenists. I want to show that what she claims is new in Luther is not new, and what she claims is unique to the structure of his thought is not so. I want then to consider why it is possible for her to understand Catholicism as she does, in order to conclude by showing that it is not Lutheranism that is irreconcilable with Catholicism, but Christianity that is irreconcilable with what she calls Enlightenment thinking. In short, although I shall conclude by agreeing with many of her most fundamental assertions, I argue that this exactly explains why I am a Christian and she is not. I disagree with Hampson really on only one matter – she is in no way close to a position that could be called Catholic, for there is no authentic Catholic position that can be shorn of revelation.

It should be clear why Hampson seeks to identify herself with what she believes Catholicism to be. In the first instance her own position with regard to the human relationship to God flows from an ethical position – that Christianity harms women and that in Western, later especially Christian, history “women have been excluded from conceptualising ultimate reality” (AC117). An ethical (and dialectical) position, that women must become what they truly are, will, she believes, eclipse Christianity.

Recent pronouncements of the Catholic Church have adopted a position seemingly close to the one she claims is Catholic, supported by many exponents of ‘natural law’: and so we find in a recent Vatican document: “Since this question relates to the natural moral law, the arguments that follow are addressed not only to those who believe in Christ, but to all persons committed to promoting and defending the common good of society”.<sup>3</sup> What this sentence

<sup>3</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals To Give Legal Recognition To Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003, §1.

obscures is that, as much for Aquinas as for any other theologian, the paradox is that the natural law named here is known only objectively to faith, in virtue of revelation. It can be inferred, but not confirmed, by means of natural reason. Why this is will become clear later, but in anticipation we should note Eugene Rogers's comment that: "We cannot *see* the eternal law in which the law of our nature is a rational participation, or know the law of our nature with *scientia*, until we *see ourselves in God*, a prospect [Aquinas] reserves for the next life. Until then we can observe it only *in effectu*".<sup>4</sup> Rogers quotes Daniel Nelson in adding that natural law in the *Summa Theologiae* "does not play the role of guiding conduct",<sup>5</sup> and for these reasons it is a category of *theology* not *philosophy*. Hampson, and many others, could be forgiven for mistaking it as a natural category given the strenuousness of recent official documents in their assertions about natural law.<sup>6</sup>

The understanding of Catholicism, indeed, the understanding of Christianity, which Hampson presents has not come simply from her own pen. The fundamental distortions with which she interprets Catholicism and Christianity are Christians' own faults, in that we have often been insufficiently attentive either to our history, our tradition, or our most cherished ways of thinking to prevent through our published works a thinker of Hampson's acuity from so misunderstanding us. In this I want to begin with a point, the sharpness of which I cannot stress strongly enough. The reason why Hampson has formed so poor an understanding of Catholic theology is because too much of her argumentation is dependent on secondary and tertiary literature. It is inadequate of her in a supposed work of high scholarship to present an argument as authoritative which "I gather one can find in Thomas Aquinas" (CC243), to castigate one of the foremost Catholic authors in Lutheran scholarship for his shortcomings whilst confessing "I have not read all of [his] monumental work... fortunately... [he] contributed an article... which Wicks tells us presents the main thesis" (CC137), or to confess in her *Preface* that most of her reading of Luther has been gleaned from a published Reader of Luther's texts, and that the references to the *Weimarer Ausgabe* edition of Luther's works (still incomplete from its inception at the beginning of the last century) were put in to the book by a student (CCx) thereby giving secondary literature the semblance of

<sup>4</sup> Rogers, E., *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, p. 121. (Emphases in original)

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, E., *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, p. 120.

<sup>6</sup> See in addition: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2002. For a discussion of the issues surrounding natural law, see also Parsons, S. F., *Concerning Natural Law: The Turn in American Aquinas Scholarship* in Kerr, F. (ed.), *Contemplating Aquinas: On the Varieties of Interpretation*, London, SCM Press, pp. 163–183.

scholarly respectability. These three stand for many other failings in the book.

And if anyone should smile that I should be so sharp with Hampson, let them be aware that her faults in this respect are now a commonplace among students, teachers, and writers of theology, so that there are now too many books based on secondary, tertiary, and worse literature, ignoring the subtleties of texts in their original languages for the sake of cruder translations and routinely degrading the complexity of arguments into easily digestible bullet points and cheap summaries. Hampson learnt her trade at the hands of others, mostly Christians, and every minor fault of hers has more major offenders amongst Christian theologians, teachers, writers and students.

Nor should Hampson object if Catholics like myself take her to task for her misrepresentations both of Catholicism, of metaphysics, and of other matters: her purpose in writing is, she claims, to point out failures of understanding, and her exasperation with the faults of others is only too evident from the pages of her text (“where is one to start?”[CC108] she asks after a catalogue of Catholic misreading, later adding “it is difficult to know where one should start when there are such uncomprehending accounts . . . abroad” [CC124]). She surely cannot object to anyone pointing out her own confusions and falsehoods (descriptions she applies to others) in these matters.<sup>7</sup>

### Summary of *Christian Contradictions*

It is dangerous to reduce a substantial text to its bare bones, but, for the sake of those who have not read it, I will provide a short summary of the book. After a brief *Introduction*, Hampson in Chapter 1 (*Luther's Revolution*) lays out with some clarity Luther's central arguments, which I will describe in further detail. The second chapter (*The Catholic Alternative*) traces Catholic responses to Luther, up to and beyond the Council of Trent. She begins this chapter by arguing that the Reformation closed down possibilities in Catholicism, and had the effect of narrowing it as a tradition. These are tantalising thoughts, but they are never developed. In Chapter 3 (*Catholic Incomprehension*) Hampson tries to show by appeal to more recent Catholic commentary on Luther why it is that Catholics simply do

<sup>7</sup> There are a number of minor errors in the book which better editing by the publisher should have picked up. Amongst these: Cardinal Ratzinger is Prefect, not President, of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; Gregory Dix, the Anglican Benedictine monk, is correctly named in the text but appears as D. G. Dix in the *Bibliography*. The Fourth Council of the Lateran took place in 1215 not 1216. Hampson argues that Schillebeeckx is the champion of the doctrine of transignification (CC93), and the work that is referred to on the same page is *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*. Schillebeeckx makes no mention of transignification in this book, but he does in the book he published after the Second Vatican Council, *Christus tegenwoordigheid in de Eucharistie*, the English translation of which she mentions two pages later.

not understand Luther and what follows from him – the structures of Catholic and Lutheran thought are just fundamentally different. In Chapter 4 (*Nygren's Detractors*) she attempts to demonstrate how a more recent Lutheran, Anders Nygren, replicates the structure of Luther's thought in his work *Agape and Eros*. The fifth chapter (*Ecumenical Encounters*) develops the argument of Chapter 3, and traces the history and vicissitudes of the recent discussions between Lutherans and the Vatican, up to the signing of the *Joint Declaration* on justification, on the Pope's personal instruction.<sup>8</sup> Chapter 6 (*Dialogue with Bultmann*) begins a more personal section of the book, where Hampson moves from her broader researches to consider first in the person of Bultmann, and then Kierkegaard in Chapter 7 (*Kierkegaard's Odyssey*), the forceful claims that these two Lutherans have made on her theological imagination, and her rejection of those claims. Kierkegaard she picks out as of particular interest, as the Lutheran she identifies who comes closest to what she understands as Catholicism. The book ends with a brief *Epilogue*.

There is no doubt that Hampson does a good job both in laying out Luther's basic positions, and in finding a multitude of Catholics who can make no sense of them. She tells the recent ecumenical story well, so that in a text of this density the twists and turns become quite gripping. I am also no expert on Kierkegaard, but it seems to me she brings to the reading of him a particular sensitivity.

### Hampson and Aquinas

Hampson argues that "for the most part I think that a major thinker is incomprehensible if one does not possess at least some knowledge of the framework from which he commenced" (CC145). This is a plea she makes in her presentation of Kierkegaard, one of the strongest areas of the book, and it is a good guiding hermeneutical principle. Nevertheless it is largely absent from her consideration either of Luther or Aquinas. Hampson pursues truncated and inadequate interpretations of both these latter two which too many theologians – Christian or otherwise – all too frequently make in current scholarship. The flattened interpretation of Aquinas Hampson pursues she calls 'linear', adding, "Catholicism has none of the dialectic around which Lutheranism is structured" (CC86). In support of this linearity she cites Cornelius Ernst, in that he argues "there is a 'continuity of divine purpose in creation, restoration, and consummation'" (CC86).<sup>9</sup> There is here a confusion: as far as she reports him, I find no place where Luther would not also assert a (linear) continuity of

<sup>8</sup> *Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre des lutherischen Weltbundes und der katholischen Kirche*, signed in Augsburg, October 31, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Citing Ernst, C., *The Theology of Grace*, Notre Dame, Notre Dame University Press, 1974, p. 88.

divine purpose, indeed I think he could even assert the *same* linear continuity Ernst asserts. The dialectic at issue which she describes is to be found in the *human* relation to God, not in God's own purposes. Ernst therefore does not stand against Luther.

Contrary to her assertion, dialectic plays a fundamental role in the human relation to God in Aquinas' theology. The dialectic in Aquinas is not the same as in Luther, but that is not what Hampson claims – her argument is that Catholicism (and so by extension, Aquinas) has no dialectic at all: "Catholicism does not, in the same way as does Lutheranism, have a disruptive sense of revelation. Precisely, Catholicism is not structured around a dialectic" (CC241).

Although Hampson attempts to consider the differing understanding of sin in Catholicism and Lutheranism (CC90 ff.) this discussion is hampered by her reluctance to discuss the doctrine of original sin in either tradition, indeed she does not even consider it in any depth until the very end of the book (C291–292). The issue here is that of perspective, precisely the ground out of which dialectic arises. Luther employs a dialectical structure to the relationship which emerges once the Christian has committed to Christ, in other words, once faith begins. It is this that leads his writing (as Hampson reports it) to have a 'subjective' feel. Aquinas also writes from a position of faith, but the point of rupture, the point at which dialectic comes to be operative in the human relation to God, is not at the point of faith, but baptism. It is actually *known*, and so capable of being experienced, also for Aquinas at the point of faith – but it is operative prior to this. There is a difference here in the point of departure. It would be wrong, however, to say that there is no point of rupture for Aquinas – and so the 'continuity' which Hampson ascribes to Ernst can only begin to be effected and understood for the human *after* the point of rupture. As I understand it from Hampson, this is not different for Luther – recalling that for both Luther and Ernst (and Aquinas) the continuity of purpose at issue is God's, not mine or yours.

Otto Hermann Pesch has made a compelling case that had Luther understood Aquinas better, Luther would not have taken up the position with regard to Aquinas and Metaphysics that he did.<sup>10</sup> This is based on Pesch's considerable researches into and experience of Lutheranism, as the only Catholic ever to have held a professorial chair in a German Protestant university theology faculty, in Hamburg

<sup>10</sup> To understand this argument in full one would need to read Pesch, O.-H., *Martin Luther, Thomas von Aquin und die reformatorische Kritik an der Scholastik: Zur Geschichte und Wirkungsgeschichte eines Mißverständnisses mit weltgeschichtlichen Folgen*, No. 12, Hamburg, Verlag Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994. A good summary of his main arguments exists in Pesch, O.-H., 'Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology' in Kerr, F. (ed.), *Contemplating Aquinas*, pp. 185–216.

between 1975 and 1998.<sup>11</sup> Hampson's quarrel with Pesch is that for him "Thomas' theology is 'sapiential' in that he considers 'objective' ontological structures, while Luther's is 'existential' in that he is envisaging the actual situation of the Christian before God" (CC137). Critical here is the meaning of the word 'objective'. Hampson, like many contemporary thinkers, understands 'objective' to mean the same as 'certain', the pursuit of the certainty of 'standpoint-free' knowledge initiated by Descartes and celebrated in Modernity or the Enlightenment. This is exactly not what Aquinas means, or Pesch for that matter. 'Objective' here means 'from the divine standpoint', in the sense that precisely because reason is a good means of working out things but not the best, it is superseded by revelation where *in virtue of faith* something better can be known, but *it requires faith to know it*.

How so? If we take Aquinas' understanding of essences, we discover that reason, *ratio*, is required for the human to attempt to work out what essences are – this is the tradition of the philosophers. Even here, though, we can never be 'certain' because we know essences only through the way they appear phenomenally – in Aristotle's terms, accidentally, (κατὰ συμβεβηκός", literally, 'as it happens to fall out with'). Reason has always to be applied to the working out of substances, and mistakes can be made, although these can be guarded against by an expertise based on the practices of thinking – in other words ἐπιστήμη, *scientia*, scientific knowledge. God, however, does not know substances accidentally, but directly, because in creating them, he intended them to be what they are (God needs no science of essences). God's knowledge, being entirely intellectual and not mediated physically, is of a higher order than ours – an order in which we will only share in after we are divinised (after we have been raised again) and our minds are flooded with the light of what God knows.<sup>12</sup> In consequence, only God has 'objective' knowledge. *In faith* we can trust in what *at the end of time* we will come to know in a higher way, objectively. So the truths *of faith* are higher than the truths of reason, and their source lies ahead of us, in what we will know at the end of time. This also demonstrates how another of Hampson's assertions turns out to be rather different to how she presents it. Hampson argues that Luther's understanding of the

<sup>11</sup> Hampson seems unaware of this and of Pesch's considerable bibliography of studies of Luther (given in full in the notes of Pesch's chapter in the volume by van Geest, P., Goris, H. and Leget, C., *Aquinas as Authority*, Leuven and Utrecht, Peeters and Thomas Instituut, 2002, pp. 123–163). She compares Pesch's understanding of Luther unfavourably with another former Dominican friar, Stephan Pfürtnner, whom she clearly thinks understands Luther better precisely because of his work in a Protestant environment as a Seminary teacher (CC139–142).

<sup>12</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, Q. 12, art. 7. "Nullus autem intellectus creatum potest Deum infinite cognoscere. Instantum enim intellectus creatus divinam essentiam perfectius vel minus perfecte cognoscit, in quantum maiori vel minori lumine gloriae perfunditur."



Christian's relation to God is structured entirely from out of the future, in *opposition* to that of Catholicism: but so too is Aquinas' – in that the objectivity which we can now have by faith will be confirmed only at the end of time. The 'living from the future' that she finds so well expressed in Bultmann (CC226) is also implicit in Aquinas.

I am not arguing that Luther and Aquinas are commensurate, far from it – I am arguing however, that Hampson has mis-read Pesch, and that Pesch is demonstrating a difference that nevertheless confirms a greater closeness of Luther to Aquinas than either Luther (as Hampson presents him) or Hampson understand. The reason for this is that Aquinas' positions are also profoundly dialectical. Not in the Hegelian sense, but precisely in the sense she claims (rightly, I am sure) that Luther's understanding of the Christian's relationship to God is dialectical – it is a complex, involving a double movement. I am not claiming that the dialectic involved is the *same* dialectic, I am claiming that as Luther employs a dialectic in his understanding of *simul iustus et peccator*, so Aquinas' positions are constantly dialectical in their various ways. The dialectic at work here functions to enable me to discover a knowledge which is, in Pesch's term, 'objective', and for me to attain this objectivity I must have faith. This objectivity is precisely *not* a feature of rational enquiry (contrary to the Enlightenment pursuit of certainty). It cannot be said, therefore, to arise out of an introspection, but *must* arise in virtue of me believing in something *extra me*, namely God, as he is revealed to be through the person of Jesus Christ.

Hampson has little natural sympathy for Aquinas (consistently interpreting him as 'Aristotelian'). Admittedly she tells us "I am no Thomistic scholar" (CC243), and she is no scholar of Thomas either, by which I mean she seems unaware that Thomism and the study of the texts of Thomas have thankfully come apart in the last four decades, so that there is now an explosion of interpretative work on Aquinas.<sup>13</sup> She seems unaware, therefore, that Thomas, *like Luther* regards biblical revelation as fundamental to every doctrinal position. Regular readers of this journal will be familiar with this understanding.<sup>14</sup> Thus when she says: "Given his Aristotelianism, for Thomas . . ." (CC91), we must point out that Aquinas is only ever a student of Aristotle (or Plato, or any other *philosopher*) insofar as he is absolutely confident that whatever is to be found in them is

<sup>13</sup> For just one presentation of the breadth of this, see the essays in Kerr OP, F. (ed.), *Contemplating Aquinas*.

<sup>14</sup> See, for just one example of this, the reviews by the Editor, 'Recent Thomistica I' in *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 83, No. 975, May 2002, reviewing a number of books emphasising this point, but especially Valkenberg, W. G. B. M., *Did Not Our Hearts Burn? Place and Function of Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Leuven and Utrecht, Peeters and Thomas Instituut, 2000.

subordinately consonant with, and authenticated by, the testimony of Scripture. Would that Thomism, or later Scholasticism, had held that view! What is unfortunate here is that Hampson contrasts Aquinas with what she finds to be the biblically based positions of Luther, noting in the case of Aquinas that “it must be difficult to think that the New Testament could be squared with any of this” (CC91). The squaring, even if it is not obvious, is always there in Aquinas: with a gap of near 700 years we are under more of an obligation to seek it out than Hampson has understood. Valkenburg argues that “the theological primary function of scripture is a constant factor in Aquinas’ theology. This theologically primary function also comes to the fore in *quaestiones* in which Aquinas rarely quotes from Scripture”.<sup>15</sup>

The failure to understand that doctrinal positions *for Aquinas as much as for Luther* must always be grounded biblically blinds Hampson to Aquinas’ fundamental principle of interpretation: that *reason* must be shown to be consonant with *scripture* and what is derived from it, and never the other way around. This is the opposite of the Enlightenment position she cherishes, where revelation must conform to the limits of reason or else its claims are false. She claims that “Aquinas has a whole theological anthropology apart from revelation” (CC142). Nothing could be further from the truth. The *Summa contra gentiles* opens with a defence of the truths of faith as above reason, so that the claims of the philosophers and (therefore) the claims of reason are surpassed by the incarnation of Christ. This has resulted in “the wonderful conversion of the world to the Christian faith”.<sup>16</sup> It is important to note what is being said here: reason *gives way* to scripture, because the truth proclaimed by scripture and revealed in the person of Jesus Christ is *more compelling* than reason.

Early on Hampson asserts that: “Since for Catholicism creation as we know it already stands in relation to God, one may say that there is one order of reality in which both God and the human take their place” (CC86). This is really closer to Kant than to Aquinas – in the sense that for Kant the central problem of his later concerns is how to reconcile God, the world, and humanity, as three distinct orders of *thinghood*. For Aquinas creation is more like the stuff of the conversation between God and the creature: the one order of reality is only really present from the perspective of the creature, it is the context in which the creature comes to know God. How God knows the creature is not through creation, however, but directly. In other words the way God is ordered to the creature (and by extension creation) is asymmetrical (and in fact asynchronous) with

<sup>15</sup> Valkenberg, W. G. B. M., *Did Not Our Hearts Burn?*, p. 208.

<sup>16</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, Lib. I, Cp. 6. “Hæc autem tam mirabilis mundi conversio ad fidem Christianam . . .”

how the creature is ordered to God. God is ordered to the creature by direct continuity and contiguity with every moment and act of the creature (hence God's continuity of purpose): God is a single act and knows his creations as a single act of knowing: the creature is ordered to God through time, hence creation is really nothing other than the *temporal structure* of the creaturely knowledge of God. God's creations do not know God in a single act, but in countless *acts* (whose relation to God is dialectical).

Hampson cites the Lutheran Gerhard Forde, arguing that "the fact that the world is *created* is an item of *faith*, not of natural theology" (CC191 – emphases in Hampson's citation). She comments on the consequences Forde draws out from this, saying "agree with this they may not, but Catholics need to hear it". Aquinas argues no differently however, in one of the most important works in his corpus, *De aeternitate mundi*. He begins the work asserting as an article of Catholic faith that the world has not existed from eternity but had a beginning of its duration.<sup>17</sup> The argument is explicit: it sets out from an article of faith. As the treatise demonstrates, whilst it is certainly possible for the *philosophers* to argue that God is the cause of the being of the world, it is not possible to demonstrate by means of philosophy the creation *ex nihilo*. The doctrine of creation as Aquinas teaches it is to be known only through scripture and by faith.

Aquinas is as skilled in developing dialectical positions in eliciting the human relation to God as Hampson's portrayal of Luther, and for the same reason: the human relation to God is only in consequence of the revelation of God in Christ, known through the scriptures, and through faith in that revelation, a faith through which a rupture in the continuity of the person comes to be known. Reason, linear or otherwise, is insufficient.

### Self and Enlightenment

The occasion for *Christian Contradictions*, we are told on the first page, is to demonstrate that "Catholic thought and Lutheran thought are differently structured, embodying divergent conceptions of the self in relation to God" (CCi). This is in order to shed greater light on the question that besets her, both in *Christian Contradictions* and in *After Christianity*: how the self may relate to God, and moreover, that we should seek to understand "God as intrinsically a part of what we are" (AC214).

Hampson's strong commitment to feminism is not the direct reason for her adopting a position she names as 'post-Christian'.

<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *De aeternitate mundi*, §1. "Supposito, secundum fidem catholicam, quod mundus durationis initium habuit, dubitatio mota est, utrum potuerit semper fuisse."

Her feminist commitments have led her to a powerful commitment to what she calls ‘Enlightenment thought’, and it is this thought that has led her to reject the central positions of Christianity. *After Christianity* begins by tracing a shift in paradigm, disbaring any possibility of a return to “pre-Enlightenment sensibilities... that door is firmly shut” (AC9) so that “Enlightenment epistemology ruled out the kind of particularity upon which Christian doctrine rests” (AC8). What is meant here is that there can have been no physical resurrection of the man Jesus at a certain time or place in human history. A paradigm shift is also named in *Christian Contradictions*, from a Catholic world view where the perfection of the person in God is a transition carried out over a lifetime, what Hampson frequently refers to as the ‘*in via*’ transformation (which she traces to St. Augustine), to the ‘dialectical’ position of Luther, exemplified in his early description of the Christian’s relation to God as ‘*simul iustus et peccator*’.<sup>18</sup> The early part of *After Christianity* rehearses an understanding of human subjectivity that simply rules out the possibility that God might become human in the person of Jesus and, sinless, having been crucified, rise again from the dead for the sake of the redemption of the whole of humanity. In *Christian Contradictions* Hampson reasserts an abbreviated version of these arguments, going so far as to say: “Of course Christians do not deify Jesus; they hold that the man Jesus was one among others, a full human person and no more” (CC235).

Immediately we are alerted to something very important in Hampson’s whole approach. For one of the questions I believe her work raises in contemporary scholarship is – how is what Christians teach and hold to be true being received by its critics – especially those as well informed as her. Hampson was for some years a Christian, and taught systematic theology in one of the foremost theology faculties in Britain, and yet what she says here is patently false. Christians have held from the earliest times that Jesus – fully human – was also fully divine. *We* do not deify Jesus only in the sense that orthodox Christians believe him to have been conceived fully deified. She argues, and I want to argue with her, that what is to be believed is in some sense *bounded*. The difference between us is that the boundary for her is philosophical, for me that boundary is set by the Church’s interpretation of the witness of scripture. In this I want to argue that her position is entirely consistent. She has before argued, and does now, that it is not possible to believe certain things (i.e., that there can be no particular resurrection of the man Jesus) and be a Christian. She responds: ‘I am therefore not a Christian’. I concur, and argue it is not possible *not* to believe certain things and call yourself a Christian. I think she

<sup>18</sup> At once justified and sinner.

would applaud. What is at issue here, however, is that the Enlightenment paradigm (as Hampson calls it) determines not only the *structure* of human believing, but also attempts to settle the bounds of the *content* of *what* is to be believed. My own philosophical training leads me to understand Christian believing in a very different way. For me it is not the task of philosophy to settle on *what* (in the realm of faith) is to be believed. But it must show that what *is* believed can be grounded in the being of being-human. Thus a phenomenological explanation will determine how it is and what it means that someone holds a belief in unicorns. It does not settle whether unicorns exist. This is essentially a transition from a set of positive limits to a set of negative ones. Therefore it is perfectly *possible* for a human being to believe in a bodily resurrection, phenomenologically speaking. Whether this belief can be ‘verified’ or not is outside the concern of a strictly phenomenological account. This is not relativism, it is properly distinguishing between what belongs to faith and what to thinking, or philosophy – an issue at the heart of the interpretation of the work of Thomas Aquinas.

I do not share Hampson’s essential commitment to progress in thought. I do not accept the view that humanity is in possession of an ever-augmentable ‘stock’ of knowledge, which, as it matures and proceeds through paradigmatic shifts, ensures that some ways of thinking about the world are simply to be discarded in favour of their (better) successors. This view has radically hampered her own understanding of metaphysics. About some things we know less than we once did, and in a worse way. In this sense I agree with her that what she calls the Enlightenment closed off certain possibilities of human thinking, but for me these closures are often without benefit to thought, and in ways that are not in any sense final. Put slightly differently, I do not accept that humanity is ‘*in via*’ from a lower to a higher intellectual state.

Hampson begins by tracing in Luther a paradigmatic challenge to Catholicism: first, that no longer is the human person understood in a “medieval ‘Aristotelian’ framework . . . understood as a derived substance, which has independence . . . existing in and for itself. Of such a substance (or essence) qualities or attributes can be predicated” (CC10).<sup>19</sup> Now, the human person is said to stand in a dialectical, rather than direct, relationship to God. The “basic axis of his [the

<sup>19</sup> Hampson has an odd understanding of the reception of Aristotle in the Mediaeval context. Thus she argues that (CC92) “Anselm’s context was after all not that of an Aristotelian philosophy, but rather feudalism”. In fact the political context of the reception of Aristotle was also entirely feudal – Anselm’s *philosophical* context was the Christian neo-Platonism that immediately preceded the recovery in the West of many of the lost texts of Aristotle concomitant with the inception of the great Mediaeval Universities, especially Paris. It should not be forgotten that neo-Platonism had itself been profoundly influenced by Aristotle, nor that these texts were never ‘lost’ in the same way in the East.

Christian's] life is only to be understood with reference to an *extra se*" (CC12). This *extra se* means the Christian is no longer independent or self-standing, but is grounded only in Christ.

This is Luther's aggressive rejection of the Mediaeval reception of Aristotle and of metaphysics – indeed this vigorous anti-metaphysicism is what attracted the young Martin Heidegger to Luther, so much so that Bultmann wrote to Hans von Soden in 1923 to say that Heidegger was *the* expert on Luther in Marburg at the time.<sup>20</sup> It is not unknown, therefore, for a Catholic to have a reputation amongst Lutherans for understanding Luther.

Heidegger, above all in *Sein und Zeit* and in his phenomenological investigations of Aristotle demonstrates that in no sense does the Aristotelian, or indeed any other prevalent ancient understanding of the 'self' consist in this 'self-standingness' that Hampson claims is the Aristotelian understanding. She derives this from interpreting Aristotle's notion of οὐσία, *substantia* or 'substance' as an independent or self-standing *thing*, a thing which is in some sense 'already there' prior to any specificities it has, like gender, or freedom, or some particular attribute. This is very much the argument for the self she develops in *After Christianity*. Substance, or an individual οὐσία, really just means 'a being'; but what 'a being' means in different (historical) contexts is itself highly problematic. Heidegger above all has shown how a being as self-subsistent *thing* is a later, in fact Cartesian and post-Cartesian, development, which would have been unthinkable to the ancient mind. In fact to the ancients (and this includes Aquinas) there is no real 'being' at all until there is something other than me to activate my knowledge of myself alongside and at the same time as what it is I am having knowledge of. This is the meaning of Aquinas' 'agent intellect' – not that there is an intellect which is self-activated and so goes out and 'gets' knowledge of the world, but rather that the intellect is there only *in potentia* until something causes it to be disclosed to itself whilst at the same time disclosing what it is that caused it to itself. This is a roundabout way of saying when I see a tree what I really know is me-seeing-the-tree. Aristotle and the ancients described this understanding of the self by means of the term ἐκστάσις", which does not so much mean a 'going out of oneself' as the already-being-stood-out which then gives the self the 'place' (τόπος") wherein it finds itself, which Heidegger analysed as the 'da', the 'there', of *Dasein*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Ott, H., *Martin Heidegger: Unterwegs zu seiner Biographie*, Frankfurt, Campus Verlag, p. 123. "Für Bultmann galt er als *der* Luther-Kenner, wie er an seinen Freund Hans von Soden ... schrieb." (Emphasis in Ott's text)

<sup>21</sup> Understood strictly as being-the-there, rather than in Sartre's incorrect translation of 'être-là', 'there-being'. For a full discussion of this see Hemming, L. P., *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice*, Notre Dame University Press, 2002, pp. 5–7.

Because there is never really a prior moment when I know nothing, so there is no moment when I would not be known to myself, as there is always a self constantly being activated by the world. World discloses the self to the self as it comes to know the world it finds itself already to *be*. Without unduly complicating the picture (but Aristotle's philosophy is anything but simple) all beings relate intrinsically to each other in the context of a hierarchically finite cosmos in which the four elements are ordered to each other. Nothing in the Aristotelian cosmos is, strictly speaking 'self-standing'.

It becomes clear then, that the ancient and Mediaeval self can only be a self at all by living '*extra se*'. It is, to coin a neologism, only its '*extraseity*' that makes it possible to be a self at all. As a pure conjecture therefore (because I am insufficiently well-versed in Luther to be able to do anything other than speculate, based on what Hampson argues), the *extraseity* Luther describes could be understood as an exchange of the self's knowledge of God through the things it knows in the world, for the self coming (through faith) to have God as a something more akin to a direct object of experience for itself.<sup>22</sup> If I am right, that Luther makes God a more direct object of faith to one who believes, Luther actually *rules out* God being an object of general experience, i.e., known through what the self *generally* knows – now there has also to be a *personal* affective disposition, given as the content of faith, which *is* God. It is for this very reason that God, or grace, could not be known or experienced 'in general' or 'automatically' through the action of, for instance, objectly things like sacraments: rather the meaning of sacraments and external aspects of the Christian life must also be taken into account in how the self knows God. It would seem therefore Hampson misses the point when she argues that "what is pivotal to Luther is to have escaped the kind of introspective concern which an interest in receiving grace implies". Grace is received through *exterior* things, it is not understood except through an apprehension of these exteriors. It is therefore without introspection in the formal sense – indeed it is the formalism of the receipt of grace which Luther seems to be challenging, in favour of a more personal understanding of the effects of grace. In this Luther appears to be challenging the indifference implied in too heavy an emphasis on the Catholic understanding of the sacraments as merely functioning *ex opere operato*. Luther's notion of '*extra se*' could be construed as kind of radicalisation of

<sup>22</sup> As an aside, Hampson having stressed that Luther's thought-structure is *not* a result of his (personal) experiences, it was perplexing to say the least to find in the following chapter her admiration for Luther's Catholic interlocutor, Gaspari Contarini, whose sympathy for Luther she traces to the fact that "Contarini underwent experiences and came to conclusions which bear a marked similarity to Luther's" (CC58).

a structure of knowledge which the ancient and Mediaeval world took for granted.<sup>23</sup>

Toward the end of the first chapter of *Christian Contradictions* we encounter a recurrent problem in the book, namely Hampson's slipperiness with regard to terms,<sup>24</sup> which makes it important to be clear what is being said here. She notes that for Luther "faith believes against reason and against experience," and goes on to note that "consequently it is not particularly helpful when Catholics constantly reiterate that Luther's faith was founded on 'his personal experience'" (CC47).<sup>25</sup> There are two different meanings of the word 'experience' at issue here, however – the first would be denoted by the Greek ἐπιστήμη, knowledge in general (hence science, taken in the broadest sense of German *Wissenschaft*), 'know-how', knowing-your-way-around. This I believe (and have tried to show) Luther rules out; the second would be denoted by αἴσθησις or πάθος, what befalls me directly, what *happens to me*, and is exactly what Luther believes is the proper way in which God can become an object of *my* experience. Hampson has therefore confused the two. Thus she contrasts Luther to the Catholic view, arguing that faith carries the Christian out of him- or herself, and is "in this sense extrinsic" (CC48).

How is it, therefore, that Hampson has the understanding of the self that she attributes to Aristotle, and that in fact underpins something like the self that she describes and clearly favours both in *Christian Contradictions* and in *After Christianity*? Put slightly differently, how is it that she can draw out from Aristotle an understanding of the self which actually has its inception elsewhere in

<sup>23</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Bernd Wannewetsch of the University of Oxford for his remarks on my understanding of this. I hope I have done justice to his explanation. If I am right, Luther stands in a venerable Mediaeval tradition. Elsewhere, just to cite one parallel example, I have traced the way in which Eckhart spiritualises Aristotle's understanding of place, τόπος, to describe why Mary has the relationship to God she does. See Eckhart, *Von Abgeschiedenheit* in Largier, N. (Ed.), *Meister Eckhart: Werke*, Stuttgart, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993, Vol. II, pp. 434–458 (459); Hemming, L. P., 'On the Nature of Nature: Is Sexual Difference Really Necessary' in Parsons, S. F. (ed.), *Challenging Women's Orthodoxies in the Context of Faith*, Farnborough, Ashgate, 2000, pp. 155–174.

<sup>24</sup> At times Hampson's imprecision is frankly exasperating. For instance, after numerous paragraphs where we are chided that under no circumstances should justification ever be thought of as a doctrine ("justification is not to be conceived of as a 'doctrine'" [CC177]; "Catholics suppose [i.e. erroneously] that 'justification by faith' is a 'doctrine'" [CC178]) we suddenly discover that what Lutherans want to say "is most neatly expressed through the doctrine of justification" (CC179).

<sup>25</sup> We are exhorted that we must not fall into the routine Catholic error that "the Reformation resulted from Luther's personality" (CC103) and so must not concentrate on Luther's psychology, thus whilst it is "beside the point" for "Catholics to show that Luther was foul-mouthed, misogynist and anti-semitic", Hampson supplies us with an entirely psychological explanation for this behaviour herself – this was she tells us, "particularly in his latter years when he was not well" (CC104).



philosophy? The conception of the self that Hampson relies upon, that one where God is already understood to be intrinsically a part of who it is we are, and that self which is independent and ‘self-standing’, is the modern Subject, ushered in by Descartes’ *cogito*, and which grounds all ‘Enlightenment’ understandings of self-hood. In Descartes a radical transformation of the self is undertaken, whereby there is always a self established *prior* to everything the self knows. This is the most radical reversal in the history of philosophy, a fundamental transformation which is now so constitutive of how we understand the being of being-human that it is taken to be automatically true – that I *am* before anything I know *is*. It becomes immediately apparent that this view stands opposite to the view of the ancients, for whom all self-knowledge is consequent upon and concomitant to what it is the self knows. It represents a transformation of the basis of self-hood, from being based on something which *lies ahead of me*, to something which is ‘already there’ and so lies in the past for me, namely the Subject, the underlying (*sub-iectum*). It was in seeking a return to the ground of the ancient understanding of the self, and so in inaugurating the most relentless critique of Enlightenment subjectivity, that Heidegger argued over and over again, that “*the fundamental phenomenon of time is the future*”.<sup>26</sup> Heidegger sought a phenomenological description of the originary ground of the self, on which the ancient understanding of the self was it turn grounded. This is that springing from out of the future that the self, in coming across the world, thereby discovers itself to be.<sup>27</sup>

The Cartesian and Enlightenment self, taking the self as already given prior to discovering itself to be worlded, reverses this temporal structure so that the self already takes itself as an entity prior to anything it knows (it precedes what is known and so exists, not from the future, but the past). How then is God taken to be an *already constitutive* aspect of this *already existent* self? One need look no further than Descartes’ *Meditationes*, whereby the self, discovering itself to be independently of anything else that *is* (what could be more *Selbstständig*), asserts that the self is finite, substance. It then proceeds to ask itself, *before* establishing itself as worlded, what more perfect, *infinite*, substance could have given such a self existence: and Descartes replies that only God could have authored such a

<sup>26</sup> Heidegger, M., *Der Begriff der Zeit in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 64, Tübingen, Niemeyer Verlag, 1995. From a lecture originally given to the (Protestant) Marburg Theology Society, July 1924, p. 19. “*Das Grundphänomen der Zeit ist die Zukunft*.” (Emphasis in original)

<sup>27</sup> It is important here to stress that Heidegger is *not* taking a Lutheran structure and ‘secularising’ it, as authors like Macquarrie and Löwith have occasionally attempted to suggest he does in his analysis of Christian theological ideas: rather the other way around, he seeks to show how it is that Christian insights, although developed as faith-positions, nevertheless arise on the basis of the originary structures of the being of being-human, that is to say, they have an ontological basis.

self (i.e. precisely *not* the realm of the things the self knows by experience): “I understand by the name of God a substance at once infinite, independent . . . by which I myself, and all others – if some other exists, inasmuch as it exists – have been created . . . For although the idea of substance would surely be in me from thence that I be a substance, this idea would therefore not be the idea of an infinite substance, since I be finite, unless it did not proceed from some other substance which indeed truly were infinite”.<sup>28</sup>

Although Hampson certainly does not cite this passage, nevertheless it is the grounding understanding from out of which the fundamental Enlightenment determinations of the relationship – the one named in Kant’s *Opus Postumum* – between the human being, the world and God is formulated, to which Descartes is giving description.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, it is only arising out of this understanding that God, world, and the being of being-human (God as an ‘infinite substance’, the world as consisting of ‘substances’, the human as a ‘finite substance’) become separate, and independent kinds of, entities. Descartes demonstrates how the being (substance) of God is determined out of the being (substance) of being-human *without respect to ‘exterior’ substances* – this is the force of the ‘*si . . . extat*’ of this passage. Hampson’s ‘self’ turns out, therefore, to be none other than the Enlightenment Subject, the description of the being of being-human whose description originates in Descartes and is developed in the German philosophical tradition of Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche.

The question therefore arises, how did Hampson come to think of it as in any sense ‘Catholic’? It has been my firm view that Hampson’s strength as a thinker is in her ruthlessly honest pursuit of the philosophical presuppositions to which she has committed herself. When she says “Catholics have not faced the fact that Christianity cannot be made to fit the world as we now know it to be (CC242)” she speaks the truth. My own researches into Heidegger have precisely been strengthened by the fact that this Catholic who so carefully read Luther also explains that the description of the world ‘as we know it to be’, namely the description of the world that arises out of a wholesale swallowing of the Cartesian Subject, and its further developments in Nietzsche and in postmodernity’s ‘decentring’ of the Subject (which are only a further extending and expanding of the philosophy of subjectivity) means that there is a radical disjuncture

<sup>28</sup> Descartes, R., *Meditationes de prima philosophia* (Third Meditation) in Adam, C. and Tannery, P., *Descartes*, Paris, Vrin, VII, p. 45. “Dei nomine intelligo substantiam quendam infinitam, independentem . . . a qua tum ego ipse, tum aliud omne, si quid aliud extat, quodcumque extat, est creatum . . . Nam quamvis substantiae quidem idea in me sit ex hoc ipso sim substantia, non tamen idcirco esset idea substantiae infinitae, cum sim finitus, nisi ab aliqua substantia, quae revera esset infinita, procederet.”

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Kant, I., *Opus Postumum* in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1936, Vol. 21, p. 50.

between the way we *think we know the world to be* and the way that it *is*, which – strictly on the philosophical level – needs to be called into the deepest questioning. Put more simply, the philosophy of subjectivity, both as a historical development and as a description of the being of being human needs to be overcome, as precisely the *Überwindung der Metaphysik* which Heidegger himself claimed to be ushering in, and for the very possibility of the genuine propagation of a theology which is faithful to the biblical witness to Jesus the Christ and to the deepness and greatness of the Christian tradition as proclaimed by the Church in two thousand years of faithful witness to her Lord.

### Conclusion

Hampson argues that for Luther, concomitant with living *extra se* is the Christian's discovery of him- or herself as *simul iustus et peccator*. Hampson explains with considerable care the dialectical character of this phrase of the earlier Luther's.<sup>30</sup> Hampson relates her discussion of Luther to the place he assigns to ethics. Here she argues that "Luther breaks here with a natural-law tradition, in which the relationship to God is built upon and presupposes ethics" (CC39). She presents Luther as challenging this view: ethics is consequent upon faith, not the other way around. The Lutheran, dialectical understanding succeeds the Catholic 'linear' model of relating to God. The Catholic 'model', she claims, means that theology follows from ethics and not the other (Protestant) way around: "It follows that for Catholicism there is no sharp division between our own moral efforts and sanctification" (CC87). This is only true if revelation is indeed superfluous to Catholicism – in fact, as I have demonstrated, exactly the opposite is the case. If I have understood Hampson's Luther correctly, there is indeed a radical 'paradigm shift' in Luther, though not as she describes it. The shift is from understanding the Church predominantly as an exterior manifestation of practices, structures, and events – sacraments, an institutional interpretation of Scripture and a community whose constitutive roles are fundamentally differentiated in their being ordered around the body of Christ – to include a more personal ordering of the believer to God.<sup>31</sup> Both of these forms – Catholic and Lutheran – employ complex dialectical thought-structures in order to describe the orders which in each case pertain.

<sup>30</sup> Although one must take with a hefty pinch of salt her claim that "Luther[s]...system is quite extraordinarily integrated and internally consistent" (CC111). She admits herself that the phrase *simul iustus et peccator* simply disappears from the later Luther, so that an interpretative hermeneutic is required to demonstrate that it is still at work in texts where it is never mentioned.

<sup>31</sup> Hence why the Church 'stands or falls' on the *simul iustus* understanding – the individual believer now embodies in his- or herself what the church needs to be.

It is clear why for Hampson ethics leads to theology. The structure of the human person as a liberatory event established as an intellectual break from anterior shackles based on a practice of reason, thus a break from patriarchy, repression, and an inadequate sense of self (“women have frequently lacked an adequate sense of self” [CC238]) is fundamentally an *ethical* practice. Such a practice requires a continuity of the sense of the self, the continuity of the ‘I’ that she attributes both to her own thinking and to Catholicism. Thus an *already established self by means of a practice of reason*, the ‘method’ championed by Descartes’ and out of which the *cogito* is born, depends in order to accomplish the coming-in-to-its-own of selfhood on a continuous, stable, sense of the self. In truth, however, she has misread Catholicism: Christianity, Lutheran or Catholic, begins with sinners, who are transformed *from the future*, from a radical ‘*extra-seity*’ if you will forgive my neologism, by their being established in Christ. For Luther, this establishment is a spiritual event, established in faith, in a structure which Hampson describes. For Catholics, however – and this is what she overlooks – it is established sacramentally in baptism, through the enfleshment of the redeemed sinner, and through the signs of its being divinised in Christ.<sup>32</sup> Here is her most radical misunderstanding of Catholicism. In each of her books she has scorned the position in Catholic belief of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In *Theology and Feminism* she notes that “there is nothing on which Mariology could be built! It is a castle in the sky, a male construction of an earlier age”;<sup>33</sup> in *After Christianity*, having considered the official position of the Catholic Church with regard to Mary, she comments “clearly these celibate males in Rome do not bat an eyelid at telling woman who she is” (AC202). The reason for her derision is to be found when she says “it has not infrequently been suggested that [Catholic] women should conform to Mary, but this is surely an aberration” (CC286). Hampson understands that Mary is venerated by Catholics – women especially (though she is especially sharp toward men who do this)<sup>34</sup> as an exemplar. In this she completely misses the point. Catholic Christians have venerated Mary because as Christ is for us the *promise* that the human can become deiform (he is wholly human and wholly divine), Mary is the *means by which* this can be seen to be accomplished. As entirely creature, she rejoices in the title of *first* among the redeemed. This is not because of any spiritual merit she possesses – all her merit is Christ’s – but because Mary is the one who concretely supplies her flesh to Christ. Her flesh and our flesh are identical. This is the force of the Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception – Mary receives in advance,

<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the understanding of the importance of baptism which Luther holds to.

<sup>33</sup> Hampson, D., *Theology and Feminism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1990, p. 73.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. AC200–203.

at conception, the freedom from sin we receive at baptism, so that her flesh can supply flesh to God and the second person of the divine Trinity can become human. This reality is re-enacted for each of us in the Eucharist, for it is only the baptised who can receive into our bodies the body of Christ, the very body she bore in the womb. By tradition, we do not assimilate this food, we are assimilated *to it*, it is the fulfilment of the promise that we may be adopted sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters to him who is Son by right. Mary is the answer to why a male Christ may redeem woman – because his flesh and hers are one, or rather, Mary reveals that male and female flesh are the same in the order of redemption. Mary is not a moral exemplar, she is physically identical to the stuff through which her divine son is made human. If Mary had given birth to a female Christ, the salvation of men would have been in doubt.

To see this requires faith. From faith, flows a demand to comport ourselves to God – ethics, if you like. But strictly an ethics that flows from the *disruption* of the linearity of reason (though it is not thereby irrational), not from a rational working-out. Catholics – and Protestants too, if Hampson’s Luther is to be believed – love our neighbours and live in the world in view of a disjunction of the self from the perspective of the human, but a unity conferred upon the self from God (the dialectic of redemption). The contradiction in Christianity is that between the claims of reason and those of faith. On this Catholics and Lutherans, I pray God, may agree.

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### Postscript

Having read Hampson’s reply there is nothing I have changed, or would change, in presenting my arguments about her work. Hampson argues that I work and think in “a self-enclosed bubble”, and indeed she is not wrong, for the bubble which I entered and from out of which I sought to write was of her making – it was in consequence of her invitation to enter into her thought. Should she wish better to understand the gap between us in what and how we think, I should rather she judged me in my various publications, and did not restrict herself to consideration of my thoughts on her own.