Tradition and the Other:

The authority of Tradition within the context of a contested
ecclesia -- a Catholic foundational theology

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the fundamental problem of whether and how the church's tradition can be understood as revelatory given its patriarchal nature and its implication in relations of power. It is therefore concerned with how feminist Catholics are to be accountable to tradition.

In addressing this problem the thesis follows three basic movements. The first juxtaposes contemporary discourses that are concerned with revelation, on the one hand, and rupture, on the other. However, by an investigation of the apophatic tradition in theology and its relation to the cataphatic, it suggests that this juxtaposition is both necessary to theology and that it has a long theological pedigree. Therefore the second movement, in seeking mediating paths with which to respond to this rupture in knowledge, proposes a dual mediation that maintains an unreconcilable tensiveness between a path of transformative interpretation and a path which continues to probe that which is unsaid. The third movement looks at how this is expressed in the theology of tradition and the church. By highlighting the distinction between tradition as the whole life of the church and the Tradition which is ultimately Other, it points to a fundamental tension between that which is witnessed to in discourse and is therefore implicated in relations of power and that which, while witnessed to, is ultimately uncapturable but nevertheless accompanies all discourse.

In this context, the thesis concludes, the church is both the privileged witness to the Other, but its witness is a wounded witness. While it is in the church that we encounter the Tradition, the challenge that we face is to find ways to allow that which is Other to break through our limited and necessarily wounded discourse.

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Unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, the whole thesis is my original work.

21 May 1997
First anniversary of the death of the Atlas martyrs of Algeria
Extraordinary witnesses to the Other

Abbreviations

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DF	*Dei Filius*
DM	*Dives in Misericordia*
DV	*Dei Verbum*
GS	*Gaudium et Spes*
II	*Inter insigniores*
LG	*Lumen Gentium*
OS	*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*
SC	*Sacrosanctum Concilium*
SCG	*Summa Contra Gentiles*
ST	*Summa Theologiæ*
UR	*Unitatis Redintegratio*

All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Introduction

Chapter One

Posing the problem:

Recent discourse around gender and ordination

This teaching [that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women] requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium (cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium 25, 2). Thus, in the present circumstances, the Roman Pontiff, exercising his proper office of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk 22:32), has handed on this same teaching by a formal declaration, explicitly stating what is to be held always, everywhere, and by all, as belonging to the deposit of the faith.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,
28 October 1995.

That tradition is a problem for Catholic feminists is perhaps nowhere more clearly seen than in recent discourse around the issue of the non-ordainability of women to the ministerial priesthood. The ordination of women is not the specific focus of this thesis; indeed the desirability of ordaining women within the present context of a clericalised church has become questionable for many feminists.[1] However, for the church to proclaim that women are intrinsically unordainable, and are therefore incapable of imaging God in Christ as fully as

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[1]   For an analysis of the divisions that emerged at the Womens' Ordination Conference in November 1995 between those in favour of continuing to struggle for the ordination of women and those (led by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza) propagating the idea of a discipleship of equals see, *The Tablet*, 9 December 1995:1595. For a discussion of the issue within an Anglican context, see Ross (1994).

men are, as an infallible part of the Catholic faith, is cause for grave concern.

In focusing on questions of gender and ordination I am deliberately selecting this as one among other issues[2] in order to highlight the problematic of the authority of tradition in the midst of a context of a contested ecclesia. Therefore in this chapter I begin by outlining the developments in the debate around the ordination of women which has resulted in the *Responsum ad Dubium* quoted above. I then consider responses to these and the ambiguities around the theology of the magisterium. I end by highlighting the problematic that this raises with regard to the tradition of the church and the theology of revelation, which is the real focus of this thesis.

Inter Insigniores to *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*:
from the iconic argument to the argument from tradition alone

Discussion of the ordination of women in a Catholic context is a recent discussion, although it has clearly been linked to movements in other churches, in particular, the Anglican communion.[3] While Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* (41) and the bishops of the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* (9, 60) identified movements for the liberation of women as a sign of the times to which the church should pay attention, it was only in the late 1960s and early

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[2]   Other issues that have been highlighted recently are those involving Catholic moral teaching in the areas of sexual ethics. The encyclicals of Pope John Paul II *Veritatis Spendor* in 1993 and *Evangelium Vitae* in 1995 have sought to reaffirm Catholic moral teaching on matters such as contraception, abortion, divorce and remarriage, and homosexuality, on the grounds that they are based on revealed truth.

[3]   Indeed the first papal statement that we have is that of Pope Paul VI in his letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury. See page 6 below.

1970s that the statement of canon law that "only a baptised man can validly receive ordination" came to be questioned.[4]

In 1968 the World Congress of the Lay apostolate asked for a study on the role of women in the sacramental order of the church. This was followed by requests from the national synods of Holland in 1969, Austria in 1974, and the synods of three Swiss dioceses in 1975, that this question be studied. (Field-Bibb 1991:179) In the U.S.A. the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) adopted a resolution in 1974 calling for all ministries in the church to be open to women and men as the Spirit calls them. This was followed by the launch in 1975 of the Women's Ordination Conference whose stated aim was to work for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church. (Iadarola 1985:468)

It was in this context that the Pontifical Biblical Commission was asked to study the role of women in the Bible with particular reference to the question of priesthood, while the International Theological Commission looked at women's ministries on the basis of baptism in the context of the universal priesthood. (Field-Bibb 1991:179)

The report of the Pontifical Biblical Commission

In addressing the scriptural grounds for ordaining or not ordaining women the commission noted that the New Testament texts do not say much about either women or priesthood. In speaking of women it stresses feminine symbolism associated with wives and mothers as well as Marian symbolism which leads

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[4]   This is not to negate previous "hidden traditions" (see Byrne 1994:50ff) which speak either of ordained women in the Church or of women's desire for ordination. What is at stake, however, is that the last thirty years have seen its emergence as a *public* discourse in the Church.

into an understanding of the feminine nature of the church. (1978:227ff) It notes, moreover, the normatively hierarchical nature of the church, which is derived from the twelve patriarchs. (1978:232)

The fundamental question posed by the commission was what normative value should be accorded to the "masculine nature of the hierarchical order" and whether this necessarily excluded women from the sacramental economy. (1978:233) In considering this they noted that in the Old Testament women could have sacrifices offered, could participate in worship and were prophetesses and intercessors. In the New Testament they followed and served Jesus, were exemplary disciples, witnesses and announcers of the resurrection. They helped spread the gospel and were collaborators of Paul. They number nine or ten of the twenty-seven people mentioned in Romans 16 and a female *diakonos* is mentioned with Junia or Junio being placed in the rank of apostles. (1978:231f)

In its plenary session the commission agreed unanimously that

> It does not seem that the New Testament by itself alone will
> permit us to settle in a clear way and once and for all the problem
> of the accession of women to the presbyterate. (1978:234)

Of its seventeen members, five believe that there were sufficient grounds for excluding women from ordination, while twelve wondered if:

> the church hierarchy, entrusted with the sacramental economy,
> would be able to entrust the ministries of eucharist and
> reconciliation to women in the light of circumstances, without
> going against Christ's original intention. (1978:234f)

Inter insigniores

This was not to be. The response of the hierarchy, in the form of Pope Paul VI and the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, clearly felt that to ordain women would be to go against Christ's original intention, which, it argued, had been faithfully preserved in the church. In correspondence of November 1975 Paul VI informed the Archbishop of Canterbury that

> it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church. (Quoted in *OS*:1)

This statement was expanded on by the "Declaration on the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood" (*Inter Insigniores*) which was issued by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the request of the pope, and which argued that exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood in no way detracted from women's equality with men.

In considering the reasons given by *Inter Insigniores* for excluding women from the ministerial priesthood, we can divide the arguments into two categories, namely, those that derive from tradition, and those which give theological importance to the maleness of Jesus of Nazareth.

Argument from tradition

Inter Insigniores states that "The Catholic Church has never felt that priestly or episcopal ordination can be validly conferred on women". (*II*:1) While a few

heretical sects of the early centuries ordained women, it has been unanimously held by the fathers of the church, the medieval scholastics and the churches of the east that only men can be ordained.

This belief and practice derives from the attitude of Jesus himself, who, while free from social convention in his attitudes to women, "did not call any woman to become part of the Twelve." (*II*:2) This example was preserved by the apostolic community who "remained faithful to the teaching of Jesus towards women" but did not include women in "the official and public proclamation of the message, since this proclamation belongs exclusively to the apostolic mission." (*II*:3)

It is thus tradition — including that of Jesus, the apostles and the church throughout its history -- that precludes the possibility of women being ordained. This tradition has

> a normative character: in the fact of conferring priestly ordination only on men, it is a question of an unbroken tradition throughout the history of the Church, universal in the East and in the West, and alert to repress abuses immediately. This norm, based on Christ's example, has been and still is observed because it is believed to conform to God's plan for his Church. (*II*:4)

Argument from the maleness of Jesus

Having argued that tradition precludes the ordination of women, *Inter Insigniores* proceeds to show the fittingness of a male priesthood on the grounds of the natural resemblance between Jesus and men.[5] The priest

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[5] This appears to be following Thomas Aquinas' use of the category of *convenientia* which is an intermediary category between necessity and contingency. (See *ST* 3a, q.1, a.1) Thus, according to such thinking, the maleness of the priest is not absolutely necessary but is rather appropriate and

represents Christ in his ministry, and in the celebration of the eucharist he

> acts not only through the effective power conferred on him by
> Christ, but *in persona Christi*, taking the role of Christ, to the point
> of being his very image, when he pronounces the words of
> consecration. (*II*:5)

In order for the priest to be able to effectively image Christ, the Declaration
argues, the priest must be male. While Christ is the firstborn of all humanity,
male and female,

> Nevertheless, the Incarnation of the Word took place according to
> the male sex: this is indeed a question of fact, and this fact, while
> not implying any alleged natural superiority of men over women,
> cannot be dissociated from the economy of salvation. (*II*:5)

It is, moreover, in the context of the nuptial mystery of Christ and the church
that this fittingness is seen. Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the
bride. As such he must necessarily be male. While it can be said that the priest
also represents the church, this is a secondary role which does not lessen the
need for him to be male. (*II*:5)

The "feminine"

Lurking behind these arguments we can discern assumptions about what is
properly "feminine" and the difference which this makes to women's roles in
the church.

In excluding women from the ministerial priesthood *Inter Insigniores* is at pains
to point out that this exclusion should in no way be understood as

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fitting. Hence we see that this argument can really only be used to support the
more fundamental argument which is that from tradition.

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undermining the fundamental equality of all the baptised when it comes to "the universal calling to divine filiation, which is the same for all." (*II*:6) However, equality does not imply identity, nor does it undermine differentiated roles.

This stress on what is properly "feminine" was developed in responses to *Inter Insigniores* in *L'Osservatore Romano*. In criticising the feminist movement for undermining "the meaning of things" such as femininity, the family and society, Raimondo Spiazzi, for example, argued that:

> if the ministerial priesthood reflects the image of Christ, the head and bridegroom, the Christian woman is called to reflect in herself and reveal the identity of the bride-Church, the supreme figure and type of which is a woman whose name is Mary ... (Field-Bibb 1991:186)

Hans Urs von Balthasar likewise argued that

> natural sexual difference is charged, *as* difference, with a supernatural emphasis, of which it is not itself aware, so that outside of Christian Revelation it is possible to arrive at various deformations. (Field-Bibb 1991:187)

The establishment of this ideological "feminine" as an ontological category has been reinforced by recent papal teaching on Mary[6] as well as teaching specifically on "women". Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Mulieris Dignitatem* ("On the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year")

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[6]   See, for example, Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* ("On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Pilgrim Church") which argues that "the figure of Mary of Nazareth sheds light on womanhood as such ... In the light of Mary, the Church sees in the face of women the reflection of a beauty which mirrors the loftiest sentiments of which the human heart is capable..." (46) For a feminist analysis of the way in which Marian teaching defines women according to a "patriarchal feminine" see my Masters thesis (Walker 1991:ch 1).

reinforced the teaching of *Inter Insigniores* (26), identified women's involvement in sin and redemption with Eve and Mary respectively (9-11), and defined women's roles in the church according to motherhood and virginity both of which, paradoxically, draw their inspiration from Mary. (17-22)

Even when papal pronouncements have argued for the protection of the human rights of women, the appropriateness of women's involvement at all levels in society, and have apologised for the way women have been treated in the history of the church, they have still spoken in terms of "feminine genius". Thus Pope John Paul's *Letter to Women* in preparation for the Beijing conference in 1995 argues that the exclusion of women from the ministerial priesthood "is in no way prejudicial to women ... but is rather an expression of what is specific to being male and female." This is entrenched by contrasting "the 'Marian' principle" with which women are identified with "the apostolic Petrine principle" with which men are identified. (11)

Ordinatio Sacerdotalis

That *Inter Insigniores* was not received as definitive teaching by many in the church is evidenced by the need felt by Pope John Paul II to reinforce its teaching with the publication of *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* in 1994. This Apostolic Letter "On Reserving Priestly Ministry to Men Alone" reaffirmed the teaching of *Inter Insigniores* that the church "does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination". (2) In response to those who considered the matter as still open to debate, or as having a merely disciplinary force, the pope argued that:

> Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of

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confirming the brethren (cf. *Lk* 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful. (4)

In restating the arguments of *Inter Insigniores*, it is significant to note that *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* focuses on the arguments from tradition (which broadly include the practice of Jesus and the apostles) rather than on the arguments about the appropriateness of male priests in the light of the maleness of Jesus.[7] Thus it relies exclusively on the authority of tradition.

The *Responsum ad Dubium*

This is highlighted by the *Responsum ad Dubium*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1995 and quoted at the beginning of this chapter. This statement claims that the teaching contained in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* is founded on "the written Word of God", has been "constantly preserved and applied in the Tradition of the Church" and "set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal Magisterium", and is therefore to be understood as belonging to the deposit of faith.

Tradition, magisterium and infallibility

The publication of the *Responsum ad Dubium*, and in particular its invocation of the category of infallibility, was clearly designed as an attempt to put an end to the debate by appealing to the authority of scripture, tradition and

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[7] I am grateful to Paul O'Leary OP for first drawing my attention to this shift. He suggests, moreover, that the omission of the iconic argument in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* may be a result of a growing realisation of its theological inadequacies.

magisterium. However, by appealing to the infallibility of the ordinary and universal magisterium in this matter, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith effectively opened the way for the contestation of its understanding of the realities of scripture, tradition and magisterium, particularly in regard to their teaching on women.

The infallibility of the ordinary and universal magisterium

In claiming that this doctrine belongs to the "deposit of faith" the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith is not claiming that this is a newly-defined statement of the extraordinary magisterium, such as the *ex-cathedra* papal pronouncements of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption of Mary, or the solemn declarations of an Ecumenical Council. What is involved is rather the defining of beliefs that have always been held, even if they have not been solemnly expressed. Thus what is infallible is not the declaration of any Roman Congregation, or even of the pope himself (unless he specifically claimed to be speaking *ex cathedra* which he did not), but the ordinary magisterium of the church which contains, it is claimed, the doctrine itself.

What is at stake, however, is whether this doctrine is in fact part of the "deposit of faith", that is, whether it is to be understood as divinely revealed, and, indeed, what that means. The *Responsum ad Dubium* claims that it is to be understood as divinely revealed because it is based on the written word of God, constantly preserved in the tradition of the church, and set forth by the magisterium of the church. Let us consider these briefly.

Scripture

The appeal to scripture that is made by *Inter Insigniores, Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*

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and the *Responsum ad Dubium* is, at best, a tenuous one. We have already noted that when Paul VI consulted the Pontifical Biblical Commission on this matter the commission members agreed unanimously that the New Testament alone could not settle the issue. This is hardly surprising given that the New Testament had not developed a doctrine of priesthood in the sense that we understand it today. In the words of Nicholas Lash:

> the biblical "foundations" of the present Pope's teaching in his apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, in so far as they exist at all, are too fragile to bear the weight he seeks to put upon them. (1995:1544)

This is not to deny the patriarchal nature of scripture, however. The commission itself noted the patriarchal nature of the hierarchy established in the New Testament. (1978:232) The decisive question, however, is the weight that this should be given in the present practice of the church.

Tradition

The appeal to the constant tradition of the church is, apparently, more convincing. Avery Dulles argues persuasively that "Tradition says no". (1995:1572) The male nature of the priesthood was, after all, taught by the church fathers, the eastern churches and the medieval scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas.

For most of the time the maleness of the priesthood was simply assumed. But, when it was explicitly taught this was always in the context of the assumed inferiority of women. In the words of Thomas Aquinas:

> since it is not possible in the female sex to signify eminence of degree, for a woman is in the state of subjection, it follows that

she cannot receive the sacrament of Order. (*ST* Supp, q.xxxix, 1.c)

In similar fashion Thomas argued that women cannot have authority as teachers in the church, principally because women must be subjected to men. (ST:2a2æ.177,2)

Recent papal teaching on the non-ordainability of women has been adamant that this doctrine is not to be understood as involving ideas of the inferiority of women. However, Lash says:

> It follows that, if we set aside (as the present Pope has indicated he would wish to do) arguments based on the inferiority of women, there simply is no traditional teaching on the matter. The question, as now raised, is a *new* question. (Lash 1985:1544)

Magisterium

Moreover, in asserting that a doctrine has been infallibly taught by the ordinary and universal magisterium, it is not enough to show that it has been a longstanding tradition in the church. Francis Sullivan has pointed out that:

> the history of Catholic doctrine provides some examples of propositions that, up to a certain point in time, seemed to be the unanimous teaching of the whole episcopate and yet, as a result of a further development of doctrine, are no longer the teaching of the Church. (1995:1646)

Sullivan cites the example of the Council of Florence in 1442 which expressed the common belief of the bishops of the time that Jews and pagans would go to hell if they did not become Christians before they died. This clearly does not reflect the current teaching of the Catholic Church. Other examples are the morality of slavery and the duty of Catholic rulers to prevent the propagation of Protestantism in their territories. (1995:1646)

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Thus in order to discern what belongs to authentic magisterial teaching, Sullivan argues that:

> What has to be clearly established is that the tradition has remained constant, and that even today the universal body of Catholic bishops is teaching the same doctrine as definitively to be held. (1995:1646)

In addition he argues that papal teaching and Canon Law also require the "constant consensus of Catholic theologians" and the "common adherence of Christ's faithful" in order for a doctrine to be seen as revealed truth. (1995:1646)

Thus we find ourselves in a context in which there is no evidence that the bishops (much less the theologians and the laity) were consulted about this teaching. Moreover, the arguments traditionally used to justify the exclusion of women from ordination are no longer considered acceptable, even by the pope and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Hence Sullivan argues that

> The question that remains in my mind is whether it is a clearly established fact that the bishops of the Catholic Church are as convinced by those reasons as Pope John Paul evidently is, and that, in exercising their proper role as judges and teachers of the faith, they have been unanimous in teaching that the exclusion of women is a divinely revealed truth to which all Catholics are obliged to give a definitive assent of faith. Unless this is manifestly the case, I do not see how it can be certain that this doctrine is taught infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium. (1995:1646)

Contested reality

Thus we see that the debate around the ordination or non-ordination of women touches on broader issues than simply whether or not women should be ordained. Instead this question leads us to a debate around the authority of

scripture, our church tradition and the church's magisterium and opens the way for the contestation of these categories.

It is clear that scripture, the church's tradition and its magisterium are patriarchal realities. The issue, however, is the extent to which this patriarchal nature can be seen as normative. This is especially so once the magisterium itself has disavowed the legitimacy of arguing on the basis of the inferiority of women.

Conclusion

In tracing the development of the current debate around the non-ordainability of women to the ministerial priesthood, we have seen that the arguments for this position hinge around the authority of tradition and its role as bearer of divine revelation.

While the arguments of the official Roman declarations fall short of establishing what they set out to establish, namely, that we can argue for the non-ordainability of women on the basis of tradition, they nevertheless highlight the problematic of tradition. It has been the "constant and universal Tradition of the Church"[8] (OS:4) that women cannot be ordained just as it has been the teaching of the church that women are inferior to men. If these assumptions are no longer acceptable to us, how are we to relate to the tradition as bearer of divine revelation?

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[8]   What is at stake, of course, is whether this is indeed the Church's Tradition (with a capital "T"), and hence part of the deposit of faith as John Paul would have us believe, or whether it is part of a more general and fallible tradition with a small "t". This will be discussed in Part III below.

Chapter Two

Sketching the terrain:

Towards a viable foundational theology

This thesis arises out of two distinct commitments.

I am a Christian, a Catholic, someone who has been baptised into a church community. This community lives on tradition. That which has been "handed on to us" (Lk 1:2), which is the very revelation of God in Christ, is the Wisdom which instructs, nourishes and sustains my Christian faith. Such revelation necessarily calls for "the obedience of faith". (*DV:* 5; cf Rom 16:26)

Yet I am also a feminist. As such I am deeply conscious that the church is a profoundly human institution that has been gravely impacted by the patriarchal, androcentric and sexist assumptions of the historical contexts which influenced its growth, and by the sinfulness of its own members. Thus while the church is the bearer of divine revelation, the means by which it witnesses to this revelation are profoundly historical, human, and therefore partial, realities that must necessarily be problematic for women and other marginalised groups.

The previous chapter has highlighted, from one particular area of the contemporary church's discourse, the problem which tradition poses for feminist theology. That it was necessary for the papacy and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to issue three separate statements on the issue (the last invoking the weapon of infallibility in a way it had never been invoked

before) clearly points to a teaching that was not only not well received but actively contested. And, by appealing to the divinely revealed nature of Christian tradition, Pope John Paul II and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith have effectively placed questions of revelation and tradition on the theological agenda.

The fundamental question which this thesis addresses is not "Can women be ordained?" but "Can patriarchal[1] tradition be revelatory?" Thus it both takes a step back from the official discourse of the previous chapter to ask questions about whose discourse this is, and whose tradition we are speaking about. And, while acknowledging the partial and decidedly ideological nature of tradition, it asks the properly theological question of how we are to view this tradition. How is tradition to be understood as revelatory? And how are we as feminist Catholics to be accountable to Christian tradition in a way that is faithful to both the tradition itself and to our feminist commitments?

In this short chapter, which serves as an introduction to my thesis as a whole, I outline both some key elements of my understanding of theology, and of the challenge that feminism poses to theology. I then outline how I shall attempt to

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[1]   I am aware of the inadequacy of the use of the term "patriarchal" which is usually understood as referring to a male power and property structure in which men are dominant to the detriment of women. (King 1989:22) Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has pointed out that power relations function at multiple and sometimes contradictory levels and has proposed the use of the term "kyriarchy" which refers to "a complex social pyramid of graduated dominations and subordinations". (1994:14) While I accept Schüssler Fiorenza's analysis and the need for a term which can take the complexity of multiple levels of oppression into account, I have become increasingly uncomfortable with the Christological connotations of kyriarchy. This is obviously related to the appropriateness of the use of the term and imagery of "Lord" in reference to Jesus Christ. For a discussion of this, see Ross (1994:126f) and Collins (1995:xxxviii). Given the lack of an acceptable term, I continue to use "patriarchal" although aware of the need to broaden its meaning.

develop a foundational theology that can take seriously *both* the fundamental authority of tradition for the theological task *and* the necessarily partial nature of our ecclesial reality.

The task of theology

As reflection on Christian faith, theology is a second order discipline that has sought to categorise and clarify the faith of believers. It is, however, necessarily related to religious experience -- both individual and corporate -- and can bring a critical awareness to the faith of believers.

Theology as relation to divine reality

Christian faith is necessarily in relation to something outside of itself and the theological task for the Christian is fundamentally bound up with the encounter with divine reality. The fathers of the church knew nothing of our distinction between "theology" and "spirituality". For them, as expressed in the words of Evagrius of Pontus, "The theologian is one who prays and one who prays is a theologian." (Nichols 1991:26) Such an emphasis continues to be essential for the eastern churches for whom

> all theology is mystical, inasmuch as it shows forth the divine mystery: the data of revelation ... The eastern tradition has never made a sharp distinction between mysticism and theology; between personal experience of the divine mysteries and the dogma affirmed by the church. (Lossky 1976:7f)

While such an emphasis continued in the monastic theology of the medieval west,[2] the dominant mode of theologising by the late middle ages had become the scholastic one. By shifting the focus of learning to "the schools," which were to become the forerunners of modern universities, scholasticism enabled the objectification of theology, with a key role being given to human reason, and its detachment from the individual theologian's journey to God. "Spirituality" became the application of theological truths to personal prayer and life, rather than the necessary matrix out of which theology emerged.[3] Such a movement prepared the ground for the enlightenment's glorification of rationality and mistrust of tradition and authority. The reactionary response of much Catholic theology,[4] while strenuously opposed to modernity, remained within a positivistic frame of mind, viewing theological truth as somehow separate from the individual believer. It is only in last couple of centuries that we see the emergence of a more historical understanding which implicates the theologian her or himself in the theological task.[5]

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[2]   See Leclercq (1961).

[3]   It is instructive to note that in the middle of the fifteenth century Denys the Carthusian wrote a work in which he included a list of what he termed "mystical theologians". Turner has pointed out that those theologians included in his list correspond, almost exactly, with any list that one might draw up of systematic theologians up to the fourteenth century. After the fourteenth century the lists diverge however and

> hardly anyone who would be agreed to be of significance in the
> history of Western Christian theology figures at all in a list of
> 'mystics' and hardly any mystics make a significant contribution
> to the development of mainstream theology. (1995:214f)

[4]   For a discussion of the neoscholastic reaction to both rationalism and idealism, see Francis Schüssler Fiorenza. (1992:263)

[5]   The last few decades have also seen the growth of "spirituality" both as a religious (and, some would argue, secular) phenomenon and as an academic discipline. McGinn distinguishes between those who view spirituality in theological terms, often preferring the term "spiritual theology",

Thus it is my assumption, together with the Fathers of the church, the eastern churches, and the monastic tradition in the west, that to do theology necessarily implies personal commitment to the journey into God.

Theology as ecclesial act

Such a commitment is not simply an individual act however. Christian faith is necessarily ecclesial and communitarian. *Lumen Gentium* tells us that God has

> willed to make women and men holy and to save them, not as individuals without any bond between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness ... Christ ... called a people together made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and it would be the new people of God. (*LG*:9)

Such an identity has theological implications. The "faith seeking understanding"[6] is an ecclesial faith that both shapes and limits the work of the individual theologian. Francis Sullivan expresses this when he says:

> In the case of the Catholic theologian, this faith will be Christian, ecclesial, and Catholic. It is Christian in that it accepts Christ as the definitive word of God for humanity. It is ecclesial in that it is a faith that we have not found by ourselves, but have received from the church ... If our faith is Catholic, we engage in the science of theology from within the Catholic tradition. This

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and those who view it as an anthropological phenomenon. He also introduces a third category which emphasises its context in a community's history. (1993:4ff) As will become more apparent in chapter five, while we can view spirituality -- like religion -- as a human phenomenon, my concern is not with spirituality as a phenomenon or with the application of theological truths in the life of Christian believers, but rather with the integral role which it plays in the theological task as a whole.

[6]   This widely-used definition of theology was first employed by Anselm of Canterbury in the twelfth century. (*Proslogion*, 1)

means that we do theology as committed participants in the faith, life and worship of the Catholic tradition. (1996:5f)

Theology as critical impulse

It should be apparent that such a commitment could be -- and all-too-often is -- invoked to appeal for conformity and curtail the freedom of the theologian. Therefore such a commitment needs to be balanced by the an understanding of the critical nature of theology.

As a call to, and offer of, life, the Christian gospel necessarily involves a judgement of sinful situations. Jesus clearly saw himself as situated within the prophetic tradition of the Judaism and was prepared to denounce as contrary to God's will all situations of oppression and human suffering. He was particularly critical of those religious institutions and beliefs that prevented people from experiencing the gratuitous love of God.

Throughout the history of the church prophetic movements have arisen which have denounced sin and oppression and called the church back to the authenticity of the gospel. Likewise, when theology has become static and has ceased to give life, new movements have arisen that have served to better-illuminate the truth of the gospel.

This obviously calls for careful discernment. Theology is ever in need of renewal, but at what point does renewal cease to be Christian and Catholic? And who determines what is authentic?

Feminism as a challenge to the church

A central theological challenge in recent decades has come from the feminist movement. Since the late 1960s and early 1970s we have seen the development of a distinctively feminist theology in which women's experience is seen as central to theological work. While this movement initially emerged in North America,[7] and to a lesser extent in western Europe,[8] since then we have seen the development of theologies arising from the experiences of women in Africa,[9]

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[7]   See, for example, Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968); Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Religion and Sexism* (1974), *New Woman, New Earth* (1975) and *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983b); Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow's (ed). *Womanspirit Rising. A Feminist Reader in Religion* (1979); Sally McFague's *Metaphorical Theology* (1982); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's *In Memory of Her* (1983), *Bread Not Stone* (1984) and *Jesus. Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet* (1994); and Elizabeth Johnson's *She Who Is* (1992). For womanist theology arising out of an African American context see Jacquelyn Grant's *White Woman's Christ and Black Woman's Jesus* (1989) and Delores Williams' *Sisters in the Wilderness. The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (1993).

[8]   See Kari Elizabeth Børressen's *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Women in Augustine and Aquinas* (1968); Sara Maitland's *A Map of the New Country: Women and Christianity* (1983); Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel's *A Land Flowing with Milk and Honey. Perspectives on Feminist Theology* (1986); Ann Loades' *Searching for Lost Coins. Explorations in Christianity and Feminism* (1987); Ursula King's *Women and Spirituality* (1989); Uta Ranke-Heinemann's *Eunuchs for Heaven. The Catholic Church and Sexuality* (1990); Monica Furlong's *A Dangerous Delight. Women and Power in the Church* (1991); and Mary Grey's *Redeeming the Dream* (1989) and *The Wisdom of Fools* (1993).

[9]   See Denise Ackermann, Jonathan Draper and Emma Mashinini's (ed). *Women Hold Up Half the Sky. Women in the Church in Southern Africa* (1991); Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro's *The Will to Arise: Women, tradition and the church in Africa* (1992); Mercy Amba Oduyoye's *Daughters of Anowa. African women and patriarchy* (1995); and Christina Landmann's (ed). *Digging Up Our Foremothers. Stories of Women in Africa* (1996).

Asia[10] and Latin America.[11,12]

Feminist theology can be understood as a form of theological reflection that takes as its starting point a commitment to the liberation of women from all forms of oppression. It seeks to show how theology has been impoverished by the exclusion of women's experiences and voices and also how the retrieval of such voices will make a difference to our theology. While there have been many different approaches within feminist theology, the last three decades have seen an explosion in the production of knowledge in all the theological disciplines from an explicitly feminist perspective.

Within this new context we find differing responses to the authoritative role of tradition. For some, the Christian tradition is viewed as irredeemably sexist and an evil which feminists must actively distance themselves from. Mary Daly expressed this view when she said that

> A logical consequence of the liberation of women will be a loss of plausibility of Christological formulas which reflect and encourage idolatry in relation to the person of Jesus. (1973:69)

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[10] See Chung Hyun Kyung's *Struggle to be the Sun Again. Introducing Asian Women's Theology* (1990) and Hisako Kinukawa's *Women and Jesus in Mark. A Japanese Feminist Perspective* (1994).

[11] See Elsa Tamez's (ed). *Through Her Eyes. Women's Theology from Latin America* (1989) and María Pilar Aquino's *Our Cry for Life. Feminist Theology from Latin America* (1993).

[12] For feminist theology in the third world generally, see Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye's (ed). *With Passion and Compassion. Third World Women Doing Theology* (1988); Letty Russell, Kwok Pui-lan, Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Katie Geneva Cannon's (ed). *Inheriting Our Mothers' Gardens. Feminist Theology in Third World Perspective* (1988); and Ursula King's (ed). *Feminist Theology from the Third World. A Reader* (1994).

Others, while remaining within the Christian tradition, seek to relocate the locus of authority. For Rosemary Radford Ruether it is particular traditions that become authoritative. She identifies a particular strand of prophetic-liberating traditions which run through biblical faith and which can be appropriated by feminists. (1983b:22f)

For others, such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, the locus of authority lies not with the text or tradition itself, which is, after all, a patriarchal product, but rather to a community of women which is in solidarity with the excluded victims of history. (1984:3ff)

The question remains for me, however, how one is to view Christian tradition itself. To undermine its authority as bearer of revelation is to effectively undermine doctrines of ecclesiology and revelation themselves. While it may be that this is a necessary consequence of a critical and feminist theology, this thesis will argue that it is possible to develop a credible theology of tradition that takes seriously both the authoritative nature of this tradition and its partial and ideological nature.

The way forward

This argument will be expressed in three sections.

Part I will look at both shifts in the theology of revelation towards a hermeneutical understanding of theology found in chapter three, but also at the rupture of the other that threatens this understanding which is found in chapter four. This rupture is not anything new however but is fundamental to

the theological task as I argue in chapter five.

Part II will look at two mediating responses to this rupture. The first, found in chapter six, builds on the hermeneutical work of Gadamer and Ricoeur and is expressed in Sandra Schneiders' work on revelation. The second, found in chapter seven, looks at Kristeva's work which is more concerned with epistemology, and at Mary Grey's work on revelation, and probes that which is excluded from the dominant discourses. I argue that both of these responses are necessary and that they stand in a tensed relationship to one another which is akin to the cataphatic-apophatic dynamic in theology.

Part III moves to the properly theological moment in the thesis by asking how, given this process, we are to understand tradition and the church's witness to it. In chapter eight I distinguish between tradition as the whole life of the church, and the Tradition which is ultimately Other and uncapturable in discourse. Such a Tradition is nevertheless witnessed to, and in chapter nine I show the necessarily wounded nature of the church's witness to the Tradition.

Out of this interaction I conclude by arguing that we can only encounter the Tradition through the church's witness to it, but that while such a witness is privileged it is also wounded. Hence the challenge becomes one of finding ways of listening to this witness that allows that which is suppressed to find a voice.

PART I:

Revelation and Rupture

Introduction to Part I

Having introduced the problem that this thesis is addressing, we see that it is not simply concerned with the practice of the church, but with the underlying theology that sustains the church's life. The challenge that we face is one of developing an adequate and viable foundational theology that can enable a transformative church life and praxis. In this I am aware of the need to operate out of a dual loyalty -- to the received tradition of the church on the one hand, and to those excluded from the formulation of this tradition on the other hand.

In the first part of this thesis I seek to outline something of the current state of contemporary discourse as it affects our theological task. As will become apparent in the course of Part I, there have been key philosophical and cultural movements in the last centuries, and especially our own, that seriously challenge the integrity of traditional theological approaches.

This is not simply an abstract challenge. What is at stake is the means by which we are able to communicate the Christian gospel with the greatest degree of authenticity and integrity. By probing the possibility of any speech about revelation and of the power dynamics inherent in all discourse, I seek to show both the challenges that these present to the theological task, and to seek ways of doing theology with a greater degree of integrity.

I therefore introduce and juxtapose two movements in this section.

The first, which emerges from chapter three, is broadly hermeneutical. Recognising the limitations of previous metaphysical systems and

epistemologies, it focuses on received texts and traditions and their actualization in the present. Such a movement therefore engages the discourse of revelation and focuses on the possibility of revelation becoming present to us today.

If this movement is concerned with presence, then the second movement, which we see in chapter four, is about absence. By probing that which has been excluded from discourse, it points to the irreducible alterity of the Other and shows the inability of our language to express this Other, who must always remain excluded. Such an Other is a rupturing absent presence that nevertheless accompanies all discourse.

While these two movements are in many respects mutually antithetical, in chapter five I argue that the rupture represented by the discourse of alterity in chapter four is not as new as it appears and is in fact at the heart of the theological task. By a reading of the Christian apophatic tradition, I propose that alterity is in fact at the heart of Christian theology and needs to serve as the critical moment in all theology.

Thus I suggest that revelation and rupture are the two key ingredients that a viable foundational theology needs to engage. That they are not easy companions is clear; however, to dismiss or downplay either of them would, I suggest, be to weaken the integrity of the theology both received and in process.

Chapter Three

Truth, history and divine disclosure:
Revelation in a contested ecclesia

> Feminism challenges profoundly the understanding of revelation
> in the Roman Catholic tradition. It raises fundamental questions
> about the relationship of revelation and human experience, the
> centrality of Jesus Christ, the identity and structure of the church,
> the normativity and authentic interpretation of Scripture and the
> apostolic tradition. On the one hand, in what sense can the
> Catholic church (or even the larger Christian Church) claim to be
> faithful to the life and mission of Jesus when it is so
> fundamentally distorted by patriarchal structures and sexist
> attitudes and practices? On the other hand, at what point are
> Christian feminists no longer identifiably Christian in belief,
> ritual, or practice?

> Mary Catherine Hilkert (1993:76)

It should be clear by now that revelation is a key category in the work that I am

attempting. If the patriarchal nature of the church is claimed to be divinely

revealed and part of authoritative tradition, then such categories become the

contested terrain which feminist and other forms of contextual theologies need

to engage.

Any speech about revelation is fraught with problems. Claude Geffré has

pointed out that revelation is a transcendental theological category that both

precedes and contains every single theological datum. It cannot be proved by

sheer rational argument, but "is the basic presupposition from which we start,

and without which any truth that theology deals with collapses." (1974:15)

A discussion of revelation, then, is closely interwoven with a discussion of options in foundational theology and with questions of theological method. It is closely linked to questions of truth, knowledge and interpretation. Given that many of the traditional philosophical and epistemological presuppositions that accompanied traditional theologies of revelation appear to be no longer credible,[1] we face new challenges in speaking credibly about revelation, and indeed about theology itself. As Sandra Schneiders says,

> The question of revelation, including its possibility and actuality, its extent, its nature, and its mode, is the most foundational question in theology. The answer (whether explicit or implicit) given to this question determines not only the shape and content of a particular theology but the very possibility of elaborating theology at all. (1991b:44f)

In this chapter I seek to give a historical overview of Christian ideas on revelation, focusing in particular on recent shifts towards a hermeneutical understanding of theology which itself will become problematised in the following chapter.

Shifts in the theology of revelation

In looking at the historical development of the doctrine of revelation we see that for much of the history of Christianity (and before it the history of Israel) the giveness of revelation was simply assumed. Avery Dulles has pointed out

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[1] Geffré speaks about a shift from knowledge to interpretation, highlighting the greater understanding that we have of the historical, and therefore contingent, character of all truth. Since Heidegger contemporary philosophy has abandoned its claim to absolute knowledge, recognising instead the provisional and relative nature of all knowledge. Thus we cannot do theology on the basis of metaphysical thought. (1987:11ff)

that the idea of revelation was pervasive throughout the Bible and the theology of the early Christian centuries but because it was taken for granted there was no need to prove its existence or define the concept. (1983:3f)

We should note that for the biblical authors revelation was experienced as historically mediated. (Schneiders 1991b: 97) While the bible does not set out to discuss or prove the fact of revelation, it testifies to it by presenting an interpretation of history in which the action of God is a key interpretive category.

For the early Christian community, the self-disclosure of God was brought to fulfilment in the person of Jesus Christ. Gerald O'Collins writes that:

> This saving revelation, which reached its definitive climax with the resurrection of the crucified Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, constitutes the basic religious reality for Christians and the primary object of their faith. This revelation forms the absolutely fundamental principle and foundation for theology in all its particular sectors. (1993:41)

Given that the first Christian generations were "still under the impact of the great epiphany of God in Christ" it is understandable, argues René Latourelle, "that the theme of revelation is in the foreground of all Christian awareness in the first three centuries." (1968:145) For the Fathers of the church, the good news of salvation is that the Unknowable has been shown to humanity. This is seen as being in accordance with God's eternal plan of salvation which they understood as having gone through various stages of which the summit is Christ. (Latourelle 1968:147)

In their desire to communicate this mystery with the rest of the Graeco-Roman world the apologists took up the idea of Logos, a common religious and

philosophical concept in the second century. They developed a theology of the logos, of his life in the Trinity and of his manifestation in the law and the gospel. (Latourelle 1968:145)

However revelation was not only seen as that which was proposed for belief. As a divine word revelation was accompanied by grace. At the same time as the word is proclaimed, the Spirit was seen as being at work within the person to ensure that the word was heard and bore fruit. Augustine, Origen and Cyril of Alexandria, in particular, insisted on the importance of this second dimension of revelation. (Latourelle 1968:150) In the words of Augustine:

> See here now, brethren, see a mighty mystery. The sound of our words strikes the ears, the Master is within. Do not suppose that any man learns ought from man. We can admonish by the sound of our voice; if there be not One within that shall teach, vain is the noise we make. (*Ep. Jo. tr.* 3,13)

In the Middle Ages this emphasis on revelation as interior illumination influenced Bonaventure who identified revelation with the illuminative action of God or with the subjective illumination that results from God's actions. It is with Thomas Aquinas that a more cognitive approach emerges. For Thomas, revelation is that saving act by which God furnishes us with the truths necessary for our salvation. (McBrien:213) He tells us that

> the formal objective of faith is the first truth as this is made
> known in Scripture and in Church teaching. (*ST*, 2a2æ, q.5, a.3)

Although Thomas insists, like Augustine and Bonaventure, on the necessity of interior illumination from God, and acknowledged different types of revelation, he is interested primarily in prophetic revelation which he sees as an essentially cognitive act. (Latourelle 1968:171)

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In the sixteenth century theories of revelation came to the fore in response to the humanist movement on the one hand and the reformation controversies on the other.[2] As both Protestants and Catholics appealed to revelation to justify their confessional positions new questions arose and theologians were at pains to define both the sources of revelation and their definitions of revelation. (Latourelle:1968:181)

In this period we find an emerging Protestant view that the Word of God is available in scripture alone. The bible was seen as self-interpreting and no other norm of revelation was required. In reaction the Council of Trent insisted that the gospel was contained

> in written books and in unwritten traditions which were received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or else have come down to us, handed on as it were from the apostles themselves at the inspiration of the Holy Spirit ... which have been preserved in unbroken sequence in the catholic church. (Session 4, First decree)

Trent also opposed the Protestant emphasis on faith as trusting, insisting rather that faith comes when people "are moved freely towards God and believe to be true what has been divinely revealed and promised". (Session 6, Decree on Justification) For Trent, the "gospel" is the source of "the whole truth of salvation and rule of conduct" and "this truth and rule are contained in the written books and in unwritten traditions". (Session 4, first decree) Although Trent spoke of "the gospel" as the (single) source of revelation, a so-called "two-source" theory of revelation emerged which viewed scripture and tradition as distinct sources of revealed truth. As O'Collins has pointed out,

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[2]   Melchior Cano and Dominic Banez emphasised the illumination of the individual subject rather than the unveiling of the unseen object, while Francis Suarez focused on the mediation through which God reveals Godself. (Latourelle 1968:181ff)

this privileged a "propositional" view of revelation which saw revelation as the passing on of otherwise hidden truths. (1993:49)

In the new rationalistic period resulting from the enlightenment with its emphasis on the foundations of knowledge, Catholic theology reacted with a new and more rigid form of scholasticism. Theologians such as Suarez and de Lugo stressed the objective character of revelation which saw it as some static reality which one received from others. (McBrien 1980:215)

In this new form of scholasticism a split developed not only between the different theological disciplines, with dogmatic and speculative theology being seen as separate entities (a process that had begun in the late middle ages) but between history and meaning, as scholasticism became cut off from its biblical roots. Geffré has argued that historical positivism and theological rationalism both have the same origin, namely a misunderstanding of the past based on a lack of hermeneutical insight, which he traces to Kant's distinction between knowledge of the facts and the search for meaning. (1987:16)

With increasing attacks on the idea of revelation from both empiricism and idealism some theologians attempted to engage this new spirit.[3] However the dominant Catholic model remained a dogmatic one. This was reinforced by the First Vatican Council which spoke of God "revealing himself and the eternal

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[3]   McBrien contrasts semi-rationalists such as Georg Hermes (d. 1831), Anton Günther (d. 1863) and Jacob Frohschammer (d. 1893) who, while accepting the truth of revelation nevertheless held that reason could independently establish the truths of revelation, with the Catholic fideism of Louis Bautain (d. 1867) and the traditionalism of Louis de Bonald (d. 1840), Félicité de Lammenais (d. 1854) and Augustine Bonnetty (d. 1879). More mainstream attempts to engage the new spirit can be seen in certain Jesuits at the Roman College such as Giovanni Perrone (d. 1876) and Johannes Franzelin (d. 1886), Tübingen's Johanes Möhler (d. 1838), England's John Henry Newman (d. 1890) and the German Matthias Scheeben (d. 1888). (1980:216)

laws of his will to the human race" (*DF*:2). It is worth noting however that *Dei Filius* (the Council's document on faith) spoke of the radical inadequacy of our present knowledge of the revealed mysteries of God. (*DF*:4) It also situated revelation within an eschatological context which links the revealed mysteries to our own "ultimate end". (*DF*:3)

Vatican II and contemporary theology

With *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, as well as its other documents, the Second Vatican Council, while affirming previous statements on revelation, offered a significantly different perspective.

Dei Verbum placed its discussion on revelation within the context of salvation history and saw it as the self-communication of God to humanity. This divine self-disclosure does not simply disclose knowledge about God but makes God present in person. Moreover it is a disclosure that is salvific in intent so that the "economy of revelation" is synonymous with the "history of salvation". (O'Collins 1993:54) As such it is Christocentric and

> The most intimate truth thus revealed about God and human
> salvation shines forth for us in Christ, who is himself both the
> mediator and sum total of revelation. (*DV*:2)

O'Collins has described *Dei Verbum* as profoundly biblical in its language and mentality. (1993:51) Not only does it draw on scriptural themes but it states that the study of scripture should be the very soul of sacred theology (*DV*:24) and that

> The church has always venerated the divine scriptures as it has
> venerated the Body of the Lord, in that it never ceases, above all
> in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and to offer it

to the faithful from the one table of the word of God and the
Body of Christ. (*DV*:21)

For *Dei Verbum* scripture and tradition form a unity "flowing from the same
divine well-spring" (*DV*:9) and "make up a single sacred deposit of the word of
God". (*DV*:10) While it is the task of the church to interpret this word of God,
the magisterium of the church is not to be understood as above the word of
God but rather as its servant. (*DV*:10)

While *Dei Verbum* is Vatican II's principal document on revelation, O'Collins
has pointed out that we should not neglect the council's other documents as
they also contain new and important points. (1993:63) Here we may briefly
note the following.

Sacrosanctum Concilium, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, speaks of
Christ's revelatory presence in the liturgy. It states

> Christ is always present in his church, especially in liturgical
> celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass both in the
> person of his minister ... and most of all in the eucharistic species.
> By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when
> anybody baptizes it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is
> present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the
> holy scriptures are read in church. Lastly, he is present when the
> church prays and sings, for he has promised "where two or three
> are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of
> them" (Mt. 18:20). (*SC*:7)

Revelation involves the revealing of the kingdom of God. For *Lumen Gentium*,
the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,

> This kingdom shines out before humanity in the words, the
> works and the presence of Christ ... principally the kingdom is
> revealed in the person of Christ himself. (*LG*:5)

This revelation of the kingdom is continued in the church which, "longs for the completed kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its king". (*LG*:5)

Thus *Lumen Gentium* defines the church in terms of its revelatory mission and shows how revelation is mediated not only through the bishops' authoritative teaching but also through persons of heroic sanctity. (O'Collins 1993:69)

Revelation may also be found, according to *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, "in the events, the needs and the desires" of our time in which we can discern "the true sign of God's presence and purpose". (*GS*:11)

In noting some of these ways in which revelation occurs we can see that for the second Vatican council revelation refers to both a past and a present reality. This is echoed by recent statements by Pope John Paul II, notably his encyclical on revelation, *Dives in Misericordia*. This is seen in his conclusion when he writes:

> In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and risen, in the spirit of his messianic mission, enduring in the history of humanity, *we raise our voices in prayer* that the Love which is in the Father may once again be revealed at this stage of history, and that, through the work of the Son and Holy Spirit, it may be shown to be present to our modern world ... (*DM*:15)

Commenting on this O'Collins states:

> Both in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in important postconciliar statements, revelation is understood to have been a complete, and unrepeatable self-communication of God through Jesus Christ. Almost in the same breath, however, this official church teaching also calls revelation a present reality

which is repeatedly actualized here and now. (1993:89)

While these two sets of affirmations appear mutually exclusive, O'Collins argues that present revelation actualizes the event of divine self-manifestation but does not add to the content of what was revealed in Christ. (1993:91) Thus he speaks of them as foundational and dependent revelation. (1993:93f)

From proposition to relation

The key move that we see in the last century is from a propositional view of revelation to a relational one. It can be argued that propositional theories developed against the backdrop of and in reaction to the enlightenment's search for clear and certain foundations for knowledge. Likewise relational theories can be seen in relation to existentialist theologies of the Word of God and political theologies of history.[4]

Our present context has seen the problemetisation of both traditional metaphysics and the experiential and positivistic concerns of modernity. Epistemology, whether scholastic or Cartesian, which sought to provide an absolutely secure foundation for all knowledge, has been challenged by both the Kantian strictures against applying knowledge of the observable world to the noumenal world, and by the discovery of the central role of language and history in all knowledge.

This has had serious implications for the theology of revelation. Linguistic philosophers such as Wittgenstein and later the structuralists and

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[4]   For a discussion of existentialist and political theologies and their relationship to their context, see Geffré (1974) chapter four.

poststructuralists have shown us the radical historicity of all language. Language is both necessary for all knowledge and necessarily structures knowledge. Language is a human construct that is influenced by situation, time, class, gender and a host of other factors of social location. Language is, therefore, linked to our human experience and necessarily limited.

In addition, our understanding of history has undergone a radical change since the nineteenth century. Heidegger has shown us the historicity of the human existent and the resultant inadequacy of the positivist subject-object paradigm of human understanding. (Schneiders 1991b:67) This has been pursued by Gadamer with his notion of "effective historical consciousness". As Schneiders emphasises:

> We are never "outside" history but always participants in it. And we do not participate as stable or fixed essences but as ever-changing historical entities. (1991b:67)

While such moves have undermined traditional metaphysics with its stress on an ahistorical being "in itself" and epistemology as the knowledge of that being, they have also undermined the supposedly scientific models of enlightenment knowledge, and its resultant logical positivism, which demanded an objective and demonstrable verification for knowledge. The work of Thomas Kuhn (1970) has shown that even scientific knowledge is fundamentally perpectival in that we cannot step outside of history to some neutral or objective vantage point. Commenting on this, Stephen Toulmin writes

> By insisting on the radical character of scientific change, Kuhn completed the historicization of human thought that had begun in the eighteenth century, and so finally undercut older views about the "immutable" order of nature and human knowledge. (1991:233)

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In this context Richard Rorty has spoken of a shift from epistemology to hermeneutics that is taking place in philosophy, and of which he is an advocate. Rorty has sought to undermine the epistemological tradition by attacking the idea of the "mind" which he sees as a post-Cartesian invention which has become tyrannous in its demand for foundational immediacy and which expects reality to be

> unveiled to us, not as in a glass darkly, but with some
> unimaginable sort of immediacy which would make discourse
> and description superfluous. (1980:375)

In contrast to this idea of knowledge as a "mirror of nature" Rorty proposes a hermeneutical model which sees conversation rather than construction as the only legitimate course for philosophers. (1980:315ff) Such a model is not another philosophical project with its own programmes and agendas but rather the hope that "the cultural space left open by the demise of epistemology will not be filled". (1980:315) It is modest in its claims for what philosophy can achieve in its search for knowledge, and as such recognises the radical temporality of knowledge and its boundedness to the cultural contexts that produce it. (Thiel 1994:27) For Rorty wisdom is the ability to sustain a cultural conversation over and against the fundamentalist desire for closure. Thus he prefers images of listening to those of seeing.

Moreover, if we accept that knowledge is radically linguistic and historical -- that there is no "given" text that is not also created -- then it should be readily apparent that it is also ideological. The impact of the so-called masters of suspicion -- Marx, Nietzsche and Freud -- have left us with a legacy of critical questioning of distortions behind received texts that has been taken up by both contemporary ideology critics and poststructuralists. Although arguing from different contexts, they point to a dynamic of power and exclusion that is at the

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heart of all knowledge that will be discussed further in chapter four.

Thus we find ourselves in a situation where it is hardly possible to accept either that the traditional sources of revelation (the tradition of the church in which scripture has a particular priority) actually contain the "Word of God" as we are to receive it or even that they witness to the self-disclosure of God to humanity without acknowledging that the ways in which such divine disclosure have been understood and communicated have been deeply structured by the historical and linguistic human situation which more often than not has been that of those at the centre of power.

However it should also be apparent that we cannot either look for nor create some pure knowledge outside of history and language. In this context, Geffré argues, we must go beyond both theological objectivism and theological existentialism. While the first leads to false objectifications of God in metaphysical thought, the second risks reducing the mystery of God to its meaning for humanity. (1974:37) He suggests that:

> The crisis in metaphysical language could at least have the
> advantage of making us more attentive to what is entrusted to us
> in revelation and lead us to a re-reading of the theological and
> dogmatic tradition by seeking to unveil what has often been
> obscured through the interpenetration of the metaphysical and
> Christian elements. (1974:39)

This brings us back to the point that Christian theology has always taught but one gets the impression not often taken seriously, namely, that we *cannot* speak about God in the same way that we speak about anything else as an object, and that the moment we do, what we are speaking about is not God. As Augustine writes:

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So what are we to say, brothers, about God? For if you have fully grasped what you want to say, it isn't God. If you have been able to comprehend it, you have comprehended something else instead of God. If you think you have been able to comprehend, your thoughts have deceived you. So he isn't this, if this is what you have understood; but if he is this, then you haven't understood it. So what is it you want to say, seeing you haven't been able to understand it? (*Sermon 52*, 16)

Or, in the words of Thomas Aquinas:

we cannot grasp what God is, but only what He is not ... (*SCG I*, 30)

Commenting on this emphasis in Thomas, Geffré has said:

if there was in fact in Aquinas "the seed of the possibility of going beyond metaphysics," [Welte] that is, a very clear realisation of how much of the divine *Ipsum Esse* lay beyond conceptualization, this remained in the background: the later development of Thomist thought was affected by the increasing tendency to conceptualization. (1974:57)

However in our present context this apophatic emphasis could be an important theological resource. It could also help us to remember that the object of theology, as Geffré has pointed out, is not God but rather the texts of the Christian tradition. He says:

It is certain that once we accept the Kantian critique of knowledge, it becomes difficult to consider the object of theology as the knowledge of God and the object of revelation as "a body of doctrinal truths communicated by God." Its object in the strict sense of the word is a *text*, that of the Bible and its successive interpretations in tradition -- a text to be known and therefore to be interpreted. (1974:44)

All we have is the text, or discourse which is the term David Tracy prefers as it foregrounds both that much discourse is non-written and the social locations

from which it arises. (1994:133ff) Whether we speak of text or discourse, what I am referring to is all the ways in which meaning is passed on to us in a particular tradition -- different types of written text, art, ritual, symbol etc.

Such a hermeneutical approach accepts the hermeneutical circle implicit in all knowledge. In this context revelation is both highlighted -- the texts of our tradition are, after all, all that we have -- and understood in a different light to theologies of revelation that were dependant on traditional metaphysics. Aware of the historical and contingent character of all our understanding of truth, Geffré makes the following statements:

> (1) We are more acutely aware nowadays of the fact that the Word of God cannot be literally identified either with Scripture or with dogmatic pronouncements. Scripture and dogma both bear partial witness to the fullness of the Gospel, which belongs to the eschatological order.
>
> (2) Revelation is not a communication from on high of knowledge that has been settled once and for all time. It points both to God's action in history and to the interpretive expression of that activity. To put this in a different way, what we call Scripture is already an interpretation and the response of faith also forms part of the content of revelation.
>
> (3) Revelation only reaches its fulfilment and becomes fully significant and contemporary in the faith that receives it. That is why, as the Word of God, given in a human word or in a trace of God in human history, it does not depend on a scientific method based on historical criticism. In its cognitive aspect, faith is always an interpretive knowledge that is marked by the historical conditions of a particular period. (1987:11f)

Hermeneutics and beyond

Such a hermeneutical understanding of theology is, I believe, of value in searching for a viable theology of tradition. However, it is not without its own critics. Geffré shows that the work of Derrida, in particular, has placed hermeneutics "on trial" seeing his work of "grammatology" as a radical protest against all theology based on hermeneutics. Derrida writes that

> The encounter between hermeneutics and grammatology has necessarily to take the form of a struggle to the death, a confrontation that straightaway excludes any possibility of reconciliation or mediation. (Geffré 1987:29)

In this Derrida is part of a deconstructionist discourse that emphasises rupture and the breakdown of language which is part of a broader breakdown of all forms of metaphysical thinking. It resists hermeneutics because it sees in it an extension of metaphysics with its concerns with being, presence and identity. The challenges posed by such a rupture will be considered in the following chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the idea of revelation has grown out of the faith of community and its encounter with God. As a reality that is always expressed in human discourse it is necessarily historical. We cannot therefore speak of revelation without an awareness of the broader context of human discourse. This chapter has argued for a hermeneutical understanding of revelation in which tradition is seen as both historical and in need of continual interpretation. However, this is only one position within contemporary

discourse. In the following chapter we will see that such a hermeneutical approach is also problematised.

Chapter Four

Power, discourse and alterity:

the destabilisation of theological knowledge

"May you live in interesting times," says an ancient Chinese
curse. Unfortunately, our choice is not when to live, but only
how. This is not a time when Western culture needs one last burst
of overweening, indeed hubristic, self-confidence masking self-
absorbtion and newfound insecurity. At this time we all need to
face the strong claims on our attention made by other cultures
and by the other, subjugated, forgotten and marginalized
traditions in Western culture itself. We also need to face the
ambiguous otherness within our own psyches and traditions ...
There is no escape from the insight that modernity most feared:
there is no innocent tradition (including modernity), no innocent
classic (including the Scriptures) and no innocent reading
(including this one).

David Tracy (1991:95,97)

In 1965 Michael Theunissen declared that "Few issues have exercised as
powerful a hold over the thought of this century as that of 'the Other'."
(Bernstein 1992:295) Since then what Richard Bernstein refers to as "the tangled
network of questions" relating to "the Other" have been further foregrounded
and are, Bernstein argues, "at the very centre of philosophy and the full range
of the cultural disciplines." (1992:296)

The purpose of this chapter is to outline this "tangled network of questions"
posed by "the Other" as they impact on the development of a theology of
tradition. It is difficult to imagine how one can do theology in a credible way
in our contemporary world without engaging the fundamental challenges that
"the Other" poses. Alterity effects a rupture that presents a sharp challenge to

all forms of ontological thinking, whether this is the being-in-itself of scholastic theology or the historically mediated being of more explicitly hermeneutical theology. While the previous chapter favoured a shift to a theological method that understands itself as hermeneutical, Geffré has pointed out that this too is placed "on trial" (1987:21ff) by questions of otherness. While the following chapters will argue that the hermeneutical approach is still important, this needs to be seen against the backdrop effected by the rupture of "the Other". This chapter focuses on questions of alterity raised by contemporary philosophical discourses while the following chapter examines the question from the perspective of traditional Christian language about God.

In charting the territory of otherness in contemporary discourse it seems that there are two distinct clusters of concern, both of which raise the question of otherness though in different ways, and both of which present a challenge to theology, and especially to a theology of tradition. Firstly, there are the forms of critical theory associated with the work of the Frankfurt school[1] and developed by feminists such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. Secondly, and perhaps more fundamentally, there is the cluster of discourses associated with poststructuralist rereadings of Nietzsche and Freud which emerged from the post-1968 French context associated with the work of Lacan,[2] Derrida,[3]

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[1] See Raymond Geuss' *The Idea of Critical Theory. Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (1981); Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt's (ed) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (1978); and David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram's *Critical Theory. The Essential Readings* (1992).

[2] See *Ecrits: a selection* (1966) and *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (1977).

[3] See *Of grammatology* (1976), *Writing and difference* (1978) and *Margins of Philosophy* (1982).

Foucault[4] and Lyotard,[5] and developed by feminists such as Julia Kristeva[6] and Luce Irigaray.[7] While both address issues of power and discourse they occupy significantly different spaces within the contemporary controversies around modernity and postmodernity.

In what follows I will outline each of these clusters of discourse, followed by specifically feminist examples of them in the work of Schüssler Fiorenza and Kristeva. I will then introduce the idea of the call of the Other found in the work of Emmanuel Levinas and Paul Ricoeur. I conclude by asking what this says about the status of our theological discourse.

The end of neutrality

The important contribution of critical theory, as developed by the Frankfurt School, is to make us aware of the relations of interest and power inherent in discourse that might otherwise have been taken for granted. They have shown us that not only is there no such thing as presuppositionless understanding, but that our presuppositions are rarely neutral or innocent. (Schneiders 1991b:20)

Critical theorists see their work as a continuation of the Enlightenment's project

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[4]   See *Power/Knowledge* (1972), *The Order of Things* (1977) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1978).

[5]   See *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge* (1984), *The differend; phrases in dispute* (1988) and *The Lyotard Reader* (1989).

[6]   See *Desire in Language. A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980), *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984) and *The Kristeva Reader* (1986).

[7]   See *Speculum of the other woman* (1985), *This sex which is not one* (1985) and *The Irigaray Reader* (1991).

of emancipation. Using classical and enlightenment concepts of rationality and humanity they seek to uncover and undermine human captivity to formations of power that, under the guise of science and rationality, present themselves as necessary and normal. In the words of Theodore Adorno: "The task before philosophy is to break up the seemingly obvious and the apparently incomprehensible." (Adorno in Ingram and Simon-Ingram 1992:26)

Working in this context Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) has shown how the ideological interests of the dominant have served to systematically distort our communicative competence. While the dominant in society have entrenched their own interests through the guise of rationalisation, especially in the fields of science and technology, Habermas argues that rationalisation can also enable the development of productive forces that can be a potential for liberation if they help to remove restrictions on communication. (Habermas in Ingram and Simon-Ingram 1992:142) Thus he seeks to develop a theory of communicative competence that would analyze the conditions of non-repressive communicative competence. (Jeanrond 1991:68)

Central to this work of criticism of ideologies is Habermas' critical stance in relation to tradition. In his critical interaction with Hans-Georg Gadamer he argued that Gadamer's model of understanding cannot work when our understanding is systematically distorted. While Gadamer had rehabilitated the concept of tradition that had been discredited by the enlightenment and argued that we cannot understand without consenting to the tradition that constitutes us, Habermas protested that this is a betrayal of enlightenment's demands for critical reflection and emancipation. As a result Gadamer's work, according to Habermas, has resulted in an imperialism that is not critical of tradition. (Geffré 1987:23)

Thus critical theory seeks to remind us of the interests implicated in and sustained by any discourse, and, conversely, of those who have been excluded from the formation of discourse. If our theological tradition has been articulated by the powerful in church and society, it has done so at the expense of "the other" -- an other that I argue needs to be given a privileged place in the development of a theology of tradition.

Ideology criticism in feminist perspective:
the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza

In this context the gender base of the creation of religious knowledge becomes an important consideration. It is by now a truism to say, following Simone de Beauvoir, that women have always been defined as the other and that our reality has therefore found no place in accepted discourse. (Ackermann 1991:93) Indeed, a central feature of much feminist theology has involved an analysis of how Christian tradition has been distorted by androcentric and patriarchal interests. (Ruether 1983a:211)

Utilising Gramsci's work on hegemony and Habermas' work on ideology Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (b. 1938) argues that the function of feminist ideology criticism is to disrupt this "common sense" assumption and show it up for what it is, namely a kyriarchal construct. (1994:26-27) By questioning "how things are" and seeking to undermine what is apparently taken for granted, feminist scholarship enables new possibilities to emerge.

In this Schüssler Fiorenza is determined to situate theological discourse in its broader social, political and ecclesiastical context. Just as "women"[8] is not

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[8]   Schüssler Fiorenza uses the term "wo/men" to show the politically constituted nature of the category "woman"/"women" and to

an ideal category, neither is an eternal nor universal one. Our identities are constituted not only by our biological gender, fundamental though this may be, but also by our race, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity and access to ecclesial and political power structures.

Recognising this multiple, and sometimes contradictory, operation of power relations and oppressions, Schüssler Fiorenza has developed the concept of kyriarchy as a more adequate understanding than that of patriarchy. Whereas patriarchy -- literally the "rule of the fathers" -- refers to a male power and property structure in which men are dominant to the detriment of women, (King 1989:22) kyriarchy refers "to a complex social pyramid of graduated dominations and subordinations". (Schüssler Fiorenza 1994:14) There are, in other words, both different types and different degrees of oppressions and we need to take these seriously.

Such an analysis destabilises our received categories of "women" and "feminine" as eternally "given". Traditional notions of what was and was not considered "feminine" were impacted by factors such as race and class. What was considered appropriate "feminine" behaviour for "ladies" was somehow not necessary for working class women. In the often-quoted words of Sojourner Truth, a African-American former slave:

> That man over there say
> a woman needs to be helped into carriages
> and lifted over ditches
> and to have the best places everywhere.
> Nobody ever helped me into carriages
> or over mud puddles
> or gives me best place ...

---

indicate that she includes in it not only all women but also oppressed and marginalised men. (1994:191)

And ain't I a woman?
                    (quoted in Schüssler Fiorenza 1994:57f)

By shifting the focus from "the rule of men" to "the rule of the

emperor/master/lord/father/husband" Schüssler Fiorenza seeks the links

between different types of oppressions.

> With this term I mean to indicate that not all men dominate and
> exploit all women without difference and that elite Western
> educated propertied Euro-American men have articulated and
> benefitted from women's and other "nonpersons'" exploitation.
> As a consequence, the hermeneutical center of a critical feminist
> theology of liberation cannot simply be women. Rather, it must
> be constituted and determined by the interests of women who
> live at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid and who struggle
> against multiplicative forms of oppression. (1994:14)

This focusing on dynamics of power and exclusion, and privileging of those "at

the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid" has serious consequences for the work

of biblical and theological interpretation that Schüssler Fiorenza is engaged in.

She argues that:

> A feminist critical interpretation of the Bible cannot take as its
> point of departure the normative authority of the biblical
> archetype, but must begin with women's experience in their
> struggle for liberation. In doing so this mode of interpretation
> subjects the Bible to a critical feminist scrutiny and to the
> theological authority of the church of women, an authority that
> seeks to assess the oppressive or liberating dynamics of all
> biblical texts. (1984:13)

Thus interpretation begins, for Schüssler Fiorenza, with a hermeneutics of

suspicion rather than a hermeneutic of consent. (1984:15) She writes:

> Because of its allegiance to the "defeated in history," a feminist
> critical theology maintains that a "hermeneutics of consent"
> which understands itself as the "actualizing continuation of the

Christian history of interpretation" does not suffice. This hermeneutics overlooks the fact that Christian Scripture and tradition are not only a source of truth, but also of untruth, repression and domination. (1984:57f)

Schüssler Fiorenza's concerns are therefore not primarily with the authority of the biblical text but with the historical struggles of women in biblical and Christian history. Her focus is on what Gerald West calls a "behind the text" (1995:135ff) reading which is concerned with the historical and cultural world that gave rise to the text. Through historical and sociological research she seeks to uncover the role which women played in the social, economic and religious affairs of the period and to analyze the ways in which women's roles have been marginalised by the text. (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:29; West 1995:142ff) Thus she does not see herself as accountable to the text or tradition itself, but rather to the community of women whom she seeks to discover behind the text.

Both Habermas and Schüssler Fiorenza show us the problem with a theology that is based on a hermeneutics of consent. For if the texts and traditions that we have received are those of the historical winners and serve to entrench the interests of the dominant, will consenting to their message not further enslave rather than liberate people? And yet, does Christian faith not necessarily involve an element of consent? These issues will be pursued further in chapter six.

However, while such concerns are critical of what they would consider too easy an appropriation of tradition, they are nevertheless concerned with developing a communicative competence that would enable forgotten voices to be heard. Thus the possibility exists of a genuine dialogue which, while critical, would nevertheless seek a historical continuity.

The irreducible alterity of the Other

If the work of Habermas and the critical theorists poses a fundamental challenge to tradition in refusing to consent to its authority, then poststructuralists pose a fundamental challenge not only to tradition but to all forms of western discourse that assume a totality and sameness in any sense linked to metaphysical ideas. They bear witness to a rupture in knowledge that threatens not only traditional metaphysics and hermeneutics but also, and perhaps especially, the critical traditions of the Enlightenment.

The use of the term poststructuralist is an ambiguous label, for the cluster of discourses that I am referring to grew out of the structuralist movement of the 1960s and it is impossible to find a clear dividing line between the two. According to Donald Palmer poststructuralism represents a radicalisation and intensification, but not a rejection, of certain structuralist concerns. (1994:364) Moreover, it appears to primarily be a term used in certain intellectual circles outside of France to draw a line of affinity around several French theorists who are rarely so grouped in France. (Poster 1989:4)

Such discourses emerged in opposition to the humanist traditions represented by existentialist philosophy. Humanism, in the words of Elizabeth Grosz,

> is the belief that all values, meanings, history and culture are the products of human consciousness and individual activity. It conflates the subject and consciousness, granting primary value to consciousness in making choices, and judging, creating and transforming social relations. (1989:6f)

By contrast, structuralism deposed both the individual subject, human consciousness and the sign from any privileged position. It criticised the idea of a pregiven subject and the sign as bearer of a self-constituted meaning.

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Structuralism seeks out the underlying structures or relations
between empirical elements, seeing the empirically given object
merely as a manifestation of this broader system ... the sign is
dethroned from the centre of meaning and consciousness is
displaced from the centre of subjectivity. (Grosz 1989:10f)

The turn to the unconscious

In this we find a turn to the unconscious and a corresponding interest in
psychoanalysis as a tool for interrogating the unconscious. The work of Jacques
Lacan (1901-1981) linked psychoanalysis to questions of textuality, reading and
interpretation and drew attention to the gaps and flaws in conscious
expression. (Grosz 1989:18f) In this context:

psychoanalysis challenges many of the central presuppositions of
post-Cartesian philosophy and literary analysis. Post-Cartesian
philosophy tends to presume a rational, unified self-certain
consciousness. It is undermined more effectively by Freud's
postulate of the unconscious than it is by the Hegelian
assumption of otherness; otherness is the *duplication* of
consciousness. The unconscious is the *displacement* of
consciousness from the centre or core of subjectivity. (Grosz
1989:19)

Such an approach highlights our radical inability to know. The subject, for
Lacan, does not know itself; it is not the master of language but rather its result
or product. (Grosz 1989:19) In the same way such an approach undermines a
correspondence approach to truth in which language is seen as an expression of
reality. As Poster says:

Poststructuralists criticise the assumption of much modern
thought that theoretical discourse is an expression of a truth in
the theorist's mind, that this truth in some way captures historical
reality, and that the question of freedom entails the appropriation
of this truth by historical agents and their subsequent action to
actualize it. (1989:4)

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By contrast, poststructuralists point to the various ways in which the subject materially affects and is affected by language. In the words of Claude Geffré:

> We have to study the language itself as a system of signs and not as a sign or expression of a thought. The words used have meaning in relation to the other words in the sentence, but not in relation to an external reality. The lateral game of the signifiers has to be taken seriously without postulating an ultimate signified. We may say, then, that language as a word, a manifestation of meaning and the event of an encounter is absorbed by language as a system. "It speaks before I speak," as Lacan observed in a frequently quoted sentence. (1987:3)

In this context alterity represents more than simply the opposite of the self. It is a form of otherness that is irreducible to and unable to be modelled on any form of projection of or identification with the subject. (Grosz 1989:xiv) The discourse of the unconscious is quite different from that of consciousness and yet cannot be expressed independently of consciousness: "it can only speak through or as consciousness, as that which intervenes into consciousness as eruption and interruption." (Grosz 1989:23)

Thus the other, in this context, is not simply the excluded, but the unspeakable. The other is not merely excluded, but silenced; it is denied a voice and the means with which to acquire a voice.

The destabilisation of logocentric discourses

Emerging from such a position is the insight that exclusion is not simply the work of political and economic constellations, but of the very structuring of our thought processes, which are integrally linked to such constellations. In western tradition this has involved the privileging of the logos and has resulted in logocentrism. Grosz defines these as follows:

> The logos, logic, reason, knowledge, represents a singular and
> unified conceptual order, one which seems to grasp the presence
> or immediacy of things. Logocentrism is a system of thought
> centred around the dominance of this singular logic of presence.
> It is a system which seeks, beyond signs and representation, the
> real and the true, the presence of being, of knowing and reality, to
> the mind -- an access to concepts and things in their pure,
> unmediated form. (1989:xix)

It is Jacques Derrida (b. 1930) who confronts the captivity of western thought to a metaphysics of presence. He argues that western metaphysics is structured around a series of binary oppositions which simultaneously value what is considered positive and devalue what is considered negative. However, the positive term (presence, good, being) fails to acknowledge the extent to which it is dependent on the negative (absence, bad, non-being). He argues that to recognise that identity depends on difference and that presence depends on absence is to disturb the very structure of knowledge. (Grosz 1989:27)

Derrida shows that the west's obsession with knowledge and with the possibility of self-certain, unmediated and guaranteed truth, while an impossible ideal, is necessary for the functioning of logocentrism. (Grosz 1989:28) By assuming the apparently given nature of concepts such as being and truth, the western logocentric tradition has been able to avoid their real materiality and origin in language, and hence their implication in relations of power.

In problematising and seeking to challenge logocentrism Derrida seeks to replace metaphysics with grammatology. Whereas logocentric metaphysics gave priority to the word, grammatology gives priority to writing. Whereas logocentrism gave priority to a metaphysics of presence, grammatology seeks out the idea of *differance*, a term which he introduces to point beyond both sameness and difference.

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In this Derrida is at pains to point out the end of the sign as signifier of something other than itself. (1991:34f) Peggy Kamuf comments:

> Derrida insists that linguistics remains a metaphysics as long as it retains the distinction between signified and signifier within the concept of the sign. This distinction is always ultimately grounded in a pure intelligibility tied to an absolute logos: the face of God. The concept of the sign, whose history is coextensive with the history of logocentrism, is essentially theological. (Kamuf's introduction in Derrida 1991:32)

Grammatology is thus fundamentally deconstructive. Deconstruction is one of Derrida's strategies for engaging logocentrism and involves

> a series of close readings of particular philosophical and literary texts, seeking out the traces or remainders of textuality and materiality that are its central points, hinges in a destabilisation of the text's explicit ideals. (Grosz 1989:28)

It thus seeks out blindspots and contradictions "where the text spills over its conceptual boundaries." (Grosz 1989:28) Such points of excess indicate a movement that "escapes the logic of the self-present subject considered as rational master of meaning." (Grosz 1989:29)

In pushing the boundaries between sameness and otherness, presence and absence, being and non-being, Derrida uses the term *differance* to indicate an alterity that is more than simply the binary opposite of sameness. The term differance plays on the double meaning of the French word *différer* which means both to differ and to defer. It is, moreover, dependent on writing, being inaudible when spoken, and thus further prioritises writing over speech. (Kamuf's introduction in Derrida 1991:59) With it he seeks to indicate an inevitable (and potentially endless) deferral and displacement of meaning that escapes the logic of the self-present subject. (Grosz 1989:29)

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Derrida's deconstructive strategies also seek to make apparent the violence involved in the logocentric production of knowledge. By displacing repressed terms, and showing that dominant terms are dependent on them, he "makes explicit the unacknowledged debt the dominant term owes to the secondary term". (Grosz 1989:30)

The end of master stories and globalising discourses

Similar concerns are present in the work of Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault. By showing that western discourse is based on a violence of exclusion they seek to disrupt the apparent legitimacy of all totalising and globalising forms of discourse.

Lyotard (b. 1924) draws attention to the conflict inherent in discourse. The linking of phrases is always done through the victory of one genre of discourse over and against another. Each phrase is always one out of endless possibilities which cannot survive, and hence of a plurality that can never be respected. (Boeve 1995:370) The use of a phrase creates an expectation which is closed off by the use of the next phrase. However this expectation is never totally closed off for its expectation is never totally fulfilled. Thus Lyotard points to a heterogeneity that accompanies all decision-making. He seeks to show that plurality is a consequence of a fundamental heterogeneity. This unspeakable, which he calls the *differend*, "accompanies and provokes each and every uttered word, yet can never be identified with it." (Boeve 1995:370)

For Lyotard postmodern consciousness is this consciousness of this inexpressible event and must give witness to this *differend*. This involves a discourse which witnesses to the essential openness of the *differend* and an opposition to what Lyotard calls modern master stories which involve a

universalistic, hegemonic, cognitive and exclusivistic discourse. (Boeve 1995:371)

This is echoed in the work of Foucault (1926-1984) who speaks of the tyranny held by unitary, globalising discourses. Discourse has consequences for social relations for,

> relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated not implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. (Foucault 1980:93)

He points to the importance of local criticism which allows for a

> non-centralised kind of theoretical production, one that is to say whose validity is not dependent on the approval of established regimes of thought ... it seems to me that this local criticism has proceeded by means of what one might term "a return of knowledge". (Foucault 1980:81)

This allows for what Foucault terms the insurrection of subjugated knowledges. This term refers to two types of knowledge. Firstly, it refers to bodies of historical knowledge that have been buried and disguised within the knowledge of the dominant. Their rediscovery, which critical scholarship can aid, allows us

> to rediscover the ruptural effects of conflict and struggle that the order imposed by functionalist or systematising thought is designed to mask. (1980:82)

Secondly, the term subjugated knowledges, refers to something altogether different, namely popular or naive knowledges which the dominant discourses

have refused to acknowledge as real knowledge. Such knowledges are based on

> a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge
> incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the
> harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it.
> (1980:82)

Emerging from the insurrection of these subjugated knowledges Foucault sees the development of what he terms a genealogy

> or rather a multiplicity of genealogical researches, a painstaking
> rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their
> conflicts ... Let us give the term genealogy to the union of erudite
> knowledges and local memories which allows us to establish a
> historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this
> historical knowledge tactically today. (1980:83)

Thus for Foucault, as for Lyotard, the challenge is to break open totalising discourses and he seeks to do this through seeking out that which has been excluded.

**Alterity in French feminist thought:
the work of Julia Kristeva**

We have seen that in the cluster of discourses associated with poststructuralism relations of power have functioned not simply to exclude the voices of the other, but have shaped discourse in ways that have denied the possibility of such voices even emerging. In this context, the issue, from a feminist perspective, is not simply that women's voices have not been heard, but that the very shape of the dominant discourses have excluded them from the start.

While the feminist movement in the English speaking world has tended to focus on the struggle for women's subjectivity and has given a privileged place to the category of women's experience, French feminism (drawing on poststructuralism and psychoanalysis) has tended to undermine the very category of women's experience itself. (Moi 1987:5) Thus it becomes increasingly difficult to locate the existence of the female (or other marginalised) subject.

While there are significant differences amongst French feminists, I am focusing here on aspects of the work of Julia Kristeva (b. 1941) as it provides us with insight into the radical alterity which results from a gendered reading of poststructuralist (and particularly psychoanalytical) concerns. Working within an antihumanist tradition, and influenced by Lacan, Kristeva is concerned with the creation of the subject and its emergence through language. Like Lacan, she is concerned with decentering the subject so that

> What we call *significance*, then, is precisely this unlimited and
> unbounded generating process, this unceasing operation of the
> drives toward, in, and through language; toward, in, and through
> the exchange system and its protagonists -- the subject and his
> institutions. This heterogeneous process, neither anarchic,
> fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, is a
> structuring and de-structuring *practice*, a passage to the outer
> *boundaries* of the subject and society. Then -- and only then -- can
> it be jouissance and revolution. (1984:17)

Kristeva sees a parallel between three realms of social existence, namely, the speaking subject, signifying practices and the socio-political ensemble. (Grosz 1989:68) By interrogating the speaking subject she is engaging an entity that is symptomatic of a broader social organisation. (Grosz 1989:41) She is concerned with the region of overlap between linguistic/literary theory and psychoanalysis and seeks to link subjectivity and textuality through an

exploration of terms such as "the semiotic", "the symbolic" and "the thetic". (Grosz 1989:42)

Kristeva uses the terms "semiotic" and "the symbolic" to denote the two components of the signifying process. Leon Roudiez notes that

> While this division is not identical with that of unconscious/conscious, id/superego, or nature/culture, there are analogies here that could be usefully kept in mind. (Introduction in Kristeva 1984:4)

For Kristeva all signifying practices and social subjects are the effects of the relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic. She understands the semiotic to be the fluid, non-differentiated and prior space which is "distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration." (1984:25) Borrowing the term from Plato's *Timaeus* she refers to it as the maternal *chora*:

> an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movements and their ephemeral stases ... the *chora* as rupture and articulations (rhythm), precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality and temporality. (1984:25f)

While the semiotic *chora* is regulated through natural or socio-historical constraints, it precedes the establishment of the sign and hence of social laws. (1984:27) The semiotic is composed of non-signifying raw materials and precedes all unities, binary oppositional structures and hierarchical forms of organisation. It is the symbiotic space shared by the mother and child's indistinguishable bodies. (Grosz 1989:43)

While the semiotic always accompanies us, it is the realm of the symbolic that we usually inhabit for through the processes of signification, the symbolic has

gained precedence and subordinated the semiotic. The symbolic is thus

> a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the
> objective constraints of biological (including sexual) differences
> and concrete, historical family structures. (1984:29)

While the *chora* is identified as the domain of the mother, Kristeva identifies the

symbolic with the domain of the father, and argues that, in Grosz's words:

> The oedipus complex severs the child from its dependence on the
> (m)other by means of the castration threat, which pits the child's
> narcissistic investment in the integrity of its body against its
> desire for access to the mother's body. Only then can it gain a
> position within the socio-symbolic order, and the privileges
> associated with the Name-of-the-Father. (1989:48)

Between the domains of the semiotic and the symbolic Kristeva posits the *thetic*

threshold which she sees as an anticipation of the symbolic from within the

semiotic. This includes both the mirror stage and the discovery of castration.

(1984:46) In the mirror stage the child discovers a sense of itself as separate

from other objects in space. In the discovery of castration the subject is

detached from dependence on the mother and makes the phallic function *the*

symbolic function. (1984:47) Such a rupture makes signification possible but it

also impacts the nature of the signification:

> Ultimately this signifier/signified transformation, constitutive of
> language, is seen as being indebted to, induced and imposed by
> the social realm. Dependence on the mother is severed, and
> transformed into a symbolic relation to an other; the constitution
> of the Other is indispensable for communicating with an other. In
> this way the signifier/signified break is synonymous with social
> sanction: "the first social censorship." (1984:48)

Thus the founding thesis of all signification is itself dependant on a certain set

of social relations.

> To brand the thetic as the foundation of metaphysics is to risk
> serving as an antechamber for metaphysics -- unless, that is, we
> specify the way the thetic is produced. In our view, the Freudian
> theory of the unconscious and its Lacanian development show,
> precisely, that thetic signification is a stage attained under certain
> precise conditions during the signifying process, and that it
> constitutes the subject without being reduced to this process
> precisely because it is the threshold of language. (1984:44f)

What emerges from Kristeva's work then is that the process of signification, and the emergence of the subject, has involved the victory of the symbolic and the displacement of the semiotic, which correlate to the masculine and the feminine respectively. This victory is only provisional, however. The semiotic continues to accompany the symbolic as "the unspoken, threatening condition of signification, unable to be signified." (Grosz 1989:52) In times of crisis it threatens to overflow its boundaries and transgress the borders of the symbolic order. The possibility of such transgression will be explored further in chapter seven.

Modernity versus postmodernity

It should be clear that the two clusters of discourse outlined in this chapter assume radically different understandings, especially as regards truth, reason and the nature of human subjectivity and hence agency. While both claim allegiance to a project of emancipation, they differ fundamentally over what this means and how it can be achieved. This is illustrated by the debate between Habermas and the poststructuralists which has focused on the nature of modernity. (Poster 1989:19) For Habermas the French move to postmodernity, and in particular their attack on rationality, was a retreat from the challenge of the enlightenment rather than a move beyond it, while for the poststructuralists, especially Lyotard, Habermas' insistence on a search for consensual truth is an oppressive totalisation that prevents the celebration of

plurality and difference.

In feminist perspective it should also be clear that there are distinct differences between the work of Schüssler Fiorenza and the work of Kristeva. While Schüssler Fiorenza focuses on the exclusion of women from biblical and historical texts and seeks to reclaim their subjecthood and historical agency, Kristeva's work can be seen to undermine the very idea of female subjectivity.[9] While Schüssler Fiorenza acknowledges that gender is socially constructed, she is concerned with finding strategies for reclaiming the subjectivity of the marginalised. By contrast Kristeva's work has been criticised for an ambiguous relationship to feminist struggles and an uncritical acceptance of psychoanalytical conceptions of women and femininity. (Grosz 1989:63ff)

It is not my concern here to mediate between these opposing positions. Rather, I have outlined each of these clusters of discourse because both clusters both present a challenge for theology and provide us with possible resources for theological work. They show us that certain voices have been excluded from the formulation of the church's tradition and that there are dynamics that encourage this exclusion. But they also show us that we are always accompanied by that which is unsaid -- and unsayable.

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[9]   Grosz criticises Kristeva not only for an ambiguous relation to feminist struggles, but also because in focusing on and seeking to undermine specific male and female identities she undermines female subjectivity while privileging the male avant-garde. (1989:91ff)

The call of the Other

Before ending this chapter I would like to allow an interjection from two thinkers not easily identifiable with either of the above clusters of discourse but whose work engages the question of alterity in compelling, if conflicting ways.

The face of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas

Like the poststructuralists Levinas (b. 1905) is critical of the totalising agenda of western philosophical thought. He rejects a concern with being and essences arguing that such an ontological approach is rooted in violence to the Other. (1989:83f)

By contrast Levinas argues for the priority of ethics as a first philosophy. Ethics for him is rooted in an openness to the face of the Other:

> The sense of the human is not to be measured by presence, not even by self-presence. The meaning of proximity exceeds the limits of ontology, of the human essence, and of the world. It signifies by way of transcendence and the relationship-to-God-in-me (*l'á-Dieu-en-moi*) which is the putting of myself into question. The face signifies in the fact of summoning, of *summoning me* -- in its nudity or its destitution, in everything that is precarious in questioning, in all the hazards of mortality -- to the unresolved alternative between Being and Nothingness, a questioning which, *ipso facto, summons me.*

> The Infinite in its absolute difference withholds itself from presence in me; the Infinite does not come to meet me in a contemporaneousness like that in which noesis and noema meet simultaneously together, nor the way in which interlocutors responding to one another may meet. The Infinite is not indifferent to me. It is in calling me to other men that transcendence concerns me. In this unique intrigue of

transcendence, non-absence of the Infinite is neither presence, nor re-presentation. Instead, the Idea of the Infinite is to be found in my responsibility for the Other. (1989:5)

Rooted in the Hasidic tradition Levinas refers to God and the Infinite. God, however, is always encountered and witnessed to:

> Nobody can really say I believe -- or I do not believe for that matter -- that God exists. The existence of God is not a question of an individual soul's uttering logical syllogisms. It cannot be proved. The existence of God, the Sein Gottes, is sacred history itself, the sacredness of man's relation to man through which God may pass. God's existence is the story of his revelation in biblical history. (quoted in Grosz 1989:157)

The response to alterity, for Levinas, is the biblical response of "Here I am!" It is not a response to a being but rather to a *face*, which signifies beyond any epistemological level and is conceptually uncontainable. But the face, in its nakedness and poverty, speaks and "it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse." (1985:87) And when the face speaks its first word is "Thou shalt not kill." (1985:89)

Thus Levinas is concerned with an ethical and a sacred history rather than an epistemological one. This history points beyond ontology in affirming *being-for-itself* to the unconditional responsibility of *being-for-the-other*. (Hand in 1989:7)

Oneself as Another: Paul Ricoeur

While Levinas highlights the absolute exteriority of the Other which precludes any relation between Same and Other, as a way of protecting the Other from being reduced to a totalising ontology of the Same, Ricoeur (b. 1913) argues that it is possible for the Other to be in relation to the self and that the Other

actually serves to constitute the self.

Ricoeur argues that while, with Levinas, "Each face is a Sinai that prohibits murder" he continues to ask:

> And me? It is in me that the movement coming from the other completes its trajectory: the other constitutes me as responsible, that is, as capable of responding. In this way the word of the other comes to be placed at the origin of my acts. (1992:336)

For Ricoeur the relationship between the self and the Other is central. It is in seeing myself in the Other that the command "Thou shalt not kill" becomes my own to the point of becoming a conviction that enables me to say "Here I stand!" (1992:339) Thus testimony enables the emergence of the self, who is nevertheless intimately related to the Other. (1992:340) One can therefore speak both of a movement from the Same to the Other and of a movement from the Other to the Same. (1992:340)

Such an engagement with alterity necessarily has ontological implications for Ricoeur for he sees otherness as *"being enjoined as the structure of selfhood"*. (1992:354) He objects, to Levinas, that

> the injunction is primordially attestation, or the injunction risks not being heard and the self not being affected in the mode of being-enjoined. (1992:355)

However, while the Other is the necessary path of injunction, one needs to maintain "a certain equivocalness of the status of the Other on the strictly philosophical plane". (1992:355)

> Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one has to say that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other,

the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God -- living God, absent God -- or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end. (1992:355)

Conclusion

Engaging with the discourse of alterity shows something of the gulf between the concerns raised by both the critical theorists and the poststructuralists, on the one hand, and the predominant forms of Christian theologising, on the other hand. Both the critical theorists and the poststructuralists challenge us to listen to and for the voices of the excluded and the silenced, a call that is poignantly echoed by both Levinas and Ricoeur.

Such a challenge appears at first sight to be foreign to -- indeed antithetical to -- our theological tradition, for both scholastic and hermeneutical forms of theologising are based on concepts of presence and being (whether in itself or historically mediated). However, it is my contention that this is not necessarily the case. In the next chapter I hope to present a reading of the Christian apophatic tradition that indicates that alterity is at the very heart of Christian faith. How, and whether, this negativity can be held together with other theological expressions will be considered in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Five

Beyond affirmation or negation:

the self-subverting nature of theological discourse

as seen in the Christian "mystical" tradition

God, then, is infinite and incomprehensible, and all that is
comprehensible about him is his infinity and incomprehensibility.

John Damascene (Lossky 1976:36)

It is on the other side of both our affirmations and our denials that
the silence of the transcendent is glimpsed, seen through the
fissures opened up in our language by the dialectical strategy of
self-subversion.

Denys Turner (1995:45)

God is a word, a word unspoken.

Meister Eckhart (1981:203)

All theologians agree that, in the words of Thomas Aquinas, recently echoed in

The Catechism of the Catholic Church, "we cannot grasp what God is, but only

what He is not". (*SCG*, 1, 30; cf *Catechism* 1994:42) The ultimate unknowability

of God was affirmed by both the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and the First

Vatican Council in 1870.[1] While the church has continued to say much about

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[1]   The Fourth Lateran Council stated that

For between creator and creature there can be noted no similarity
so great that a greater dissimilarity cannot be seen between them.
(Constitution 2)

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God, it has done so against the backdrop of this acknowledgement and with the admission that we can only speak of God by way of analogy.[2]

While the apophatic or negative way has a long theological history, a stress on God's unknowability has, in recent times, come to be seen not so much as a theological emphasis or strategy, but as the theme for a type of spirituality or mysticism. This apophatic or negative way

> stresses that because God is the ever-greater God, so radically different from any creature, God is best known by negation, elimination, forgetting, unknowing, without images and symbols, and in darkness. (Egan 1978:403)

Such a way is in distinction to, but nevertheless dependant on, the cataphatic or positive way. This way

> emphasizes a definite similarity between God and creatures, that God can be reached by creatures, images, and symbols, because He has manifested Himself in creation and salvation history. (Egan 1978:403)

The two different paths to God are seen as represented by different great mystics in the church's tradition: Dionysius, Eckhart and John of the Cross are seen, among others, as examples of apophatic mysticism, while Francis of

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The First Vatican Council tells us that:

> For the divine mysteries, by their very nature, so far surpass the created understanding that, even when a revelation has been given and accepted by faith, they remain covered by the veil of that same faith and wrapped, as it were, in a certain obscurity, as long as in this mortal life we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight. (*DF*:4)

[2]   For a discussion of analogy in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, see Klubertanz (1960). For discussion of the use of analogy and metaphor in speech about God see McFague, (1983) chapter one.

Assisi, Julian of Norwich and Ignatius of Loyola are seen, among others, as examples of cataphatic mysticism.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate how the Christian apophatic tradition can be a resource in developing a theology of tradition that takes seriously the fundamental alterity that accompanies all human discourse. However, to do this we need to challenge both the gulf that separates theology from spirituality and/or mysticism and much of the contemporary understanding of mysticism. I begin then by addressing this question. I then consider aspects of the apophatic theology of Gregory, Dionysius, Eckhart and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. I then turn to a consideration of key themes that emerge and conclude by arguing that the apophatic theologians would welcome the destabilisation of discourse brought on by our contemporary context, although their strategies for engaging it would provide a challenge to our postmodern world.

Mysticism and its problematisation

Mysticism is generally understood as a religious phenomenon that refers to immediate experience of, or union with, Ultimate Reality. Ellwood defines it as follows:

> Mystical experience is experience in a religious context which is immediately or subsequently interpreted by the experiencer as encounter with ultimate divine reality in a direct nonrational way which engenders a deep sense of unity, and of living during the experience on a level of being other than the ordinary. (1980:29)

Thus, while it is possible to argue for a non-religious mysticism, it is usually seen as a particular form of religious experience -- one that, because of its

intense nature and undescribable character, necessarily involves direct personal participation.

The last century has seen the development of an academic discourse of mysticism that has been concerned with questions of experience, knowledge, language and interpretation.[3] It has moreover sought to define what it understands by the term mysticism and has usually related this to a particular type of experience which William James' classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1905) defined as ineffable, noetic, transient, passive and unitive.

This approach to mysticism as an experiential phenomena has been criticised by two recent works. While coming from different directions Grace Jantzen's *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (1995) and Denys Turner's *The Darkness of God* (1995) seek to disrupt this discourse by showing it up as socially constructed (Jantzen) and a form of positivism (Turner) that is inevitably bound up with the enlightenment's perceptions of truth and verifiability.

Jantzen has pointed out that

> it is plain that the preoccupations of most modern philosophical interpreters of mysticism were not the preoccupations of the mystics themselves. (1995:10)

Indeed, she argues that the modern discourse of mysticism needs to be understood as carried out "under the long shadow of Kant". (1995:8) By this she means that mysticism is seen as a way of rescuing the possibility of

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[3]   For a discussion of these, see Robert Ellwood's *Mysticism and Religion* (1980), Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism* (1974), Steven Katz' (ed) *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (1978), Richard Wood's *Understanding Mysticism* (1980) and the General Introduction and Appendix in Bernard McGinn's *The Foundations of Mysticism*, Vol. 1 (1991).

religious knowledge from the Kantian strictures which foreclosed the possibility of transcendent knowledge. It is this interest that determines modern mystical discourse, even though the mystics themselves had never heard of Kant and were not informed by the enlightenment concerns, much less what properly pertains to mystical states according to James and his followers. In the words of Bernard McGinn

> No mystics (at least before the present century) believed in or practised "mysticism." They believed in and practised Christianity (or Judaism, or Islam, or Hinduism), that is, religions that contained mystical elements as parts of a wider historical whole. (1991:xvi)

Jantzen argues that we need to understand mysticism as a social construct and that "the delimiting of mysticism through the centuries was crucial to maintaining male hierarchical control in church and society". (1995:3) Following Foucault she seeks a genealogy of mysticism that will enable us to "uncover the power struggles which were inherent in the emergence of particular concepts." (1995:14)

Like Jantzen, Turner has pointed out the difference between the concerns of the current discourse of mysticism and the concerns of those that this discourse considers mystics, noting that

> the idea that there is a "mysticism" or that there are practitioners of it, "mystics", is an idea of very recent provenance, perhaps as recently as our century itself. (1995:260)

Turner is particularly concerned with the association of mysticism with experientialism in modern mystical discourse, an association that implies a theological positivism "not without its parallels in the philosophical positivisms of our own century". (1995:262) Such a trend identifies immediate

mystical experience as foundational and free from theoretical presuppositions, and as providing grounds for verifying or falsifying theological truth. (1995:261)

When the texts of those considered mystics, and especially supposedly apophatic texts, are read in terms of such concerns, we achieve a reading that is diametrically opposed to their own concerns.

> Put very bluntly, the difference seemed to be this: that whereas our employment of the metaphors of "inwardness" and "ascent" appears to be tied in with the achievement and the cultivation of a certain kind of experience ... the medieval employment of them was tied in with a "critique" of such religious experiences and practices. (1995:4)

Thus by creating a category called mysticism and by identifying it with experience the modern discourse of mysticism has missed the point of what might more properly be called mystical theology. In particular, by identifying the apophatic with *experiences* of negativity and with negative metaphors, it has, ironically, turned the apophatic into a type of positivism and has stripped it of its proper power as a critical moment in all theological tasks. We shall return to a consideration of the real importance of the apophatic moment in theology after seeing how it functions in certain selected theologians/mystics in the church's tradition.

The apophatic critique as seen in selected theologians

In looking at the concerns of Gregory, Dionysius, Eckhart and the author of the *Cloud*, I have selected four of the best known representatives of the apophatic tradition. However, as should be apparent below, it is not so much the apophatic images they use that are important for our task, as the dynamic that they develop, a dynamic that is proper to *all* theology, and not simply that labelled apophatic.

Gregory of Nyssa: knowledge beyond all knowing

The patristic era, as the age of the great councils, was a key period in the church's self-definition and increasing understanding of what it believed, especially regarding the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. It would be a mistake, however, to see such beliefs as merely beliefs: this was an era for whom truth about God was lived truth. Vladimir Lossky's words reflect this when he says:

> Unlike gnosticism, in which knowledge for its own sake
> constitutes the aim of the gnostic, Christian theology is always in
> the last resort a means: a unity of knowledge subserving an end
> which transcends all knowledge. (1976:9)

Like other church Fathers Gregory of Nyssa, a fourth century monk and bishop from Cappadocia,[4] attempts to bring together the neoplatonism of his Greek

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[4]   Born into an illustrious Christian family Gregory (c.335 - c. 395) joined his brother Basil's monastery and was made bishop of Nyssa about 371/2. He played a prominent role in the Council of Constantinople in 381. Together with his brother Basil and their friend Gregory of Nazianzus he is known for opposing Arianism and promoting trinitarian teaching. In his later years Gregory turned his attention to the spiritual life and the *Life of Moses* was his chief work of spiritual theology. Other related works are *On the Titles of the*

intellectual background with the Jewish narrative of historical encounter with God. He sees humanity as being positioned on the frontier between two worlds, that of the spiritual and that of the material. Through his incarnation Christ has opened this frontier for us and directs our nature towards God. (Kannengiesser 1985:72)

In *The Life of Moses* Gregory sets forth his doctrine of the spiritual life. This allegorical commentary provides an example of the spiritual life in which, after outlining the life of Moses, "we shall seek out the spiritual understanding which corresponds to the history in order to obtain suggestions of virtue." (1978:33)

After portraying Moses' departure from Egypt, crossing of the Red Sea, and being fed with manna, which are related to rites of initiation, we come to Moses' experience on "The Mountain of Divine Knowledge" where "the higher levels of virtue" are encountered and "the ineffable knowledge of God" discovered. (1978:91ff) On this mountain God is discovered in darkness and unknowing:

> What does it mean that Moses entered the darkness and then saw God in it? What is now recounted seems somehow to be contradictory to the first epiphany, for then the Divine was beheld in light but now he is seen in darkness. Let us not think that this is at variance with the sequence of things we have contemplated spiritually. Scripture teaches by this that religious knowledge comes first to those who receive it as light. Therefore what is perceived to be contrary to religion is darkness, and the escape from darkness comes about when one participates in light. But as the mind progresses and, through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it

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Psalms, Homilies on Ecclesiastes, On the Lord's Prayer, On the Beatitudes, On the Canticle of Canticles, On Perfection and *On the Christian Profession.* (Introduction in 1978:2)

approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is uncontemplated.

For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness. Wherefore John the sublime, who penetrated into the luminous darkness, says, *No one has ever seen God*, thus asserting that knowledge of the divine essence is unattainable not only by men but also by every intelligent creature. (1978:94f)

What is important for our purposes is that Gregory insists on both on our growing knowledge of God and, simultaneously, on the impossibility of such knowledge. We are called to knowledge of God. And yet, as we advance in that knowledge, we become aware of our radical inability to know. We contemplate what is uncontemplated and see what is unseen. Thus we come to realise that seeing consists in not seeing.

Such statements are not simply arbitrary contradictions but part of a dialectical strategy that seeks to transcend the limitations of language. Darkness is not simply the opposite of light but the bearer of that which cannot be expressed by any metaphor.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite:

knowledge beyond assertion and denial

Like Gregory, Dionysius[5] uses the image of Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai in order to describe our growing knowledge of God. And, like Gregory, the further we progress on this path to God, the more we realise that we cannot speak of God.

Yet, although Dionysius is regarded as a (perhaps *the*) leading exponent of the apophatic way, his theology is nevertheless full of names and images for God. In his work *The Divine Names* he argues that, as the Cause of all, God "is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is." (1987:56) Thus theologians give God many names:

> such as "I am being," "life," "light," "God," the "truth." These same wise writers, when praising the Cause of everything that is, use names from all the things caused: good, beautiful, wise, beloved, God of gods, Lord of Lords, Holy of Holies, eternal, existent, Cause of the ages. They call him source of life, wisdom, mind, word, knower, possessor beforehand of all the treasures of knowledge, power, powerful, and King of Kings, ancient of days ... (1987:55)

In addition

For all sorts of reasons and because of all sorts of dynamic

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5   Variously known as Denys, Dionysius or Pseudo-Dionysius, the real identity of the person who wrote under the pseudonym of Dionysius the Areopagite is unknown. Although he was originally thought to be the Dionysius referred to in Acts 17:34, scholars now date his texts from the fifth or sixth century and see them as influenced by neoplatonism and especially the work of Plotinus. His chief works are *The Divine Names* and *The Mystical Theology*, which most concern us here, but he also wrote *The Celestial Hierarchy*, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and various letters.

energies they have applied to the divine Goodness, which surpasses every name and every splendor, descriptions of every sort -- human, fiery, or amber shapes and forms; they praise its eyes, ears, hair, face, and hands, back, wings, and arms, a posterior, and feet.... (1987:57)

Dionysius speaks of both affirmative and negative theologies. These are not simply alternative ways to God, however. Rather they are different moments in a strategy that is intended to take us beyond both affirmation and denial. Thus the process of naming ultimately leads to a collapse of language and allows us to encounter God through a process of unknowing. The *via affirmitiva* leads to the *via negativa* which in turn leads to the *via mystica*. (Bischoff 1976:31)

In this process there is a certain hierarchy and a clear direction to the process of naming and unnaming. Dionysius begins by outlining the cognitive names and attributes of God which he considers to be most similar to God before naming other, less similar attributes. However, in the necessary denial that follows it is the less similar attributes that are first denied before moving to denying any likeness even with the conceptual attributes such as life, being and goodness. Thus in *The Mystical Theology* Dionysius states that

When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must proceed from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain. Is it not closer to reality to say that God is life and goodness rather than that he is air and stone? Is it not more accurate to deny that drunkenness and rage can be attributed to him than to deny that we can apply to him the terms of speech and thought? (1987:139f)

Moreover, while knowledge of God for Dionysius relies on both affirmation and negation, it is ultimately our negations about God, as much as our affirmations that need to be denied.

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There is no speaking of it, nor name nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth -- it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; it is also beyond every denial. (1987:141)

Noting this process of denying even our denials, Turner is at pains to point out that it is not simply negative language about God that results in an apophatic theology. Rather he claims that

The apophatic is the linguistic strategy of somehow showing by means of language that which lies beyond language. It is not done, and it cannot be done, by means of negative utterances alone which are no less bits of ordinary intelligible human discourse than are affirmations. Our negations, therefore, fail of God as much as do our affirmations. Over and over again Denys repeats the refrain: "[The Cause of all] is beyond assertion *and denial*"; and again: "We make assertions *and denials* of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is beyond every assertion ... [and] *also beyond every denial*"; and yet again: "[The One is] beyond ... the assertion of all things and the denial of all things, [is] that which is beyond every assertion *and denial*." (1995:34f)

Thus it is through the breakdown of all discourse that we glimpse something of the knowledge of God.

Meister Eckhart: God beyond God

Like Gregory and Dionysius, Eckhart, a German Dominican from the high
middle ages,[6] is concerned with what he terms "the purity of the divine nature"
which is "beyond words". (1981:203) This is closely related to another of his key
themes, namely, the necessity for us to be detached from ourselves and from all
things. For only if we are free of all created things, and free of God, and of
ourselves, may God find a place in us in which to work. (1981:202)

In emphasising the purity of God Eckhart says:

> In scripture God is called by many names. I say that whoever
> perceives something in God and attaches thereby some name to
> him, that is not God. God is above names and above nature.
> (1981:204)

Working within a Platonic framework of emanation and return, Eckhart
distinguishes between all that is said about God, including the relations of the
three persons of the Trinity, and the hidden Godhead or God beyond God, of
whom we can say nothing at all. It is from this hidden abyss or ground that
both "God" and all creatures proceed. And it is to this ground that we return
through the birth of God in the soul and the soul's re-entry into this God
beyond God. (McGinn 1981:31) Of this Eckhart states:

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6   Called "Meister" because of his teaching appointment at the
University of Paris, Eckhart (c. 1260-1327) had studied at both Cologne, where
he may have known Albert the Great, and Paris. He served for a time as a
Dominican vicar general provincial as well as serving as spiritual director to
nuns and beguines. In 1326 inquisitorial proceedings were initiated against him
but he did not live to see his work condemned in 1329. Scholars are now re-
evaluating Eckhart's orthodoxy (see Davies 1991:ch 9) and the Dominican
Order is appealing for a recinding of his condemnation. (Fleming's introduction
in 1988:17ff) Eckhart's chief works are the *Benedictus, Counsels on Discernment,
On Detachment,* various scripture commentaries and sermons in both Latin and
German.

> Even so do all creatures speak God. And why do they not speak
> the Godhead? Everything in the Godhead is one, and of that there
> is nothing to be said. God works, the Godhead does no work,
> there is nothing to do; in it is no activity. It never envisaged any
> work. God and Godhead are as different as active and inactive.
> On my return to God, where I am formless, my breaking through
> will be far nobler than my emanation. I alone take all creatures
> out of their sense into my mind and make them one in me. When
> I go back into the ground, into the depths, into the wellspring of
> the Godhead, no one will ask me whence I came or whither I
> went. No one missed me: God passes away. (1988:134)

In order for God to be born in the soul it is necessary that we become totally

detached from all things, from our own selves and even from God Godself.

Eckhart argues that detachment is greater than any other virtue as it is free

from all created things. (1981:285) Detachment makes us totally available for

God and compels God to come to us. (1981:286)

This detachment is not simply from material things, or from our own desires. It

is detachment from *all* desires and ideas. Such detachment "reposes in a naked

nothingness." (1981:291)

> And when the heart that has detachment attains to the highest
> place, that must be nothingness, for in this is the greatest
> receptivity. (1981:292)

We are to be detached even from religious practices and experience and even

from God.

> Therefore I pray to God that he may make me free of "God," for
> my real being is above God if we take "God" to be the beginning
> of all created things. (1981:202)

Thus for Eckhart not only can we not know God but we should actively seek a

practice that enables us to rest in nothingness. Therefore linked to his

apophatic theology we can see an apophatic anthropology that extends this subversion of discourse to language about the self. In this Eckhart may be seen as a precursor to the decentered self of contemporary discourse.

Building on the work of Marguerite Porete,[7] Eckhart systematically developed the theme of the "nothingness" of the self in which he explored the soul's identity with the Godhead. (Turner 1995:139) Using terms such as "light of the soul" and "spark of the soul" Eckhart explored the idea that there is something in us that "comprehends God without a medium, uncovered, naked, as he is in himself." (1981:198)

Such ideas are complex and controversial and traverse the dangerous theological terrain of personalism and impersonalism[8] and the relationship between God and creation. It is not my intention to enter the debate over Eckhart's orthodoxy at this point. What I am concerned with, however, is that in asserting that there is something in us that is unknowable about our own being, Eckhart is witnessing to a destabilisation of language that occurs not only when we speak about God, but also when we speak about God in relation to the self.

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[7]   A Beguin who was burnt at the stake in Paris in 1310, Marguerite's mystical treatise *The Mirror of Simple Souls* was written around the beginning of the fourteenth century and was published into Latin, English and Italian. For a discussion of the relationship between Porete's work and Eckhart's work see Davies. (1991:65ff)

[8]   A fundamental difference between the religions of the west -- Judaism, Christianity and Islam -- the those of the east -- especially Hinduism -- centre around the question of whether Ultimate Reality is a personal God or an impersonal Absolute. While western religions view God as personal, much, although not all, of Hinduism sees God as ultimately impersonal. In this context Brahman (God) and Atman (the divine self in people) are seen as ultimately one. It is easy to see how Eckhart can be seen as holding such a position, although both Davies (1991) and Smith (1987) argue for his orthodoxy.

The Cloud of Unknowing: the blind impulse of love

While the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*[9] repeats the theme of our inability to speak about God which we have seen above, and is particularly indebted to Dionysius' *The Mystical Theology*, this work also marks a shift from what can be termed an intellectualist "mysticism of vision" to a voluntarist "mysticism of affectivity". (Turner 1995:187)

The author of the *Cloud* teaches that between us and God there exists a dark cloud which prevents us from knowing God.

> This darkness and cloud is always between you and your God,
> no matter what you do, and it prevents you from seeing him
> clearly by the light of understanding in your reason, and from
> experiencing him in sweetness of love in your affection.
> (1981:120f)

If we are to encounter God "it must always be in this cloud and in this darkness." (1981:121) In order for us to pierce this cloud we are told to "put beneath you a cloud of forgetting, between you and all the creatures that have ever been made". (1981:128)

To do this we need to "unknow", to let go of even the most holy of thoughts. Using a mantra-like word the author encourages all who would seek God to

beat upon this cloud and this darkness above you. With this

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9   Originating in late fourteenth century England, *The Cloud of Unknowing* is written by a spiritual director to a disciple (possibly a young monk) who is drawn to contemplative prayer. Its author also wrote a book on privy counsel (counselling) and paraphrased Dionysius' *The Mystical Theology*. Walsh argues that he was most likely a Carthusian priest, although there are also suggestions that he may have been a Cistercian hermit. (Walsh in 1981:3)

word you are to strike down every kind of thought under the
cloud of forgetting ... (1981:134)

The *Cloud* is adamant that knowledge cannot lead us to God. It is rather the
"blind impulse of love" that can pierce the cloud of unknowing. (1981:139) And

> It is better for you to experience this spiritually in your affection
> than it is to have the eye of your soul opened in contemplation
> either in seeing all the angels and the saints in heaven, or in
> hearing all the mirth or the melody of those who are in bliss.
> (1981:140)

For, while God is incomprehensible to our "knowing power",

> to the second, which is the loving power, he is entirely
> comprehensible in each one individually; in so much that one
> loving soul of itself, because of love, would be able to
> comprehend him who is entirely sufficient, and much more so,
> without limit, to fill all the souls of men and angels that could
> ever exist. (1981:123)

Thus while for Dionysius and for Eckhart our inability to know God through
intellectual means is seen through the breakdown of our language, for the
author of the *Cloud* such knowledge is contrasted with a knowledge acquired
through love. This does not produce an alternative language however and
there is ultimately nothing we can say about what happens in the darkness of
the cloud. Where Eckhart plays with language to try and force it, through gaps
and paradoxes, to say the unsayable, the *Cloud* author merely invokes another
realm of human experience. However, Turner has pointed out that even the
words that he does invoke, such as "above" and below, and "within" and
"without", also break down as they are dependant on an imagination that also
has to be left behind under the dark cloud of forgetting. (1995:208)

The apophatic critique as bearer of alterity

What, it may be asked, does an apophatic naming of God have to do with the theology of tradition? And how can it enable us respond to the challenge of exclusion of the Other that has been posed to tradition?

The apophatic as strategy rather than imagery

It should be apparent from the above that to view apophatic theology, in distinction from cataphatic theology, as simply an alternative way of speaking about God is inadequate. While the apophatic way does invoke distinctive negative images for speaking about God, I will argue, following Turner, that this is not its primary concern and that "negative language about God is no more apophatic in itself than is affirmative language." (1995:34)

Apophatic theology, properly understood, is about strategy rather than imagery. Turner argues that the apophatic is best understood as "the linguistic strategy of somehow showing by means of language that which lies beyond language." (1995:34) It is a second order activity that uses *both* cataphatic *and* apophatic imagery to push language to its limits and thus reveal the inability of language to speak of that which is beyond language. Thus it seeks to witness to the Other through exploiting contradiction, paradox and hyperbole.

Turner has pointed out that cataphatic imagery, as much as apophatic imagery, can aid this breakdown in language. The point of cataphatic language, he claims, citing Dionysius' *The Divine Names* as a prime example, is to exploit language to such an extent that one creates "a kind of verbal riot, an anarchy of discourse in which anything goes". (1995:20) Such a riot procures a general linguistic embarrassment that leads to the collapse of language. (1995:23) Such

a strategy is present even in those theologians generally considered as cataphatic. For example, he argues that Julian of Norwich deliberately confuses the gender of Christ in her references to the Motherhood of Christ in order to aid this breakdown in language. (1995:34) Thus Julian can say

> our Mother works in mercy on all his beloved children who are docile and obedient to him ... (1978:294)

In order for such a breakdown to occur, however, it is necessary that we encourage the full play of divine imagery. Turner argues that

> Theological adequacy therefore requires the maximization of our discourses about God -- and, whatever constraints an apophatic theology may impose, they cannot justify the restriction of theological language to just a few, favoured, respectful, "pious", names ... In a pious vocabulary of unshocking, "appropriate" names lies the danger of the theologian's being all the more tempted to suppose that our language about God has succeeded in capturing divine reality in some ultimately adequate way. (1995:24)

Of particular relevance here is the question of whose discourses are allowed to impact our imagery of God. It is common cause in a feminist context to argue that exclusively masculine imagery for God is both theologically inadequate and also furthers the oppression of women by not enabling them to see themselves as created in the image of God. What is less immediately obvious but equally important is that including feminine imagery in the process of naming God serves to destabilise our images and hence furthers the breakdown of language. It is considerably more difficult to hold to a realistic view of God as *both* Father *and* Mother, than it is to simply see God as Father!

The relationship between the cataphatic and the apophatic in theology

It is common to argue that one cannot see the cataphatic and apophatic dimensions of Christian spirituality in isolated terms. Harvey Egan expresses the conventional view that cataphatic and apophatic are merely different sides of a continuum of ways in which we image God when he says

> It must be emphasized that the negative way is inextricably linked to the affirmative way because the ineffable God has spoken his word and Word. (1993:703)

Thus we see that even the most apophatic of people use positive imagery for God, and even the most cataphatic are aware that their language can never capture the reality of God.

However, according to Turner's reading of the mystical tradition, the differences of vocabulary and imagery that are usually seen as differences between cataphatic and apophatic theology, are only differences on the first order level. And, whether one takes the positive or the negative route in the use of imagery, one is still led to the breakdown of language which is the properly apophatic moment:

> these qualities of affirmativeness and negativity are first-order qualities, relating to the concrete imagery of a spiritual style and practice of prayer, not to be confused with second-order negations of the negations, which is the truly apophatic dialectic, and is the common possession of them all. (1995:257)

In this context the real difference between cataphatic and apophatic relates, not to different types of spiritualities or different imagery, but rather to different *moments* in the theological task.

The apophatic as the critical moment in all theology

Thus the key concern of the Christian mystical tradition, whether conventionally understood as either cataphatic or apophatic, is that of

> seeking the terms with which to state, with a theological
> precision which alone can sustain an adequate Christian practice,
> the relation between the apophatic and cataphatic "moments"
> within the trajectory of the Christian *itinerarium in Deum*.
> (1995:256)

Understood in this way the apophatic becomes that critical moment that needs to occur in all theology when we realise the collapse of language. We can therefore see the Christian mystical tradition as bearer of, and witness to, an alterity that has been too-easily covered over by the positivism brought in with scholasticism and extended in the modern (and counter-modern) era.

It is worth noting that this apophatic dialectic occurs against the backdrop of a constant Christian practice. While we find a denial of the importance of religious experience,[10] this needs to be seen as part of the apophatic strategy which strenuously resists the temptation to identify faith with experience. Likewise, while we hear disparaging comments about the efficacy of religious practices, most of these writers expected their readers to be part of a liturgical context that was more or less taken for granted.[11] Thus critique happened

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[10]   The author of the *Cloud* tells us that we need to let go not only of "worldly" thoughts but also of spiritual ones – "all should be hid under the cloud of forgetting". (1981:128) Thus we must not expect to be sustained by spiritual experiences for "if you are to experience him or to see him at all, insofar as it is possible here, it must always be in this cloud and in this darkness." (1981:121)

[11]   Oliver Davies argues that one of the elements responsible for a misreading of Eckhart's thought is the neglect of the context of much of his preaching, namely monasteries of nuns and Beguinages which assume a full

against the backdrop of sustained practice.

Conclusion

I ended the previous chapter by suggesting that alterity may be at the very heart of Christian faith. Certainly the apophatic dynamic considered in this chapter would seem to confirm this and witnesses to the need for all that we say to constantly subvert itself.

However, the question of the relationship between the cataphatic and apophatic moments in theology remains and is a dialectic that will be woven throughout this thesis. The mystical tradition presented in this chapter points us towards both the need to maximise our theological discourses so as to allow as many voices as possible to be heard, and also, at the same time, to allow those voices to collapse into silence. By balancing the twin demands of both hermeneutics and grammatology, I hope, in the following section, to outline a response to the problematic of tradition that remains faithful to this apophatic dialectic.

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liturgical and sacramental life. (1991:78f)

PART II:

Mediating Paths

Introduction to Part II

The previous section has touched on discourses of presence and absence;

hermeneutically orientated forms of understanding that allow revelation to

become present today, and a discourse of alterity that points to the radical

inadequacy of such an approach and to the absolute otherness of the Other that

resists being accounted for in the terms of the same.

In an article entitled "Reconciliation and Rupture: The Challenge and Threat of

Otherness" (1992) Richard Bernstein argues that

> we now find ourselves in a new force-field and constellation that
> deeply affects our thinking about otherness -- not only in
> philosophy but in the entire range of the cultural disciplines. In
> this context I want to focus on the interplay of attractions and
> aversions between hermeneutics and deconstruction -- two
> juxtaposed, nonreducible elements in this new constellation.
> (1992:300)

Using the metaphors of force-field and constellation from Theodore Adorno

and Walter Benjamin,[1] Bernstein highlights an unstable and tensed relationship

of changing elements that resist reduction and unification. (1992:300) He

suggests that the contemporary movements of hermeneutics, represented by

Gadamer, and deconstructionism, represented by Derrida, exist in such a

tensed relationship. While each privileges a particular moment in

understanding, it also recognises the need for the other moment.

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[1]   Adorno defines a "force-field" as "a relational interplay of
attractions and aversions that constitute the dynamic, transmutational structure
of a complex phenomenon." He defines a constellation as "a juxtaposed rather
than integrated cluster of changing elements that resist reduction to a common
denominator, essential core, or generative first principle." (Bernstein 1992:299f)

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Thus while Gadamer emphasises the moment of reconciliation which is achieved through dialogue with the tradition he is also aware of the need for an encounter with the otherness of the tradition itself. However,

> What is lacking in Gadamer is an equally profound sense of the ruptures, breaks, fissures, gaps -- the dis-ruptions that break out in our attempts to fuse horizons. (1992:305)

It is this "irreducible otherness of the Other" (1992:305) that Derrida foregrounds. His language

> is not that of dialogue, reconciliation, and fusion. It is the language of double readings, double gestures, and double binds. We are always haunted by otherness that can never be completely mastered, domesticated, or contained. (1992:306)

Bernstein argues that Derrida does not rule out the possibility of dialogue, but rather emphasises its pitfalls. His call is for us to beware that "our attempted reconciliations do not mask ruptures, fissures, and différance that cannot be reconciled." (1992:306f)

Thus Bernstein argues that hermeneutics and deconstruction, although often seen as antithetical, should be seen as standing in a tensed, unstable relationship; instead of seeing them as Either/Or we should recognise the need for Both/And. (1992:305)

In looking for mediating tools which will allow us to speak theologically, I am deliberately focusing on a dual mediation that follows the basic contours of Bernstein's argument. The first is the hermeneutical path outlined in chapter six that allows us to be impacted by the presence of the tradition in ever-new ways. However, by continuing to probe the discourse of alterity in chapter

seven, I point to the need for these two approaches to continue to stand in a tensed relationship in which both of them interact in order to provide a theological mediation that can more effectively respond to the needs of our present context.

It should also be apparent from the argument presented in chapter five, that this dynamic, while informed by contemporary movements, has a long theological pedigree. The cataphatic and the apophatic moments in theology always stand in a tensed relationship that is fundamentally the same as the tensiveness outlined above. When this tensiveness is lost theology either degenerates into positivism or completely loses its voice. By choosing this dual mediation I hope to safeguard the theological (and ethical) adequacy of the theology of tradition and church that is to be developed in Part III.

Chapter Six

Building a dwelling in time:

Transformative interpretation from within history and language

> The ultimate question is not what ideal object the structures of
> the text generate, what the authors of the text intended to say
> about women, or how the early church thought about or behaved
> towards women (although the answers to all of these questions
> have instrumental roles to play in interpretation); it is whether
> the meaning of the Second Testament as it is decontextualized
> and recontextualized in successive generations is irredeemably
> and necessarily oppressive of women or whether and how it can
> offer liberating possibilities to the very people whose oppression
> it has legitimated.

> Sandra Schneiders (1989:4)

How are we to deal with that which is handed on to us, and which is believed

to be authoritative, by our faith community? Can we give "the obedience of

faith" (*DV:*5) to a tradition that is not only exclusive of women but actively

patriarchal, androcentric and, at times, decidedly misogynist?

Sandra Schneiders has asked fundamentally the same question of the New

Testament. Her concern is how

> an intrinsically oppressive text, one which is actually morally
> offensive in some respects, can function normatively in and for
> the believing community. In what sense can one regard as word
> of God that which, in some respects at least, cannot possibly be
> attributed to God without rendering God the enemy and
> oppressor of some human beings? (1991a:54)

In responding to this challenge Schneiders has developed an interpretive theory and theology of revelation that respects both the challenges of ideology criticism and the text's privileged role as mediator between God and humanity and therefore as revelatory. (1991b:178) In this she is dependant on the hermeneutical theory of Gadamer and Ricoeur which she appropriates for a particular feminist cause.

In this chapter I seek to outline this hermeneutical path which, I have suggested, is one contemporary response to the challenge that this thesis is addressing. In what follows I outline the hermeneutical context from which the work of Gadamer and Ricoeur has emerged before showing their particular contributions and the way in which Schneiders has used and built on these.

Mapping hermeneutical terrain:
the return to ontology

Such a response stands within a particular philosophical tradition which views the hermeneutical task as disclosive of being. Palmer points to two different (and polarized) understandings of hermeneutics today. Firstly, there are those, represented by Betti, who see hermeneutics as a general body of methodological principles which underlie interpretation. Secondly, there are those, represented by Gadamer, "who see hermeneutics as a philosophical exploration of the character and requisite conditions for all understanding." (1969:46)

While hermeneutics, as an interpretive task, is as old as humanity,[1] Schleiermacher, (1768-1834) who became known as the "father of modern hermeneutics", was the first thinker to demand a philosophical theory of understanding which aimed "to understand the text first as well and then better than its author did". (Jeanrond 1991:47) A century later Dilthey continued his emphasis on viewing hermeneutics as an exact science which accords the human sciences the same degree of objectivity as the natural sciences, hence providing a foundational theory for the humanities. (Jeanrond 1991:52)

Central to this modern approach to hermeneutics was a concern with method. Schleiermacher's goal was the precise reproduction of the meaning of a work as the author intended it and so he was concerned with the proper methods with which to access such meaning. In this theological hermeneutics must be subordinated to general hermeneutical methods. (Jeanrond 1991:49) Thus we find what Dilthey referred to as the "liberation of interpretation from dogma". (Warnke 1987:5)

With Heidegger (1889-1976) we see the beginning of a departure from this concern with methods for objectively accessing meaning. His great contribution was to show us the necessarily historical nature of all knowledge and the profound implications of the hermeneutical circle for all interpretive work. It is, moreover, with Heidegger, that we see the return of ontology to hermeneutics.

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[1]   Werner Jeanrond points out that, as the human practice of reflecting on adequate methods of interpreting linguistic, pictorial and other forms of human expression, hermeneutics is found in all cultural contexts. Nevertheless, in the west its history is particularly influenced by its Greek origins, especially Homeric criticism. (1991:12f) For a discussion of Greek, Jewish, early Christian and medieval hermeneutics, see his *Theological Hermeneutics. Development and Significance* (1991), chapter two.

While Heidegger was concerned with offering an ontological approach to the meaning of human existence, he was insistent that we cannot understand outside of the context that impacts us. We cannot speak of an autonomous subject who can know objectively, for all knowledge is already conditioned. Heidegger spoke of the fore-structure of understanding which conditions our "being-in-the-world". (1962:78) Warnke comments:

> All understanding is related to self-understanding and self-understanding is thrown projection; this means that it begins and ends outside the subject -- in a past it did not create and in a future over which it has no control. (1987:40)

Thus intelligibility is always structured by the pre-judgements of the understanding person and meaning cannot be discovered outside of the human context. (Jeanrond 1991:61) In this context:

> what is decisive is not to get out of the [hermeneutical] circle but to come into it the right way. (Ricoeur 1981:58)

Central to this "being-in-the-world", particularly for the later Heidegger, is the mediating role of language. Heidegger referred to language as the "house of being" (Schneiders 1991b:34) and argued that

> language is neither expression, nor an activity of the human being. The language speaks. (quoted in Jeanrond 1991:63)

Thus language precedes the speaking subject. The human being speaks insofar as she or he corresponds to language and listening is the key to such correspondence. Thoughtful listening to language is the key to re-establishing contact with true or authentic being. (Jeanrond 1991:63)

This ontological aspect of language precedes other aspects, including the intentions of the speaking subject. Language itself has a hermeneutical function in which speaking is subjected to something other than the power of the person speaking. Schillebeeckx has pointed out that language is fundamentally communitarian -- it is the deposit of a common human experience. (1981:46) Thus for Heidegger language becomes the medium of revelation; what is manifested must necessarily pass through the filter of human language. (Schillebeeckx 1974:38f)

What emerges from this shift, then, is the foregrounding of context, especially that of language, as the necessarily medium through which we come to knowledge. However, linked with this, we find a new concern with the manifestation of being itself which takes precedence over the processes by which any individual subject comes to know.

While Heidegger clearly privileges the role of ontology over epistemology, questions relating to epistemology remain. How are we to evaluate the ways by which we come to know? Ricoeur comments:

> the question which remains unresolved in Heidegger's work is this: *how can a question of* critique *in general be accounted for within the framework of a fundamental hermeneutics?* (1981:59)

It is this central question of critique that Gadamer addresses.

Gadamer:

the rehabilitation of prejudice, authority and tradition

Hans-Georg Gadamer (b. 1900) is indebted to this understanding of hermeneutics as both necessarily contextual and ontological. Like Heidegger he rejects a purely methodological approach and is concerned instead with the truth yielded by interpretation. What Dilthey had understood as a liberation from dogma, Gadamer sees rather as a move from one sense of understanding, centred on truth-content, to another sense of understanding, centred on an understanding of the conditions of genesis. (Warnke 1987:9) Thus his major work, appropriately entitled *Truth and Method*, insists on the return of the question of truth to a discipline dominated by methodology.

Like Heidegger, Gadamer insists on the importance of our own situatedness within history and points to the implications that this has for the task of interpretation. His concept of "effective history" shows that no interpretation is possible outside a historical continuum which both the interpreter and the object studied share. (Mueller-Vollmer 1985:256) Thus there can be no innocent interpretation outside of history; the reader is inextricably immersed in tradition and can never attain a superior vantage point from which to observe self, text or historical process. (Schneiders 1989:6)

Gadamer argues that the enlightenment's insistence on the replacement of prejudice by reason is both misplaced and illusory and is itself a form of prejudice.

> The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the enlightenment, will prove to be itself a prejudice, the removal of which opens the way to an appropriate understanding of our finitude, which dominates not only our humanity, but also our

historical consciousness. (1979:244)

Thus we cannot begin with the rational self. Neither rationality nor the individual subject can stand alone; rather both are the products of, and are deeply impacted by, a tradition that is prior to them.

> In fact history does not belong to us, but we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being. (1979:245)

Gadamer's task, therefore, is the unveiling of this prejudice against prejudice and also the rehabilitation of authority and tradition that is necessary for any genuine understanding. Prejudice, in its strict sense, is absolutely necessary for any understanding. We cannot speak of an absolute reason that is not influenced by pre-judgements, for all human existence is limited and qualified in various ways. Thus

> Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, ie it is not its own master, but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates. (1979:245)

Thus the enlightenment demand that we subject all authority to reason is ultimately illusory. Contrary to the beliefs of the enlightenment Gadamer argues that we need to be prepared to acknowledge that there are legitimate prejudices. The epistemological question that we should be asking is:

> where is the ground of the legitimacy of prejudices? What distinguishes legitimate prejudices from all the countless ones which it is the undeniable task of the critical reason to overcome?

This leads him to the role and status of authority and tradition and to his assertion that authority and tradition may indeed be disclosive of truth.

For Gadamer authority is based not on persons but on truth. The Enlightenment concept of authority, which saw it as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom and hence as blind obedience, "is not the essence of authority". (1979:248) Rather,

> The authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge -- knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence, ie it has priority over one's own.... authority has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge. (1979:248)

Thus authority is not arbitrary but can be seen in principle to be true. Prejudice appears to acquire an "objectivity"[2] that enables one to reclaim the role of tradition.

> That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that always the authority of what has been transmitted -- and not only what is clearly grounded -- has power over our attitudes and behaviour. (1979:249)

However, this does not involve submission to "traditionalism" as romanticism assumed. Gadamer insists that "there is no such unconditional antithesis

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[2] Gadamer writes that "this makes them, in a sense, objective prejudices, for they bring about the same bias in favour of something that can come about through other means, eg through solid grounds offered by reason. Thus the essence of authority belongs in the context of a theory of prejudices free from the extremism of the enlightenment." (1979:249)

between tradition and reason". (1979:250) Tradition itself is in constant process.

> The fact is that tradition is constantly an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and solid tradition does not persist by nature because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. (1979:250)

Tradition is therefore part of us and as such we need to allow ourselves to be addressed by tradition if we are to come to understanding in the human sciences. (1979:251) Instead of seeing tradition as the polarized antithesis of historical research, we need to recognise the mutual interdependency of the two. Indeed historical consciousness is not as radically new as it seems at first but has always been part of our human relation to our past. (1979:251)

Thus, while we need to reclaim the past and allow ourselves to be addressed by it, this does not mean the abdication of our own critical reason. For Gadamer, it is the past itself that has the power to unmask our own prejudices and disclose new truths. (West 1995:125) For

> the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion ... Our own past, and that other past towards which our historical consciousness is directed, help to shape the moving horizon out of which human life always lives, and which determines it as tradition. (1979:271)

What was crucial for Gadamer, therefore, was a dialogue between the horizon of the past and the horizon of the present. This is a reciprocal process in which the horizons of past and present are mutually interdependent and understanding constitutes "a fusion of these horizons which we imagine to exist by themselves". (1979:273)

Thus we see that there can be no objective unconditioned knowledge outside of our context. We are deeply impacted not only by language but also by history which necessarily shapes the ways through which we come to know. We cannot escape history. However, our historically conditioned reality nevertheless bears within itself the possibility of self-criticism and liberation.

The challenge of ideology

It is at this point that we encounter the question of *how* hermeneutics can be critical and liberatory. Gadamer believed that understanding will always be successful as long as people are willing to submit themselves to the claims of a text and to enter into the tradition which it represents. (Jeanrond 1991:67) As we saw in chapter four this was questioned by Jürgen Habermas who pointed instead to the limits of our understanding and to the extent to which the consensus achieved in understanding may be "systematically distorted". (Warnke 1987:111)

By favouring a "hermeneutical consciousness" over a "critical consciousness" Habermas believed that hermeneutics represented a "linguistic idealism" in assuming that traditions are self-contained and not influenced by anything outside of themselves. (Warnke 1987:112) Thus Gadamer's hermeneutics overlooks the extent to which tradition may be "systematically distorted" by the influence of ideology. (Warnke 1987:111) He argues:

> Hermeneutical consciousness is incomplete so long as it has not incorporated into itself reflection on the limit of hermeneutical understanding ... Such hermeneutical consciousness proves inadequate in the case of a systematically distorted communication: here the unintelligibility results from a faulty organization of speech itself ... The self-conception of

> hermeneutics can be shaken only if it becomes apparent that
> systematically distorted patterns of communication also occur in
> "normal" -- that is to say, in pathologically inconspicuous --
> speech ... The limit experience of hermeneutics thus consists in
> the discovery of systematically produced misunderstandings --
> without at first being able to "comprehend" them. (Habermas
> in Mueller-Vollmer 1985: 302f)

Gadamer is aware of some such critiques and makes allowances for abandoning texts that we cannot learn from. However Habermas' point is not simply that some texts are oppressive and don't disclose truth, but that even texts that are disclosive of truth are nevertheless ideological. (Warnke 1987:113) Therefore he advocates a comprehensive theory of communicative competence which seeks to discover the conditions necessary for an unrestrained communicative competence.

> explanatory understanding, as a depth-hermeneutical
> deciphering of specifically inaccessible expressions, presupposes
> not only, as simple hermeneutical understanding does, the
> trained application of naturally acquired communicative
> competence, but a theory of communicative competence as well.
> (Habermas in Mueller-Vollmer 1985:312)

Such a critique of ideology, in the words of Ricoeur, "thinks in terms of emancipation where the hermeneutics of tradition thinks in terms of assumed tradition." (1981:86)

Ricoeur:

a hermeneutic of the "power-to-be"

It is Paul Ricoeur (b. 1913) who has gone further than Gadamer in proposing a hermeneutical theory that both responds to Habermas' challenge and yet allows us to continue to be addressed by tradition. While it assumes much that Gadamer argued about the importance of tradition, it goes beyond him in the way in which it allows texts to be freed from their original contexts and take on new meaning in new contexts.

Moreover, Ricoeur challenges Habermas' own indebtedness to tradition. For ideology criticism, in taking an ethical option in favour of emancipation, assumes an implicit interpretation of society. (Schillebeeckx 1974:124) Thus Ricoeur argues that

> Man can project his emancipation and anticipate an unlimited
> and unconstrained communication only on the basis of the
> creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage ... he who is unable
> to reinterpret his past may also be incapable of projecting
> concretely his interest in emancipation. (1981:97)

For, he asks, where does one speak from, if not from a point within tradition?

> Critique is also a tradition. I would even say that it plunges us
> into the most impressive tradition, that of liberating acts, of the
> Exodus and Resurrection. Perhaps there would be no more
> interest in emancipation, no more anticipation of freedom, if the
> Exodus and Resurrection were effaced from the memory of
> mankind ... (1981:99f)

Thus Ricoeur insists that we cannot escape from tradition. The challenge, however, is to allow it to address us in such a way that it overcomes the ideological interests always implicit in it. This happens, he claims, through the

distanciation that occurs in interpretation.

Unlike Gadamer, who held that the distanciation that occurs between the original formation of a text and its contemporary reception was a scandal which had to be overcome by a fusion of horizons, Ricoeur argues that such distanciation is productive and is necessary for any liberatory interpretation. Indeed it is a condition for any interpretation. For Ricoeur the various texts of tradition assume a certain autonomy with respect to the intention of their author, their original cultural situation and the social conditions that affected their production, and their original addressees. (1981:91)

In this way texts become freed from their original context in such a way that they can take on new meaning as they are interpreted in new contexts. It is in this process of distanciation, which is the condition of understanding, and appropriation, which is its dialectical counterpart, that we find the possibility of a critique of ideologies. (1981:94) For, argues Ricoeur,

> An essential characteristic of a literary work, and of a work of art in general, is that it transcends its own psycho-sociological conditions of production and thereby opens itself to an unlimited series of readings, themselves situated in different socio-cultural conditions. (1981:139)

Thus, for him,

> A hermeneutics of the power-to-be thus turns itself towards a critique of ideology, of which it constitutes the most fundamental possibility. Distanciation, at the same time, emerges at the heart of reference: poetic discourse distances itself from everyday reality, aiming towards being as power-to-be. (1981:94)

For such a hermeneutic the real referent of the text is located in front of the text in the world which the text opens up for people. Ricoeur says that "what is

sought is no longer an intention hidden behind the text, but a world unfolded in front of it". (1981:93) It is this world that the text is finally about.

Thus for Ricoeur the properly hermeneutical moment arises when one turns one's interrogation towards the sort of world opened up by the text. It is in poetic discourse, in particular, that this subversive power is still alive. He writes:

> The strategy of this discourse involves holding two moments in equilibrium: suspending the reference of ordinary language and releasing a second order reference, which is another name for what we have designated above as the world opened up by the work. In the case of poetry, fiction is the path of redescription; or to speak as Aristotle does in his *poetics*, the creation of a *mythos*, of a "fable", is the path of *mimesis*, of creative imitation. (1981:93)

It is this world, also, that has to be appropriated by the reader. The text which has been decontextualised in the process of distanciation becomes recontextualised as it is appropriated by contemporary readers. This appropriation does not involve the projection of oneself into the text but rather the receiving of an enlarged self by apprehending the proposed worlds which are the genuine object of interpretation. (1981:182) Appropriation gives the reader a new capacity for knowing her or himself through the new modes of being opened up by the text. (1981:192)

Such a hermeneutic provides us with a way of dealing with tradition that takes tradition seriously but which is also committed to liberating us from that which is oppressive within tradition. For Ricoeur, tradition and critique are not mutually exclusive but exist in a certain dialectical relationship which becomes the key to the inner life of hermeneutics. (1981:90) Such a position recognises that the urge towards liberation comes from tradition itself. However it also recognises that there is much within tradition that is oppressive and so its

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orientation is towards the future, a future which the texts of the past open up for us and a future whose meaning we need to continue to draw out of those texts.

In this the philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer and Ricoeur prepare the way for a liberating theological hermeneutic such as that developed by Sandra Schneiders.

Schneiders: the revelatory text

Schneiders is a New Testament scholar who is concerned with how sacred scripture may function as revelatory for the believing Christian. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the fundamental question that she seeks to answer is how an intrinsically oppressive text can function normatively in and for the believing community. (1991a:54)

While acknowledging that the text is a thoroughly human text, she argues that it can still be the privileged mediator between God and humanity and therefore the revelatory text. (1991b:178)

Schneiders asks what it means to affirm that scripture is the word of God. She suggests that this phrase can best be understood as a root metaphor for our understanding of divine revelation, as "the central and organizing image for the richly complex reality of divine revelation". (1991b:32) It is important to realise, however, that a metaphor is a linguistic expression which cannot be reduced to its literal meaning.

> A metaphor is a predication which involves an unresolved tension between an "is" and an "is not," an affirmation and a negation, predicated of the same thing at the same time. At the literal level what is affirmed must be denied, i.e. it "is not." But at some other level, some deeper and more important level, the affirmation is true. (1991a:44)

As a root metaphor, i.e. a metaphor whose tensiveness is ultimately unresolvable because its tenor is so intrinsically irreducible to its vehicle, and which draws nourishment from and organises a wide range of experience, (1991a:45f) the phrase "word of God" is a linguistic phenomenon. Following Heidegger, Schneiders shows that language is the necessary medium of our encounter with the real. Moreover,

> Human language is so intimately bound up with being that it can even become transparent to divine being, becoming a medium of encounter with God. (1991b:34f)

Thus we see that

> language is the paradigmatic model for understanding divine revelation. (1991b:35)

While divine revelation is actually coextensive with reality as it speaks of its creator, Christian reflection has identified nature, history and humanity as the three primary spheres of revelation. (1991a:49)[3] However,

> For Christians the ultimate divine self-revelation is not the Bible but Jesus, the word of God incarnate. (1991a:50)

> This is equivalent to calling him the great symbol of God, the locus of symbolic revelation. The root metaphor "word of God"

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3   See, for example, Walter Kaspar's *Theology and Church* (1989), chapter one. See also *Dei Verbum*, 2 and 3.

> derives its perennial life and immense power from the fact that it
> is the linguistic evocation of the reality of symbolic revelation.
> (1991b:39)

What then is the role of scripture? Scripture is neither identical to revelation nor even the paradigmatic instance of revelation. Neither does scripture contain revelation the way a dictionary contains definitions. Instead scripture bears witness to the special revelation that occurred in the history of Israel, in the early church and especially in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. (1991a:51)

Schneiders argues that it is more correct to say that the Bible is (potentially) revelatory, than to say that it is revelation. It is a privileged witness to the divine self-gift that has been taking place from the moment of creation. But,

> it is symbolic witness, and that means that it becomes the actual
> locus of divine-human encounter only in the act of interpretation.
> This interpretation will always be an arduous task because
> symbols are inherently and invincibly ambiguous, simultaneously
> revealing and concealing. (1991b:39)

As a witness the biblical text bears testimony to an ultimately significant event. However witness is always a language event and no matter how faithful it never delivers the reality of the event as such.

> Witness is always at least two removes from the reality in
> question. The first remove is the interpreting experience of the
> person who is the witness. The second remove is the recounting
> of the interpreting experience in the giving of testimony.
> (1991a:51)

Thus the biblical witness is always biased. As a human witness it is necessarily linguistic and historical and cannot therefore be free from ideology. Therefore the receiving of this witness must of necessity also be an essentially

hermeneutical enterprise. It is in this reception and appropriation of the text that the properly revelatory moment occurs.

Schneiders uses the hermeneutical theory of Ricoeur to show how the transformative appropriation of the text by the reader allows the possibility

> of the text's exploding the very world out of which it came and whose prejudices and errors it ineluctably expresses. (1989:7)

According to this hermeneutical understanding, as opposed to a positivist understanding, meaning is not to be found in the text as something separate from the reader, but rather in the encounter between the reader and the text. Thus the text mediates, rather than contains, meaning. (1991a:56)

Following Ricoeur, Schneiders argues that by the process of inscription the text has assumed a certain autonomy. It can no longer be limited to the intention of its author, its address to its original audience, or the situation out of which it emerged. This

> potentially enriches a text by enabling it to transcend the coordinates of its production and function in very different later situations. (1991b:144)

The text now refers not merely to the world of the author but to those who receive it and it has the capacity to create a world which it projects "in front of itself". It clears a space and creates a world into which the reader is invited. (1991b:167) According to Schneiders, the world that the New Testament projects is the world of Christian discipleship.

> the real referent of the New Testament text, what the text is primarily "about," is not the world of first century Christians which we are expected to reconstitute in the twentieth century

but the experience of discipleship that is proposed to us and to each successive generation of readers as it was proposed by Jesus to the first generation. (1991a:62)

In this context it is the Christian community that becomes the active subject, rather than the passive object, of revelation. (1991a:70) The biblical text is not something that is accepted uncritically; one's engagement with the truth claims of the text remains a critical one, ever suspicious of the distorting influence of ideology. However, through an ongoing dialogue with the text about its subject matter the text can come to transcend its own conditions of production and mean something other than what it originally intended.[4] Thus Schneiders argues that

the theological and moral limitations of the text are no more ultimately destructive of its revelatory potential than its scientific, psychological, ethical, historical, or other limitations. (1991b:177)

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the development of current hermeneutical theory and probed its usefulness for a transformative theology of tradition. We saw how all understanding and interpretation is necessarily impacted by its linguistic and historic context. Thus we cannot escape the influence of tradition which, it has been argued, is itself disclosive of truth.

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[4]   We should note, however, that for both Schneiders and Ricoeur, while the text can take on endless different meanings, it cannot take on just any meaning. Schneiders compares the text to a musical score or the script of a play. (1991b:149f) While such a score or script is open to endless different performances, it necessarily also limits them.

However, the hermeneutical path outlined in this chapter has also presented the possibility of a transformative appropriation of tradition. Acknowledging the ideological distortions within the texts of tradition, it has developed an interpretive strategy that both respects the integrity of the texts themselves and the integrity of contemporary values and suspicions. As a hermeneutical path it involves the positive, although not positivistic, appropriation of text or tradition that creates a world which it invites us to enter.

In doing this, however, this path is aware that it always stands against what Schneiders calls "the background of the vast unsaid". (1991b:138) It is this "vast unsaid" that will be the focus of the following chapter.

Chapter Seven

The other side of silence:

Transgressing the boundaries of language

The technology of silence
The rituals, etiquette

The blurring of terms
silence not absence

of words or music or even
raw sounds

Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed

the blueprint to a life

It is a presence
it has a history   a form

Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence

Adrienne Rich (1978:17)

If the path outlined in the previous chapter can be relatively easily identified as
hermeneutical, the present path, perhaps by its very nature, is less easy to
define. Who, after all, can speak the unspeakable?

My point of departure in this chapter is based on Schneiders'
acknowledgement that the transformative interpretation of the previous
chapter always stands against "the background of the vast unsaid". (1991b:138)
Moreover, as we saw in chapter four, there are contemporary responses to

issues of oppression and liberation that insist that we pay attention to the irreducible alterity of the Other. They argue that our dominant western discourses, be they metaphysical or hermeneutical, in covering over this otherness of the Other have continued to marginalise and exclude the Other. I have suggested, following Bernstein, that such a response represents one part of a tensed relationship that we must necessarily hold together. Moreover I suggest that such discourses should be seen as an apophatic moment and that the dynamics that they represent are thus a necessary part of the theological task.

In this chapter I seek out a mediating path that can respond to the challenge of alterity and allow us some access to that which has been excluded. In particular I focus on the work of Julia Kristeva, especially her work on the processes of transgression by which that which is excluded is able to find voice. I then consider how Mary Grey's work on revelation presents an alternative paradigm which privileges the voices of the excluded.

A return to epistemology:
Kristeva and the possibility of transgression

If hermeneutics represents a transcendence of scholastic concerns with epistemology and a way of getting beyond the Kantian impasse,[1] then poststructuralism in general, and French feminism in particular, represent a return to questions of epistemology, albeit this time a contested epistemology. For the point that they make is that knowledge and power are inseparably

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[1]   Kant's strictures against applying knowledge of the observable world to the noumenal world had effectively undermined the possibility of any metaphysical foundations for religious beliefs.

linked and that the ways through which we come to know are themselves deeply impacted by the power relations in society. Thus Michel Foucault speaks of "a return of knowledge" and of the possibility of the "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (1980:81) and Kristeva opens up the possibility of transgression, whereby our boundaries of knowledge become more fluid and allow access to a prior knowledge.

In chapter four I outlined Kristeva's views on the relationship between the semiotic realm of the *chora*, and the symbolic realm which has attained dominance at the expense of the semiotic. This process of signification is necessary for language to function but is both dependent on and reproduces a certain set of social relations, in particular those of a patriarchal society. Between these two realms stands the thetic threshold which already begins to order semiotic drives towards the symbolic, opening a gap between lived experience and representation. (Grosz 1989:46) The thetic thus "marks a threshold between two heterogenous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic". (1984:48)

For Kristeva this semiotic *chora* represents the excluded domain of the (m)other which the process of signification has suppressed. It is a "nonexpressive totality" (1984:25) that

> precedes evidence, verisimilitude, spatiality, and temporality.
> Our discourse -- all discourse -- moves with and against the *chora*
> in the sense that it simultaneously depends upon and refuses it.
> (1984:26)

She continues,

> Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space
> underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its

intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment,
but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax. (1984:29)

While the processes of signification have enabled the victory of the symbolic

and the banishment of the (m)other, namely the semiotic *chora*, this banishment

is never complete nor stable. Though the thetic is necessary for signification,

> the thetic is not exclusive: the semiotic which also precedes it,
> constantly tears it open, and this transgression brings about all
> the various transformations of the signifying practice that are
> called "creation." Whether in the realm of metalanguage
> (mathematics, for example) or literature, what remodels the
> symbolic order is always the influx of the semiotic. This is
> particularly evident in poetic language since, for there to be a
> transgression of the symbolic, there must be an irruption of the
> drives in the universal signifying order, that of "natural" language
> which binds together the social unit. (1984:62)

Thus once signification has occurred the semiotic *chora*, which was once the

precondition of the symbolic, can only be seen as a negativity introduced into

the symbolic order and through the transgression of the symbolic order.

(1984:68f)

It is the subversive possibility of such transgression that Kristeva is concerned

with. She refers to a radical trinity of subversion, namely, madness, holiness

and poetry in which the semiotic explodes in an excessive, uncontrolled

jouissance.[2] (Grosz 1989:52) It is, however, in the poetic realm -- and particularly

the poetry of the avant-garde -- that Kristeva appears to see the greatest

possibility of transgression. By transgressing grammatical rules poetic

language -- and especially modern poetic language -- serves to subvert the

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[2]   A deliberately ambiguous term used by French feminists to
denote pleasure understood in orgasmic terms, and a more generally corporeal,
non-genital pleasure. (Grosz 1989:xix)

positing of the symbolic as possessor of meaning. (1984:57) While not calling into question the thetic itself,

> Mimesis and the poetic language inseparable from it tend, rather, to prevent the thetic from becoming theological; in other words, they prevent the imposition of the thetic from hiding the semiotic process that produces it, and they bar it from inducing the subject, reified as a transcendental ego, to function solely within the systems of science and monotheistic religion. (1984:59)

The role of religion

It is at this point that we see the role of religion which, for Kristeva, serves to contain the rupture of the thetic by the semiotic. By representing the unspeakable which continues to try and overflow its boundaries, religion neutralises the subversive demands of the *chora* by recoding and resymbolising. Religion thus

> arrogates to itself the privilege of *representing* (i.e. unifying into the socio-symbolic ensemble the hitherto heterogeneous) and of speaking the infinite element which the ensemble oppresses and yet demands to be spoken. Religion here is that discourse (whether transcendental or not) which knows, as far as is possible, what is at stake in the relation between socio-symbolic homogeneity and the heterogeneity of the drives at work within and it restores their *other* to them, thus religious discourse appears not only as the speculative (specular) form of what is unrepresentable in orgasmic (genital) pleasure and of what is uncapitalisable in expenditure (of productive power): it is also the privileged place of speculation and the place from which it represents its own signifying practice to itself -- theory of language and of the function of language as communication or expenditure. (quoted in Grosz 1989:53)

Religion, for Kristeva, is based on and covers over a sacrifice.[3] It is theologisation of the thetic which posits a boundary to the infinite and hence also to violence. (1984:78f) Religion, for Kristeva, is thus necessary to the maintenance of the social order.

While we can speak of religion as the symbolization of the semiotic, art, Kristeva claims, involves the semiotization of the symbolic and thus represents the flow of *jouissance* into language. While religion is based on and covers over murder, it is art, including poetry, that "is not a form of murder". (1984:72)

> Whereas sacrifice assigns jouissance its productive limit in the social and symbolic order, art specifies the means -- the only means -- that jouissance harbors for infiltrating that order. In cracking the socio-symbolic order, splitting it open, changing vocabulary, syntax, the word itself, and releasing from beneath them the drives borne by vocalic or kinetic differences, jouissance works its way into the social and symbolic. In contrast to sacrifice, poetry shows us that language lends itself to the penetration of the socio-symbolic by jouissance, and that the thetic does not necessarily imply theological sacrifice. (1984:80)

Kristeva sees sacrifice (which is identified with religion) and art as representing polar aspects of the thetic function. To put it bluntly: the one regulates and prohibits while the other challenges and enables breakthrough. Thus poetic

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[3]   Following Freud, Kristeva argues that the regulation of the semiotic through the symbolic, which is made possible by the thetic break, is represented in society's signification processes -- hence the ritual role of murder in archaic societies. Freud held that society is founded on a complicity in a common crime and Kristeva argues that language serves to divert and confine this death drive.

> The social order, for its part, reveals the confinement of the death drive, whose endless course conditions and moves through every stasis and thus every structure, in an act of murder. Religions as we know, have set themselves up as specialists on the discourse concerning this radical, unique, thetic event. (1984:70)

language

> reminds us of its eternal function: to introduce through the
> symbolic that which works on, moves through and threatens it.
> The theory of the unconscious seeks the very thing that poetic
> language practices within and against the social order: the
> ultimate means of its transformation or subversion, the
> precondition for its survival and revolution. (1984:81)

Kristeva's works clearly see religion and theology as identified with the

symbolic, and hence patriarchal, processes that serve to contain and suppress

the semiotic. The question therefore arises as to the legitimacy of using her

work in a theological task. While Kristeva recognises the importance of

religious questions for feminism, her references to religion, and particularly to

Christianity, are almost always critical, seeing it as necessarily patriarchal.

However Kristeva also notes that there is a semiotic residue that, while not

represented in Christianity, necessarily accompanies it. Grosz writes:

> Her point is that there is an unrepresented residue in maternity
> which has not been adequately taken up in religious discourse, a
> residue that refuses to conform, as Christianity requires, to
> masculine, oedipal, phallic order. This residue of maternity is
> occasionally touched upon by discourses of the sacred ... (1989:84)

It should be possible to argue, moreover, that religious and poetic language are

not necessarily always polar opposites. The liturgical and spiritual traditions

pass on their message through both poetic and ritual language that, I would

suggest, come close to breaching the thetic threshold. Kristeva is aware of this

and writes:

> As the place of production for a subject who transgresses the
> thetic by using it as a necessary boundary -- but not as an absolute
> or as an origin -- poetic language and the mimesis from which it is

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inseparable, are profoundly a-theological. They are not critics of theology but rather the enemy within and without, recognizing both its necessity and its pretensions. In other words, poetic language and mimesis may appear as an argument complicitous with dogma -- we are familiar with religion's use of them -- but they may also set in motion what dogma represses. In so doing, they no longer act as instinctual floodgates within the enclosure of the sacred and become instead protestors against its posturing. (1984:61)

Thus, while there are subversive elements within religious discourse, Kristeva sees these as "the enemy within" which are hostile to the theologisation of the semiotic and help to subvert it. She continues, however, to view religion and Christianity in a fundamentally negative light.

While a work such as this thesis necessarily views Christianity from a different perspective to that of Kristeva, her work is still of value in helping us to probe that which is excluded from our theological discourse. Whether one views poetic language as "the enemy within" or as an integral dimension of Christian theology, it remains a place of possible transgression and can therefore help us to probe that which is excluded.

Possibilities of eruption

The eruption of the semiotic within the symbolic that Kristeva suggests is possible is only relative, however. Though the thetic is permeable, it "continues to ensure the position of the subject in process/on trial". (1984:63) Thus

musicality is not without signification; indeed it is deployed within it. Logical syntheses and all ideologies are present, but they are pulverized within their own logic before being displaced towards something that is no longer within the realm of the idea, sign, syntax, and thus Logos, but is instead simply semiotic functioning. (1984:63)

Thus we cannot seek "pure" semiotic knowledge, but must rather seek its rupturing effects within the realm of the symbolic. Kristeva therefore seeks modes of reading that can enable such transgression to become evident. (Grosz 1989:62)

There are, moreover, limited circumstances in which transgression becomes possible. In particular Kristeva sees the work of avant-garde literary texts[4] as "the laboratory of a new discourse". (1980:92) This avant-garde needs to maintain a fine balance between coherence (with obedience to the symbolic) and transgression (enabling the overflow of the semiotic) in order to avoid the twin dangers of fetishism and psychosis.[5] (Grosz 1989:58)

Despite the possibilities of such transgression, Kristeva maintains that the possibilities of such eruption remain relative. (1984:63) Grosz has pointed out that while avant-garde practices can lead to transgression of the symbolic and point to the limits of signification, they do not obliterate them. Kristeva's view of subversion is ultimately reformist as language and the symbolic can only accommodate so much change at any given time. (1989:60) Thus, in Grosz's words,

> The avant-garde can only speak through/as the symbolic, just as
> the unconscious can only speak through the discourses of
> consciousness. In this sense, there can be no "pure" avant-garde,

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[4]   The works to which Kristeva refers most frequently include Mallarmé, Artaud, Lautréamont and Joyce.

[5]   Kristeva sees fetishism and psychosis as dangers associated with avant-garde practices. Fetishism affirms the thetic but instead of investing it in signifying practice instead turns it back towards the maternal *chora* thus disavowing the maternal castration necessary for signification. By contrast psychosis forecloses such castration, and therefore also the possibility of representation. (Grosz 1989:57f)

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only a process already mediated by the symbolic, which, at the same time, problematises it. (1989:60)

Semanalysis

In this context Kristeva argues for a semiotics which

> can establish the heterogeneous logic of signifying practices, and
> locate them, finally and by way of their subject, in the historically
> determined relations of production. Semiotics can lead to a
> *historical typology of signifying practices* by the mere fact of
> recognizing the specific status within them of the speaking
> subject. In this way we arrive at the possibility of a new
> perspective on history ... (1986:32)

Such a semanalysis seeks out the ways in which discourses are put into question, analysing the confrontation between the unity required by the symbolic and the heterogeneity of the semiotic drives. (Grosz 1989:60)

Thus semanalysis seeks out

> the various deviations from the grammatical rules of the
> language: articulatory effects which shift the phonemative system
> back towards its articulatory, phonetic base and consequently
> towards the drive-governed bases of sound-production; the over-
> determination of a lexeme by multiple meanings which it does
> not carry in ordinary usage but which accrue to it as a result of its
> occurrence in other texts; syntactic irregularities such as ellipses,
> non-recoverable deletions, indefinite embeddings, etc, ... (1986:28)

Semanalysis thus seeks out the negativity beneath rationality and language and seeks to rehabilitate what is heterogeneous to the system of meaning. (1986:31) Moreover, it seeks what calls into question the transcendental subject.

> the subject of the semiotic metalanguage must, however briefly,
> call himself in question, must emerge from the protective shell of

a transcendental ego within a logical system, and so restore his
connection with that negativity -- drive-governed, but also social,
political and historical -- which rends and renews the social code.
(1986:33)

For Kristeva, then, the task is one of seeking out the unspoken which becomes

evident through the gaps, contradictions and hyperbole in the dominant

discourse. We need to seek

By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in all discourse,
however Revolutionary, by emphasizing at each point whatever
remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible,
that which disturbs the mutual understanding of the established
powers. (1986:156)

The implications for theology: Mary Grey

While Kristeva's work is not specifically concerned with theology -- indeed, in a

certain sense as we have seen it is antithetical to theology -- it nevertheless has

serious implications for the theological task. By probing the ability of the

semiotic to impact our discourse she points to an interlocutor -- or interlocutory

place -- that it is important for theology to address.

It is Mary Grey who probes the implications of this in her work on revelation.[6]

She points out that the way to come to new understandings that take us

beyond the traditional formulations about revelation is to search for better

understandings of the questions. The fundamental question that she brings to

revelation is:

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[6]   Grey's key work in this area is *The Wisdom of Fools? Seeking
Revelation for Today* (1993) although her earlier work *Redeeming the Dream:
Feminism Redemption and Christian Tradition* (1989) works within a similar
framework.

How can revelation be understood in such a way as to bring
God's justice to the victims of global oppression? (1993:3)

Like Schneiders, Grey is deeply conscious that the texts of revelation as we
receive them are those of the historical winners and argues that:

> the controversy over the "eternal truths of revelation" is
> deadlocked, first because the underlying relation between truth
> and power structures is disguised; second, because theological
> doctrines are enunciated within a framework giving support to
> disengaged individualism and, third, that they are underpinned
> by a narrow, confrontational logic. (1993:92)

In order to understand revelation as "divine communication for our times",
Grey argues that we need to bring to light the "filter" through which we
understand our culture, identity and relation to the world of the sacred.
(1993:1) To this end she contrasts two mythical figures, and the conceptual
realities that they represent, namely logos and sophia.

The "logos" myth is that of the dominant western world view of nationalistic
individualism and materialistic success.[7] Logos is an expression of western
rationality and has philosophical, theological and economic dimensions which
imposes a tight control on truth and truths. Thus our logocentric culture has
influenced the processes by which we come to know. Grey tells us, quoting
Fiumara, that

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[7]   The noun "logos" derives from the Greek legein and referred, for
the Greek philosophers, to a statement, discussion or argument that provides a
rational account of the world, as opposed to opinion or story-telling. Heraclitus
saw the logos as that law which governs the changes of the world. In later
Judaism, as God came to be seen as remote and transcendent, God was seen as
communicating with the world through agencies such as God's word and
wisdom, that came to be separately personified. Philo of Alexandria, for
example, saw the logos as the intelligible element in God's mysterious being
and hence the means of God's self-disclosure to the world. John's gospel picks
up this language and speaks of Christ as the logos. (Stead 1983:339f)

> Logos has become for us a means of "epistemic control", or
> epistemic prejudice, which "prevents us from seeing any different
> logical tradition because it is believed that it cannot be 'logical'."
> Another tradition may be "primitive", "intuitive", animistic, but
> not logical. (1993:90)

Grey argues that "the dominant understanding of Christian revelation is too controlled by the logos myth" (1993:2) and that this has had disastrous consequences for our planet. She points to and problematises a confrontational logic that is both dualist and sexist.

> From Plato to Peter Abelard, from Abelard to Locke, right
> through to the clear-cut demands of the verificationists, western
> logic has developed as adversarial, patriarchal and hierarchical.
> Being learned, being a scholar, has been bound up with being
> able to destroy the position of another. In ecclesiastical terms this
> has meant an over use of Abelard's tool of *Sic et Non* ("Yes and
> No"). (1993:88)

However, the world of logos is increasingly being called into question today. The clear certainties that built the culture of modernity are no more. Rather the foundations of philosophy, psychology, science and language are being brought into question by the "quagmire of post-modernism". The "Europe of Christendom" exists no longer and we now acknowledge a pluralistic world with a matrix of overlapping cultures and discourses. The previously dominant culture is not only disintegrating but also becoming aware of its complicity in a system of imperial exploitation. (1993:10)

Moreover, our world with its clear divides between heaven and earth, divine and human, body and soul, has given way to a more integrated understanding of holiness. Instead of seeing salvation as a reward to earthly behaviour, we now speak of realising the kingdom of justice and peace in the here and now. (1993:10)

In addition, our understanding of human subjectivity is being called into question by the realisation that women have never been considered subjects of history but always "other" to the masculine norm. (1993:10f) At the same time as modernity itself is crumbling, there is a realisation that women were never really part of the project of modernity. (1995:349)

The problem we must face before we can speak of revelation, is the problem of epistemology. Grey points to .

> the dominant pattern of western logic as dualist, sexist and intrinsically linked to the power discourse of the particular political regime. (1993:88)

She shows that our philosophical, theological and ethical discourses, as well as our political and economic systems, are built around a "structured separateness" which (following Kristeva) has involved a "sacrificed subjectivity" in which women become anonymous in order to pass on the social norm. (1993:39) Thus the establishment of monotheism in the Old Testament is linked not only with the suppression of -- and separation from -- paganism but also the female and maternal images of agrarian civilisations. (1993:40) Grey writes, following Kristeva,

> It was necessary to maintain the separation of the sexes because, in the realm of the symbolic, for society to guarantee order, law, unity, uniquely symbolized by the transcendent God the Father, the One, this entailed the exclusion of the "polymorphic, orgasmic body, desiring and laughing of the other sex". (1993:40)

The second mythical figure which Grey uses, namely Sophia, is more difficult to define as it is almost submerged under the dominant culture.[8] She writes:

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[8]   Recent feminist theological work has been concerned with the retrieval of theologies of Sophia or Wisdom, seeing her as a feminine counter-

It is more a question of intuiting another story beneath the
dominant culture, a story which has been pushed to the margins
of consciousness and public responsibility. It is the myth of
connectedness, which conveys a sense of rootedness in the earth,
with its changing seasons and rhythms, and a sense of
interdependence, which sees human beings as vulnerable parts of
a wider, interlocking whole, not as "masters of the universe". This
story has philosophical, theological, political and ethical
implications ... (1993:6)

In contrast to traditional metaphysical systems based on separation, Grey

argues for a metaphysic of connection as the dominant metaphor for the way in

which we receive the world. Such a restructuring of our root metaphors gives

us new eyes for reading our sacred texts.

Thus the revelation of God, I am arguing, is communicated
through these epiphanies of connection -- which have ethical,
epistemological and doctrinal dimensions. (1995:357)

Grey therefore argues that, while we need to build relationships around the

notion of mutuality, this cannot happen without a recognition of the

epistemological and theological issues at stake. We need to restructure our

discourse on the basis of connection and discover "the connected self" in a

connected world. (1993:67)

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part to the masculine logos, especially as it is used to speak of Christ. In the
wisdom literature of the Old Testament, the feminine divine Wisdom is
presented (*hokmah* in Hebrew and *Sophia* in Greek). She is feminine not only
grammatically but also in the way she is depicted, for example, as Lady
Wisdom. (Swidler 1979:36ff) One loves Wisdom and seeks her as a woman
(Eccles. 14:22f); she is spouse and mother (14:26f; 15:2f). Thus Wisdom appears
as a female personification of God, as God's daughter and as the second person
in God's creative work. (Moltmann 1986:242) Behind this concept of Wisdom
may well have been Ancient Near Eastern Goddesses of Wisdom such as Isis
(Egyptian) and Ishtar (Babylonian). Biblically, however, she is pictured as an
agent of God in creation, continually ordering the world and bringing people
back to God. (Edwards 1981:27f) Ruether, furthermore, sees her as an
expression of God's immanence in creation. (1983:58) For a discussion of
Sophia as a feminine personification of God, see Johnson (1992:86ff).

Such a metaphysic of connection recognises the limitations of any one perspective. It is attentive, moreover, to the voices from the margins that have not been heard. Grey writes:

> Thus the key question now is, whether we are prepared to give attention to the silences, gaps, discontinuities in the proclamation of the Word. Are we prepared to ask awkward questions about whose voice is excluded from official discourse? We would hope then for a Church able to respond in terms of a listening metanoia, a developing consciousness of the link between word and power. (1993:27f)

Such a "metaphysic of connection" requires a "listening logic" which seeks to rediscover listening as a fundamental part of logos. (1993:89) It is conscious of the difficulties of getting in touch with "authentic experience" which is only accessible through the dominant interpreting discourses. However, quoting Kristeva, she argues that truth is to be found by listening to the unspoken, unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric and incomprehensible. (1993:43f)

This is essential for any feminist praxis that views discourse as a "hearing into speech". Indeed such discourse is necessary for the rediscovery of subjecthood.

> Whereas listening has been accepted as a tool of liberation theology, as a means of giving marginalized groups access to discourse, Plato [in his reference to bringing ideas to birth as midwifery] shows us that listening, intuiting another logic, is actually the very heart of the whole process of reasoning. Where a listening culture is absent, what other alternative is there but to fall into the adversarial logic of Yes or No? When such a logic is controlled by those who hold the reigns of power, small wonder that the logic of domination seems inevitable and decreed by the "nature of things". (1993:91)

Grey argues that in the context of the truths of faith and revelation, a listening logic highlights the very fragility of our doctrines. It also acknowledges the

wounded condition from which we start and, in the words of Adrienne Rich,

> the world as it is
> not as her users boast
> damaged beyond reclamation by their using. (1995:356)

Such a starting point allows other ways of knowing their full space. Here Grey argues that we need to allow the shock of what Chung Hyun Kyung calls the "epistemology of the broken body" -- the acknowledgement of suffering as an epistemological starting point -- to reach our consciousness. (1993:91)[9] Kyung writes:

> Pain and suffering are the epistemological starting point for
> Asian women in their search for the meaning of full humanity.
> The Asian woman knows the depth of humanity and the aching
> hearts of other women because she has suffered and lived in
> pain. (1990:39)

This is in striking contrast to the epistemology that emerges from privileged situations. Grey comments

> it should spark off in western theology not only a "metanoia" of
> listening, but a praxis of turning away from the past and a
> transformation of the future. Above all, this epistemological
> instability reveals to us the sheer vulnerability of God to our
> conceptual inadequacies. (1993:92)

This listening for the "other" enables "another mysticism" which is necessarily political. In the context in which the power of old images and concepts have been shaken off, an empty space has been created for the birthing of new images.

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[9]   For a similar perspective see Albert Nolan's *God in South Africa* (1988), chapter three; and Dorothee Soelle's *Suffering* (1975).

> Mysticism is at home in the Dark Night, in the empty spaces, in the chasms and fissures which the Spirit has cracked open for us. (1993:136)

Yet, while the feminist mystic yearns for wholeness, she "refuses to wallpaper the cracks, to fill them with pseudo-meanings". (1993:136) We need to listen to the message of the mystic to let go...

> Be not afraid of vulnerability, of powerlessness, of the body's mortality, of impotence in the face of the raging storm. Stay with the emptiness. Look at the faces of the suffering. And what will emerge? Like the child who puts a sea shell to her ear and hears the roar of the ocean, you will become attentive to the silent music. Sophia, God as wisdom, will reveal the hidden connections to your own Christian story. (1993:136)

It is, I suggest, at this point that Grey's theology converges with Kristeva's work. By listening to that which is unsaid, and by paying attention to the silences, gaps and discontinuities in our discourse, we approach a situation in which transgression and eruption may occur.

Conclusion

By probing the absent presence of the m/o/Other in discourse, the path presented in this chapter has highlighted both the fragility of all discourse and the rupture and exclusion on which it is based. Such a rupture stands at the beginning of all discourse. When we ignore it and cover over the cracks that begin to appear in our knowledge, we further perpetuate the process of excluding the o/Other that disturbs our knowledge. This chapter has argued that we need to pay attention to this o/Otherness and see it as a key interlocutor/interlocutory place in the theological task.

There is no unmediated access to such knowledge, however. The unsaid can only be glimpsed through the said, although we need to broaden our understanding of what constitutes discourse. We cannot banish either our traditions or our discourse. But we need to hold it in a tensed relationship with an awareness of and a commitment to seeking out that which is absent yet present -- the unspoken Other that accompanies all discourse.

PART III:

Contested Terrain
and the
Silence of God

Introduction to Part III

Having probed the possibility of a dual mediation that involves a tensed relationship between transformative interpretation and the seeking out of the alterity that accompanies discourse, we move, in this section, to the strictly theological task of identifying how this may be expressed in a theological understanding of tradition and the ecclesiology that follows from it.

In the discussion of tradition that emerges in chapter eight we see that it is possible to identify tradition as both the whole totality of the church's life and as the absolutely Other that this witnesses to but cannot capture. While tradition, as the whole of the church's life, is expressed in discourse and is therefore implicated in power relations, the Tradition, as ultimately Other, is unable to be captured by any discourse.

However, this Other is nevertheless witnessed to in the church. And, as the discussion in chapter nine reveals, the means by which the church witnesses to the Tradition are necessarily historical and therefore limited, partial and incomplete. Such witnessing happens from within the wounded nature of all speech.

Thus the wounded nature of the church and of its witness to the Tradition becomes of key importance -- for it both enables witnessing and impairs it. This speech cannot happen without wounding and yet speech that happens in and through the wounded bearer of revelation that is the church is necessarily also limited and partial.

Theological adequacy and integrity, I conclude by arguing, must continue to hold together the tensiveness that has run throughout this thesis. The witness of the church is both immensely privileged and profoundly wounded. And it is only by faithfully listening to it -- aware of both of these limitations, that a viable and life-giving theology will be able to emerge.

Chapter Eight

Tradition and the Other:

Locating tradition in the life of the church

Tradition is not a book which records a certain moment in the development of the Church and stops itself, but a book always being written by the Church's life. Tradition continues always and now not less than before; we live in tradition and create it. And nevertheless the sacred tradition of the past exists for us as present; it lives in our own life and consciousness.

Sergius Bulgakov (1988:27)

He who has made the words of Jesus really his own is able also to hear His silence.

Ignatius of Antioch
(*To the Ephesians*, 14,2)

Tradition is an ambiguous and often confusing theological term, being used to refer to several different although related realities. In Christian theology it is closely linked to speech about revelation, and, as such, has been problematised in this thesis. The term has nevertheless so far been used in a general sense and one of the tasks of this chapter must be to clarify the different senses in which we speak of tradition in order to develop a viable theology of tradition.[1]

In this chapter I propose to begin with an account of tradition as a human phenomenon which is contrasted to a specifically theological understanding of

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[1]   Congar notes that "Even in its restricted dogmatic sense, 'tradition' designates a reality which is too large, a concept too dense, to be formulable in a concise definition." (1966:234)

tradition. This highlights the problematic of tradition that this thesis is focusing on. I then move into an historical overview of the church's understanding of tradition. This is followed by highlighting the thought of Congar and Lossky which leads to my juxtaposition of tradition with alterity arguing that the otherness of tradition is fundamental to our understanding of it.

Tradition as a human phenomenon

As should be apparent from the discussion of Gadamer's work in chapter six, tradition is a broadly human phenomenon that is necessary for both life and understanding. Coming from the Latin *traditio*, and corresponding to the Greek *paradosis*, tradition means "transmission" and is usually understood as opinion, belief or custom that is handed down through history, and which is assumed to be both reliable and normative.

Tradition, moreover, is necessary for religion. Valliere claims that "A sense of tradition as normative is a basic element in all religious systems, whether or not formal concepts of tradition exist." (1987:2) Religion, as a social phenomenon, owes its continuation to being handed over from one generation to the next. (Geiselmann 1966:81) However, Geiselmann argues that the continuation of religion through tradition cannot only be explained by its social character of meeting and assembly, but must also be seen in terms of its ability to provide access to the "holy". (1966:83) It is its ability to bring about a "new mode of being" (1966:88) that really gives power to a tradition.

Geiselmann argues that religious tradition is mediated through ritual, myth, fixed formulas and an authority that ensures that these elements become fixed in language. (1966:84ff) The purpose of such mediations, however, is to ensure

the living link between the generations establishing a community
between them and it brings powerfully effective religious rites
into line with those that have preceded them. (1966:93)

Thus tradition is not simply about the preservation of rites or myths but
necessarily involves rendering present today the original event that gave rise
to the rites or myths.

The significance of religious tradition in general is seen from this
evocation of living tradition in the ritual of every religion.
(1966:93)

Religious tradition is therefore determined by two opposites according to
Geiselmann. These are continuity and actuality. It is continuity that determines
religious tradition and ensures perpetuity. (1966:93ff) However, if this were the
only point of view "an impoverishment of tradition would ensue" and one
would have only a "superficial view". (1966:95)

For tradition is not only the transmission of a legacy of
knowledge; it gives access to a new mode of being. (1966:95)

Thus the transmission of tradition involves actualization as much as it involves
continuity and it lives in the tension created by these two poles. Tradition,
according to Geiselmann,

has not merely a function of preserving but also an active
purpose. For tradition, in the form of rites, which place the
initiate in direct contact with the original event, becomes for him
the principle both of transformation and of rebirth. Thus tradition
in its receptive aspect can be a stabilizing and conservative force
and in its active aspect a factor of progress by impelling and
summoning the *homo religiosus* to positive undertakings. That is
the reason for the ambivalence of tradition which exactly reflects
that of religion ... (1966:97f)

While this is true of religious tradition as a human phenomenon, and while the Christian tradition of revelation has much in common with it, Geiselmann argues that with Christian revelation we are speaking about something completely new. While revelation is also a historical tradition,

> It alone is based on genuine human freedom, because that freedom, as bearer of tradition, is supported by the operation of the Holy Spirit and a teaching ministry endowed with the gift of infallibility. Alone among traditions, therefore, it is not a revolution that has reached an equilibrium; it puts an end to all revolutions. With it, revolution is replaced by development from the absolutely new historical beginning posited by Jesus Christ. Of Jesus Christ it is really true to say what a pope once said of himself: I am tradition.[2] (1966:112)

Tradition in theological terms

Here we come to the crux of the matter: tradition, in Christian theology, is seen as more than simply a human phenomena but is intimately linked with ideas about revealed truth that is ultimately infallible. The Council of Trent spoke of

> the traditions concerning both faith and conduct, as either directly spoken by Christ or dictated by the Holy Spirit, which have been preserved in unbroken sequence in the catholic church. (Session 4, first decree)

In similar fashion we saw in chapter one the extraordinary assertion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that we cannot discuss the topic of the ordination of women because to do so would be to contradict divine revelation.

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[2]   These words are alleged to have been spoken by Pius IX on 19 June 1870. (Geiselmann 1966:16)

In feminist perspective this is obviously problematic. Like other forms of theologising that take a commitment to those on the margins of church and society seriously, feminist theologies have pointed out that tradition has emerged out of a patriarchal paradigm of reality that

> places everything in a hierarchy of domination and subordination, accepting the marginalization of the powerless as a given. This paradigm is a manifestation of a social system that changes form but continues to define women as marginal to the male center ... (Russell 1993:35)

Thus feminist and other critical theologies of solidarity bring into question the authenticity of what is claimed to be tradition. For the Fathers of the church for Christian tradition to be binding it needed to have the three marks of "antiquity, universality and consensus".[3] If such a criterion is brought into dialogue with feminist and other critical theologies, then it is possible to argue that much of what is accepted as binding tradition is based neither on antiquity (for scholars are pointing to earlier traditions that were suppressed[4]), nor universality (for how can a tradition be universal if half of humanity had no voice in its formulation?), nor consensus (for the apparent agreement of those who have been deprived of a voice is an agreement forced through violence).

Moreover, we come up against the question of exactly *what* constitutes tradition. How much of the general phenomenon of tradition is divinely revealed? And what of tradition that clearly does change and cannot therefore,

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[3] This definition of what "has been believed everywhere, always, by everyone" comes from Vincent of Lerins (*A Commonitory*, 2, 6) and became influential in the western church. Constantine Scouteris has pointed out that is less influential in the eastern church where the criteria for tradition relate more to that which promotes *koinonia*. (discussion, 6 August 1996)

[4] See, for example, the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983).

presumably, be claimed to be divinely revealed, or belong to the very deposit of faith? And in what sense is tradition separate from, or the same as, scripture? What of the distinction between *the* Tradition (with a capital "t") and the many human traditions (with a small "t")? It is these distinctions that will hopefully emerge as we consider the history of the theology of tradition.

Tradition in the history of the church

As is to be expected of such a vital topic, the church's understandings of tradition has undergone developments and changes in different eras and contexts. The following outline provides a rough overview of these.

The Jewish context

The Judaism from which Christianity arose was not simply a religion of the written word, but also a religion that was dependent on unwritten tradition. Arising prior to the written law, the early Hebrew tradition was originally the only source of Jewish faith. (Malaty 1979:34) Long before it was written down, the Mosaic law regulated Israel's life and the psalms expressed its prayer. (Congar 1966:2) Congar has commented:

> Begotten in tradition, or even from tradition, the biblical writings
> come to us borne on a living religious reality -- the community of
> God's chosen people, and this religious reality itself existed
> before these writings, either as the whole community, or as its
> most genuine and representative elements. (1966:2)

Even after receiving the written law, tradition was still seen as necessary in order to interpret it and, indeed, added to it. The establishment of schools for the interpretation of the Law provided disciples called *talmid* who became

links in a chain of transmission that passed on this accumulated wisdom. While originally completely dependent on scripture, this tradition acquired a value of its own and eventually found its way into a book -- the Talmud -- by the second century.[5] (Congar 1966:4f; Nichols 1991:166)

The early Christians clearly accepted the reality of Jewish tradition and assumed knowledge based on tradition. At the same time, like Jesus, they were prepared to reject traditions that contradicted what they believed to be the Word of God and refused to adopt a literal attitude towards tradition. (Malaty 1979:38f) For example, following the apostle Peter's vision, reported in Acts 10, they made a bold move in allowing Gentiles into their community of faith. In this they universalised what had previously been an ethnically based salvation community and made the message of salvation available for all people.

The early Christians

For the earliest Christians tradition was the only source of Christian faith. Specifically Christian revelation was necessarily in oral form until the writing (or more strictly the canonization) of the New Testament. According to Congar, such

> "tradition" implies an activity of the Church living its belief, and
> consequently elaborating it, rather as Israel had done ... Before
> the written gospels, there had only been *the* Gospel: a gospel
> preached and transmitted orally. (1966:5)

Aware of the possibility of a misuse of tradition, the gospels present Jesus as promising the disciples the help of the Holy Spirit. (Nichols 1991:167) Such a

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[5]   Judith Plaskow, writing from a Jewish feminist perspective, points to the partiality of this Jewish record of wrestling with God. (1990:ch 2).

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Spirit-guided authority stands behind Paul's appeal to tradition as what is handed on, received and conserved. For, for Paul it is Jesus Christ himself who is both the content and the principle of tradition. (Congar 1966:9) Thus, speaking of the eucharist, he says:

> For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

Thus the tradition that the first Christians received and passed on was not simply a human or historical tradition, but was Christ himself.

> This is the "tradition", i.e., "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), or the "Gospel" written in our lives and engraved within our hearts. It is a living thing, received by the apostles who delivered it to their disciples by the Holy Spirit, who bears witness to Christ within the life of the Church, and unites her with the Saviour. (Malaty 1979:8)

> In a word, then, the tradition is the Christian religion itself, a reality larger than that of the scriptural text ... Concretely, Tradition is the Church's life; abstractly or reflectively, it is the Church's faith. (Nichols 1991:169)

The Patristic era

It is with the Patristic church of the first three centuries that the key theological and Christological controversies force the church to work out and define its criteria for judging theological adequacy and hence the role of tradition.

In this era we see an emphasis on the strong link between the church and tradition. In contrast to the gnostics who argued for a private interpretation of the scriptures, the Fathers insisted that Christian truth can only be properly understood within the church. Saint Irenaeus, often called the "father of the Ecclesiastical Tradition", insisted that the validity of the church's tradition comes from the fact that it originates from the Apostles and has been passed down by an unbroken succession of bishops. This tradition is not something secret, but is manifested in every church throughout the whole world. (Malaty 1979:22)

> It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of those men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. (*Against Heresies*, 3, 3, 1)

Hence the authority of the church's tradition derives from its apostilicity and apostilicity came to be seen as the test for determining whether or not something belonged to the church's faith. (Gaybba 1971:2) The test of apostilicity, however, was unanimity. It was the church as a whole that possessed the Spirit and could therefore not be in error. (Gaybba 1971:3) However, within the universal church, those churches that were believed to have been founded by the apostles held a special place. Irenaeus wrote:

> Suppose there arises a dispute relative to some important question among us, should we not have recourse to the most ancient Churches with which the apostles held constant intercourse, and learn from them what is certain and clear in regard to the present question? For how should it be if the apostles themselves had not left us writings? Would it not be necessary, [in that case,] to follow the course of tradition which they handed down to those to whom they did commit the

Churches? (*Against Heresies*, 3, 4, 1)

The same view is echoed by Tertullian who held that the surest test of authenticity of doctrine or practice lies in the fact that the churches had been founded by and were continually linked with the apostles.

> Now, what that was that they [the apostles] preached -- in other words, what it was which Christ revealed to them -- can, as I must here likewise prescribe, properly be proved in no other way than by those very churches which the apostles founded in person, by declaring the gospel to them directly themselves, both vivâ voca, as the phrase is, and subsequently by their epistles. If, then, these things are so, it is in the same degree manifest that all doctrine that agrees with the apostolic churches -- those moulds and original sources of the faith -- must be reckoned for truth, as undoubtedly containing that which the (said) churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, Christ from God.... We hold communion with the apostolic churches because our doctrine is in no respect different *from theirs*. This is our witness of truth. (*The Prescription Against Heretics*, 21)

Similar views were expressed by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, John Chrysostom and Augustine.[6]

At issue sometimes was the relationship between scripture and tradition. Initially little distinction was made between oral and written tradition. However, in their interchanges with heretics, we see the affirmation of a specifically oral tradition and the insistence that the scriptures belong to the church and can only properly be read in the context of the church. In the words of Origen,

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[6]   For Clement, see *Stromata*, 7,17; for Origen, *De Principiis*, Pref. 2; for Cyprian, *Epistle 73*, 11; for Gregory, *Against Eunomius*, 2, 1; for Basil, *On the Spirit*, 10, 25; 27, 66-67; for John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Thessalonians*, 4, 15; and for Augustine, *On Baptism, Against the Donatists*, 2, 6-7.

> The true disciple of Jesus is he who enters the house, that is to
> say, the Church. He enters it by thinking as the Church does, and
> living as she does; this is how he understands the Word. The key
> of the Scriptures must be received from the tradition of the
> Church, as from the Lord Himself. (quoted in Congar 1964:83)

However, scripture and tradition remain integrally related. Just as one cannot have scripture without the church, so too one cannot have the church without scripture. They are reciprocally conditioned and, while distinguishable, cannot be separated. (Congar 1966:33ff,44)

It is in this era also that we find the beginning of church councils which became central in determining what belongs to tradition. While the roots of the conciliar idea lie in the New Testament, in the fourth to the eighth centuries,

> we find a shift of emphasis from the apostolic authority of the
> deposit of faith to the authority of doctrine as taught and
> believed by the Church, because of the action within her of the
> Spirit -- the belief and teaching of the Church, which now
> contains not merely the apostolic deposit of but also an unfolding
> of the meaning of that deposit, is considered normative precisely
> because it is the belief and teaching of the whole Church.
> (Gaybba 1971:4)

Hence ecumenicity came to be seen as key to determining what belongs to the tradition and the dogmatic teachings of the ecumenical councils became binding on all the churches. However, this development retained a connection with the apostolic church by insisting that for a council to be truly ecumenical it had to be attended by the patriarchs of the apostolic sees. (Nichols 1991:212)

The patristic era is thus characterised by a close connection between scripture, tradition and the life of the Spirit in the church which work together to constitute the church's life. However, Gaybba has noted that while this bond was regarded as a close one, "the precise relationships between these various

entities had not been worked out". (1971:5) This was to lead to major ruptions for parts of the church at a later date.

Moreover, in the later Fathers, notably Augustine and Vincent of Lerins, we find the emergence of ideas regarding dogmatic development.[7] Such ideas were to be particularly influential in the later development of the western church.

The Second Council of Nicaea and the eastern church

The Second Council of Nicaea in 787, while commonly considered as the last ecumenical council of the undivided church,[8] was nevertheless more influential in the east than in the west. Iconoclasm was a fundamentally eastern problem; while the western church had disapproved of iconoclasm from the outset and had participated in the deliberations of the council, its decisions were not well received in the west, particularly among the Franks. (Pheidas 1990:16f) This was partly due to the poor Latin translation of the council's rulings which was vague on certain theological points. It was also because, for the west, the role of images, while valid, was a fundamentally ornamentative one rather than a guarantee of orthodoxy. (Pheidas 1990:17) Thus while Nicaea's teachings were ultimately received as the teachings of an ecumenical council, its influence on the western church was limited.

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[7]   For Augustine, see *The City of God*, 16, 2; for Vincent, see *A Commonitory*, 23.

[8]

This would of course be disputed by the non-Calcedonian Orthodox Churches for whom the last ecumenical council was Council of Ephesus in 431.

For the east, however, the triumph of orthodoxy at the council was seen as the triumph of tradition. Congar has commented

> The victory of the icononphils was considered to be a victory both for orthodoxy and for tradition, the two things being more closely identified than ever before with each other and with the Church. (1966:102)

The council thus marked a decisive moment for the eastern churches. In reasserting the authority of tradition it stated:

> we declare that we defend free from any innovations all the written and unwritten ecclesiastical traditions that have been entrusted to us ... Therefore all those who dare to think or teach anything different, or who follow the accursed heretics in rejecting ecclesiastical traditions, or who devise innovations, or who spurn anything entrusted to the church (whether it be the gospel or the figure of the cross or any example of representational art or any martyr's holy relic), or who fabricate perverted and evil prejudices against cherishing any of the lawful traditions of the catholic church, or who secularize the sacred objects and saintly monasteries, we order that they be suspended if they are bishops or clerics, and excommunicated if they are monks or lay people! (Definition)

Orthodoxy, or the faith of the eastern churches, thus came to be seen as

> a victory over error, and of a conservation of tradition; it is the Church of the Fathers, the Church of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. (Congar 1966:103)

However, this conservative view of the eastern church in regard to tradition is only partly accurate. While the conservation of tradition was seen as centrally important, this did not stop them from undergoing certain new disciplinary

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provisions and even doctrinal developments.[9] (Congar 1966:104) Moreover, in modern times Orthodox theologians have argued for a much more dynamic understanding of tradition which is linked to the role of the Holy Spirit in the church.[10] (Congar 1966:104ff)

The medieval west

While the theology of tradition of the Christian east remained fundamentally that of the Fathers and saw its dogmatic expression as necessarily limited by the seven ecumenical councils, the rift that developed between east and west meant that the western church became increasingly isolated and underwent doctrinal developments in isolation from the rest of the church.

The initial orientation of the western church was a fundamentally biblical one. It was generally held that the scriptures contained all the truths necessary for salvation. While there was some speculation on the idea that there may be Christian truth that is not contained in scripture, this occupied a comparatively

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[9]   Mackey points out, for example, that fundamental doctrines of Orthodoxy, such as those concerning the sacraments and justification, were not fully elaborated until after the Schism. (1962:197) Moreover, the Hesychast controversy in the fourteenth century gave rise to the development of Gregory Palamas' distinction between God's essence and God's energies that became widely accepted in Orthodox theology.

[10]   Influential here is the work of A S Khomyakov (1804-1860) who used ideas of dynamic totality and historical continuity and who "saw in the Orthodox faithful, the vehicle of the Spirit, and in this vehicle the very principle of tradition itself." (Congar 1966:104) For him tradition was more than just continuity, but was rather a dynamic, living continuity that is not attainable except from within and can only be understood as the work of the Holy Spirit. (Congar 1966:105) For more on Khomyakov, see O'Leary's *The Triune Church* (1982). Such ideas clearly influenced Vladimir Lossky, whose work we will consider later in this chapter. Their influence can also be seen in the theology of Sergius Bulgakov, who speaks of "the church as tradition". (1988)

limited role for the great medieval theologians. When questions arose about non-scriptural doctrinal formulations, such as the filioque and the institution of certain sacraments, attempts were generally made to provide some scriptural reference, even if this was equivalent or indirect. (Congar 1966:87)

However, Congar has pointed out the lack of an historical consciousness and the importance of the idea of transcendent causalities for medieval theology. The concept of *auctoritas*

> indicated the value that some thing or statement derived from its source, considered less historically as a factor of temporal genesis, than according to its place in the great hierarchy of the world, and thus for the part of infallible truth it represented in virtue of its function or status. (1966:90)

This found application in the idea of the communication to humans of uncreated divine Truth. While this refers first and foremost to scriptural revelation, it is nevertheless coextensive with the duration of the church. (Congar 1966:90) Hence we find a tendency to include the fathers, the councils, pontifical decrees and occasionally the work of theologians within the *Scriptura sacra*. (Congar 1966:92) While Thomas Aquinas was careful to distinguish the *auctoritas* of scripture from that of the fathers and doctors, (*ST*, 1, q.1,a.8) this was far from common practice. (Congar 1966:93)

Moreover, in the last decades of the thirteenth and the first decades of the fourteenth centuries, we also see a growing need for distinctions and precise definitions and so one gradually found the dissociation of elements that were previously closely united. (Gaybba 1971:5; Congar 1966:94) With Duns Scotus (d. 1308) we find a distinction between metaphysical knowledge and knowledge by faith, while with Henry of Ghent (d. 1293) we find the beginning of hypothetical questioning about the relative authority of scripture

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and the church. Henry posed the scenario of all but a few in the church falling into heresy and asked whether, in that situation, one should believe scripture or the church. He opted for scripture. (Gaybba 1971:5) Tavard comments:

> The Church would then reside among the small group of true believers standing by the Bible over against the judgement of the (heretical) Christian society. There is nothing novel in this idea, insofar as it lies at the root of most medieval sectarian movements. Yet its introduction into orthodox thinking is unexpected. As against the views of the older theologians, Henry's doctrine implies an ethereal conception of the Church. She is not necessarily identified with the community of believers. (1959:25)

In a context in which papal power was at its height we thus begin to see a split developing between scripture and the church as the highest authority. While curial canonists and theologians exalted papal power to an extreme, supporters of the emperor such as Dante and Ockham, reaffirmed the primacy of scripture. (Congar 1966:94f) Thus we find a prefiguring of the reformation controversies.

> Consequently, when the time came for the outbreak of the Reformation, the question was often posed in terms of this false alternative, which ought to have been rejected, but which was seized upon by the Reformers: Is the Church above Scripture, or Scripture above the Church? (Congar 1966:99)

The reformation, Trent and beyond

That the reformers responded to this alternative with the cry of *sola scriptura* is well known. In rejecting "human traditions" Luther insisted that everything must be judged according to the criterion of scripture. (Congar 1966:140f) He wrote

> Did I not say that the affairs of the pope and of all papists are nothing but human teaching and usage, without any Scripture ... what else am I fighting about but precisely this? I do it so that everyone may understand the true difference between divine Scripture and human teaching or usage and so that a Christian heart does not buy the one for the other -- straw for gold, hay for silver, and wood for jewels ... (1989:98)

However, Tavard has pointed out that for Luther scripture must nevertheless be interpreted and judged and the criterion that Luther uses for this is the doctrine of justification by faith.

> That is the true test by which to judge all books, when we see whether they deal with Christ or not, since all Scriptures show us Christ and St Paul will know nothing but Christ. Whatever does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even though St Peter or St Paul had taught it; again what preaches Christ would be apostolic even though Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod did it. (quoted in Tavard 1959:82)

Commenting on this Tavard states:

> When Luther says, "to preach Christ", he understands, "to preach justification by faith alone". (1959:82f)

A similar dynamic is evident in Calvin. While he rejects the authority of the church's tradition and states that "Scripture will finally suffice for our saving knowledge of God", he adds "when its certainty is sponsored by the inner persuasion of the Holy Spirit." For,

> The naked word of God avails nothing without the illumination of the Holy Spirit. (quoted in Tanner 1959:103)

Thus we see that, for the reformers, the individual interpretation of scripture becomes of paramount importance. Nevertheless, the principle of *sola scriptura* means that:

> For the Reformation, the only bond -- perhaps not *de facto*, but the
> only certain, normative one, divinely guaranteed at least to a
> certain extent -- which links the Church of today, and every
> believer in any age, to the unique fact of the apostles, is Holy
> Scripture. (Congar 1966:146)

Despite this the reformers did not ignore tradition. They retained the early councils and referred to the teachings of the fathers recognising "the purity of the early Church, which represents, for them also, a privileged moment in history." (Congar 1966:143) Such an acknowledgement was nevertheless founded on the congruency between the patristic era and the witness of scripture. The reformers accepted the fathers only "in so far as these are in accord with the word of God, Scripture". (Congar 1966:144)

In rejecting the principle of *sola scriptura* Catholic apologists developed a new synthesis that came to dominate Catholic thinking. This involved the idea, firstly, that scripture and unwritten traditions formed two distinct sources of doctrinal truth and, secondly, that the development of such tradition takes place under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Gaybba 1971:7)

The Council of Trent identified "the Gospel" as the single source of saving truth and moral discipline. (Congar 1966:157) This truth is contained, however, in both the written books of scripture and in unwritten traditions. (Session 4, first decree) In this Trent

> implicitly reaffirmed the existence of a teaching magisterium, one
> that is authoritative thanks to the guidance of the Spirit. In other
> words, to the burning question of the day: Scripture? or the
> Church? Trent replied: neither by themselves, but the two
> together, possessing a similar authority. (Gaybba 1971:9)

While Trent did not explicitly speak of two sources of revelation, the *partim-partim* view[11] that scripture and tradition are two separate sources of revelation became the dominant Catholic view after Trent. Moreover, Gaybba has noted that

> Alongside this clear division between Scripture and tradition was a trend, to become more marked as the 19th century got under way, to regard tradition not so much as a deposit of revelation received from the apostles and conserved by the whole Church but rather as the teachings of the magisterium of the Church, which magisterium came to be regarded more and more exclusively as the organ of tradition. (1971:9)

In this period we also find an increasing emphasis on the role of the magisterium. The logical extension of such thinking was the declaration on papal infallibility of the First Vatican Council. For Vatican I tradition was a deposit entrusted to the care of the church, by which it understood the magisterium and especially the pope. (Congar 1966:198)

> For the doctrine of the faith which God has revealed is put forward not as some philosophical discovery capable of being perfected by human intelligence, but as a divine deposit committed to the spouse of Christ to be faithfully protected and infallibly promulgated. (Session 3, chapter 4)

Beginnings of a renewal

While this view continued into the twentieth century, the nineteenth century also saw the beginnings of a renewal in the theology of tradition. Theologians such as Möhler, Newman and Scheeben developed an organic view of the

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[11]   An early draft had spoken of revelation being found partly in scripture and partly in tradition. (*partim ... partim*) This was later revised to read that it is found both in scripture and in tradition. (*et ... et*) (Nichols 1991:176)

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relationship between the church and tradition and saw tradition as a function of the whole church. (Gaybba 1971:10)

Möhler rejected the idea of revelation handed on partly through texts and partly through oral tradition. Rather he saw tradition as a mode of communication that covers the whole of Christianity and encompasses scripture. Scripture and tradition are not independent sources but include, fulfil and condition one another. (Congar 1966:193)

> Tradition or the living Gospel, always proclaimed in the Church, extends to the whole spirit of Christianity and to all its doctrines. (quoted in Congar 1966:193)

For Möhler, tradition is linked with a theology of communion. Through the activity of the Holy Spirit and the hierarchical succession, tradition links the identity of the individual believer with the consciousness of all. It is the consciousness given to individual believers when they live in the communion of all, by the Spirit who is given to their unanimous agreement. (Congar 1966:194f)

> This vital, spiritual force, which we inherit from our fathers and which is perpetuated in the Church, is interior tradition. (quoted in Congar 1966:194)

Newman is remembered largely for his contributions appropriately entitled *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine*. In the former he argues that the historical idea of tradition can be complemented by the idea of the magisterium. While the church had always possessed the faith it had not always possessed a total understanding of it. With the idea of a developing understanding of faith Newman was able to hold together both history and the role of the magisterium.

if Christianity be an universal religion, suited not to one locality or period, but to all times and places, it cannot but vary in its relations and dealings towards the world around it, that is, it will develope. Principles require a very various application according to persons and circumstances and must be thrown into new shapes according to the form of society which they are to influence. (1846:96)

In the latter essay Newman argues for the importance of the *sensus fidelium* in defining doctrine. Using patristic and historical examples he showed the key role of the laity in events leading up to dogmatic definitions and argued:

Though the laity be but the reflection or echo of the clergy in matters of faith, yet there is something in the "pastorum ac fidelium *congregatio*," which is not in the pastors alone. (1986:103f)

These points are more or less echoed by Scheeben who helped to define the role of the magisterium and also the role of the laity and hierarchy. While the laity have an important role in conserving and handing on tradition, he saw the activity of defining its content as belonging to the hierarchy alone. (Congar 1966:213) Laity and hierarchy are, however, closely related.

The members of and organs of the Church form one body of Christ and assemble around the Eucharist as the source of their common life, and they are called to image forth the highest unity of all, that of the Trinity. In the unfolding of their life and activity, these members and organs constitute a closely knit whole, in which the unity and harmony of external social life is the faithful reflection of its true, internal, mysterious unity. This fact must be manifested by the unity of the pastoral power. (1946:552)

In our own century we have seen a continuation of this renewal. [12] Tradition is now seen less as a deposit of truths, than as a totality into which one enters and in which one lives. Schmaus expresses this when he says

> In his faith the believer does not merely give his assent to true propositions. Much more, through his faith he comes in contact with the one in whom he believes. (Mackey 1962:110)

Thus today we find a wider notion of tradition in which

> Tradition is now commonly described as "the life of the Church", as an activity in which there are handed down not merely truths (verbal tradition) but also realities, especially the real contact with God in faith (real tradition), or as the sensus fidei, i.e., "the living understanding of the faith which manifests itself in the ensemble of the teaching and hearing Church", [Dillenschneider as quoted by Mackey 1962:129)] or as a dialogue between the magisterium and the faithful. (Gaybba 1971:11)

As can be seen from the discussion in chapter three, it is this dynamic view of tradition that was adopted at Vatican II and which is evident in *Dei Verbum* and its other constitutions.

> Tradition and scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church. By adhering to it the entire holy people, united to its pastors, remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the communion of life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (see Acts 2:42). So, in maintaining, practising and professing the faith that has been handed on there is a unique interplay between the bishops and the faithful. (*DV*:10)

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[12]   This is associated with the work of Lercher, Zapalena, Dillenschneider, Balic, Congar, Ternus, Schmaus, Rondet, Rahner, Bacht and Geiselmann. (Gaybba 1971:11)

Thus we see that tradition is necessarily linked to the ongoing life of the church. Like the shift from proposition to relation which we saw with regard to the theology of revelation in chapter three, there has been a shift from viewing tradition as a source of cerebral knowledge of theological truth, to viewing it as providing access to a living encounter with the Christian reality. This represents in many respects a return to the patristic perspective although it also allows for later developments such as the ongoing development of doctrine under the action of the Holy Spirit in the church.

Tradition in the thought of Yves Congar

One of the important contributions to a contemporary Catholic theology of tradition is that of the recently deceased Yves Congar (1904-1995). In what follows I will outline key central ideas of his work in order to highlight that "Other" that I will argue below accompanies and is at the heart of tradition.

Congar describes tradition as a principle of transmission and delivery. It is something that we receive and, like everything in the church, it comes from elsewhere. (1966:240f; 1964:144) In baptism faith is transmitted

> and it is at once knowledge, the principle of life and salvation, catechesis and sacrament, and "mystery" in its double meaning of knowledge and of divine saving action working through sacred signs understood by faith. (1966:243)

Tradition is also the principle that ensures continuity and identity throughout successive generations. (1964:8) If faith is transmitted it must also be received and it is received by a living, active and historical subject who needs to appropriate it. (1966:253ff) While its principle of identity is unchanging,

tradition also represents a permanent renewal. (1966:264) Thus tradition is development as well as transmission.

> That which was received and professed in baptism becomes, in the context of the Christian life, praise, service, witness, response and decision. (1966:266)

Thus,

> The tradition received by each one of us is not the quintessence of primitive Christianity, but the totality of what has been revealed about Christ over long ages. (1966:268)

The subject of tradition

For Congar the act of transmitting implies an active subject. (1964:48) While there are many different subjects of tradition -- such as the prophets, Jesus and the apostles -- he singles out two central ones and distinguishes between a transcendent subject, namely the Holy Spirit, and a visible and historical subject, namely the church.

It is the Spirit who is the principle of identity for the church -- a unifying principle who promotes fellowship. (1964:55) The mission of the Spirit constitutes a form of sacrament with a visible structure of signs and a kernel working within. (1966:338) The Spirit's role is one of actualising and interiorising what Christ said and did. (1966:342)

It is important to note, however, that

> There is no "incarnation" of the Holy Ghost in the Church, like the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ; there is simply a covenant between them, guaranteed by God's absolute

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fidelity, as between two persons who do not form a single, physical, existing reality, but retain their liberty. With the exception of a final indeflectibility which God has promised it, the ecclesiastical body whose soul is the Holy Ghost remains fully human and historical. And so, to speak of the Holy Ghost as the Church's soul and the transcendent principle of her identity, does not mean that *all* that happens in the historical life of this Church is guaranteed by the Holy Ghost. (1964:55f)

As the visible, historical subject of tradition, the church is a complex organic reality being made up of both hierarchy and laity. However, while all the "faithful" transmit tradition by the simple practice of faith, (1964:70; 1966:323ff) it is the task of the magisterium to keep faithfully, judge authentically and define infallibly the content of the deposit of faith. (1964:63) This it is enabled to do since it has a special grace that corresponds to the mission entrusted to it. (1964:65)

However, Congar notes that according to Thomas Aquinas (see *ST*, 1, q.1, a.8) the church only has a secondary role in relation to tradition which needs to be measured by the primary rule which is divine revelation. (1964:68) Thus the magisterium is a witness to revelation and does not have autonomy with regard to it. (1964:69) While the activity of the magisterium changes material tradition into formal tradition, as rules of belief for the church,

> The deposit alone, the true faith of the Church alone, constitutes Tradition in the sense whereby it imposes itself upon the faithful as the actual content of what they should believe. (1964:67)

Tradition and traditions

Here we come to what I believe is a centrally important point in Congar's theology which is the distinction between *the Tradition* and various *traditions*. For Congar although tradition is witnessed to by various monuments, these

should not be confused with the Tradition itself.

> the monuments of Tradition are not Tradition itself, which
> transcends them; they are the concrete expressions of various
> aspects of it and thus, for us, a means of reaching this Tradition ...
> (1964:139)

Congar distinguishes between the one Tradition (with a capital "T"), which is ultimately inaccessible, and various traditions (with a small "t"). For him traditions are customs, rites, practical methods and concrete details which have been handed down to us and which form a certain system of discipline for the Christian life. They function as a language or national symbols functions for a national culture: they are

> the concrete carrier of a spirit, that which enables one to become
> an actual member of a certain community, by receiving,
> effortlessly and almost unconsciously, a certain type of humanity.
> (1964:145)

Tradition, on the other hand, is something much broader and apparently less tangible. It cannot be captured in writing but is "the very principle of the whole economy of salvation". (1964:15) Tradition both precedes and exceeds written communication though it is definitively witnessed to in the scriptures, the Fathers, the liturgy and the teaching of the church's magisterium. It cannot, however, be reduced to any of these. (1966:458)

Tradition in Orthodox perspective: the work of Vladimir Lossky

This ultimate inaccessibility of the Tradition is also expressed in the work of Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), a Russian Orthodox theologian. Like Congar he distinguishes between the Tradition and various traditions and objects to the confusing use of the term "tradition" without an adjective to qualify it. (1982:21)

Lossky argues that Tradition is not something that can be juxtaposed with, or opposed to, scripture, as the polemicists of the counter-reformation attempted to do. (1982:11) Neither is it, although this comes closer to its true meaning, a term which refers to the oral teaching of faith, over and against that which is written. (1982:12) It also does not ultimately refer to mysterious and secret knowledge, although this also sheds some light on its meaning. (1982:13)

In these definitions, while they shed some light on the meaning of tradition, we come up against a boundary with Tradition properly so called. "In effect there is participation in the revealed mystery through the fact of sacramental initiation." (1982:13) However all of these definitions remain linked to verbal expression and operate within the economy of the *word*.

> In order to isolate the pure notion of Tradition, in order to strip it of all that is its projection on the horizontal life of the Church, it would be necessary to go beyond the opposition of secret words and words preached aloud, ranging together "the traditions" and "preaching". These two have this in common that, secret or not, they are none the less expressed by word. They always imply a verbal expression, whether it is a question of words properly so-called, pronounced or written, or whether of the dumb language which is addressed to the understanding by visual manifestation (iconography, ritual gestures, etc.). Taken in this general sense, the word is not uniquely an external sign used to designate a concept, but above all a content, which is defined intelligibly and

declared in assuming a body, in becoming incorporated in articulate discourse or in any other form of external expression. (1982:14)

While revelation, for Lossky, is intimately connected to the economy of the Word Incarnate, tradition is something different from this and is linked to the role of the Holy Spirit in the church. Thus one needs to see his work in the context of a trinitarian ecclesiology which distinguishes between the Christological and Pneumatological aspects of the church.[13] For our purposes here, though, it is important to note that for him Tradition is radically different from any form of verbal knowledge, whether of scripture or of traditions.

If again we wished to oppose it to all that belongs to the reality of the Word, it would be necessary to say that the Tradition is Silence. (1982:14f)

He continues

The words of Revelation have then a margin of silence which cannot be picked up by the ears of those who are outside ... This silence of the Scriptures could not be detached from them: it is transmitted by the Church with the words of Revelation, as the very condition of their reception. (1982:15)

This silence "implies no kind of insufficiency or lack" but rather indicates that for revelation to be truly received it "demands a conversion towards the vertical plane". (1982:15)

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[13]   In chapter nine of his work *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (1976) Lossky sees the church as one in Christ but as multiple through the Spirit. In the church our nature is recapitulated in Christ and contained in him. But human beings are still free. The church's nature is both organic and personal, objective and subjective, a definite reality but also a reality in the process of becoming.

While scripture and all that the church has produced by means of words, symbols and images represent different expressions of the truth, Tradition, for Lossky, is "the unique mode of receiving it". (1982:15) Tradition

> is not the content of Revelation, but the light that reveals it; it is not the word, but the living breath which makes the word heard at the same time as the silence from which it came; it is not the Truth, but a communication of the Spirit of Truth, outside which the Truth cannot be received. (1982:15)

Tradition is thus "the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church" (1982:15) and is therefore something separate from the economy of the word:

> To preserve the "dogmatic tradition" does not mean to be attached to doctrinal formulae: to be within the Tradition is to keep the living truth in the Light of the Holy Spirit, or rather -- it is to be kept in the Truth by the vivifying power of Tradition. But this power preserves by a ceaseless renewing, like all that comes from the Spirit. (1982:19)

This does not mean that Lossky rejects the authority of word-orientated revelation. However, anything expressed in words is always partial and doctrines, while necessary, become traitors to Tradition when they seek to take its place. (1982:19)

> As an expression of truth, a dogma of faith belongs to the Tradition, without all the same constituting one of its "parts". It is a means, an intelligible instrument, which makes for adherence to the Tradition of the Church: it is a witness of Tradition, its external limit, or rather the narrow door which leads to knowledge of Truth in the Tradition. (1982:20)

Tradition and the Other

The work of both Congar and Lossky points to Tradition as an ultimately uncapturable reality that the church lives off and bears witness to. Thus we may argue that there is an alterity that is at the very heart of the theological meaning of Tradition. This "Otherness" of Congar and Lossky is at once totally different from the marginalised "other" of contemporary contextual and feminist discourses, and yet also has something in common with them. While theologians such as Congar and Lossky often seem regrettably ignorant of the sort of critical challenges to knowledge outlined in chapter four, they nevertheless point to a reality that is beyond the enslavement of patriarchal and other forms of word-based discourse, namely the activity of the Holy Spirit within the church which, while witnessed to in discourse, is not encaptured by it.

This is not to suggest that problems do not remain; we are still faced with witnesses to Tradition which Christian theology, whether Catholic or Orthodox, believes to be authoritative. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

However, what is asserted here is that despite the problematic nature of such witnesses, the traditioning process of the church, which includes such witnesses and, given the power dynamics found in our human history, is almost necessarily patriarchal, is nevertheless capable of bearing witness to the absolute Other. While this Other cannot be grasped in words -- even though it has been definitively revealed in the Word -- it can be encountered in darkness and in silence. And it is this "Other" that is ultimately the principle of the church's life.

Conclusion

This chapter has moved from a general description of tradition to a more precise theological location of the Tradition. In this we moved from a general idea of tradition as the whole life of the church to the Tradition as silence and alterity. In this we have seen that tradition is necessarily ecclesial and also that it is necessarily "Other". As an ecclesial reality, it is necessarily expressed in discourse and therefore implicated a set of power relations. However, as something "Other" it is beyond all discourse. As the life of the Spirit in the church, it is ultimately uncapturable. The following chapter will examine how we may hold together these two realities and the type of ecclesiology needed for such a task.

Chapter Nine

Bearing witness to the Other:

The church as wounded bearer of revelation

We have seen, then, that Tradition is never accessible in itself, in
its pure form, but only comes to us via some kind of concrete
mediation.

> Aidan Nichols (1991:181)

The church and Tradition are but two aspects for the life of Faith.
We can't know one of them without the other.

> Tadros Malaty (1979:51)

If we are to mirror God, to be in God's image, to be like God, to
invite God to indwell us so that we live Christ's life in today's
world and in every day's world, we have to be willing to enter
the wound of history, particularly the wound of Judeo-Christian
history. We have to be willing to enter the wound of God.

> Maggie Ross (1987:xvii)

Just as speech about revelation is integrally linked with speech about tradition,

so too, speech about tradition is integrally linked with speech about the church.

If, as the previous chapter argued, the Tradition itself is ultimately Other and

unable to be captured in words, it is nevertheless witnessed to in ways which,

while not capturing it, are nevertheless held to be decisive. Thus, while I

believe that it is important to locate the Tradition as ultimately Other and

uncapturable, we also need to deal with the church's discourse which

surrounds it and, however inadequately, expresses it.

This chapter therefore focuses on the church's role in witnessing to the Tradition. I begin by looking at the role of monuments to tradition in Catholic theology, highlighting both their necessity and importance and also their limitations. I then move into a consideration of what we can say about the nature of the church as bearer of revelation, in the light of the problematic that has run throughout this thesis suggesting that we need to enter into the wounded nature of the church in order to hold together its role as bearer of revelation with its own limitations that hinder this role.

Witnessing to the Tradition

While the monuments or witnesses to the Tradition are not the Tradition itself, they are the concrete forms through which it is mediated to us. They are, to quote Congar,

> expressions in which Tradition is, at least partially, fixed and contained, and in which as a result it can be grasped and analysed. Tradition is, logically at least, prior to its monuments, since they are only expressions of it. (1966:425)

Congar distinguishes between what he terms constitutive *loci* which is the apostolic heritage and declarative *loci* which help our understanding of the constitutive *loci*. The constitutive *loci* consists of scripture and unwritten traditions. These unwritten traditions are, however, only accessible in the form of declarative *loci* which include the teaching of the magisterium, the liturgy and the church's practice, the Fathers and Doctors, the Sacred Canons, and the theologians. (1966:426)

This is obviously problematic for, if the Tradition itself is inaccessible and outside the realm of patriarchal language, these "monuments" very clearly assume a patriarchal discourse. Thus a feminist interaction with them must necessarily include a hermeneutic of suspicion.

In approaching these realities I suggest that it is more helpful to see them as witnesses rather than as monuments. Schneiders has developed the category of a witness which bears testimony in relation to scripture but I suggest that her observations are also applicable to the other realities that are cited as "monuments" to the Tradition in Catholic theology.

According to Schneiders, a witness is someone who has experienced a certain event which is seen as significant. (1991b:133f) The testimony that a witness gives, however, is not simply a matter of giving an account of what happened. Testimony is usually accompanied by the taking of an oath which shows that the testimony given is "self-implicating discourse". (1991b:135)

> The witness claims that her or his personhood and integrity are the guarantee of the truthfulness of the testimony, so much so that even God is called to witness and invited to exact retribution if what is said is not true. This accounts for the paradigmatic use of the term *witness* for the "martyrs," for those who forfeit their lives as warranty to the truth of their testimony. The implication is that the truth of what is being said is so important that one could not live humanly if one defected from that truth. (1991b:135)

Testimony is however always limited and the testimony that a witness gives is always necessarily historical, partial and incomplete.

> There is no such thing as totally adequate human testimony, not because witnesses are incompetent or untruthful but because of the necessarily limited relationship of human knowing to reality and to language. (1991b:135)

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Thus we find that there is always the possibility of error or inadequacy in the witness's interpretation of her or his experience. While such inadequacy could simply be a matter of incompleteness, it could also distort the account. (1991b:135) This means that all testimony is partial and biased. One selects what is integrated into an account of an experience and what is marginalised and ignored. We experience from a particular standpoint and a particular social location and history. (1991b:136) Finally, Schneiders claims, testimony is limited by the necessity for articulation. Not only is language itself limiting, but the individual witness's limited competence in using language is even more constricting. (1991b:136)

We therefore see that

> testimony is both the most reliable of human communications
> because of its highly self-implicating character and yet limited in
> so many ways that no adequate claims to inerrancy, infallibility,
> or total adequacy of any human testimony can be taken seriously
> by anyone who understands the nature of human experience and
> language. (1991b:136)

Thus I suggest that the witness that the church bears to the Tradition needs to hold two elements in tension. In the first place, it arises out of what it experiences as an absolutely crucial encounter with the Other, an encounter that has been testified to by the lives of saints and martyrs as well as the work of theologians and bishops. At the same time, however, this testimony is limited, partial and necessarily incomplete. The task of a witness is to witness to a particular experience and not to provide access to objective truth.

This is not the place to engage in an extensive discussion of what are termed "monuments" to the Tradition. What I do propose to do below, however, is to highlight the central features of four privileged witnesses to the Tradition,

namely scripture, the Fathers, the liturgy and the church's magisterium.

The witness of scripture

As we saw in the previous chapter, much of the focus of the western church from the late middle ages, through the reformation controversies, and into the contemporary era has been on the relationship between scripture and tradition, often viewing them as separate sources of revelation. With *Dei Verbum*, the Church now speaks of scripture and tradition making up a single deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church. (*DV*:10) Nevertheless, it still speaks of scripture and tradition as separate realities, reflecting one particular sense of the meaning of tradition, namely as something other than scripture. (Congar 1964:121)

As has emerged in the foregoing chapters, I prefer to speak of tradition as the whole life of the church and, at the same time, distinguishing this from the Tradition, which is ultimately inaccessible. In this context scripture is one aspect, albeit a primary and foundational aspect, of tradition, or one of the key witnesses to the Tradition.

In this context then scripture is the "measure and norm" of the various witnesses to the Tradition. (Congar 1964:120) It is, according to *Dei Verbum*, "a pure and unfailing fount of spiritual life" (*DV*:21) and a "permanent foundation" for sacred theology. (*DV*:24)

As we have seen from both the work of Schüssler Fiorenza in chapter four and that of Schneiders in chapter six, while scripture may serve as a "fount of spiritual life (*DV*:21) it is also a source of error and oppression. Schneiders expresses this when she says:

As feminist biblical scholarship has progressed during the past
two decades it has become virtually impossible to pretend that
the long established tradition of invoking biblical scholarship to
justify the oppression of women in family, society, and church is
based solely on a misreading of scripture. Without doubt there
have been misogynist misinterpretations of scripture in the
course of history, but it is no longer possible to deny that the text
itself is not only androcentric, i.e. a male-centred account of male
experience for male purposes with women relegated to the
margins of salvation history, but also patriarchal in its
assumptions and often in its explicit teaching, and at times
deeply sexist, i.e. anti-woman. Its God-language and imagery are
overwhelmingly male. When the official church invokes scripture
to justify its discriminatory treatment of women it does not have
to resort to fundamentalist prooftexting or to questionable
exegetical methods. In other words, the problem is in the text.
(1991a:38)

Thus while Catholic theology gives scripture a privileged position as a witness

to the Tradition, feminist scholarship reminds us that, like all witnesses as we

saw above, it is limited, partial and incomplete.

The witness of the Fathers

The term "Fathers of the church" is the traditional title given to the Christian

preachers, writers and theologians of the post-canonical period. (Ramsey

1987:386) Congar argues that their category is a dogmatic one and implies a

doctrinal value judgement on their work making them a privileged witness to

the Tradition. (1964:133;138) Certainly the work of the Fathers has been

accorded a privileged position in the life of the both the eastern and western

churches and, to a lesser degree, the churches of the reformation.

Aidan Nichols has distinguished three ways of arguing for the significance of

the fathers which relate to the historical period in which they lived, the nature

of their theological work, and their role as receivers of biblical revelation.

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In the first place, he points out, following Congar, that the era of the Fathers[1] --
which also more or less corresponded with the era of the seven ecumenical
councils -- was the key period for working out the church's faith and belief. At
the end of the New Testament era there was no clearly defined creed, no
clearly defined liturgical norms and no clear pattern of church government.
While the Christian religion is present in embryonic form in the New
Testament, it has not yet been worked out in a systematic way. (1991:202) By
contrast,

> the patristic period was, then, the crucial period in the
> crystallization of Christianity in its confessional, doxological, and
> government structure -- as creed, worship and Church order.
> (1991:203)

In the second place, Nichols argues for the importance of the fathers on the
basis of their *type* of theology. While they come from different contexts, their
work shares certain common characteristics. Firstly, it is a unified theology that
concentrates on the fundamental Christian dogmas of God, Christ, the Spirit
and the church. (1991:204) Secondly, it is a pastoral theology that focuses on
the needs of the church. (1991:204f) And, thirdly, as we saw in chapter two, it
is a fundamentally ascetical theology that assumed a deep familiarity with
God, Christ, the Spirit and the church. (1991:205)

The third argument outlined by Nichols for the importance of the patristic era
relates to reception in this era of biblical revelation. Joseph Ratzinger has
proposed that the fathers have a constitutive role in Christian faith because

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[1]   The patristic age is generally dated from the *First Letter of Clement*
which was composed around 96. Dates for its ending vary. In the east it is seen
as ending with the death of John Damascene (c. 750) and in the west with the
death of either Gregory the Great (604), Isidore of Seville (636) or the Venerable
Bede (735). (Ramsey 1987:387)

their response to scripture was a constitutive element in the happening of the Word of God in revelation. Thus, Ratzinger argues, the "moment" of the fathers was an essential moment in the church's receiving of the Word of God. (Nichols 1991:206)

It is difficult to deny the foundational role played by the Fathers of the church in the formulation and mediation of Christian faith. The church is necessarily indebted to the Fathers. Indeed, the witness of the patristic era is a part of our heritage and as such is part of what makes us Christian.

This is not without its problems however. The very term "Fathers" should alert us to a similar problem to that which we saw in relation to scripture. The very fact that we speak of "Fathers" rather than "Mothers and Fathers" should draw our attention to the partiality and incompleteness of this theological location. Moreover, the ecclesial context from which they received their authority was a fundamentally patriarchal one in which the discipleship of equals and plurality of ministries of the early Jesus movement had been replaced by a patriarchal hierarchy. This patriarchy -- and even misogyny -- is reflected in the teachings of the Fathers.[2]

Thus we once again find ourselves in a situation of having to hold together two difficult-to-hold-together affirmations. One the one hand, one cannot be Christian without recognising in the Fathers of this era a particularly privileged source of theological truth, or, in terms of the theology of tradition, a particularly privileged witness to the Tradition. On the other hand, however, their witness is historically situated and therefore contingent and thus limited,

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[2]   For a discussion of early patristic views on women, see Marie-Henry Keane's article "Woman in the theological anthropology of the Early Fathers" (1988).

partial and incomplete.

The witness of the liturgy

The oft-quoted words of Dom Guéranger sum up the witness to the Tradition of the liturgy:

> It is in the liturgy that the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures
> speaks again; the liturgy is Tradition itself at its highest degree of
> power and solemnity. (Congar 1964:125)

It is in the liturgy that the maxim *lex orandi est lex credendi* (the law of praying is the law of believing) applies most fully. By the liturgy is meant -- in a western context at least -- the official common prayer of the church, i.e. the liturgy of the eucharist and other sacraments, and the Divine Office.[3] The theological importance of the liturgy is seen in the care which the church takes with the various liturgical rites and accords them such a high authority. (Nichols 1991:183) However, while prayers and hymns are full of doctrine,

> The liturgy is the poetry of the Church, and just as poetry is
> language at its most intensely expressive, so in the liturgy we
> hear the Church's voice at its most eloquent. (Nichols 1991:184)

Vatican II tells us that

> the liturgy is the summit towards which the activity of the church
> is directed; it is also the source from which all its power flows.
> (*SC*:10)

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[3]   In the east the term refers more specifically to the eucharistic liturgy. (Nichols 1991:182)

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With the liturgy we move away from a merely *textual* witness to the Tradition to one that also encompasses various means other than writing and enables a participation of our whole person. Congar says:

> The celebration of the Eucharist communicates the whole reality: the merest sign of the cross is an entire profession of faith in the Redemption. (1964:127)

Thus the liturgy, as poetry and ritual, is able to provide access to something that cannot be expressed in words. Through the fully incarnational use of symbol, music, silence, space, movement and colour, it allows a glimpse of that which is beyond cerebral expression.

Christian imagery

Nichols includes the category of Christian art as well as architecture with that of liturgy, (1991:188ff) an inclusion that follows the norm of the Second Vatican Council which included a chapter on "Sacred Music" and a chapter on "Sacred Art and Furnishings" in its constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. Nichols argues that

> the more familiar we are with the art of the Church, the better grasp we shall have of Tradition. (1991:189)

It is clear that as a non-verbal form of communication Christian art is clearly related to the liturgy. Both are mediums through which we enter into something that cannot simply be expressed in words and hence develop a language of another kind.

What is open to question, however, is whether Christian imagery should simply form an addendum, as it were, to the category of liturgy or whether it

should comprise a category of its own. While art and architecture are clearly

crucial to meaningful celebration of the liturgy, according to Second Council of

Nicaea, Christian imagery -- specifically iconography -- is not simply

ornamentative, but possesses a dogmatic mediation of its own.[4] Thus for

Nicaea, according to Ouspensky:

> the icon is placed on a level with the Holy Scriptures and with
> the Cross, as one of the forms of revelation and knowledge of
> God, in which the divine and human will and action become
> blended ... Consequently, the meaning both of the word and of
> the image, their role and significance are the same ... The Church
> evolves an entirely special category of image, in accordance with
> its nature, and this special character is conditioned by the
> purpose it serves. (Ouspensky 1982:30)

However one views the relationship between liturgy and visual imagery it is

clear that both these realities have a crucial role to play in mediating meaning

and in particular in opening up a communication that is more than purely

verbal. This does not mean, however, that they somehow convey "pure"

meaning, undistorted by the influence of ideology. As Lossky showed us in the

previous chapter, symbolic and visual language is still a form of language that

is addressed to our understanding. (1982:14) It is still a form of discourse and

as such is not a "pure" mediator of meaning.

Like scripture and the Fathers, the category/ies of liturgy and imagery mediate

not simply divine truth but also a certain set of power relations that are clearly

patriarchal. The marginalisation within and alienation from the church felt by

many feminists is clearly related to their liturgical experience. This is not only

a matter of explicitly sexist verbal language, whether for human beings or for

God, but also that of symbols and gestures. For example, the significance given

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[4]   This dogmatic mediation has, admittedly, been much more
influential in the east than in the west.

to the gender of those who preside at liturgical celebrations reinforces the teaching that women are not able to image God in Christ as fully as men are. The same is true of visual imagery which often reinforces the church's patriarchal understanding of itself. For example, the icon of pentecost shows the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the twelve (male) apostles. While Mary is sometimes shown as present, other women are rarely depicted.

Thus, like the other witnesses we have considered, the liturgy and Christian imagery, are both crucial for Christian faith and yet also limited. As a form of discourse they are, like all discourse, partial and biased. And yet they are genuine witnesses to a reality that is beyond all partiality.

Where liturgy and imagery may go beyond the categories of scripture and the Fathers, however, is in their ability to introduce us to a world that is beyond language. While this is clearly done from within language -- even if it is a different type of language -- their use of poetry, symbol and ritual moves us towards a place where language itself becomes destabilised. Thus I suggest that they can serve to make us more aware of that "margin of silence" that accompanies all discourse.

The witness of the church's magisterium

The witnesses considered so far are all witnesses of the church. It is in the church that we encounter the scriptures, the Fathers, the liturgy and Christian imagery. However, there is also a more specific way of speaking of the church as a witness to the Tradition which usually refers to its teaching authority and its role in defining dogma. *Dei Verbum* tells us that:

the task of giving an authentic[5] interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the church alone. (*DV*:10)

Here we come, then, to the specific roles -- and charisms -- of particular institutional manifestations of the church. As we saw in the previous chapter, for the early church it was the criterion of apostilicity that guaranteed the validity of church tradition. Here we find the category not just of "witness" but of "authorized witnesses". Sullivan says:

> All Christians agree that the apostles, and the "apostolic men" who were the authors of the NT, were chosen by God as authorized witnesses of the Christ event. The teaching of the apostles was recognized as normative for the faith of the christian community, for they were the authoritative witnesses to what God had revealed in Jesus Christ. (Sullivan 1987:618)

This authority, according to the church's self-understanding, did not end with the death of the apostles but was passed on to their successors. While it is not clear exactly how this development came about, by the end of the second century there was a clear recognition of the role of the bishops as successors to the apostles in their pastoral role.[6] Thus the teaching of the bishops was recognised as normative for the faith of the church. (Sullivan 1987:619)

While an individual bishop was recognised as having responsibility for the teaching of faith in his diocese, at times the bishops also chose to speak collectively gathering in synods or councils. With the emergence of the criteria

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[5]   Sullivan points out that the word "authentic" here does not mean "genuine" but rather "authoritative", i.e. "endowed with pastoral authority, ultimately derived from Christ". (1987:617)

[6]   For a discussion of the development of this ordained ministry, see Kenan Osborne's *Priesthood*, (1988) chapters three and four.

of ecumenicity in the 260s, the reception of the council's teaching by the universal episcopate was seen as giving that teaching a definitive status. (Nichols 1991:211) Moreover, with the emperor Constantine's action in calling an ecumenical council at Nicaea in 325 to deal with the Arian controversy we see the emergence of the most authoritative teaching location within the church. The dogmatic teaching of these ecumenical councils, if properly received by the whole church, came to be seen as a necessarily binding witness to the Tradition. Thus their teaching is a formal expression of the faith of the whole church.

With the split between east and west the western church centralised this teaching authority of the episcopate more and more around the papacy. Western councils came to be considered as ecumenical on the basis of the presence of the Roman patriarch, over and against the patristic criteria of the presence, or at least the approval, of the patriarchs of all the ancient sees.[7] Moreover, with the development of the doctrine of papal infallibility[8] solemn papal declarations came to enjoy the same infallibility as those of an

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[7]   Even after the Great Schism, the councils of the western church were not considered ecumenical. It was only in the late sixteenth century that Robert Bellarmine introduced the idea that papally approved councils of the west were also ecumenical and this won virtually instantaneous and universal acceptance in the west. (Nichols 1991:212)

[8]   The First Vatican Council, meeting in 1870, declared:

We teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith and morals to be held by the whole church, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. (First dogmatic constitution on the church of Christ, ch. 4)

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ecumenical council. (Sullivan 1987:620)

Thus for the contemporary Catholic church teaching authority is located in "the Roman Pontiff, or the body of bishops together with him". (*LG*:36) They are nevertheless dependent on the "sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church". (*LG*:10) Thus

> This magisterium is not superior to the word of God, but is rather its servant. It teaches only what has been handed on to it. At the divine command and with the help of the holy Spirit, it listens to this devoutly, guards it reverently and expounds it faithfully. All that it proposes for belief as being divinely revealed it draws from this sole deposit of faith. (*LG*:10)

We find a distinction moreover between the extraordinary and the ordinary magisterium. The former refers to the definitive teachings of an ecumenical council or of the pope speaking *ex cathedra* and are clearly held to be infallible. What is less clear, as we saw in chapter one, is the status of the ordinary magisterium, i.e. the teaching authority of the pope that is exercised in a non-definitive way through encyclical letters etc. (Sullivan 1987:622)

Clearly the teaching authority of the church is an area that is being actively contested in our contemporary church as the discussion in chapter one indicated. And, like the other witnesses to the Tradition that we have considered in this chapter, it is a witness that is problematic for feminists and that can seem to be a counter-witness to the gospel. Like the other witnesses we considered it is clearly limited and partial. We can view this partiality from two perspectives.

Firstly, from a feminist perspective, episcopal and papal authority, emerged from, reflected and reinforced a clearly patriarchal church. By linking teaching

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authority with an ordained role and by excluding women from ordination, this development clearly excluded women from teaching authority in the church.

It can, moreover, be argued that feminism calls into question all hierarchical patterns of leadership seeing them as integrally linked to a patriarchal understanding of society. Letty Russell says:

> In patriarchal styles of leadership, authority is exercised by standing above and is enhanced through a capitalist model of power accumulation at the expense of others. (1993:56)

By contrast,

> Feminist styles of leadership would draw their model of behavior from a partnership paradigm. This perspective on reality establishes norms of language, thought and action in a model of shared authority in community. (1993:57)

At stake here is the relationship between the magisterium and the rest of the church. As we saw in the previous chapter, since the last century there has been a recovery of the idea of the "sense of the faithful" associated in particular with the work of Newman. However, while it is now readily acknowledged that the whole church, including the laity, clearly has a role in passing on the deposit of faith, *Lumen Gentium* clearly states that task of giving "authentic interpretation" belongs to the teaching office alone. (*LG*:10)

This tension is indicative of the ecclesial climate in which we live in which we are hearing increasing calls for democratisation within the church.[9] It is not my

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[9] A recent popular example of this is the "We are the church" petitions that, after beginning in Austria, have been circulating in western Europe and the U.S.A. For a theological plea for democratisation in the church, see Schillebeeckx's *Church. The Human Story of God*, (1990) chapter four; Denis'

purpose to enter these debates here, but merely to show the limitations that they show us about the church's witness to the Tradition.

Secondly, one can also view the partiality of the church's magisterium from another perspective, namely its lack of ecumenicity. If one takes the patristic criteria for ecumenicity seriously, then the disunity of the church since the time of the Great Schism or even before[10] greatly impedes the authority of its teaching, particularly that of what are claimed to be ecumenical councils which in turn gave rise to present ideas about papal authority. Thus our contemporary churches live in a state of impaired ecumenicity which will be discussed below.

Thus, whether we speak of contemporary feminist and democratic discourses, or the more ancient criteria of the universal church, we see, that the magisterium, as currently defined, while it clearly does witness to the Tradition, is nevertheless limited, partial, incomplete and therefore biased.

"The Catholic Church between monarchy and democracy" (1991); and Hill's *Ministry and Authority in the Catholic Church* (1988).

[10] If one accepts the patristic criterion of being in communion with the ancient apostolic sees, then one can argue that the split at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 between the church of Alexandria and the rest of the churches should mark the beginning of real schism.

The nature of the church's witness to the Tradition

As should be apparent from this discussion of the traditional "monuments" to the Tradition, there is a fundamental conflict running through the nature of the church's witness to the Tradition. As our discussion of the phenomenon of witness above showed, the testimony of a witness is both crucial and limited, both the strongest possible form of discourse and yet, at one and the same time, vulnerable to accusations of partiality and bias.

All of the witnesses that we have considered above arise out of the church's encounter with God in Christian revelation. This absolutely foundational event necessarily marks those so encountered. Through baptism, the Christian community bears witness to something beyond itself. Through this encounter with that which is absolutely Other it discovers that its own identity is integrally linked with that which is beyond it. Through its participation in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ it testifies to this Christ-event as ultimately meaningful.

At the same time, however, the church expresses this witness through limited human means. The cultural context and intellectual milieu out of which it arose was necessarily particular and therefore limiting. Moreover, the political systems that influenced its growth were both arbitrary and, it can be argued, oppressive.[11] The growth and the development of the church was clearly influenced by the Roman and Hellenistic society out of which it emerged, especially after the conversion of Constantine, and later by the feudal order of

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[11] Schillebeeckx points out that "in its uniqueness and distinctiveness as a religion, Christianity is essentially bound up with an unavoidable 'historical peculiarity' and thus is regional and limited. Therefore (like all religions), Christianity too is limited: limited in means of expression, perspective and specific practice." (1990:165)

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the middle ages. (Schillebeeckx 1990:187)

Thus, as a human phenomenon the church clearly reflected the patriarchal --
and hierarchical -- society out of which it emerged and this clearly impacted
the nature of its witness to the Other. In this, as a human phenomenon, the
church is clearly a historical reality and the witness that it bears to the
Tradition has to be seen in the context of its historical situatedness and the
importance of historicity for understanding outlined in chapter six.

We cannot, therefore, look for a "pure" church outside of history just as we
cannot look for a "pure" discourse outside of history and language. It is the
church that we have -- with all its contradictions and struggles -- that is witness
to the Tradition. It is however a church that is deeply wounded.

The wounds of the church

By focusing on the partiality and limitation of the church's witness to the
Tradition, I have attempted to show that this witness happens from within
history and discourse while that which is witnessed to is outside of human
discourse. All speech implies a woundedness for all speech happens within
history and the power relations that structure discourse. All speech implies
complicity in a power which allows some a voice and denies it of others.

It is only, I suggest, from within an appreciation of the necessarily wounded
nature of all speech -- and especially speech about God -- that we will be able
develop a sense of the relationship between the absolute Other and that which
manifests it, between the Tradition and the wounded church that witnesses to
it.

The church's creed has traditionally professed that the church is "one, holy, catholic and apostolic". The *Catechism* tells us that:

> These four characteristics, inseparably linked with each other, indicate essential features of the Church and her mission. The Church does not possess them of herself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, makes his Church one, holy, catholic and apostolic, and it is he who calls her to realise each of these qualities. (1994:811)

Let us briefly consider these traditional "marks" of the church.

Unity

Unity is the first mark of the church. The letter to the Ephesians tells us that

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all ... (Eph 4:13)

This unity, which is given in baptism, (Gal 3:27-28) is based on the unity of the Trinity itself and is achieved through the Holy Spirit, Vatican II tells us,

> dwelling in those who believe and pervading and ruling over the entire church, who brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and joins them together so intimately in Christ that he is the principle of the church's unity. (*UR*:2)

While this unity does not mean uniformity, and has been expressed in a diversity of ways, it has meant a basic communion of faith. This is expressed symbolically in the one community that gathers around the one table of the eucharist.

Then, strengthened by the body of Christ in the Eucharistic communion, they manifest in a concrete way that unity of the people of God which this most holy sacrament aptly signifies and admirably realizes. (*LG*:11)

As we have seen above, the unity of the church is seriously impaired. Since the time of the Great Schism or before, communion between the ancient apostolic sees has been broken. Moreover, since the time of the reformation we have seen not only more breaks in communion, but also the development of fundamental theological differences. While we must welcome the progress of the ecumenical movement of this century, the fact remains that we face a fundamentally divided church.

This disunity of the church is not simply one of confessional and juridical differences however. The church is also fundamentally divided within itself. As long as a significant proportion of its members continue to experience themselves as alienated and not recognised as equal within the church, the church remains fundamentally divided.

Holiness

Holiness is the second mark of the church. Vatican II tells us that the church "is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy". (*LG*:39) The church's holiness derives from its relation to Christ.

> The followers of Christ, called by God not for what they had done but by his design and grace, are justified in the Lord Jesus, have been made sons and daughters of God by the Baptism of faith and partakers of the divine nature, and so are truly sanctified. They must therefore hold on to and perfect in their lives that holiness which they have received from God. (*LG*:40)

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In ecclesiological terms it is common cause to acknowledge that the church is both sinful and holy, both human and divine. (*Catechism* 1994:827) However, this is not simply a matter of individual sinfulness. Hans Küng argues that:

> All ecclesiology must take as one of its bases, not merely the historicity of the Church, but the fact that the Church is historically affected by evil; and this fact must be accepted from the start without false apologetics and always taken into account. (1968:28)

As we have seen in this thesis, the church's very historicity means that it is implicated in relations of power that privilege some and marginalise others. In this the church is historically affected by evil and its holiness is thereby necessarily impaired.

Catholicity

Catholicity is the third mark of the church. The word "catholic" means "universal" in the sense of "according to the totality" or "in keeping with the whole". (*Catechism* 1994:830) This catholicity derives from the church's mission to the whole world (Mt 28:18-20) which necessarily involved taking root in different nations and contexts. The church should, because of the principle of catholicity, take to itself the experience of all peoples.

To speak of the "catholic church" is to speak of the "whole church" -- the church universal throughout the world. Within this whole there are various local churches. But

> This multiplicity of local churches, unified in a common effort, shows all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided church. (*LG*:23)

Catholicity is clearly closely related to unity. And, as we have seen above, the church is clearly divided. While it is possible to argue that catholicity derives from being in communion with the bishop of Rome, (*Catechism* 1994:834) we have seen that the more ancient criteria for catholicity is that of communion with all four ancient apostolic sees. And, given the historical divisions of the churches, the possibility of this no longer exists. Thus the church's catholicity is necessarily impaired.

As should be clear from the arguments presented in this thesis, the church's catholicity is also open to question on other grounds. We need to question how universal the church is when it has not taken at least half of humanity's experience seriously. Can we really speak of catholicity when male experience continues to be defined as the norm?

Apostolicity

Apostolicity is the fourth traditional mark of the church. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the church's foundation on the faith of the apostles is crucial for its identity and mission.

> This divine mission, which was committed by Christ to the
> apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (see Mt
> 28:20), since the Gospel which they were obliged to hand on is
> the principle of the church's life for all time. For that very reason
> the apostles were careful to appoint successors ... (*LG*:20)

However, as with the other marks of the church, this apostolic witness is a divided witness. Both Catholic and (Calcedonian and non-Calcedonian) Orthodox churches have apostolic roots and yet are divided from one another. As we saw above, the patristic criteria of being in communion with the apostolic sees is no longer possible.

The apostolic witness is also, from a feminist perspective, a decidedly partial witness. The mere fact that all the acknowledged apostles are male, should raise questions for us. Either one accepts this as part of the divine plan, or else one needs to ask questions about who has been excluded and why. Thus the feature of apostolicity is a reminder to us of the partiality of the church and of the power dynamics inherent in it.

Acknowledging woundedness

From the perspective presented in this thesis it should be clear that the church's unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are open to serious question. The church is manifestly divided and sinful, excluding much of humanity's experience from its theological discourse, and with a divided apostolic witness. It is difficult to see this identity as a description of the church. And yet I do not want to deny the existence of these traditional "marks" of the church, for they clearly refer to a reality which is at least partly hidden from us. Like the witnesses to the Tradition considered earlier in this chapter, these marks are clearly historical and therefore necessarily limited, partial and incomplete. It is therefore perhaps more helpful to see them, as Küng suggests, as a responsibility that must be "constantly realized anew". (1968:263)

In this context, however, I would suggest that these traditional "marks" of the church can best be viewed as "wounds". As manifestly problematic statements they serve to problematise -- and destabilise -- all that we can say about the church. And yet they also remind us of an identity that we claim that is beyond the limitation of human discourse.

By shifting the imagery from limitation and partiality to that of woundedness, I am suggesting that we view the limitations of the church and of its

theological discourse not simply as a phenomenon of human discourse, but as a theological reality that needs to be entered into. It was, Christians believe, in entering into humanity's wounded condition, assuming it, and accepting to be wounded that God made Godself known and brought about redemption. Christian identity necessarily means entering into this pascal mystery

> 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. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2 Cor 4:11-12)

Maggie Ross argues that instead of denying our woundedness, claiming completeness and immutability, we need rather to be prepared to enter our wounds.

> We have to be willing to enter those wounds, not hide them by casuistry, not seal them up, not scar them over. They must remain wounds in order that Christ's resurrection may enter and indwell us and our wounds be united and glorified with his. This is the way of transfiguration ... (1987:xvii)

This woundedness means that we neither deny the limitations and partiality of the church, pretending that all is well with its witness to the Tradition, nor abandon the church and its integrity as privileged witness on the basis of its partiality. Rather we need to hold together the reality of the church as privileged witness of the Tradition and therefore bearer of revelation with an awareness of the deeply wounded nature of this witness.

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Conclusion

This chapter has probed what it means to speak about the church as a privileged witness to the Tradition. After considering the nature of witness as both self-implicating and partial we saw how this was true of the witness of the scriptures, the Fathers, the liturgy and the magisterium. While that which is witnessed to was shown to be absolutely Other, the witnesses themselves are implicated in discourse and therefore partial.

This is necessarily part of the nature of witnessing. However it also has ecclesiological implications. While the church is the privileged witness of revelation its witness is necessarily partial and incomplete. I suggested that this partiality can best be seen as woundedness -- a woundedness that is akin to that of Christ.

Thus the wounded nature of the church becomes, as I will argue in the concluding chapter, the existential context out of which the church's witnessing occurs.

Conclusion

Chapter Ten

Encountering the Tradition:

the path of wounded witness

This thesis has addressed the fundamental question of whether and how the church's tradition can be understood as revelatory given its patriarchal nature and its implication in relations of power which have given some people a voice and denied it of others. It has thus asked how feminist Catholics are to be accountable to tradition as bearer of divine revelation.

Overview of movement

In addressing this issue the thesis has followed three basic movements.

In Part I, I outlined contemporary discourses that have bearing on theologies of revelation. I juxtaposed hermeneutical developments in thought on revelation with discourses that point to the irreducible alterity of the Other who is excluded from all discourse. Thus while the hermeneutical developments of chapter three presented a discourse of presence, allowing what is received in revelation to be appropriated today, the approaches presented in chapter four pointed to the absence of all that has been excluded from our discourse due to the power relations that structure both society and language.

While these two positions, that may be said to hinge around revelation, on the one hand, and rupture, on the other hand, were presented as juxtaposed and necessarily hostile to one another, I also introduced another dynamic into this section. In

chapter five I presented a reading of the Christian apophatic tradition which argued that the apophatic moment, which is the moment of breakdown of all language that thereby seeks to show something beyond language, is the critical moment in all theology and that this points to a fundamental alterity that is at the heart of the theological task.

Thus I suggest that the ruptures presented by contemporary discourses are not as new as they may appear but are in fact akin to a breakdown in language that at least some sections of the church have always recognised as necessary for theological adequacy.

In Part II, I sought out a mediating path with which to respond to this challenge of rupture and exclusion. I argued, following Bernstein, (1992) for a dual mediation that holds two moments in a non-reducible tensiveness.

The first of these moments is the hermeneutical path of transformative appropriation outlined in chapter six. Such a mediating path allows us to be impacted by the texts of tradition in ever-new ways so that the text is able to explode the oppressive worlds out of which it arose and instead become a resource in the critique of ideology.

The second moment continues to probe the alterity that necessarily accompanies discourse. By seeking out the negativity beneath rationality and language and the contradictions, gaps and hyperbole within it, it seeks to allow that which is excluded to transgress the boundaries of knowledge which patriarchal discourse has established.

In arguing for a dual mediation of both these paths, I suggest that their relationship is fundamentally that of the cataphatic-apophatic relationship. The cataphatic and

apophatic, properly understood as we saw in chapter five, are not simply different types of theologies but are rather different moments in the theological task. Both are necessary and they stand together in an uncomfortable and necessarily unreconcilable tensiveness. Thus I suggest that while theological interpretation is necessary and indeed inevitable it stands against the backdrop of the radical inability of our language to express that which it necessarily excludes and yet is accompanied by.

In Part III, I looked at how this is expressed in our theological understanding of tradition and the church. By contrasting tradition as the whole life of the church with a more specific understanding of the Tradition as ultimately Other and uncapturable in discourse, I sought in chapter eight to continue this apophatic-cataphatic thread. This is pursued in chapter nine where I look at the witnesses to the Tradition.

What emerges from the discussion in Part III is the distinction between that which is expressed in the church's discourse and which is therefore necessarily implicated in relations of power that allow some a voice and deny it of others, and that which, while accompanying this discourse is nevertheless absolutely Other and unable to be captured by it. As a human institution the church is necessarily implicated in discourse and yet through its encounter -- that is irreducible to language and yet necessarily has to be expressed in language -- with that which is absolutely Other, the church bears witness to that which is beyond any expression in discourse.

The cataphatic-apophatic dynamic as interpretive key

We thus see that a persistent thread running throughout this thesis is the relationship between the cataphatic and the apophatic in theology. Rather than seeing these as different types of theology or spirituality, or different emphases within them, chapter five argued that they relate to different -- and necessary -- moments in all theology.

Within the context of this thesis, the cataphatic obviously refers to that which is expressed in language -- to the various texts of our tradition, be they verbal, visual or ritual texts. The apophatic refers to the breakdown in discourse which occurs when we problematise these texts and show their radical ability to represent that which is both unrepresentable and excluded from discourse.

Using the dual mediation outlined in Part II, and against the backdrop of the cataphatic-apophatic dynamic outlined in chapter five, I suggest that we approach the problem of ecclesial tradition in two ways. In the first place, we need to maximise theological discourse, insuring that as many voices as possible are heard. Thus a transformative interpretation of tradition allows a plurality of interpretations as the texts of the tradition take on new meaning in new contexts. At the same time however, and resulting from this maximisation of discourses, we find a collapse of language which itself points to the radical inability of our theological discourse to capture that which is beyond language. Such a strategy therefore needs to be coupled, in the second place, with a probing of that silence that accompanies all discourse and the possibilities of transgression of that which has been silenced.

The wound of knowledge

By probing the limitations of language, we come to see the necessary link between limitation and language. Not only is language limited, but it is necessarily so. Any expression necessarily forecloses other expressions. Thus knowledge, insofar as it can be expressed, involves a wounding process -- an acceptance of the necessarily limitations of discourse.

We see this process at work in the church's witness to its encounter with God in Christ. Not only did this encounter occur in historically specific spatial and temporal contexts, but the witness to it was expressed through specific forms of discourse which, being human, are necessarily implicated in particular power relationships. The patriarchal nature of the church's witness to the Tradition, outlined in chapter nine, is therefore a part of the scandal of particularity from which we cannot escape. We can look for neither a pure discourse outside of history and language, nor a pure church outside the historical conditioning processes which are the history of Christianity.

The fundamental woundedness of the church, which we saw in chapter nine, is ultimately, neither an abberation of some pure "essence", nor proof of its irredeemability. It is, rather, the necessary consequence of its implication in history and language. and, hence, of the possibility of its identity as a witness.

Moreover, in considering the specific wounds of the church in chapter nine we saw that there was a fundamental ambivalence about all of them. This was apparent both from the perspective of ancient patristic criteria which points to the fundamentally divided state of our contemporary church(es) and from the perspective of a critical and feminist questioning about who was and who was not included in understandings of unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity. Thus these privileged

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"marks" of the church refer to a fundamentally wounded reality.

This is the context out of which witnessing must necessarily occur. And, I argue, an adequate theological response needs to be faithful to the ambivalence and woundedness of this context. This means that we resist two temptations to completeness and invulnerability.

Firstly, there is the temptation to deny woundedness and pretend that the church and its witness to the Tradition is somehow immutable and invulnerable. We view something of this, I suggest, in the modern Catholic response to broken ecumenicity that we see in Bellarmine's proposal that was widely accepted in the sixteenth century. (see page 184) Such an approach, in redefining the criteria for ecumenicity from the patristic criteria of all the ancient apostolic sees to that of the see of Rome alone, was an attempt to mask the deeply wounded nature of the church. Coming from a very different direction we see a similar denial of woundedness in the assumption that a patriarchal church is somehow normative, for to move away from a patriarchal church would be to say that something has been very wrong for most of our history and this, it seems, we cannot do.

Secondly, however, there is also a temptation to escape from this necessarily wounded witness that is the church. While feminist theologies must necessarily engage the witness of the church in a critical interaction, they cannot escape them. Thus for Christians – particularly for Catholic Christians -- we need to allow ourselves to be addressed by these witnesses. For, it is by listening deeply to the deeply wounded witnesses of scripture, the Fathers, the liturgy and the magisterium that we encounter that Tradition that is beyond the limitations of its witnesses.

Thus I am arguing, against those feminists who seek to relocate theological authority to a community outside of the received tradition or to a particular strand in the

tradition, that it is *within* the church's historically mediated and therefore partial and necessarily wounded witness that we encounter the Tradition, and that this is necessarily authoritative for the theological task.

The challenge remains to find ways of listening to this witness that can enable that which is beyond all limitation to break through our limited discourses. This thesis has broadly proposed possible paths along which this can happen. However, detailed possibilities of how transformative interpretation and a transgressing of boundaries can occur more concretely will have to be investigated in specific contexts. One particular area that I would be interested in probing further is the role of liturgy and, particularly eucharistic liturgy, in providing access to such Tradition. That, however, is a task for the future.

I conclude with a quote from Maggie Ross:

> The revelation of the wounded God has been a scandal throughout Judeo-Christian history, and perhaps today more than at any other time. It may help us to remember that in the English language the word "wound" and the word "blessing" have the same root. Our wounds are ultimately our greatest source of blessing because they become one with the wounds of our humble God. (1987:xxiv)

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