

restored to its freshness and originality, to give them a quality of strangeness that makes them of the world, but not in it?

- 1 For an accessible account of his significance, see Derek Robbins, *The Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991.
- 2 See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- 3 John Orme Mills, 'God, Man and Media: on a problem arising when theologians speak of the modern world', in David Martin, John Orme Mills and W.S.F. Pickering, eds, *Sociology and Theology. Alliance and Conflict*, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980, p. 136.
- 4 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990 p.397.
- 5 *ibid.*, p.208.
- 6 Wolf Lepenies, *Between Literature and Science: the Rise of Sociology*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- 7 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory, op cit.*, p.97.
- 8 *ibid.* p.109.
- 9 Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1985.
- 10 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama. Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol.1, trans. Graham Harrison, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988, see especially Part III B, pp. 493–54.
- 11 See for example, David Martin, *Tongues of Fire. The Explosion of Protestantism in South America*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991.
- 12 Gustavo Gutierrez, 'Theology and the Social Sciences' in Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads. Democracy or Revolution?* New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, p.219.
- 13 *ibid.*, p.221.
- 14 Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words. Essays towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p.15.
- 15 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory, op.cit.*, p.81.
- 16 Georg Simmel, 'The Crisis of Culture' in P.A. Lawrence, *Georg Simmel: Sociologist and European*, London: Nelson, 1976, p.259.
- 17 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory, op.cit.*, p.225.

Enclaves, or Where is the Church?

John Milbank

It was not the purpose of *Theology and Social Theory* (whose argument has been so accurately précised by Fergus Kerr) to imagine the Church as Utopia. Nor to discover in its ramified and fissiparous history some single ideal exemplar. For this would have been to envisage the Church in spatial terms—as another place, which we might arrive at, or *as this* identifiable site, which we can still inhabit. How could either

characterize the Church which exists, finitely, not in time, but as time, taken in the mode of gift and promise? Not as a peace we must slowly construct, piecemeal, imbibing our hard-learned lessons, but as a peace already given, superabundantly, in the breaking of bread by the risen Lord, which assembles the harmony of peoples then and at every subsequent eucharist. But neither as a peace already realized, which might excuse our labour. For the body and blood of Christ only exist in the mode of gift, and they can *be* gift (like any gift) only as traces of the giver and promise of future provision from the same source. This is not an ideal *presence* real or imagined, but something more like an 'ideal transmission' through time, and despite its ravages. Fortunately the Church is first and foremost neither a programme, nor a 'real' society, but instead an enacted, serious fiction. Only in its eucharistic centring is it enabled to sustain a ritual distance from itself, to preserve itself, as the body of Christ under judgement *by* the body of Christ, which after all, it can only receive. In a sense, this ritual distance of the Church from itself defines the Church, or rather deflects it from any definition of what it is. In its truth it *is* not, but has been and will be. (Here I am much indebted to Kieran Flanagan for pointing out that my book omitted the ritual dimension).

And yet it is, or believes itself to be, a true rite of passage from redemption to judgement. The eucharistic elements are given to the Church, but not only may one eat to damnation, the very eating and drinking of Christ can be nullified by human greed. (I Cor 11: 20—22) For even ritual forms are entrusted to our transmission, presentation and elaboration: to receive Christ, to receive the flow of time as embodied God, is in some minimal way to receive the Church as itself an adequate mode of reception. Since the wine must unavoidably be carried in a chalice if it is not to be spilt, we can only be *persuaded* that this is indeed the blood of Christ if we are also persuaded by the performance (despite the performance) and persuaded by the preacher (despite the preacher).

Therefore the short answer to where is the Church? (or where is Milbank's Church?) might be, on the site of the eucharist, which is not a site, since it suspends presence in favour of memory and expectation, 'positions' each and every one of us only as fed—gift from God of ourselves and therefore not to ourselves—and bizarrely assimilates us to the food which we eat, so that we, in turn, must exhaust ourselves as nourishment for others. But the long answer could never be completed, since it would be nothing other than the Church's own act (which *also* defines it) of self-judgement and self-discrimination: all the stories of true and failed transmission, of more or less adequate persuasions and

receptions. An ecclesiology of the kind which Rowan Williams demands, which involves critical narratives of the (endless) genesis of the Church. Not a judgemental history which measures the Church against the pre-established standard of Christ, but a history which in detailed judging raises us to a better perception of the pre-given standard—which can only be pre-given in the mode of promise. I willingly concede that my steps in this direction have been too hesitant (to the extent, as Williams implies, of distorting my intentions) and would only add that such ‘theological Church history’ is not a task for academics only, nor one which finally privileges the first beginnings of the Church, but one which is also dedicated to many obscure, ‘private’ and scarcely traceable happenings. If one neglects the ‘micro-temperality’ of the Church, its proper precariousness, then a new kind of narrative essentialism might intrude, ignoring the fact that the Church is present as much in an obscure but precise act of charity as in the deliberations of epochal councils. Paradoxically, I would wish to argue that the ‘formalism’ of my metanarrative, of my ethics and ontology, operates precisely as a safeguard *against* such an essentialism. For two reasons: first, the metanarrative which declares that all other histories are judged by the story of the arrival of a community of reconciliation is in a sense an ‘anti-metanarrative’ as it tells of an *end* to (the rule of) imagined fateful logics, destined sacred identities and so forth. From henceforward there will, indeed, be only multiple and complexly interweaving stories to tell: what makes these stories nonetheless one, is no principle of hypotactic subordination but a peace, which (faith experiences and hopes) will shine amidst their parataxis.

Second, the ‘formal’ descriptions (which I do not claim could ever be exhaustive—even within the confines of formalism)—in terms of peace, forgiveness, harmony etc—describe structural relations, and *do not* isolate essences (ie. what substantive ingredients are necessary to an identity) nor prescribe ‘what is to be done’? In a sense, indeed, I am *not* concerned to provide an ‘ethics’ (and doubt even the desirability of doing so) but rather to describe a supra-ethical religious affirmation which recasts the ethical field in terms of a religious hope: we may think of the good as infinitely realizable harmony if we believe that reality can finally receive such an imprint. This faith sustains ethical hope, but it also *overthrows* every ‘morality’: every prescription in terms of such and such an inviolable law, uniquely valuable virtue or exemplary politics. To say ‘universal peace’ is to say, everything has its place and its moment: every person’s position can be judged equally by all others and must finally be judged by herself from her own unique and irreplaceable perspective (of course one needs general examples and

conventions and norms, but none are *inviolable*). Therefore the ecclesiastical task of judgement (the Church is to judge itself and the world, as St. Paul makes clear) cannot be academically pre-empted. Which is not to deny that the last chapter of *Theology and Social Theory* requires (infinite) supplementation by judicious narratives of ecclesial happenings which would alone indicate the shape of the Church that we desire.

Nor do I want to deny that between my 'formal' or ideal descriptions of the Church (of an 'ideal' happening, and 'ideal' yet real, if vestigial transmission) and rather minimal attempts at 'judicious narrative', there may exist a certain tension: close to the tension between ritualised and improvised (supposedly more 'real' and 'historical') action. However, it seems to me that the Church has always lived with this tension and that it already surfaces to view in the New Testament itself. Consider, for example, Paul's letters to the Corinthians. They are characterized by what one might describe as 'ritual priority'. The Church is only the Church because it imbibes and becomes Christ's body, and re-articulates his earthly performance (1 Cor. 10: 16–17). What a cumbersome and taxing re-conception of social life! This new community has no 'head' but a man once crucified, who only speaks again in the mute form of food. Unlike previous pagan (Indo-European?) rule he is not, as head, over-against the body as the superiority of reason (which from time immemorial has governed 'desire' and 'passion' with aid of auxiliary 'force'), but also as his (already) own body, at a 'distance' from his (not yet) own body, which he rules. His reasons are not commands to his body, but undergoings of his body, by which his body is given to us. This wisdom is not 'of this age', and not in this age does it exercise its power (2, 6). It is as radically absent as a dead, exhausted body can be, and its power only that of a promise. Such wisdom can therefore only operate as 'hidden, foreordained'.(2:7) It is the creative wisdom of God which as, J.-L.. Marion has pointed out,¹ can for Paul make 'to be' the things that are not and 'as nothing' the things that are, which seem to be solidly before us (1:28). This wisdom (*pace* Aidan Nicholls' plea for 'natural law' 'common wisdom' and other yogic delights)² ruins the 'wisdom of this age'; the Greek philosophic wisdom which rests on a secure grasp of what is 'present' (and so what 'is', simply) to intellectual sight (1, 18–29).

The crucified Lord only rules by giving himself over to us for our future nourishment. He refused the temptation of *present* power, and his post-ascended availability by no means reverses that refusal. To be governed by this Lord, to internalize his rule, can only mean to come

under his sign of the reversal of all worldly norms of knowledge and authority. Self-knowledge (the basis of self-command) is impossible, every image we make of ourselves illusory. But when we love, then we gradually come to know 'as we are known', not as we *are*, but under the transformative gaze of uncontingent love itself (8, 23). Without self-understanding we should not judge even ourselves, and certainly not others on the basis of our own norms. Judgement has occurred with Christ, and is radically suspended till the *parousia* (4, 3–5). The Church is, uniquely, not a community constituted by judgement, but by the acknowledgement that judgement is not yet possible. Only out of such acknowledgement, which is its possessing of the mind of Christ, its waiting on love, is it alone fit to judge the world. And its members, for now, should only submit to judgement within the Church (for violations of the suspension of judgement? For lack of love?) To enter into judicial litigation with other Christians, is supremely to betray the character of the Church as community (6, 1–8).

Without knowledge, without judgement, there can be no economy for the restriction of loss (endemic to our finite temporality). This, presumably, is why Christians are *moroi* not *phronimoi* (not prudent, *not* ethical) and only *phronimoi* in Christ according to an economy in which loss turns out to be gain (4:10). Fools, because they give themselves away, and not for a cause, not to a city, not to a place, only as links in a continuous, non-teleological chain of givings-away. Fools, because indifferent to worldly circumstance whose *reality* under the *sign* of the cross is transposed: slavery is freedom, self-giving; freedom is slavery, our bondage to the truly desirable (7:20–23). Likewise, we must be joyful as if sorrowing, for this joy is not ours, does not belong to us. And be sorrowful as if rejoicing (7:30); for every sorrowing misses something, and is our possession after all of love, and can be received as love by whomsoever is thereby loved (2 Cor. 7:7). In this way (as Marion indicates) love goes 'further' than loss of being, of presence (at least of the other). Faith in creation, in resurrection, is faith in the deeper power of love over the apparent power of destruction.

If the 'head' is a self-giving body, then no-one is submitted to anyone else, but all are submitted to all. Paul may be an apostle, but the Corinthians can be kings without him and he will be happy to rule with them (4:8). The only rule of the Christian economy must be sharing for the sake of equality (2 Cor. 8:2), and in the case of sexual exchange, each spouse must give unstintingly since each 'rules' over the other (1 Cor. 7:3–4). Most communities are 'identified' by legal codes which distinguish the pure from the impure, the ethically allowed from the disallowed (the two categories, ritual and ethical may not finally be

distinct). However, Paul begins to see, tentatively and inconsistently, that this is not properly true of the Church. Those who eat the body of Christ do not eat this food *rather than* other foods, since Christ's food is uniquely not used up and uniquely 'claims us', rather than vice-versa (6:13). Other foods are but temporarily useful, even if they have been offered to idols, who have no real power, and therefore are reduced to mere ontological indifference, and the innocence of actuality (8: 1–13). (In the sexual sphere, Paul's intimations of apurism are less marked: Christ *can be* the rival of whores, having already paid for our bodies, just as he can be the rival of our spouses (6: 15–20; 7: 33–34)). To say *this* (positive being) rather than *that* (positive being) is to say rift, exclusion, and violence: in this fashion only *law* can 'empower' sin, which otherwise would remain an inert possibility of destruction (15:56). 'Morality' is complicit with death, as it is only the fragility of the world which requires a coded shoring-up against loss. Death itself, however, or temporal disappearance, or the way we must indeed necessarily feed off each other (as Williams says) is not 'sin', for it may be the distance of love. Yet as intended or resigned-to death, as absolute loss and diminution, it is to be decoded as venomously invaded by sin, as a self-justificatory will to the annihilation of the other.

All this complex 'formal' characterization of the Church is for Paul pre-given in ritual enactment. And *yet* even the latter can only be guaranteed as an authentic repetition if it is genuinely reflected in the improvised 'real-life' of those who transmit and perform it. Paul is obsessively concerned with his own credentials as an apostle, in part because only authentic apostleship will guarantee authentic founding, authentic eucharistic performance. He therefore seeks to supplement the formal categories with rehearsals of his own missions to and dealings with the Corinthians. Sublime imagery of death and resurrection, atoning substitution and undying corporeality is harnessed without mediation to the diurnal matters of fund-raising, moral discipline and claims to authority. The character of the gospel as gift—the gift that is only of gift—is in part authenticated by Paul's own Socratic boast to have preached it *gratis*, or rather with the support of the Macedonians (9:15–18). Does this impress, as evidence of disinterest? Whether it does or not, the persuasive *content* of the gospel is here not separable from a persuasive mode of *communication*. Inversely, severely practical matters depend upon decisions regarding ineffable theological categories. Are the apostles entitled to their bread for working only at apostleship? (9:3, 11) This depends upon their direct knowledge of Christ and their bearing in their lives the Christ-like marks of substitutionary suffering: hence they also—like the body and blood of

Christ—stand judgementally over-against the Church (4:16). Appeal to one's endurances (4: 10–13) then constitutes also a claim to power, for all the redefinitions of power as self-denying ordinance, for all the assertions of ultimate equality, and for all the paradoxical vauntings of 'the least member', compared specifically to our genitalia, the weakest, most lacking and desiring (and therefore most responsive to Christ?) (12: 22–26). Will Paul efface himself (and his 'rational' headship) this far? And is such effacement shown in his claim to the right to judge harshly mere drunkards and sexual offenders? (5:1–6, 6:9–10) Does he not fall into the trap of wanting the Church to excel in a purity understood all too conventionally and exclusively? Whatever the answers, it is clear that formal specifications of *ecclesia* do not readily serve to resolve complex issues of everyday routine, discipline and authority. Nonetheless, the only Christian approach here must be a persuasive attempt to recite particular cases, particular biographies as authentic embodiments of the *logos staurou*, the logic of the cross. Whereas, indicates Paul (in an astonishing reversal) all philosophy is reduced to the level of mere persuasion, (*peithois*) this *logos* alone is truly *demonstrative* (*apodeixei*) since it is realised in power in resurrection and the emergence of the Church (2:4). Yet such power is itself first effective through persuasive preaching and this priority constitutes the ineradicable hierarchic claim of the apostle.³ However, for his persuasion to become apodeictic, for his gift to be discerned in the Holy Spirit as gift, this authority must collapse in pace with its exercise. Unlike space, which may be democratic and merely consensual, time demands asymmetrical power and aristocratic rule; but unlike space also, which may persist in oligarchy, time demands the handing over of power as the only mark of its achievement. Apostolic power is self-cancelling. And if Christ, by virtue of his proleptic character does, nonetheless, (through his apostles) continue to exercise headship over his body, which is his bride, then all the same the distinction of the Spirit, which is *from* Christ, yet also received as that 'other' gift in which he may be discerned as gift, concurs with the impossibility of ever including a later, interpretative, temporal moment merely 'under' a past authority which it is to interpret. Christ is himself more disclosed through the Spirit at work in the Church. And as mother and bride, the Church asymptotically approaches (without ever reaching) the perfection of the response of the Holy Spirit to the Logos in the Trinity, in which the Logos *is* through this response, which not only bears the Logos through desire, but as desire yet in excess of the Logos, becomes its now *equal* bride. St. Paul even seeks to locate gender relations within this suspense. As the Church is for Christ, so

woman is for man and should go veiled in church—nevertheless, he can add, in parentheses, *in the Lord* neither are independent, and both are ‘from’ each other (11:11–12). For now, the priorities of time and its subordinations, but eschatologically, mutual generation. How, practically, can one instantiate such a strictly temporal logic? When, precisely, should equality supervene? But no rules here, for Church governance: rather we are handed over to all the many particular pleas of claimed authority, all the kenotic measures of its truth.

Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, therefore, exhibit the way in which extreme attention to formal categories which detail a ‘heterotopia’ of non-exclusion and non-domination, actually demands supplementation by precise and particular appeals to contingent histories, if these categories are not to remain empty. The categories are not, however, purely paradigmatic: in a sense they detail an ideal yet also real diachrony, a ‘uchrony’, or process of peaceful transmission which is *how* time falls out, despite the universal contamination of sin (since this in Christ has been fully suffered, such that even violent abuse and rupture, now traversed by love, can itself be transmitted as gift). In Christ peace has not, indeed, been totally achieved (a building remains to be built), yet it is proleptically given, because only the perfect saving of one man from the absolute destruction of death, this refusal of the loss of any difference, can initially spell out to us perfect peace. The latter validates the individual as being in excess of any achieved totality, so that the community of infinite peace (‘total’, I concede, is a misleading qualifier) must be first inscribed in this space of the single element, the discarded stone, which yet now frames the whole future construction.

But is this really vacuous? An evasion of the contingencies of time with their unavoidable arbitrariness, violence and tragic losses? Let me append some remarks on both violence and tragedy. Graham Ward notes that I believe conclusions are arrived at by persuasion not argument, but wonders whether every act of persuasion does not have a violent character. Certainly, to be persuaded is to be forced, is to succumb to what is taken to be superior power. This power is ‘violent’ (arbitrary, domineering) *unless* what is persuasive has the force of ‘truth’ and one is ‘truly’ persuaded. But there *is* no evident truth, and truth itself (for *Theology and Social Theory*) can be nothing other than a peaceful communication which is not a consensual reception of the same, but a becoming different of what is received, yet without aggressive rupture. ‘Harmonious’ transition is peace, is truth. However (and I should have made this clearer) this non-violence is never merely *visible*, any more than violence. An apparently brutal, physical forcing may be play, may

be pleasure, whereas the most apparently freely offered consent (for example of Essex woman to John Major) may be the most subtle, most insidious domination. Of course it must be added that what is in principle a peaceful transition may be resisted, and at this point arises the question of whether it should be imposed: imposition may at times appear the lesser of two evils, yet it always risks a tragic dilution of its own truth. If it cannot be fully received in the spirit in which it is offered, then it cannot be properly received at all. But the possibility of a recipient later 'coming to his senses', in retrospect receiving after all, may justify a coercive measure. In no sense does *Theology and Social Theory* recommend 'pacifism', and the formal specification of truth as peaceful relation cannot be applied as a criterion authorizing non-resistance. The latter alone may be finally persuasive, finally redemptive, but no use of prescriptive criteria tell us when it is to be resorted to. Which is not to say that a decision for such a resort is just arbitrary. Instead it is a matter of judgement, in these unique circumstances, *now*. Just as discrimination between violent and non-violent (by participant or observer) is also entirely a matter of judgement. And to judge a reception as non-coercive *means* peacefully to receive . . . this action, or this scene before me.

The above remarks indicate that, as in *Theology and Social Theory*, I do admit a certain 'tragic dimension'. Circumstances can force us to sacrifice some good we feel essential to our integrity, or even some person who must be forever missed. Yet according to Aristotle such circumstances are usually pre-engineered by a tyrant (Betray your compatriots, or forfeit your mother's life!) and one may wonder whether they ever deserve to be baptised with ontological necessity. I agree with Williams that one cannot *guarantee* the compatibility of goods, yet unlike him feel that to go on having *faith* in this possibility is part of what it means to read the world as created. God sees the whole creation as 'good'. What does this mean? *Not* the good of the whole over against the parts, *not* a perfect order that will be eventually achieved, but the entire continuous happening. Sacrifice in time and space, which normally upholds and defines the good, constituting 'ethics', is here spectacularly refused. *This* is not worth *that* surrender, and if anything is to be given up it can only be everything for the source, God, which commands even death and non-being. But this renunciation of the whole is paradoxically in favour of every new, particular and irreplaceable good which God can bring to be over and above the whole (this, I think, is what Kierkegaard tries to spell out in *Fear and Trembling*).⁴ The Christian good is precisely *not* the good that depends on sacrifice and hierarchy, but the equal necessity and compatibility of all goods.

Tragedy as a thematic is linked to political space, to the incompatibility of private and familial goals with those of sovereign spatial order, to the monopolisation of power reinforced by a myth of scarcity: *limited* space, time and resources. By contrast, the Church has no sovereign centre, it is present 'in' individuals and small communities as much as anywhere, and indeed is *not* so long as one coin, one sheep remains missing. Creation *ex nihilo* and the resurrection of the dead are protocols *against* the myth of scarcity, of limited being. Love opens up every space, fragments every moment; where it is not wanted, steps out, again.

But is it *true* that only tyrants, only humanly engineered circumstances, deny us the compossibility of all goods? One must discriminate. First, of course there are some worthwhile roads not taken, perhaps some wonderful planets not created, and who knows whether even God knows that ours is the best of all possible? These are but wistfully mourned. Second, there are existing goods destroyed out of tragic necessity in circumstances which, I contend, one can always discover to be themselves contingent. But isn't the latter claim patently extreme? As Williams says, we *always* live 'at the expense of each other'—not merely at the eucharist are we habitual cannibals. This point should, however, be connected back to the non-visibility of violence and non-violence: in time there is ceaseless using and using up, yet this may *at* times be judged love and gift, not warfare. Further: according to the peculiar economy of love, in giving we are replenished; here the moral good is not a self-contained, Aristotelian teleological good of 'flourishing', but the goodness of this—good is only *found* in its relation to other goods and to God—relations of supplying and of supplication. The loss of 'goods' therefore, is not necessarily or always tragic since truly moral goods are only good in being lost or sublated. Indeed, this is *exactly* what the 'minimalist' theodicy in Augustine appears to imply.(CD XI, 22) Nothing *whatsoever* about tragedy here. Rather the theodicy seems to supplement the rigorously relational theory of good involved in the view of evil as privation. If the latter concerns a kind of 'intentional' relation—a certain thing is not all it ought to be in relation to God, the former concerns a kind of 'extensional' one: viewed in isolation certain pains, certain tediums, seem somewhat intolerable, but when related to other things they become acceptable. They *do not* then appear as necessary evils, or goods tragically foregone, but purely and simply as aspects of the good itself, as necessarily contrastive elements like light and shade. The life of peace is *not* an anaemic life without tedium, and therefore no climaxes: the point being that, on account of climaxes, tedium is not merely tedium, but also suspension and excitement. Of course where theodicy ceased to be 'minimalist' (as in

the Seventeenth century) then the sacrifice of individuals to the whole gets reinstated—but that means precisely a kind of legitimation and rationalization of the (ontologically) tragic. Individuals and communities are not, for the ‘minimalist’ view, to be overridden, but they themselves can exercise judgement about pains, temporary deprivations and losses which are yet not to be considered *evils*, privations of the fullness that might be. So this fullness also is not visible (like a sort of maximally bloated reality), and not a stranger to restraint and delay.

Moreover, to contrast what is tragically lost with what is selectively established, may be again to fall victim to the dominance of a spatial perspective which affords only an illusory foothold. As we live in time, everything is lost, nothing is established, and this renders politics ultimately futile (it is the *mark* of a radical politics to recognise this, and instead of seizing sovereign power, to work against this power by seeking to save what can be saved for every individual in every moment: for example to ensure that every transaction is as far as possible just and charitable, and as far as possible robs the capitalist of his profits, the state of its domination.) If anything is to be saved, it can only be saved *in* the passing moment of its loss, and if anything is to remain it can only remain through recollection, which repeats what has vanished and so intimates its eternity. As everything passes and only ‘is’ through the trace of its vanishing, nothing even of what has been violently or tragically surrendered (under force of circumstance) is irrecoverable. If we are not raised, then neither is Christ. (1 Cor. 15:13)⁷

Were indeed a tragic predicament predominant, then many (most?) decisions would be arbitrary, and the Church’s preferences no more justifiable than those of the marketplace—indeed the Church might well have to be regulated *like* a marketplace, and this would be its postmodern form. Useless, here, to speak of the resources of forgiveness and reconciliation, for what could they now mean but a sighing realisation that we all are merely obeying a throw of the die? The Church’s peace would be somewhat like camaraderie in the bath at Twickenham, once the formalized violence of the game is over.

Against Williams’ ‘tragic’ emphasis therefore, which seems too allied to political projects, the writhings of committees and the identification of the many roads not taken by a single individual with moral ‘goals’, I would want to stress the ‘absurdity’ of faith, its non-resignation to loss and scarcity, and its augmentation of the Platonic vision of good as precisely the harmonious ‘fitting in’ of all roles and options, where these have come to constitute peoples’ very identity. All the same, he is wholly right to say that we only act in a history which is

(exhaustively if contingently) 'shaped by privation': and if *Theology and Social Theory* appears to play this down, then it is much at fault. Original innocence is indeed wholly lost, and only leaves its trace as suffering. Yet it *is* still innocence that suffers, and *only* innocence (the children we are to become), because what must be suffered is the senselessness of evil, and those who know evil, having 'learned from experience', have learned precisely nothing. Furthermore, to surpass the tragic, to make the Christian gesture of faith beyond (but not without) renunciation, is not to embark on a premature celebration. On the contrary, it is to *refuse* to cease to suffer, to become resigned to a loss. Only at the price of an augmentation of suffering does a complete joy and peace begin to shine through.

And this is why Christ came to visit the lost. He sought out those who dwell in tragic enclaves, those who, through privation, enjoy goods which paradoxically cannot be goods because cut off from communication, from universal resonance. I mean something like honour amongst thieves, love in brothels, wisdom in the councils of state, Utopia constructed on the ravaged hunting-grounds of Indians. But we *all* dwell in enclaves, within founding dishonesties and deprivations which no later virtue can truly undo. Christ suffers this enclosure and so loves it and discloses it for us and to us. The enclave is henceforwards our hospital and asylum. Here—nowhere yet—is the Church. Everywhere.

- 1 Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, trans. Thomas A Carlson, Chicago: U.P. Chicago U.P., 1991, 53-108. Marion's book has further warned me that in any talk of 'theological ontology' one should not mean that one has access to the nature of being as something present, graspable through intellectual sight. While I am not sure that I can follow him in his account of a priority of charity as the 'pre-ontological' (though love creates from nothing, is it not also always already a relation?) something like an 'equal priority' of the pre-ontological with the ontological is hinted at in my critique of *actus purus* in *Theology and Social Theory* (p. 423).
- 2 One wonders how Nicholls would respond to the Pascalian theology of a Marion, with whom he might find himself more ecclesiastically in harmony. I suspect that his Englishness renders him more insular than my (never concealed!) Anglicanism.
- 3 Here and roundabouts I'm trying to make some sort of response to Nicholls' complaint about my neglect of the ordained ministry.
- 4 See my 'Choreography: The Evasion of Kierkegaard?' in *Theology Before Philosophy*, ed. Philip Blond, London: Routledge, forthcoming. In this article I also try to spell out an account of 'the self', which the possibility of 'choice' between nihilism and Christianity in *Theology and Social Theory* seems to demand.
- 5 In my article, 'Problematizing the Secular': the Post-Postmodern Problematic', in *The Shadow of Spirit* eds. Philippa Berry and Andrew Wernick, London, Routledge, 1992, I try to outline (via a discussion of Spinoza) a somewhat more positive relation of *privatio boni* and Christian eschatology to Nietzschean will-to-power and eternal return. Both outlooks are anti-tragic, but, I claim, the Christian one more consistently so.