

Duncan Reid

Report:

Discussion of Theological Anthropology by the International Commission for Anglican – Orthodox Theological Dialogue

Since the publication of *The Church of the Triune God* (the Cyprus Statement)¹ in late 2006, the International Commission for Anglican – Orthodox Theological Dialogue (ICAOTD) has focussed on developing an agreed statement on theological anthropology. As the work of the Commission is unfinished, with planned continuation of the discussion for at least the next two meetings in 2012 and 2013, the papers contributed by individual members remain confidential to the membership. I shall therefore avoid naming individual writers in this report, except where a version of their paper has subsequently been published.

THE AUTHOR



Dr. Duncan Reid is former Dean of the United Faculty of Theology Melbourne, Australia and Anglican member of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, Honorary Research Associate of the Melbourne College of Divinity

¹ *The Church of the Triune God: the Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican – Orthodox Theological Dialogue 2006* (London: Anglican Communion Office).

The Commission has met three times since the Cyprus report: at Chania, in Crete (2009), at Oxford, in the United Kingdom (2010), and most recently at at Shen Vlash, near Durrës, in Albania (2011). I shall outline the developing work of the Commission thematically rather than chronologically, as a thematic approach in itself demonstrates the remarkable convergence of priorities among the Anglican and Orthodox participants. The discussion has come to highlight several significant common themes that are felt by both groups to be indispensable to a contemporary approach to any theological understanding the human person. This convergence is demonstrated by the headings under which participants' papers were commissioned.

The 2009 meeting in Crete saw the theme of theological anthropology opened by participants from both Anglican and Orthodox traditions. These papers offered lines of development, or trajectories, from the Cyprus statement, as well as resources for discussion. By the end of the 2010 meeting in Oxford, the Commission was in a position to outline its projected task for the 2011 meeting in Albania, by commissioning members' papers on the following topics:

- The image and likeness of God in the human person, from an Anglican perspective (to correspond to the earlier treatment of this theme by an Orthodox participant);
- The role of sacrifice in understanding personhood, from both Anglican and Orthodox perspectives;
- Human dignity and human rights, from both perspectives;
- A theology of creation and the human person within creation, from both perspectives;
- An African Anglican perspective on the human person. This was intended to give voice to the sizable constituency of the Anglican Communion who live in Africa and bring an African cultural framework to their Christian faith. Unfortunately it is yet to be presented as the author was prevented by visa problems from attending the 2011 meeting.

I move to a summary of the themes addressed to date.

Theological Resources and Methods

At the meeting in Crete, Metropolitan Kallistos Ware, the Orthodox co-chairman, opened the theme with a paper on 'The image and likeness of God'. In response to the papers on Anglican political thought at Oxford (see below), he also made available an older paper of his on a corresponding

Orthodox theme, 'Catholicity and Nationalism'.² A passionate and thoughtful Orthodox contribution to the Oxford meeting carried the title 'What is a human being? An initial approach to patristic anthropology.' The author argued that a patristic theology of the human person is best studied not in isolated early church theologians, but in the consensus of the early councils. This represents an important methodological point, namely that theological decisions are consensual decisions, and go beyond the private opinions of even highly respected scholars. My own contribution to the theme of theological method, at the Oxford meeting, addressed the question of Anglican theology, indicating some of the historical factors that have contributed to the way Anglicans typically think about their faith.

Image and Likeness of God in the Human Person

Prof. Bogdan Lubardić of the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade, presented a paper at Oxford, a revised version of which has subsequently been published in the *Expository Times*.³ The paper offers, in the words of the author, 'a critical overview of the more recent Orthodox theology of personhood,' looking at the work of Lossky, Yannaras, Zizioulas and, in the West at least, rather less well known figure of Horuzhy. The author identified the essential structures and themes common to several recent Orthodox currents of personalist theological thought, and brought these into dialogue with with each other and with corresponding post-modern perspectives. 'The model of personhood they share is shown to be re-received and specifically reworked by each, not without sparks of mutual critique (...) (with, however a) general tendency is to make the conception of personhood more ecclesially and anthropologically relevant.' Lubardić went on to draw some consequences both practical and theoretical, with an element of meta-level critical reshaping of the tradition and pointing to the emergence of a new theological age anthropologically conceptualized in terms of a more ecclesial-communitarian understanding of our personhood in God.

A corresponding Anglican paper was presented at the Shen Vlash meeting, offering an overview of Anglican understandings of the divine image and likeness in humanity. The article begins by noting Anglican confidence in the real ongoing restoration of the divine image, understood as the work

² K. Ware, 'Catholicity and Nationalism: a recent debate at Athens', *Eastern Churches Review*, x, 1978, pp. 10-16.

³ B. Lubardić, 'Orthodox Theology of Personhood: a critical overview', Part 1, *Expository Times*, August 2011, No. 122, pp. 521-530, Part 2, *Expository Times*, September 2011, No. 122, pp. 573-581.

of the Spirit in the individual, the church community and the created order as a whole. Thus an Anglican anthropology will be closely connected to both ecclesiology and cosmology. Even so, Anglicans tend to be uncomfortable with theological systems, understanding their own church and theology as 'provisional in character', and thus 'open to receiving insights (...) from various traditions.' The writer refers back to the earlier discussion of Anglican theological method, and forward to the discussion of divine *kenosis* and a corresponding human attitude of self-limitation, emphasising the dynamic of process rather than a completed, perfected state. This theme is explored with reference to several 20th century Anglican writers. While patristic sources are foundational to much Anglican discussion of the human person, Lambeth Conference resolutions and local Doctrine Commission reports in several Anglican provinces tend to highlight contemporary social issues as setting the proper context for the discussion of the human being. While the foundations may be patristic, existential questions tend to stand in the foreground, which, of course, invites the positive reassessment of the capacity of the church fathers to offer responses to these. The readiness of Anglicans to draw freely from the wider Christian tradition is illustrated by the final sentiments of the paper, citing the Palestinian Catholic theologian, Elias Chacour: 'the true icon is your neighbour, the human being who has been created in the image and with the likeness of God. How beautiful it is when our eyes are transfigured and we see that our neighbour is the icon of God'. All our best efforts for social justice and equity become joyless and ultimately ineffectual without this simple insight.

The Role of Sacrifice in Understanding Human Personhood

Sacrifice was explored by an Orthodox author as an expression of the human relationship to God. The 'irreversible character of sacrifice', because it involves, in both Israelite Temple worship and pre-Christian Mediterranean cults, a death, expresses the depth of separation from God, and also the voluntary giving up of authority in order to restore a relationship. Sacrifice can be and often was an attempt to manipulate one or more deities to achieve personal goals. Whenever this occurred in the worship of ancient Israel, as we see from the prophetic writings, Israel's God was reduced to the level of a pagan deity and its worship became idolatrous. This occurred in post-exilic Judaism with its increasing emphasis on exact and correct performance of the sacrifices, and it is against this background that Jesus calls people, not to the abandonment of sacrifice as such, but to a renewed and purified understanding and practice of sacrifice. The author noted that in the biblical narrative 'the first act of man after the disruption of his relationship with God is to make clothes for himself (...) to dissociate, that is to

protect himself from his environment'. This point leads naturally to the ecological concern that has also emerged in these discussions as essential to contemporary theological anthropology. The paper goes on to consider the 'divine necessity' of Christ's sacrificial death, which however the church correctly avoids attempting to explain. There is an appropriate incompleteness in our theologies at this point; we can do nothing but fall silent before the mystery of God's self-giving.

The corresponding Anglican paper was subtitled 'sacrifice, salvation and community with particular reference to human limitation.' The author noted 'the paradoxical relationship between self-sacrifice and self-realisation' in the gospel, reflecting the reality that, citing W H Vanstone, 'the *kenosis* of God in Christ reveals who God most truly is.' The anthropological consequence of this is that human personhood is realised not through self-assertion but through renunciation of self-will. This in turn has consequences for human community, as sacrificial self-giving both reflects and creates community. The author underlines this by citing patristic sources common to both our traditions, and a wide range of Anglican writers, emphasising that this reality is true not merely in an immediate, temporal sense, but eschatologically as well: 'our salvation does in some measure depend on that of others' (Matthew Arnold). Power is realised in weakness, and it is a mark of human freedom when we can embrace our limitations. It is thus only when we both face our own limitations and also respond lovingly to the limitations of others that we are empowered to grow into true community and true personhood. The conclusion to the discussion was twofold: that attention to human rights, including the rights of the most excluded, is essential to any discussion of anthropology, and that (citing Christos Yannaras) our ecumenical dialogue requires of us that we step outside the walls of our own ecclesial self-sufficiencies.

Human Dignity and Rights

At the Oxford meeting, Prof. Tim Gorringer, as a visiting speaker offered a paper on Anglican political theology, subsequently the basis for his more generic published article 'Political Theology'.⁴ Gorringer identified three strands in Anglican political thinking: a 'magisterial' strand, originating from Richard Hooker (1554-1600); a deist, civic religion strand, originating from John Locke (1632-1704); and a third, Christian socialist strand, based in the thought of B F Westcott (1825-1901) and others. Gorringer's contribution was supplemented by a further Anglican presentation by the

⁴ T. Gorringer, Political Theology, *Expository Times*, June 2011, No. 122, pp. 417-424.

Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, on the thought, especially the political thought, of Richard Hooker as a source for Anglican theological anthropology. Dr Williams emphasized the themes of sociability in Hooker's understanding of the human person, and the affective elements in reason, seeing these as formative themes for Anglicanism.

Also at the Oxford meeting, an Orthodox delegate offered a paper on 'two meanings of freedom in the eastern patristic tradition', distinguishing the discrete associations of the terms *eleutheria* and *autexousia*. This was later developed in a subsequent paper at Shen Vlash, in the direction of a practical examination of human dignity, freedom and rights. The expanded version made particular reference to the Russian Patriarchate's policy documents 'Basis of the Social Concept' and the more recent 'Basic Teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights'.⁵ The paper argues that *eleutheria* builds on but also goes beyond *autexousia*. Human rights, properly understood, arise out of the higher notion of freedom, and must be built upon it for a solid theological basis.

Corresponding to this was an Anglican paper on human rights. The paper began by citing the Archbishop of Canterbury's recent lecture on human rights to the London School of Economics,⁶ offering a specifically Christian grounding for what might otherwise be a purely secular movement. The author continued by defining human rights (following Nicholas Wolterstorff) as 'claims to guarantees against threats' and as 'legitimate claim(s) for protection'. The author then traced the theological roots of this notion from the legal code of Justinian (534 AD) through the middle ages and into the modern era, highlighting the figure of Richard Hooker as a central Anglican thinker within this tradition, and returning to Rowan Williams' own emphasis on the integrity of the human body as a theological and practical touchstone of human rights discourse. The conclusion: theology must inform the conversation about human rights, and conversely, the conversation about human rights must also inform our theological anthropology.

⁵ <http://www.mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights/>
(accessed 28/9/2011).

⁶ <http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1161/archbishop>
(accessed 28/9/2011).

The Human Person within God's Creation

The Oxford meeting heard an Orthodox paper titled 'Human responsibility for creation: a critical overview of recent statements of the Orthodox Church', documenting the emergence of ecological themes in Orthodox theology over the past twenty years. Impetus to this movement has most notably been given by the present Ecumenical Patriarch, His All Holiness Bartholomew. The paper outlined three prominent themes in contemporary Orthodox ecological thinking: the cosmic liturgy, the human person as priest of creation, and the ascetic vision of freedom from selfishness. The paper began and ended with the point that ecological action needs to begin with personal transformation: 'Before we can effectively deal with the ecological problem we have to change our world image, and this in turn means we have to change our self-image. Any change in our outward action, if it is to have lasting results, must be based in our inner attitude.' The Orthodox paper on this theme presented at the Oxford meeting was substantially revised for re-presentation at Shen Vlash, and was supplemented by an extensive bibliography of contemporary Orthodox writings in ecological theology.

The corresponding Anglican paper was presented at the Shen Vlash meeting. Addressing the question of 'Human responsibility for creation', the author contrasted what she saw as a weak doctrine of creation in the earlier Anglican formularies to the 'spirit of serene and undisturbed devotion' in the 17th century Book of Common Prayer. It is this more self-assured attitude, combined with an ongoing engagement with the patristic tradition, that has shaped and continues to shape the best in Anglican thinking. This finds expression in many of the English poets and some notable 20th century Anglican theologians. The paper concludes with two significant points. First, ecological concern, often seen as a function of Christian mission and therefore of the church's apostolicity, might better be thought of as emerging from the second of the *notae ecclesiae*, that of holiness. This would implicitly ground ecological concern in Christian self-discipline (*askesis*) and self-restraint (*enkrateia*), points made by several other participants. Second, because of the immediacy and urgency of ecological concern, and because this is a theme not overly burdened by past disputes, ecology may become a locus for real, practical as well as theoretical convergence in our theologies and church practices. The Anglican paper was also supplemented by an extensive bibliography.

Discussion and Plans for the Future

Discussion of the themes raised by these papers ranged widely over matters concerning the origins, the present condition and the eschatological future of humanity. Participants were urged by an Orthodox member to look for the sources of theological anthropology in the practical, ascetic or neptic (*neptike*) writings, and, by members from both traditions, in conciliar decisions and official statements rather than individual theologians. The body was seen as essential to what it is to be human in both traditions, with warnings given against the dualism of body and soul in some western moral theologies, and against the individualistic conceptualisation of the human person. Moral theology is to be based not on rules but on persons. It was noted by an Orthodox member that 'soul', especially in the early patristic writings, often means what we would call 'person' in a holistic notion of human personhood. The same participant pointed out that there is no 'natural man' in the biblical sources to which relationship with God can be later appended. The human person is called into personhood, in God. Participants from both traditions agreed on the fundamental provisionality of our self-understandings, and our understandings of the human person. An Anglican participant was able to offer the insight that 'be fruitful and multiply' in Genesis 1: 28 can be read in a non-imperialist sense, as a statement against the repression of some humans by others. It is, in other words, about human flourishing. Both groups acknowledged obscuring (*amaurosis*) of the divine image (rather than its total loss) within our present human condition, making it easy to sin, harder to do good. An Orthodox participant described this not so much as a fall from original perfection, but rather as a failure to grow from a childlike state.

The *kenosis* of God both in creation and incarnation was seen by participants from both traditions as drawing out a corresponding human response of ascetic self-limitation (*enkrateia*). Self-limitation (or consciousness of our lack of self-sufficiency) was seen as essential to our fullness as human beings. There was some discussion of the dialogue between religion and the natural sciences, especially in relation to self-limitation as an ecological, and possibly even as a cosmological theme. Politically, *kenosis* represents a redefining of power and how it is exercised, but with the observation also of the need for proper self-assertion for life to continue.

Soteriologically, both traditions contain acknowledgements of the incarnation as God's plan from all eternity. A soteriology of 'satisfaction' is viewed by the Orthodox as biblical but not to be used in isolation from other sote-

riological models, which guard against an overly legalist or moralist interpretation of the former. Evangelical Anglicans see satisfaction as an expression of God's anger at, and refusal to minimise the significance of radical evil. This led into the discussion of sacrifice, in which the Orthodox councils of Constantinople in 1156 and 1157 were invoked. These councils ruled out certain false understandings of Christ's sacrifice, in terms that Anglicans would find familiar.

Both groups saw the need to view the human being in the context of human society, on the grounds that God is always present even when not named or acknowledged. Both traditions take seriously their responsibility for civic life, with Church and State meeting in dialogue for human rights or human dignity to be upheld. The State must be defended from the tendency to theocracy, and the Church must be allowed its freedom within the State. Here we also see some practical implications of the distinction between freedom as *autexousia* and as *eleutheria* which in turn can be seen to correspond to the distinction between image and likeness.

Both traditions were found to make liturgical reference to God's presence in nature, expressing the translucence of nature to God's presence in the world. Discussion touched occasionally on the dialogue between religion and the natural sciences, a circulated text by Anestis Keselopoulos noting, among other things, that a theology of divine intervention can become a form of idolatry, if it sees God's action as a force of nature, thus confusing divine energy with created energy.⁷ Underscoring a motif that was present previously, human self-restraint was advocated by members of both traditions as an important contemporary ecological virtue.

Meetings of the Commission are planned to be held in Wales (2012) and Serbia (2013). Proposed for discussion at these coming meetings are the themes, considered from the perspectives of both Anglican and Orthodox perspectives, of nature and grace, and possibly the role of law in relation to these. Other themes still to be explored include ethical questions concerning gender, the beginning and end of life, conflict, agricultural practice and technology in general.⁸

⁷ A. Keselopoulos, *Man and the Environment* (NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 36.

⁸ I would like to acknowledge with gratitude the collaboration of Prof. Bogdan Lubardić, who read this paper in draft form and offered a number of valuable comments and corrections.