

men.

Before his death Jesus had tried, but in the end failed, to bring the Spirit of love to a small group of disciples; now through him the Father pours the Spirit throughout the world; by this the world is to be transformed into a community of love, the Kingdom of God.

Christian prayer is never simply the appeal by the creature to the creator. The cross and resurrection are the eternal dialogue of Father and Son as projected on to the screen of history, what it looks like in history. If you want to know what the Trinity looks like be filled with the Holy Spirit and look at the cross. The Trinity, when reflected in our history, like something reflected in rippling water, looks pretty strange, just as the human being in our history looks strange, being despised and crucified: *Ecce homo*.

All our prayer is some kind of sharing in that eternal dialogue, the exchange represented by the cross: this is the only prayer there is. The eucharist is, of course, the principle sacrament of Calvary, but all our prayer is some kind of participation in the human voice of the Son of God addressing his Father. It is by sharing in this sacrificial prayer that we enter into our divine life and take our part in the mystery of the Trinity. I shall say more of this when we come to look at the mysteries of resurrection, the mysteries of Easter night.

From Inwardness to Social Action: A shift in the locus of religious experience

Charles Davis

There is now general agreement that Christians, in virtue of their Christian commitment, should engage in social and political action, particularly on behalf of the poor and oppressed. That is the presupposition behind liberation theology. At the same time the conviction persists that social and political action is not properly religious action, but, strictly speaking, only the consequence or overflow of religion into a non-religious, secular sphere. Hence the felt necessity, especially on the part of those with religious authority, to qualify the

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acceptance of liberation theology with frequent warnings that the Christian religion should not be *reduced* to social and political action.

More widespread among ordinary religious people is the manner in which the perennial need for reflection becomes a devaluing of social and political action in favour of interior contemplation as alone truly religious. People are urged to withdraw at regular intervals from their social involvement, which is dubbed external activity, in order to find God once more in the properly religious activity of personal, meditative prayer. The religious life is seen as the inner life in contrast to the outer life. The locus of the Transcendent and of religious experience is identified with the realm of interiority. To work for the liberation of the poor and oppressed may be demanded by religious faith, hope and love. It is applied religion, but it is not of the essence of religion, which is found in the inwardness of union with God.

This tendency of the Christian religion has been strongly reinforced by interest in the Eastern religions. Outside the academic study of those religions, interest in them has focussed upon their contribution to the exploration of states of consciousness and to the development of deep inwardness or concentration. In being exported to the West, the religions of the East have necessarily been stripped of their social and political framework and implications. Hence the conviction among both religious and secular people today that all religion is concerned with the deepening and unification of individual, interior consciousness, whether in the Western form of union with God or the Eastern form of absorption into the One.

I want to argue that this persistent conviction that religion is to be identified with interiority is wrong on two counts. First, it rests upon a faulty understanding of modern culture and, second, its conception of religious experience is mistaken. Inwardness or the withdrawal into the inner depths of consciousness is not a whit more religious than social and political action. Furthermore, it is at least arguable that in our present historical situation if there is any privileged locus for religious experience it is not the interior realm but social interaction.

To take first the question of modern culture. The phrase 'modern culture' implies a contrast with the culture of traditional societies. An analysis widely held, though given different formulations, sees differentiation of cultural spheres as the characteristic feature of modernity. Traditional cultures are compact. They form undifferentiated totalities. Within them no clear distinction is made among kinds of value or types of meaning. Modern culture is differentiated because it marks off spheres of value or, from another standpoint, realms of meaning. A representative analysis and one helpful here makes a threefold distinction: the cognitive, the normative and the expressive.

The cognitive cultural sphere mediates objective reality, reality as over against the subject as subject, and thus expands and develops the realm of human knowing. Through knowledge human beings discover surrounding reality as intelligible and affirm as truth what they discover. Not all knowledge is scientific, but modern science has led to the clear differentiation of the cognitive as the sphere of what can be objectively verified as true.

The second or normative cultural sphere consists of meanings, not discovered, but created by human beings through social interaction. Human beings all share a set of needs, interests and wants. These are not just instinctual drives, but find appropriate expression as ideals and values and thus allow for a comparative evaluation and ordering. Human beings come together in society and through a process of social communication and interaction create a normative order out of the needs, interests, wants, ideals and values of its members, both as individuals and in groups. The norms thus created are embodied in the institutions of society. As institutionalized, they constitute the various sub-orders of society, such as the economic order, the political order, the legal order, and that general order of communication and interaction we sometimes call the life-world.

Norms are not created out of nothing. They are formed out of the needs, interests and wants of actual human beings. The normative sphere, therefore, presupposes and builds upon the factual truths about human beings established in the cognitive sphere of culture. All the same, the two spheres should be differentiated. There is a variety of ideals and values and conflict among them when related to concrete reality. The normative order of society is derived from the free choice of human beings. Cultures differ according to which needs, wants and interests are made normative and following which scale of values. There is no single normative order to be discovered. To suppose so is to confuse the cognitive and the normative cultural spheres. Human creativity in imagining and establishing possible social orders is not unlimited, but it allows for a range of possibilities. Conflict of choices should in principle be resolved through the very process of social communication and action, with agreement as the aim, if not the achievement.

The third or expressive cultural sphere is that of subject as subject. It is constituted by the exploration, articulation and expression of the reality of the subject. Here what is sought is truthfulness rather than the truth of the first sphere, sincerity rather than the normative practice of the second sphere. Further, the subjective states are explored and expressed for their own sake. They are not examined primarily for any objective cognitive content they might yield. To enter into different states of consciousness, to plunge into depths of the human psyche, is to explore a world, the inward world of the human subject. To articulate

what is discovered there is the motivating force behind much poetry and prose. However, not all subjective awareness reaches such heights or depths, and a common, ordinary feature of modern culture is the differentiation of subjective as subjective.

In brief, then, one can say that modern culture distinguishes three worlds, to all of which human beings are related in their living: the external or objective world of human knowledge, the social world of practice with its norms, and the subjective world of self-awareness. Because those three worlds have emerged as distinct, modern culture clearly differentiates the objective from the subjective, history and society from nature, sincerity and truthfulness from objective truth.

I have not marked out a distinct cultural sphere for religious faith and experience. The first mistake of those who identify religion with inwardness is to suppose, in analysing modern culture, that religion should be marked off as constituting a distinct realm of meaning or of practice. To suppose so is in effect to deny that religious reality transcends all human meanings and each and every human world. Transcendence does not form a realm of meaning or cultural world, alongside the other three, but is the Unlimited that lies beyond, while underpinning and penetrating each of the three worlds and any other that human culture should distinguish. Religious faith arises from a boundary experience, an experience of finitude, which may occur in any of the three human worlds. There is no such thing as human faith pure and simple, but there are, instead, three types or forms of religion, corresponding to the three cultural spheres.

Religious faith is primarily rooted in a negative experience: an experience of the nothingness, the emptiness, the non-meaning into which each of the limited worlds of human meaning plunges at its limits. It is the dynamic tension towards the Unlimited that can survive the disintegration of every human world and underpin the new world that replaces the old, because it recognizes the finitude of every human world. Such faith, going beyond all humanly apprehensible meaning, has no positive content of its own. There are no specifically religious images or concepts. There is no specifically religious language. All religious images and concepts are drawn from one or other of three cultural spheres with their finite content and made to mean the Beyond by a process of extrapolation, intensification, hyperbole or extravagance. Transcendent reality is thus indirectly or symbolically expressed and brought to bear upon human thought and practice. It remains, however, beyond any direct grasp or experience and for that reason has no conceptual or imaginative expression properly its own.

It follows that to suppose—the first mistake—that religion constitutes a distinct world, defined as sacred over against the secular of the three human worlds, entails a second mistake, namely an erroneous

conception of religious experience. The error is to claim a direct, literal apprehension of the Transcendent, so as to give positive content to that sacred world, and thus to fall into idolatry by identifying the Transcendent with its finite symbols.

But an error about Transcendence involves an error about Immanence. To make religion a distinct world or cultural sphere is to overlook that the Transcendent is related to every human world or cultural sphere as its animating principle, underpinning its meaning and value, and thus to deny the Immanence of the Transcendent. Although the Transcendent lies beyond every human realm of meaning, and thus is experienced primarily only negatively, as the Unlimited in meaning and value, it stands as the impossible which human beings must consciously reach out for if they are to attain the possible. For that reason, the exclusion of the sacred from the differentiated cultural spheres is proving disastrous for modern culture. It marks a failure to open up these 'secular' spheres to the Beyond in symbols and images, and has resulted in a stultification and trivialization of cultural content, together with a demonic absolutizing of the impoverished meaning and values. The effect upon religion, which has been seduced into trying to maintain itself as a distinct cultural sphere, is to make it canonize obsolete cultural elements as sacred. Because these elements, drawn from the past, are no longer features of contemporary culture, they can be proclaimed as sacred. The social relationships of a bygone age are thus mystified as the sacred structure of Christ's Church.

Am I arguing for an empty Beyond? In one sense, yes. There is no direct apprehension or experience of the Transcendent. Hence those living in the tension towards the Beyond are plunged sooner or later into a void, an emptiness, a nothingness. That inevitability has been articulated most explicitly in the contemplative form of religion, with its dark nights or emptying of consciousness, but it applies to the other forms of religion as well. In another sense, I am arguing, not for an empty Beyond, but for the reality of the Beyond as Beyond. It is indirectly experienced in the experience of the finite as finite. Contemplatives are led to recognize that the blocking of all their imaginative and conceptual activity is the impact upon their finite consciousness of the unknown reality of the Unlimited. Hence their experience subjectively is both agony and bliss. There are parallel experiences in the other forms of religion. Social and political action has its dark night, giving rise to a tragic joy or despairing hope.

Moreover, the experience of finitude in a tension that draws us beyond all limits penetrates and transforms the entirety of human thought and action. It pervades the content of all three cultural spheres and brings about a transvaluation of values. It excludes all evaluations that lock people within the given, whether the given is a system of

thought, a revealed deposit of faith, an existing social order or a promised utopia. It also excludes any evaluation that makes the finite self or a finite community, such as the nation, the measure of value. The symbols, practices and rites of religion are thus liberating in so far as they are linked to the negative experience of finitude.

Unfortunately, what is in that way created as the positive content of religion becomes a strong temptation to idolatry. The idolatry comes about in this fashion. The symbols of the Transcendent are taken from each of the three spheres of human culture. Because the Transcendent is immanent, the Beyond also the Depth, its symbols become the animating principles of human culture in its threefold embodiment. But the animating power of the Transcendent is then identified with a particular symbolic content, which is absolutized, instead of being seen in its relationship to a particular form or stage of human culture. The problem is how to retain a continuous basis for the dynamic symbolization of the Transcendent, while remaining open to the constant changes of finite human culture, refusing to absolutize any of its manifestations. So much religion is the mummification of the culturally obsolete.

If, then, for the reasons I have given, we refuse to make religion a distinct cultural sphere, but regard it as the Beyond in the midst of human culture in all its forms, the previous cultural analysis leads us to distinguish three modes of religion, corresponding to the three cultural spheres, which were, we may recall, the cognitive, the normative and the expressive. The cognitive gives rise to cosmic religion, the normative to political religion, the expressive to contemplative religion. The three modes of religion—cosmic, political, contemplative—are distinct but inseparable, just as the three cultural spheres are distinct but inseparable. But one or other mode may be dominant, and thus characterize the religious life of a period or people. However, it should be kept in mind that what I am offering is a typology, which simplifies historical reality for purposes of analysis. What we have in history is the undifferentiated cultures of traditional societies, in which the three modes of religion are entangled, and modern society, which has not yet found how to relate the religion it has inherited to its own differentiated culture. My purpose is to argue that religious people today are making a mistake in confining religion to the third cultural sphere, the expressive, by identifying religious experience with inwardness, and that the primary task is to relate religion to the normative sphere of social and political action.

Let us first, however, consider for a moment the cosmic and contemplative modes of religion. Cosmic religion is a religion as mediated by our knowledge of the external world or cosmos. By extrapolation and analogy, our limited objective knowledge is projected onto the unknown Transcendent. God is worshipped as the creative source and providential sustainer of a cosmic order. The concept of God

becomes the representation of total order, the crowning concept of metaphysics, serving as a regulative principle, enabling us to organize the diverse items of our knowledge into a total synthesis or world-view. The medieval conception of the cosmos, which found its supreme articulation in Aquinas, with his synthesis of natural knowledge and revealed doctrine, is the finest example in Christian history of the cosmic mode of religion. What renders it more or less inoperative today is that it claims to know too much, both about God and about the world. (Whiteheadian metaphysics sins in that respect more than Thomism in its authentic form.) We are too aware of the fragmentary nature of our knowledge to attempt the grand synthesis. The modern version of a world-view is an affair of method or procedure rather than of content, which continually changes. There is also a well-grounded reluctance to obscure the peculiar characteristics of religious language by using it in the synthesis with the languages in which we refer to the external world. When the Christian religion is seen as purveying a cosmic synthesis, people are tempted to talk about the Divinity of Christ or about the Trinity as if the use of language in doctrinal statements was the same as in everyday or scientific discourse about the external world.

Hence I expect no grand synthesis between modern knowledge and Christian belief, and I doubt whether the cosmic mode of the Christian religion has anything more than a subordinate role to play in the foreseeable future. We can, I think, no longer look to the cognitive sphere to mediate religious experience to our secular contemporaries. Knowledge has ceased to be the privileged locus for religious faith, and religion has ceased to be plausible in the guise of higher knowledge. Where, then, shall we look next?

The liberal response in the nineteenth century to the desuetude of cosmic religion and the collapse of religion as higher knowledge was to shift the locus of religious experience to the innermost depths of the subject; in other words, from the cognitive to the expressive cultural sphere. The problem of the truth-claims of religious doctrine was obviated, so it was thought, by an appeal to a pre-categorical, pre-linguistic experience. Religious doctrines, together with the other institutional and external elements of religion, are symbolic expressions of the inner experience of the subject. To make objective truth-claims is not in this account their purpose.

The difficulty with that version of religion has been made evident by the linguistic turn in modern thought. There has been a move away from the philosophies of consciousness, away from the Cartesian private subject, with a denial of any unmediated pre-linguistic experience. From that standpoint it would be truer to say that religious experience is the product of religious doctrines, dependent upon the mediation of religious doctrines, than to say that religious doctrines are the product or

sedimentation of experience.

The religion of Cartesian subjectivity is only a bastard form of Augustine's religion of inwardness. For Augustine the inner self is a temple in which the person meets God. Descartes' subject is like a spider, drawing everything other than mere matter, including its concept of God, out of its own belly. Modern subjectivism encloses the self upon the self in a claustrophobic fashion, inducing a nihilistic breakdown. In contrast, Augustine, in entering into the self, found it an abyss filled with light from the presence of God. All the same, even for Augustine, God was met not by the expansion of the self into the world other than the self, but by the withdrawal of the self from the world. The Christian West inherited from Augustine the conviction that it was within the self that one met God; that within the depths of the self the union with God was established, sustained and consummated. Religion, properly speaking, was therefore a matter of leaving behind the distracting, multifarious business of the outer world so as (in Newman's words) to 'rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator'.

Now, such a religion of inwardness has an important contribution to make, both culturally and religiously. The differentiation through reflection of the self as individual subject is a condition for the liberation of the self from alienating compulsions, both natural and social. The interior self, or self within, should not indeed be regarded as an isolated or private entity, existing apart from social mediation and communication. The liberated self is a self-conscious subject in possession of his or her individuated being and activities, and thus able to enter as a free participant into the communication process of society. Further, it is understandable that those with religious faith should reflexively apprehend their self as constituted in a relationship with the Transcendent. The distortion, however, that attends this mode of religion is the rejection of the world, of the bodily side of human existence, of the social and the historical. Augustine himself did not avoid that error, but was the main source of its influence upon the West.

But a further point must be added. There is nothing in itself religious about the exploration and cultivation of inner states of consciousness, as found in devotional and mystical treatises. The interior life is no more religious of itself than cosmic synthesis or political action. The inner world of the subject with all its phenomena and ramifications may, like other realms of human existence and culture, become the vehicle of religious experience. But, while it gives rise to a particular mode of religion, it must not be identified with religion. It is religious insofar as it opens out onto the unknown Transcendent, just as a cosmic synthesis is religious for the same reason; and it falls into idolatry, just as cosmic religion does if it forgets its finiteness and claims a direct

apprehension of the Transcendent.

Moreover, contemplative religion does not have a monopoly of reflexion. The contrast is not between inwardness and an unthinking dogmatism on the one hand and between inwardness and mindless activism on the other. All three modes of religion include reflexion and as religious imply the raising of the mind and heart above the immediate and the finite to the hidden Transcendent. The difference is that contemplative religion finds the presence of the Transcendent in the inner states of consciousness, cosmic religion in the cosmic order and political religion in social reaction.

I come now to the mode of religion, the political, which is related to the second cultural sphere, the normative, and which is religion as embodied in the institutions and practices of society. The last remark makes it evident that all religion has a political dimension in so far as it always occurs in a social and political context. But contemplative religion characteristically withdraws from social and political involvement, and cosmic religion soars above social concern to the higher truths of theology and metaphysics. Political religion is religion as emergent in social and political action.

Nothing could be more absurdly untrue to Christian history than the contention that the Christian religion as embodied institutionally in the Church is apolitical or above politics, so that it is inappropriate to the priestly or clerical state for its members to be involved religiously in political activity. The Christian religion has always been thoroughly political, with social and political action the major vehicle of the distinctively Christian religious experience. Briefly, Christians find God in their neighbourhood rather than in their inner consciousness or in the cosmos.

Sociologically, the clergy do not constitute an intelligentsia of philosophers or a class of gurus. The clerical state was and is a political institution. It no doubt represents the religious dimension of political life. But the point is that it represents religion politically. The law that excludes the clergy from engaging in politics is not a simple reflection of the meaning of the clerical state. It is an attempt to establish a monopoly of political power in the central authority of the Church. Further, it is usually invoked when the central authority dislikes the political policy and action initiated locally.

It could be argued that monasticism, with its contemplative tradition, and the Western mystical tradition, have origins and features which are not uniquely Christian, and that the non-Christian origins and features are important ones. But if there is one type of religion which, as it is found in the West, has not got these ambiguities and is undeniably Christian, it is the political.

Yahweh from the beginning was a political God. Most of the images

and symbols we use of God are social and political in their basic meaning. The mighty acts of God are a series of political events. The prophetic message is a demand for social justice. Jesus died, not because of his inner life of prayer, but because of his impact upon the social order. The Gospel message is centred upon the political symbol of the Kingdom. The earliest Christian creed was 'Jesus is the Lord'—a declaration that takes its meaning from the political order.

The early Christians were a movement of the marginalized and under-privileged. They eventually came to power in the Roman Empire because their movement offered, culturally and politically, what was needed by society. The Christian religion was the animating principle of the unitary social order of the Middle Ages. The medieval papacy was a political institution. I do not deny that it was religious. The point is that it was politically religious. What constituted papal religion was not higher knowledge nor mystical leadership but the contribution it made over the centuries to the formation and development of Christendom or Europe. The reasons for the break-up of Christendom and the gradual secularization of the social and political order of Europe lie not in religion's involvement in politics, but in its identification with bad politics, even to the ignoring or the denial of distinctively Christian values. The problem today is not how to free religion from politics, which would be a harmful privatization of religion, but how to free it from the politics of the past, so that it can make its contribution to the politics of the present and the future.

All the same, culture and politics are not in themselves religious. They but mediate religious truths and values. Society is not to be identified with the Transcendent. But when the presence of the Transcendent in society is acknowledged, it opens the social horizon beyond the limits of any existing order to further possibilities, while acting as the animating but discriminating principle of what already exists.

Since political action is not in itself religious, the question arises: When does it become religious? When does it receive a religious determination? Here I can only sketch the lines of an analysis from a Christian perspective. It calls for expansion, both in regard to its usefulness in the interpretation of past history and in relation to the concrete issues of today.

If Christian performance is constituted as being Christian by being animated by faith, hope and charity, then political action is religiously Christian when (1) it remains in a critical relationship to the existing order; (2) it is utopian in its openness to new possibilities; and (3) it refuses to respond to hate with hate but, instead, embraces the risk of offering of gratuitous love. A political refusal to regard any existing social order or set of political institutions as absolute and unchanging is

related to faith in as much as faith, in being a response to the Infinite, relativizes all finite orders. Faith protects us from the idolatry of worshipping the established order. It is subversive in the awareness it creates of the limitations of all human achievements. The Gospel parables have rightly been called 'subversive stories' in their overthrowing of the worlds we construct for ourselves, with their limited meanings and finite values. In a far more consistent manner than Marxism, a politics animated by Christian faith should express the willingness to enter into a continuous and endless critique of all earthly institutions, beliefs, customs and practices. However, the critique should not be in the name of some new absolute, but under an appeal to the unknown Infinite or Beyond. Too much religion, like the secular ideologies that imitate it, has absolutized its own finite forms.

Besides faith there is hope. The politics of hope rests upon the confidence that, however bleak the prospect, there are always new possibilities. The ability to change direction, to inaugurate and make effective a new policy, is always there. The situation is never hopeless; the outcome is never a foregone conclusion. Christian hope is utopian, not in any unrealistic disregard for facts, but in a refusal to measure what can be done by any earthly or purely human calculus. The principle of grace is operative here. It holds that human resources are never adequate to the fulfilment of human destiny, which comes as a gift. Hence our reliance is not upon ourselves, but upon God. Hope keeps the Christian working to bring about change and watching for new opportunities to appear when there would seem to be no grounds for anything other than despair.

It says much for how far the Christian religion has already been privatized, leaving politics amoral as well as secular, that the imperative to respond to hate not with hate but with love is regarded as applicable to personal relationships, but not to politics. Yet the imperative to love first, to love gratuitously and forgivingly, to break the cycle of hate, to return good for evil, not evil for evil, is basic to the Christian understanding of the fallen human condition and the gift of salvation. It applies as much to politics and society as to individual relationships. Socially as well as individually, if what we call love is a mere self-interested calculus of gains and losses, we shall inevitably be caught in a downward spiral of cumulative hate. That spiral can be broken only if we are prepared to give without an assured return. To do that requires an openness to the gift of God's creative love. There is debate today whether the Christian imperative of love demands a policy of non-violence. One can leave that question open, provided one recognizes that even in the hypothesis that violent resistance is both allowable and necessary for Christians in society, such violence must never be motivated by hate, but always controlled and limited by love.

Those, then, are a few brief indications of a Christian transformation of politics. To transform politics in that fashion constitutes a political mode of religious practice and experience. Social interaction thus opens out upon the Transcendent and mediates an experience of the Beyond. The response to that experience is the animation of political activity with Christian values. But I want to do more than defend the legitimacy of the political mode of religious faith. I would argue that social and political activity is today the privileged locus of religious experience. The reason is that contemporary society is struggling with a strong temptation to turn its back upon the poor and the weak for a policy of self-interest unrestrained by compassion. Because the welfare state has run into economic difficulties, the powerful are protecting their own interests with a cynical disregard for the victims. The rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer on both the national and international level. At the same time, an illusory search for an unattainable ultimate security is producing a suicidal reliance upon nuclear arms. In this situation Christians cannot withdraw into a religion of inwardness and watch the remnants of Christian society being swamped by an egoistic individualism. They are called upon to mediate a healing grace that will purify, guide and restrain the working of self-interest in human affairs and then further to transform those affairs by relating them to a transcendent order of values. That is the religious performance imposed upon us by the signs of the time. It is there we find the primary locus for religious experience today. An appeal to a supposed primacy of contemplative religion, combined with a collusion with the existing social and political order, is the major temptation at present for religious people, especially for those in authority.

The Greenham Vigil : a women's theological initiative for peace

Angela West

On August 31st 1984, ten women arrived at Blue Gate, the entrance to the American Cruise missile base at Greenham Common to do the night watch for the peace camp there—and simultaneously to keep the vigil of the Passion based on the gospel of St. Mark. It so happened that that weekend was the anniversary of the women's peace camp—three years