

2011.05.03

The Human Person: Sacrifice, Salvation and Community with particular reference to human limitation. *John Stroyan*

Preface

‘Church of England doctrine is grounded in the Holy Scriptures and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures.’

Canon A5, Canons of the Church of England.

‘The mind of the Fathers, their theological method, their terminology and modes of expression have a lasting importance in both the Orthodox and the Anglican Churches.’

The Dublin Agreed Statement 1984 III.10 (ii)

‘The Church of England is no new invention but the outcome of a restoration of the historic faith of the Church confirmed by the words of Christ, by the writings of the apostles, by the testimonies of the Catholic fathers and by the example of many ages.’

Apology of the Church of England. 1564. John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury.

In this paper I seek to build, where possible, on the biblical and patristic heritage shared by both Anglican and Orthodox, and also on the work of the theological Commissions which culminated in the Agreed Statements of Moscow (1976), Dublin (1984) and Cyprus (2006). But beyond this, though most sources quoted are of Anglican provenance, I draw also from both ancient and modern, eastern and western sources in the belief, to coin a phrase, that ‘the Church needs to breathe with both her lungs’ and that this indeed is an undergirding – if not always conscious – premise of our dialogue. I would borrow from Merton on this, ‘If I can unite in myself the thought and devotion of Eastern and Western Christendom, the Greek and the Latin Fathers, the Russians with the Spanish mystics, I can prepare in myself the reunion of divided Christians.’¹ This I believe to be in keeping with the self-understanding of the Church of England as ‘*part of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church*’².

¹ Thomas Merton *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Sheldon Press London 1977, cited by A.M. Allchin *The Worship of the whole Creation: Merton and the Eastern Fathers, Merton and Hesychasm*, 104.

² Preface to the Church of England Declaration of Assent.

'Christ is the supreme manifestation of Personhood.'³

'The humanity of Christ constituted by the Spirit has anthropological consequences.'⁴

In the 1967 Bampton Lectures on *The Glory of Man*, David Jenkins asserts, 'In reality man is the image of God and depends for the fulfilment of his humanity on the personal and transcendent reality of God'⁵. He goes on: 'Jesus is the definition and declaration of the reality of Man.'⁶ If true humanity, 'life in all its fullness' (John 10.10) is both discovered and realised in Christ, if Christian anthropology is properly located within the framework of Christology, what inferences could and should be drawn from the sacrifice of God in Christ for the nature and purpose of humanity? Does the cruciformity of Christ imply the cruciformity of human life? What are the implications of the self-emptying (ἐκένωσεν) of God in Christ (Phil 2.5) for human identity and discipleship? What part does sacrifice play in the formation of human life and community?

In this paper we notice and explore the paradoxical relationship between self-sacrifice and self-realisation which is epitomised in the Gospel call 'to lose one's life to find it.' The teaching of Jesus and the writings of Paul express the *paschal* dimension of Christian life and witness unequivocally. 'If any want to become my disciples let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' (Matthew 16.24-25)⁷. St Paul writes 'I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.' (Gal 2.20) 'For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.' (2 Cor 4.11) 'Dying, we live...' (2 Cor 6.9)

Outside the Monastery of St Paul on Mount Athos are the words: 'Unless you die before you die, you will die when you die.' True humanity is revealed and realised through this self-giving or dying. As Anglicans and Orthodox together recognise, 'the new humanity is dependent on a power that achieves its end by sacrifice.'⁸

In what the Pauline scholar Dr Paula Gooder considers to be amongst the clearest examples of applied theology in Paul's writing – the hymn of the crucified Lord (Phil 2.6-11) – Paul is clear that Christian life and living *is* to reflect the mind and life of Christ. 'Let *the same mind* (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε) be in you that was in Christ Jesus who ...' (Phil 2.5) The kenosis of God in Christ 'who *emptied himself* (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) taking the form of a slave' is to be the pattern for Christian living. This identification with the dying and rising of Christ is both expressed and made possible in the liturgical life of the Church as we will see. It is also recognised and sung by hymnodists and poets. As in Philippians 2, humiliation becomes the place of exaltation. The one in whom – or even *by* whom – we are humbled is the one who will raise us up. As Hosea calls the people, 'come let us return to the Lord; for it is he who has torn and he will heal us' (Hos 6.1) The paschal language becomes clearer still: 'After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.' (Hos 6.2)

³ Church of the Triune God II.19, p 30

⁴ Church of the Triune God II.28, p33

⁵ David Jenkins *The Glory of Man* SCM-Canterbury Press Ltd. 1967 p84

⁶ Ibid. p80

⁷ See also Mark 8.34, Luke 9.23.

⁸ Church of the Triune God II.37, p35; see also Church of the Triune God I.8, p14

George Herbert, Anglican priest and poet (1593-1633), exclaims: 'These are thy wonders O Lord of Power/ Killing and quickening/ Bringing down to hell/ And up to heaven in an hour.'⁹ Thomas Traherne, also an Anglican priest poet (1637-1674), writes 'Teach me O Lord those mysterious ascensions, by descending into hell for the sake of others, let me ascend into the glory of the highest heavens.'¹⁰ Charles Wesley locates Christian life and identity even more firmly within the life of Christ, crucified, risen and ascended: 'We in thy birth are born/sustain thy grief, thy loss/ share in thy want and shame and scorn/ and die upon thy cross.' 'Made like him, like him we rise/ Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies.'¹¹

This identification of Christian life with the life, death and resurrection of Christ is expressed in a similar vein by Abba Isaiah of Scetis (early 5th cent. Palestine). 'Blessed therefore is the person who is crucified, dead, buried and risen in newness when he sees himself in the natural condition of Jesus following his holy footsteps.'¹² Being identified with the one who both emptied himself and '*humbled himself* and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross' (Phil 2.8) involves a necessary humiliation. John Donne, poet and Dean of St Paul's Cathedral (1572-1631), whose mindfulness of death led him on occasion to sleep in his coffin, wrote, 'Humiliation is the beginning of sanctification, and as without this, without holiness, no man shall see God. Without humility no man shall hear God speak to his soule. But if God bring thee to that humiliation of soule and body here, he will improve and advance thy sanctification *abundantius*.'¹³

To be conformed to Christ crucified (Gal 2.20) is to enter into the self-emptying and humiliation of Christ. It is, as Kenneth Leech puts it, 'to be one who is *grafted into the organism of the crucified God*. To be a Christian is to be part of a *passion-centred* community'.¹⁴ Lossky draws a direct analogy between the kenosis of Christ and the fulfilment of human personhood. 'The perfection of the person consists in self-abandonment, the person expresses itself most truly in that it renounces to exist for itself. It is the self-emptying of the Person of the Son, the Divine kenosis.'¹⁵ He continues: "'The entire mystery of economy" – said St Cyril of Alexandria – "consists in the self-emptying and abasement of the Son of God"¹⁶.

⁹ J Tobin *George Herbert, The Complete English Poems* Penguin 1991 p156

¹⁰ Thomas Traherne *Centuries of Meditations*, First Century, 90. New York 2007, p66

¹¹ *John and Charles Wesley* ed. Whaley, New York 1998, pp267-8, p285

¹² Abba Isaiah. *Ascetic Discourses 18. Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002, ch.5. John Chryssagvis '*The Practical Way of Holiness*' p93

¹³ Evelyn Simpson, *John Donne, Selected Prose*, 1967, p362 quoted in Moorman *The Anglican Spiritual Tradition* Darton, Longman and Todd 1983, p89

¹⁴ Kenneth Leech, *True God*, Sheldon, London, 1985, p316, my italics

¹⁵ V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, James Clarke & Co. Ltd, Cambridge 1983, p144

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p144

Kenosis

'He emptied himself (ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) taking the form of a slave' (Phil. 2.7)

Christ who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake.... became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.' (2 Cor 8.9)

Though the language of kenosis (ἐκένωσεν) is biblical (Phil. 2.7) and deployed readily by theologians of east and west, its implications and significance for the doctrine of God are more contended. For Cyril, 'He who is from above and is by nature the only begotten Son of the Father emptied himself and was brought forth from a virginal womb.'¹⁷ 'It was of his own accord out of love for us that he accepted the self-emptying and persevered with it. That is to say he humiliated himself voluntarily, not as a result of any compulsion. He humbled himself willingly for our sake.'¹⁸

For Cyril, however, the condescension of God in Christ, the Word made flesh (John 1.14), does not and cannot imply any change in God. The human is changed by the divine, but the divine nature is not changed by the human. There is no question of the Logos becoming passible and thereby losing its divine ontological status. 'It is not that the Logos suffered in his own nature being overcome by stripes or nail-piercing or any other injuries; for the divine, since it is incorporeal, is impassible.' Rather it was that 'the impassible one was within the suffering body.'¹⁹ For Gregory of Nyssa, however, although the *divine* nature cannot be changed, the *human* nature in Christ is changed and purified progressively through the lifetime, death and resurrection of Christ. 'Since the human is changeable, while the divine is unchangeable, the divinity is unmoveable with respect to change, neither varying for the better nor for the worse (for it cannot take into itself the worse and there is nothing better); but human nature in Christ undergoes change toward the better, being altered from corruption to incorruption, from the perishable to the imperishable, from the short-lived to the eternal; from the bodily and formal to what is without body or form.'²⁰ Some Kenoticists on the other hand argue that the incarnation – ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο (John 1.14) – meant more than a symbolic drawing alongside of the divine to the human nature but an actual ontological entering into the frailty (σάρξ) of human life. This indeed is what gives the incarnation its peculiar power and significance. As William Temple put it, 'The Word did not merely indwell a human being. Absolute identity is asserted. The whole of Him, flesh included is the Word, the self-utterance of God.'²¹ The apparent incompatibility between Chalcedon and more modern kenotic theology is partially mitigated by the *voluntary* dimension, God *choosing* to 'empty himself', or 'pour himself out' – both are possible translations of 'ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν'.

Equally some kenoticists would argue that what was given up in the incarnation is not divinity but some of the divine *attributes* or even simply the *use* of the divine attributes. The language of Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises* perhaps goes some way in honouring and embracing the paradox of Jesus' full divinity and full humanity. He invites his spiritual directees when meditating on

¹⁷ Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary on Isaiah*, Isaiah 1.4., London and New York, 2000, p83

¹⁸ Ibid. Commentary on John 11.9. 'The Unity of Christians' p125/6

¹⁹ *Second Letter to Nestorius*, q. in *Exploring Kenotic Christology*, ed. Stephen Davis, Regent, Vancouver, 2006, p253

²⁰ GNO 111/1, 223, trans. Brian Daley SJ *Heavenly Man and Eternal Christ "Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Saviour"*; *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 10, 2002, 469-88, at 480-1

²¹ William Temple *Readings in John's Gospel*, Macmillan 1945, p13

the passion of Christ 'to consider how *the divine nature goes into hiding*, how Christ does not destroy His enemies although He could do so, but allows Himself in His sacred human nature to suffer most cruelly.'²² Viewed from this perspective, the kenosis of Christ need not in any way undermine his divinity but on the contrary can serve precisely to illuminate it. Indeed Christ's 'equality with God' (Phil 2.6) far from being obscured by his kenosis can be revealed most truly *in it*. As Vanstone puts it 'the kenosis of Christ so far from impairing the fullness of His disclosure of God, will in fact contain the very heart of that disclosure.'²³ Similarly Rahner writes 'God expresses himself precisely if he empties himself. He discloses himself as love if he conceals the majesty of his love and manifests himself in the ordinariness of man.'²⁴ In response to the question 'how can Jesus' divine nature remain fully divine if "emptied" or "poured out"?', Vanstone argues that God's love overflows in self-giving from an abundance not from emptiness nor from need. In the economy of the Divine Life, sacrificial self-giving never diminishes the giver. Fr John Jillions, writing on St Mother Maria Skobtsova affirms this gospel message²⁵. 'Christ's self-emptying sacrifice in no way diminishes his divinity or his love, just as in the Eucharist, the Lamb is 'ever divided, yet never disunited, ever eaten but never consumed.'²⁶

Kenosis in Creation

If, as Michael Ramsey posits, 'God is as he is in Christ and in him is no unChristlikeness at all'²⁷, then the kenosis of the Redeemer points us to the kenosis of the Creator. This kenotic sacrificial love characterises God before during and after the Incarnation of Christ (ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, John 1.14). God, the omnipotent one finds fulfilment in self-limitation 'in the creative act itself God in some manner limits himself, withdraws to give human beings space in which to be free.'²⁸ Jesus Christ, the Logos, is 'The Lamb of God slain from the creation of the world' (Rev 13.8). Or, as David Jenkins puts it, 'The Logos of the Cosmos is not a mythological theory but a crucified man.'²⁹ We see God's voluntary self-limitation in his dealings with his people before the Incarnation where God chooses to reveal himself in a particular time, in a particular place and in a particular way. In the *shekinah*, as Moltmann argues, the eternal infinite God whom even the heavens cannot contain 'comes down'

(Ex 3.8) so as to dwell among his powerless little people. God leads his people from slavery in Egypt by "the pillar of cloud by day" and "the pillar of fire by night".³⁰ He was present too most particularly in the Ark of the Covenant and later in the Holy of Holies in the Temple.

It is interesting to note in passing how in the world of astrophysics, in describing how things came to be, we find the language of death or 'collapse' – as in the collapse of a star – spawning new life too. In the inevitable language of metaphor, 'God contracts himself in order to go outside of himself', and

²² Ignatius of Loyola *Personal Writings* Penguin 1996 p321-2, my italics

²³ WH Vanstone *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense*, London 1977, p58

²⁴ K. Rahner *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. W.V. Dycck, Darton, Longman and Todd 1978, p217

²⁵ *Matt 16.24, Mark 8.34, Luke 9.23*

²⁶ *Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Theology*, ed. Cunningham and Theokritoff, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p28/9

²⁷ Michael Ramsey, quoted in John V Taylor *The Christlike God*, SCM 1992, Opening page, unnumbered.

²⁸ Olivier Clément *On Human Being* New City, London, 2000, p37

²⁹ *Ibid.* p89

³⁰ *The Work of Love* ed. John Polkinghorne SPCK 2001, ch.8. J.Moltmann *God's Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World*, p142

in the Biblical language of Paul 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.' (2 Cor 8.9) A.M. Allchin draws together some of these strands and concludes 'the self-emptying obedience of the Son is showing the *ultimate character of all true being*.'³¹

Anthropological Consequences

Humanity shaped by God's Spirit is defined by the humanity of Jesus and him crucified. (1 Cor 2.2) The new humanity is dependent on a power that achieves its end by sacrifice.³²

'True humanity is most clearly seen in self-emptying kenotic love, the love expressed most profoundly in the person of Jesus Christ. Human beings are created to love and be loved as Jesus loved.'³³

These two agreed ecumenical statements, of different provenance but theologically consonant one with the other, underline that human personhood is realised not through the fulfilment of selfishness but through the renunciation of self-will, the gospel call to lose our lives so that we might find them.³⁴ To partake in the divine life is to be united with Jesus in his passion, death, resurrection and ascension. Suffering and glory are inextricably entwined in kenotic life and living. As F.W. Dillistone writes, 'To be united with Jesus in the process of self-emptying and humble service even to the limit of suffering and death is to share His glory already and to be assured of entering at length into the glory which Jesus shared with the Father from the foundation of the world.'³⁵ In more Orthodox language this relationship between renunciation and glory, between asceticism and *theosis* in becoming fully human, is expressed by Lossky: 'the human hypostasis can only realise itself by renunciation of its own will'³⁶, and by Fr Sophrony: 'The grace of God and man's asceticism activate the hypostatic principle'.³⁷

This 'cruciformity' of life is to be characteristic not simply of each baptised Christian but of the Church herself. As CTG affirms 'In every aspect of its life the Church reflects the life of God. Informed by the life and work of God in the baptismal and Eucharistic liturgy, the Church always seeks to die and be raised again.'³⁸ The sacramental life of the Church both reflects and enables this paschal living. 'Baptism in the name of the Trinity is an initiation into this eschatological community through identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus. (Romans 6.4)'³⁹

In the Eucharist, Catholics and Anglicans together affirm that 'we are entering into the movement of his self-offering'⁴⁰ and in the Eucharist Anglicans affirm that 'Christians are united sacramentally

³¹ *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* ed. A. Hastings Oxford 2000, A.M. Allchin *Kenosis*, my italics, p367

³² *Church of the Triune God* II.35, p37

³³ *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology: Faith and Order* Paper 199, WCC p16/17

³⁴ *Matt.16.24, Mark 8.34, Luke 9.23.*

³⁵ F.W. Dillistone *The Christian Understanding of Atonement*, SCM 1984, p319

³⁶ *Ibid.* p122

³⁷ Sophrony *We Shall See Him as He Is*, Monastery of St John the Baptist, Essex p205

³⁸ *Church of the Triune God* I.9.p15

³⁹ *Church of the Triune God* IV.17.

⁴⁰ ARCIC 1978

through the Holy Spirit with Christ's perfect self-offering or sacrifice to the Father.'⁴¹ As Archbishop Rowan Williams puts it we are to be 'conformed to the Eucharistic self-giving of Christ'.⁴² 'And here we offer unto thee O Lord our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice unto thee'⁴³, and 'we still need to say that the moment of relinquishing what is ours is crucial in the Eucharistic process.'⁴⁴ Such a view embraces and elaborates that which was agreed in the Dublin Agreed Statement, namely: 'The Eucharist is anamnesis and *participation* in the death and resurrection of Christ.'⁴⁵ Dom Gregory Dix, finding and rooting human identity in its liturgical expression is able to posit a Christian anthropology in terms of '*Homo Eucharisticus*'.⁴⁶

Community

Those who believe and are baptised form one body in Christ, and are members one of another, united by the Holy Spirit. Within the Body each member suffers and rejoices with the others, and in each member the Holy Spirit intercedes for the whole.⁴⁷

The Person exists not in possession of its own nature and in opposition to others but in giving itself wholly into the life of others.⁴⁸

Between being and becoming there is communing.⁴⁹

This kenotic Eucharistic life is expressed through worship of God and is revealed and authenticated in love of neighbour. 'We know that we have passed from death to life when we love the brethren.' (1 John 3.14) 'We know love by this that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.' (1 John 3.16) This sacrificial self-giving both reflects and creates *κοινωνία* in which 'if one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.' (1 Cor 12.26) This sense of belonging as 'members one of another' (Eph 4.24) is emphasised by Anthony of Egypt. 'Our perdition is from our neighbour, and our life also from our neighbour... We are all of one substance and members one of another. For he who loves his neighbour loves God: and he who loves God, loves his own soul.'⁵⁰

Centuries later, in similar vein William Tyndale writes 'To thy neighbour thou owest thine heart, thyself and all that thou hast and can do.'⁵¹ Matthew Arnold, writing on Bishop Wilson, 18th century Bishop of Sodor and Man, alludes to this corporate dimension of Christian life, and even salvation: 'Individual perfection is impossible so long as the rest of mankind are not perfected along with us. "It

⁴¹ *The Eucharist, Sacrament of Unity*, London, Church House, 2001, p95

⁴² Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd 1979, p9

⁴³ Book of Common Prayer, The Communion.

⁴⁴ R. Williams *Resurrection*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd 1982, p111

⁴⁵ *Dublin Agreed Statement* 1984 III.58

⁴⁶ Dom Gregory Dix *The Shape of the Liturgy*, AC Black London, 1982, Introduction, p.xix

⁴⁷ *Dublin Agreed Statement* 1984. II.67 p34

⁴⁸ *Church of the Triune God* 2006 I.4 p 13

⁴⁹ Nicholas Ludovikos: *Eucharistic Ontology*, Athens, 1992, p260

⁵⁰ *The Letters of Saint Anthony the Great* trans. Derwas J Chitty SLG Press Oxford 1975, pps 20,22

⁵¹ *Love's Redeeming Work* Compiled by Rowell, Stevenson and Williams, OUP Oxford 2003, p36

is not” says he [Bp. Wilson] “so much in our neighbour’s interest that we love him, but ours”. Again he says “our salvation does in some measure depend on that of others.”⁵²

This deep solidarity with the life of our neighbour is emphasised especially in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. ‘It is the whole of human nature, extending from the beginning to the end (of history) that constitutes the one image of him who is.’⁵³ ‘To say that there are ‘many human beings’ is a common abuse of language. Granted there is a plurality of those who share in the same human nature, *but in all of them humanity is one.*’⁵⁴

The relationship of our salvation to that of others is expressed succinctly by St Silouan: ‘The suffering of the other is my suffering, my neighbour’s healing is my healing, my brother’s glory will be my glory’⁵⁵, and ‘Blessed is the soul that loves her brother for our brother is our life.’⁵⁶ As Metropolitan Kallistos of Diokleia points out, Khomiakov goes further still. ‘No one is saved alone.’⁵⁷

This depth of communion is a gift of the Holy Spirit which enables this self-giving. ‘By being communion (κοινωνία) the Holy Spirit transcends the boundaries of self and subjectivity and enables humanity to reach out and meet the other’.⁵⁸ This self-giving enabled by the Holy Spirit is the expression and the fruit of God’s love, agape (ἀγάπη), creating communion. Anthony Thiselton, reflecting on the dynamics at play amongst the Christians in Corinth where some asserted their own status over others, writes: ‘Virtually every action and stance bears some relationship to the power interests of the self or to one’s own peer group, and in recentering them in the other – primarily in God but also in the other person. Genuine love alone decentres these power interests of the self and, through recentering in God and in the other, disengages from self-interest.’⁵⁹

Personhood is inescapably relational, rooted in the relational life of the Trinity. As Fr. Benson, founder of the Society of St John the Evangelist (*The Cowley Fathers*) wrote: ‘The whole of thy life must be a relative life. Man is created as a social being. As the three Divine Persons have no life whatsoever except in the relativity of action so we have no life whatsoever except in relative action towards others. It is the law of our nature that our life is personal, relative communicating all that it has. It is the law under which the Christian church, the Body of Christ is constituted.’⁶⁰

For Yannaras, ‘Personhood’ is not a quality of human nature in or of itself but derives only from relationship in and with one another and God. ‘Humans can image the life of the Trinity only in community, specifically the ecclesial community.’⁶¹ For St Paul, Christian identity is to be found and

⁵² Matthew Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*, ed. J Dover Wilson, Cambridge 1932 p4

⁵³ Gregory of Nyssa: *On the Creation of Man*, 16(PG44,183) quoted in Olivier Clément *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City London, 1993, p82

⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa *That There Are Not Three Gods* (PG 45,117), q. in Clément Ibid. p82

⁵⁵ Kallistos of Diokleia *Salvation According to St Silouan*, Sobornost 19.1. p46

⁵⁶ Archimandrite Sophrony *St Silouan the Athonite*, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, New York 1999, p371

⁵⁷ Kallistos *Salvation According to St Silouan*, Sobornost 19.1. p46

⁵⁸ Church of the Triune God II.31, p33

⁵⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek Text*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company 2000, p1055

⁶⁰ SSJE MS.viii 156

⁶¹ *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* ed. Cunningham and Theokritoff, ch.15 Aristotle Papanikolaou: *Personhood and Its Exponents* Cambridge University Press 2008, p236

made real 'in Christ' (ἐν Χριστῷ), an epithet used some 55 times in the letters ascribed to him. As Anglicans and Orthodox we can affirm that both each of us and all of us become who we are all called to be 'in Christ' (ἐν Χριστῷ). As CTG affirms, 'We need to recover our understanding of Christ as a Person who includes us in himself, who is 'one' and 'many' at the same time.'⁶²

Human Limitation

Rejoice every time you discover a new imperfection⁶³

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

(2 Cor 12.10)

The union of believers with Jesus is a union of vulnerability, 'if we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him'. (Rom 8.17)⁶⁴

We have this treasure in jars of clay so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2 Cor 4.7)

Liberty is bound up with imperfection, and... limitations, imperfections, errors are not only unavoidable but also salutary.⁶⁵

True Christian life and community in some measure depends upon the knowledge of our insufficiency without God and one another (2 Cor 3.5.). The doorway to blessing, Jesus teaches, is not human righteousness, strength or success, but rather want, poverty of spirit and insufficiency (Matt 5.1-11. Luke 6.20-26). God reveals his closeness to the broken. 'The sacrifice of God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.' (Ps 51.17)⁶⁶ Weakness for Paul is the place of encounter with God. (2 Cor 12.9) He goes further to describe the daily afflictions and dyings as the means by which the Spirit works 'transforming us from one degree of glory to another'. (2 Cor 3.18) Human limitation, weakness and insufficiency, far from being hindrances to salvation, are, if owned and acknowledged, the necessary basis for it. Without the humility that this recognition entails, humanity cannot discover the grace and mercy of God. Human frailty is part of the divine economy which leads us to see our need of God and so prepares us to receive his mercy and grace. As Mother Julian of Norwich wrote in 1373 during a severe illness in which she received her 'shewings' or 'Revelations of Divine Love': 'We need to fall and to see that we have fallen. For if we never fell we should not know how weak and pitiable we are in ourselves. Nor should we know the wonderful love of our maker.'⁶⁷

In *The Book of Homilies* (authorized sermons to be read out in the parish churches of England in the 16th century) we read, 'Let us learn to know ourselves, our frailty and weakness without any cracking or boasting of our own good deeds and merits' and 'So we learn of all good men in Holy Scripture to

⁶² *Church of the Triune God* II.39 p36

⁶³ Jean Pierre de Caussade: *Lettres Spirituelles*, Vol.1.Paris 1964, ed. Michel Olphe-Galliard

⁶⁴ *Church of the Triune God* II.35. p37

⁶⁵ Thomas Merton *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* Sheldon Press London 1977, p93

⁶⁶ See also Is. 57.15; Is. 61.1; Luke 4.18.

⁶⁷ Julian of Norwich: *Revelations of Divine Love*, ch.61, p.37

humble ourselves and to exalt, extol, praise, magnify and glorify God'.⁶⁸ Richard Baxter (1615–1691) in *The Reformed Pastor* enjoins the clergy: 'Our whole work must be carried on in a sense of our insufficiency and in a pious believing dependence upon Christ. Ministers have need of one another and must improve the gift of God in one another; and the self-sufficient are the most deficient, and commonly proud and empty men.'⁶⁹ As John Climacus writes, 'Let us with great confidence offer to Christ our spiritual weakness and impotence; let us confess them before him. He will help us irrespective of what we deserve on the sole condition that we descend continually to the bottom, into the abyss of humility.'⁷⁰

Humanity's insufficiency without God, bringing as it does both humility and longing, is held within God's redeeming purposes evoking his transforming power. Fr. Benson writes, 'The Spirit accommodates Himself to our littleness that we might respond to His greatness: we must know the pain of expansion... we are stretched indeed not on the rack of human torture but on the glorious being of the Holy Ghost.'⁷¹

Longing

As the deer longs for flowing streams so longs my soul for you, O God. Ps 42.1.

Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee.

St Augustine

God doth not want a perfect work only an infinite desire. St Catherine of Siena

To recognise and embrace our human limitation is a mark of human freedom. Indeed Zizioulas defines freedom 'as the capacity of man to embrace fully his incapacity, that is as his ability to turn weakness into strength or rather to realize his power in weakness.'⁷² Knowledge of our 'lack' leads to our longing. The recognition of human incapacity or 'lack' or 'want' is thus seen as a gift of God drawing us Godwards. It is the thirst that draws us to the One who makes us whole. Hooker quotes Augustine with approval: 'The longing disposition of the thirst is changed into the sweet affection of them that taste and are replenished.'⁷³ For Thomas Traherne, Anglican priest and poet (1637-1674), this 'want' embraces two meanings, that is, both 'lack' and 'desire'. 'From eternity it was requisite that we should want, our own wants are treasures.'⁷⁴ 'Be present with your want of a Deity and you shall be present with the Deity.'⁷⁵ The longing for God comes from God and leads to God. St Anselm (1033-1109) prays to Christ 'Give me what you have made me want... and grant me what you have made me long for.'⁷⁶ Pusey writes to a spiritual directee 'You, I hope are ripening continually. God says to you 'Open thy mouth and I will fill it'. *Only long*. He does not want our words. The parched

⁶⁸ *The Homilies: 'Of the Misery of all Mankind'* ed. John Griffiths, Regent College Publishing, Vancouver, 2008, p16

⁶⁹ *Celebrating the Saints* SCM 1988 p134

⁷⁰ John Climacus *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 1st Step. 17 (21) p16

⁷¹ *Benson of Cowley* ed. Martin Smith SSJE, OUP 1980, p107

⁷² John Zizioulas *Communion & Otherness* T&T Clark 2006 p249

⁷³ Richard Hooker *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, in Works ed. John Keble 1836. Vol. 1. 1xii3

⁷⁴ Thomas Traherne *Centuries*, Cosimo New York 2007, Century 51, p33

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* Century 45, p30

⁷⁶ *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Benedicta Ward, Penguin, London, pp93,94

soil by its cracks, opens itself for the rain from heaven and invites it. The parched soil cries out to the living God. Oh then long and long and long, and God will fill thee.⁷⁷

Just as to know our need of God is to open the door to knowing God, so knowing God is to make us more aware continually of our need to know God more and actually to *increase* our sense of limitation or insufficiency. Experience of God does not so much satisfy the hunger for God as increase it. Thus limitation and recognition of limitation with the hunger and the reaching out to God that it evokes is precisely within the economy of God who is always drawing closer us to Himself. This is the 'want' of a Deity that leads to the presence of the Deity of which Traherne speaks. Gregory of Nyssa illuminates this 'It always seems to the soul as though it is only at the beginning of the ascent. That is why the Lord repeats, 'Arise' to one who is already arisen; 'Come' to the one who has already come. He who truly rises will always have to rise; there will always be a great distance to run for him who is running towards the Lord. Thus he who climbs can never cease from climbing, going from fresh beginning to fresh beginning – beginnings which never have an end.'⁷⁸

Human Limitation and Community

The eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of you. On the contrary the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable. 1 Cor 12.23

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not to reduce to nothing the things that are, so that no-one might boast in the presence of God. 1 Cor 1. 28-9

As the worldwide *L'Arche* communities – and their advocates⁷⁹ – have been reminding us, we need both to face our own limitations and to respond in love to those of others in order to grow into true Personhood and for true community to emerge and grow among us. The fellowship of the Holy Spirit is one in which each person is released both to love and to be loved, to minister and to be ministered unto. When Peter resists having his feet washed by Jesus, Jesus responds 'Unless I wash you, you have no share in me' (John 13.8) This vulnerability becomes a means for the building of true community in which all are called both to minister and to be ministered unto. In this context Jean Vanier writes 'Weakness carries within it a secret power. The cry and the trust that flow from weakness can open up hearts.'⁸⁰ In similar vein, Hauerwas observes 'Our neediness is also the source of our greatest strength, for our need requires the co-operation and love of others from which derives our ability not only to live but to flourish.'⁸¹ But we need to face not only our own poverty, which may not be *material* poverty but which needs to be offered in communion with others but we need also to face and respond to the poverty of others, our neighbours who, like the Good Samaritan, may not be 'like us'.

⁷⁷ Letter in H.P. Liddon, *Life of E.B. Pusey*, vol. 1V (1898), p376

⁷⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, Homily 5 on the Song of Songs, q. in Margaret Magdalen CSMV *Furnace of the Heart*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998, p75

⁷⁹ E.g. Jean Vanier, Henri Nouwen, Frances Young, David Ford.

⁸⁰ Jean Vanier *Becoming Human*, , Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press 1998, p40

⁸¹ Stanley Hauerwas *Suffering the Retarded: Should We Prevent Retardation?* In *Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas' Theology of Disability, Disabling Society, Enabling Theology*, ed. John Swinton, Binghampton, NY, Hawarth Press, 2004, p97

As Jesus makes plain in the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16.19-30) and in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25.31-46) there can be no salvation and no true community without responding to the poor and the hungry. Christ both meets and challenges and teaches us in and through the poor. Jean Vanier quotes Fr Arrupe, formerly Superior General of the Jesuits, speaking about living with the truly poor. 'Here one understands true poverty; one rediscovers awareness of one's own incapacity and ignorance; one opens one's soul to receive very profound instruction in the lives of the poor, taught by God himself, by means of those rough faces, these half-ruined lives. It is a new face of Christ discovered in 'the little ones'.⁸²

Our credibility as Christians – and not least as theologians, that is people of God speaking and writing of God – is authenticated by our owning and communicating of that God-given vulnerability which issues in Christ-like ministry to and from the poor. As Paul Evdokimov, from his own earthed ecumenism with Protestant churches has concluded, 'The Church must proclaim a *social koinonia* but this demands sacrifices and sufferings, for there can be no authentic communication without identification with the suffering of others.'⁸³

Ecumenical dialogue, to have any value, needs to be rooted and grounded in this same vulnerability and the recognition that there is more growing up into the stature of Christ⁸⁴, more growing in the knowledge of God⁸⁵ for all of us to do. Yannaras has aptly described it as 'the need to go outside the walls of ecclesial self-sufficiency' Why? 'Because we are full of faults, full of weaknesses which distort our human nature. But St Paul says that from our weakness can be born a life which will triumph over death. I dream of an ecumenism that begins with a voluntary acceptance of that weakness.'⁸⁶

It is only within this poverty of spirit and the communion engendered by that common recognition of our mutual dependence upon God, upon each other, upon 'the other' and upon God's creation that the theological dialogue is likely to have any resonance with those who read it and, more importantly, to bear fruit in the real circumstances in God's world.

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⁸² Fr Arrupe 'A New Service to the World of Today, 20 December 1977. quoted in Jean Vanier *Community and Growth* Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007, p187

⁸³ Paul Evdokimov 'To the Church of Christ (a message)' in Plekon and Vinogradov (eds &trans.) 'In the World, of the Church', p90

⁸⁴ Ephesians 4.13

⁸⁵ Colossians 1.10

⁸⁶ C. Yannaras *Towards a New Ecumenism* Sourozh (Nov.1997)1-4