Chapter Seven

Conversation, persons, and community

Conversation and interpretation

Modern thinking also misrepresents the reality of conversation and interpretation. Having assumed a false dichotomy between our attention to what a person says and our attention to the real world, it now assumes a false dichotomy between our attention to each conversation-partner's attention to what the other says, and attention by each of them and by ourselves to the real world. This spawns a distorted theory of interpretation (or hermeneutics) which is caught between a correspondence theory of truth on the one hand and idealist and relativist worldviews on the other. When we now start properly from conversation as the medium of communion in radical responsiveness, we give a truer account of conversation and interpretation incorporating the question 'which way round is the truth?'. This enables us to describe the place of enlargement of horizons, correction, evasion and unresolved contradiction within conversation, and their ultimate form in prayerful attention to God

Knowledge, persons and God

Western thinking misrepresents the reality of persons as creatures made in the image of God but marred by evasion. Under the influence of cartesian habits of imagination (and with classical philosophical roots), it assumes a false dichotomy between the 'human individual' and the world, and conceives the human individual as an 'impersonal knower' and an ' autonomous personal agent'. When we start properly from knowledge of God in personal, self-giving, radical responsiveness, we have a more adequate account of the person, of the essential freedom and relatedness of persons to God and to each other, and of human evasion, either dismissive or submissive towards 'the other'. In this account, we discover ourselves as persons precisely through our knowledge of other persons, through whom we are raised to radical responsiveness. Central to this is the person of Christ, who defines our personhood precisely as he incorporates us into knowledge of God.

Persons, communities and the Church

Personal knowledge and enquiry is to a large extend a matter of participation in a group, or variety of groups, with a certain culture or tradition of practice and enquiry. Such groups overlap and relate to each other in complex ways, and may be marked by 'dysfunction', blindness and evasion just as they may nourish wellbeing and creativity.

> *The Church, by which is understood the body of people who find themselves drawn to participate in the relation of Jesus Christ to God, form a distinctive community. Within this community individuals are drawn to fullness of life in Christ which is a fulfilment at once of their unique personhood and freedom and of communion in knowledge, practice and enquiry with others. This community is formed by a Christian canon of wise doctrine and practice, with Christ at the centre. The Church and its membership always remains an eschatological affair. As such, the Church is called to model the true meaning of personhood and of community, functioning in this way as salt and light to the world.*

Conversation and interpretation

We have sought to describe faithfully the nature of knowledge of God, and to show how, as our paradigmatic knowledge, this shed light upon the nature of all knowledge. In so doing we have exposed and corrected the distortion of our thinking about these by cartesian habits of imagination. What implications does this carry for our understanding of conversation, and of the pursuit of understanding within conversation? What does our account of knowing imply for hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation?

Our thinking about conversation, like our thinking about knowledge, is prone to distortion by cartesian habits of imagination. Once again, this is exposed and corrected by our account of knowing. Cartesianism, as we have seen, imagines to step back from claims to knowledge and to view them from a wider space within which such claims and the reality to which they refer can be seen side by side. It thereby imagines for itself the status of a 'higher-order' discourse, rising above the supposed constraint of commitment to such claims. In the same way, when we think about conversation, cartesianism imagines to step back from claims to knowledge by partners-in-conversation and to view them from a wider space within which such claims and the reality to which they refer are located and can be viewed side by side.

In one version of this, such conversation is seen as open to a process of mutual correction by way of identifying and correcting each others unwarranted assumptions or ignorance. In another version, it is seen as bound by shared assumptions. This gives rise to the notion of a hermeneutical 'circle', a space of conversation located within, and viewed from, a wider space.

As we have seen, however, the cartesian habit of assuming to locate the knowing subject and that which is known within a wider space inhabited by itself is false. Properly understood, all knowing is rooted in radical responsiveness, which includes receptivity to that which properly offers us bearings. Whether the cartesian imagination recognises it or not, it indwells bearings. And to encounter knowledge of God, our ultimate context, is to encounter a knowing subject and that which is known which cannot be located within our established bearings. There is no such wider space. Rather it demands that we be receptive to new bearings which will involve the transformation of our own established bearings.

Now this sets all conversation in a different context from that imagined by cartesianism. In conversation, engagement between two subjects with regard to any claim to knowledge entails openness on the part of each to the possibility that this will involve the transformation of their own indwelt bearings. Moreover, for us to understand any given conversation requires that we be open to the possibility that in order to grasp the knowledge of one or the other or both of them, and to grasp that which it to be known by them, we must be receptive ourselves to new bearings: we cannot assume to look on at limited, located efforts at understanding; we must enter into the conversation, where we may find our own understanding enlarged.

[A metaphor for this encounter is offered by C. S. Lewis' parable called 'Meditation in a Tool-shed'. In this Lewis recounts his experience of standing in a dark tool-shed into which the sun shines through a crack, making a sunbeam bright with specks of dust floating in it. He moves so that the beam falls on his eyes. Now he no longer sees the dark shed, or the beam itself: he sees the sun, framed by the leaves of a tree and by the crack above the door through which the beam strikes.

Lewis contrasts the experience of looking *at* the beam and looking *along* it. He finds here an analogy for two ways of knowing something. In modern thinking, he says, knowledge is understood exclusively in the former terms. The only authentic knowledge of something is that which we have from outside, not from within. And yet, he points out, there is a self-referential inconsistency here: in any given instance, we can step aside from the act of looking 'at' something and analyse this act itself as an act of looking 'along' - so that it becomes itself an act which we now look 'at', with the effect of suspending its status as knowledge for us. What is needed, says Lewis, is that in any given instance we should be open to both kinds of knowledge.

The 'modern thinking' to which Lewis refers is what I have called conceptual thinking which rests upon cartesian habits of imagination, which cannot grasp that which can only be known by 'looking along'. We would of course set this in another frame: *everything* we know, we know by 'looking along', in a *from-to*

movement involving context and focus. Looking 'at' is actually a quieter form of this, which arises when context subsides into an established conceptual framework. When this is taken to *define* knowledge, in a failure to acknowledge the integral *from-to* character of knowing including itself, then we cannot of course grasp that which can be known *only* in a from-to way because the 'from' and the 'to' are in lively mutual interanimation. Indeed we can grasp neither what is known here (as Lewis says), nor what we look 'from' (which is not inside anything rightly seen from outside).]

The point here is that in conversation we cannot assume we have deeper bearings than our conversation-partner; it may be that they have deeper bearings than ourselves. We may bring this our sharply by saying that in conversation we ask ourselves 'Which way round does the truth lie? Do I have deeper bearings than the other, or do they have deeper bearings that I?'

This approach reflects the reality of conversation even where what is at issue is of the kind which most obviously invites a cartesian assumption of detached observation regarding the correspondence or otherwise of a truth-claim with facts, such as whether a trunk road is currently blocked following a traffic accident. Consider the following conversation.

Peter is due to meet me in a couple of hours, driving from another town. I find a message from him on my answerphone, saying that he has just set off on the journey. I have just come into the house having discovered, while out, that the trunk road he would normally use to visit me has been blocked for some time following an accident. I now find myself confronted with the question: Is Peter ignorant of this? Will he take the trunk road, making the assumption that it is open? In this case I need to contact him, and raise the question of its being open or closed, which has not presented itself to him as an open question. Or does Peter know about the accident, and plans to travel by another route? In this case I do not need to contact him, for the question I imagine to raise for him is one which has already been raised for him, and he has already addressed and answered it. Which way round does the truth lie?

In such ways, conversation involves making judgements about when questions need to be raised for the other, and when the other raises questions for us. Of course usually this is not the *explicit focus* of conversation; rather conversation is focussed upon some matter under discussion and the question 'who is more in touch with the questions?' (as me might put it) is a question raised and answered tacitly by attention to the matter under discussion, although in some circumstances it can attract our focal attention.

The question 'which way round does the truth lie?', as a question which usually arises and is to be answered tacitly, arises in a variety of conversations. Here are three examples:

(i) **habitual group practices**: families, local communities, voluntary associations, professions, and wider ethnic and national groups typically have their own 'culture', worldview, and way of doing things. Often those coming to these groups from outside can see assumptions and habitual practices which ask to be questioned, especially if they appear unjust or oppressive towards certain people, but which to those in the group appear simply natural and normal. Often, however, those coming from outside will recognise where questions arise
only by entering into a group and becoming apprentice to its culture; the questions which arise for them as outsiders have already been raised and answered within the culture of the group. Those

coming from outside a group find themselves presented, with respect to one matter and another, with the question 'which way round is the truth?'[1]

(ii) **ideology, evidence and personal judgement:** in Britain at the beginning of the 21st century, there has been much debate about what is called 'evidence-based medicine'. This is the practice among doctors and nurses of treating and prescribing for patients on the basis of statistic research into the effectiveness of certain medical drugs for certain purposes. This has been strongly advocated by government-based bodies in place of the practice of personal judgement guided by personal professional medical experience, knowledge of the individual patient, and habitual practice. Now sometimes those who approach medical practice from outside bearing research statistics raise new questions for doctors to address; sometimes, however, doctors know and understand the statistics and, while incorporating them into their judgement when treating a particular patient, act in way contrary to the guidance given by statistics alone. Any body which seeks to override this in favour of dictatorship by statistics is espoused to a scientistic ideology. The practical question, in any given case, is 'which way round is the truth?'

(iii) truthfulness, dishonesty and vested interests: in the West today there is much mass promotion of health, some of it by governments but much of it by private food manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies. Healthy eating has become a significant issue precisely because of the products sold by the food industry, but now the same industry offers the solution - even to the extent arguably of capturing food consumption by 'medicalising' it. Now sometimes food manufacturers provide wise guidance, raising for us question to which we do well to attend rather than eat as we find it natural to do; on other occasions the advice of food manufacturers is driven by self-interest and the issues it raises are already raised and well addressed in the course of our eating as we routinely do. Which way round lies the truth?

An issue which arises in connection with the question 'which way round lies the truth?' is the question of authority. When in conversation with those to whom we ascribe authority, we shall tend to entertain what they say, and to wrestle to make sense of it and see it for ourselves, and to bear with it nonetheless when we fail, even though we find it highly problematic. We shall be inclined to defer to the bearings offered by the other.[2] Conversely, when in conversation with others who lack our own experience and insight on some matter, we shall be inclined to insist upon our own bearings as deeper than those of our conversation-partner.

A further issue which now arises in connection with the question 'which way round lies the truth?' is the dual issue of mindless submission and of unreasonable prejudice. Whereas openness to the truth, in radical responsiveness, may inspire receptivity to that which carries authority, this is to be distinguished from mindless submission. Similarly, whereas openness to truth may inform critical judgement of that which the other says, this is to be distinguished from the prejudice which unreasonably counts what the other says to be untrustworthy or of little worth relative to our own views because they belong to a certain group of people, or because they hold certain beliefs, or because of their past behaviour.

This brings us to the question of *evasion* in the context of hermeneutics. For those engaged in conversation, *dismissal* comprises a practical assumption that one's own bearings, and not those of

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[1] Sometimes, of course, there may be no apparent answer to this question; the answer may be precisely 'these are just different ways of seeing things. The question of 'superiority' in addressing truth and goodness does not arise. However, this answer cannot be assumed *a priori*; this would be espouse a false cultural relativism. Rather, this answer (viz. that 'the question does not arise') can only be known precisely *by raising* the question.

[2] In our own account of knowledge, authority finds its paradigm in the authoritative power to open the eyes of others to see for themselves; it is the authority of one who enacts and incorporates into radical responsiveness. This lies at the root of deference to canon and its authority; it is also the source from which notions of formal authority derive, whereby authority becomes 'performative power' to make and impose rules of thought and behaviour.

one's conversation-partner, are the truer; that the other's bearings can be located within one's own. This is the manner of an assumption of superiority; it is also the manner of management. The question of receptivity to the transformation of one's own bearings in the course of conversation is held a priori not to arise.[3]

Submission comprises a practical assumption that the bearings of one's conversation-partner are truer than one's own, and that one's own bearings can somehow be located within them. This is the manner of an attitude of subservience, of personal low self-esteem, of captivity to victimhood and oppression. The question of participating for oneself in the dignified exercise of personal judgement is held a priori not to arise.

Ultimately dismissal and submission are, as we have seen, evasions of 'the truth' toward which radical responsiveness is directed. Their import extends beyond our relationship to our partner in conversation. And the question where such evasion lies, if anywhere, is to answered by attention to the truth. This applies not only to those who are themselves engaged in conversation, but also to those who, attending to conversation, seek to evaluate it. There is no assured wider framework within which a conversation can be located and appraised. [by those comparing various scholars of a given subject, or whatever]

[from paper: It follows, then, that when in conversation disagreement arises between ourselves and our partner in conversation we are confronted by two kinds of question. The first kind is directed explicitly towards the truth: where does the truth lie? Within such questions are incorporated various tacit questions: can we reach consensus upon the truth? Will this come about with shared recognition that my horizons embrace those of my partner in conversation, or that my partner's horizons embrace my own? Which way round does the truth lie? Or are my horizons and those of my partner in conversation complementary? These are the first kind of question confronting us. The second kind of question concerns responsiveness and evasion, and confronts us especially when it seems to us that we are making no progress towards resolving disagreement: which of us (if either) is open to the truth, and which of us (perhaps both) is evasive? Where there is evasion, can this be converted into openness, leading to communion in truth?]

By highlighting the question 'which way round lies the truth?' I mean to show how our theory of knowledge challenges cartesian-based hermeneutics both in its traditional form and in any relativist. In order to pursue a little further the latter, it will be helpful to enter into dialogue with a major figure in modern hermeneutics: Hans-Georg Gadamer.

In his landmark study *Truth and Method*, Gadamer argues that all 'statements', including those of science and of art - are exercises of reason within a particular historical tradition. Statements must be seen as answering questions which arise within a tradition, within the particular 'horizons of questionableness' associated with a tradition. When we approach a statement we must see it in this context. As we do so, we too bring with us the tradition we ourselves inhabit, with its own horizons of questionableness. Gadamer finds a model for this in *conversation*. Partners in conversation seek a shared understanding of the truth, through a process in which they both judge what the other says and allow what the other says to transform their own understanding. This involves a meeting of

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[3] There are of course professions settings in which, in the pursuit of professional aims, it may be appropriate to limit one's manner of relating to a narrow, technical model rather than more widely in a relationship of persons. However, conformity to such models is itself a question to be addressed within the context of the wide demands of personal relationship, and not be allowed to dismiss such demands. This is an issue which arises frequently between sellers and customers, and also between managers and employees. An good example of the latter is traced by Scott Peck in his book The Road Less Travelled (or was it Children of the Lie?), p.....

respective 'horizons of questionableness'. As conversation advances towards shared understanding, these horizons 'merge'.

How does Gadamer's theory of interpretation appear in the light of our own present account above? We shall note that Gadamer breaks deliberately with the cartesian method of doubt and with the belief in a universal, ahistorical rationality. He allows for receptivity towards the other, with the potential of transforming our own understanding. He also acknowledges the essentially *from-to* character of knowing, which he frames in terms of question and answer and the 'hermeneutical priority of the question'; and he understands questioning as fundamentally responsive rather than as the (possibly arbitrary) act of an autonomous subject. In a passage which echoes Polanyi's claim that recognition of a good problem is a paradigm for all knowing, he writes:

> 'the real nature of the sudden idea is perhaps less the sudden realisation of the solution to a problem than the sudden realisation of the question that advances into openness and thus makes an answer possible. Every sudden idea has the structure of a question. But the sudden realisation of the question is already a breach in the smooth front of popular opinion. Hence we say that a question too 'comes' to us, that it 'arises' or 'presents itself' more than we raise it or present it.'(p329)

There is much here which seems to accord with our own account of knowing and interpretation. This vital issue is, of course, whether Gadamer's account is open to knowledge of God, in radical responsiveness, as paradigmatic for all knowing. How, in particular, do his concepts of 'horizons of questionableness' and of 'merging of horizons' in conversation appear in this setting?

There is a difficulty here because the image of horizons is an ambiguous one. Its primary sense is similar to that of 'bearings': horizons are that by reference to which we understand objects, the 'ground' from which we attend to 'figure', that which we indwell as defining determinate orientation and by reference to which we understand movement. In this sense, we should say that we know God as our ultimate horizon, as the mystery which we can only know by indwelling of a most lively kind, in which we engage the question of what constitutes our horizon, in lively interanimation with that to which we attend from such horizons. It is the nature of such knowledge that we know God as 'sign' - in other words, through our particular horizons of questionableness - in which our horizons are opened.

Accordingly, we must allow that the 'meeting of horizons' includes the possibility of meeting our ultimate horizons. Our meeting with other horizons is to be understood by reference to this: that by entering into them, we shall find our horizons opened in an ultimate way. This will also give paradigmatic meaning to the communion of shared understanding: a communion of openness to the mystery of God our ultimate horizon.

Within this setting, conversation brings a range of possibilities: correction, evasion, unresolved contradiction. It may be that the other enlarges our own horizons, which lie within theirs; it may be that we enlarge the horizons of the other, which lie within our own; it may be that we enlarge each others horizons. And there is a proper shared understanding.

And then there are the possibilities associated with evasion. It may be that the horizons of the other are deeper than ours, but we refuse to grant this, in dismissiveness, or that they are dismissive of our own deeper horizons; either way there is no resolution, no shared understanding between conversation-partners. Or it may be that we defer in submissiveness to the claims of the other's

horizons, yielding an improper, premature resolution and 'communion', or that the other is similarly submissive towards us.

Importantly, we cannot know which of these is the case 'from outside'; only from within conversation can we explore, tacitly, where there are horizons and where, as we tacitly probe them, we meet evasion, and where we ourselves are inclined to evasion of one kind or the other.

Indeed there is a problem about Gadamer's designation of horizons as other than ultimate, because historical, in the first place. It is an idealist position, which assumes that it inhabits a wider horizon - which is to say, that it *has completed and moved on from* conversation with those whom it envisages as in conversation. Gadamer is right in finding the paradigm for hermeneutics in living conversation, and not in the one-sided process of interpreting dead writers. However, he is self-referentially inconsistent, in unreflectively adopting a higher-order viewpoint upon conversationalists, while not incorporating his own viewpoint within the scope of conversation under view.

One way of thinking about this is to see it as not taking seriously the reality of self-critical community. It is not enough to see communities of discourse as holding certain positions or viewpoints which limit their internal conversation (the term 'internal' is already telling here). Rather, from their viewpoints they are self-critical; they are as much stories or explorations as fixed positions.

[Gadamer: draws from our experience of living on a planet where horizons arise from the curvature of the earth and represent a curtailment of our ability to see further in pursuit of bearings, and the particular form of this curtailment is determined by one's own location. It thus leaves the assumption of determinate location untouched, as in cartesian habits of imagination; horizons become a projection or echo of one's location as a viewing subject. By analogy, 'horizons of questionableness' turn out to be projections after all of the cartesian ego, albeit the corporate ego of a 'tradition'. That Gadamer's theory remains captive to cartesian habits of imagination seem hinted at by an assumption that when horizons meet they are from different locations and when they merge the result will be wider. This implies an irreducibility of location, coupled with the asssumption of stepping back. This reflects the characteristic assumption in idealist philosophy, of a 'view from the end'. It does not represent faithfully the range of possibilities which include us who look on at a conversation finding that we are drawn into a question of truth which locates us as we imagine to 'look on'. [footnote on Pannenberg]

In summary, appears hermeneutical circle. Whereas for our part, gateway....[in footnote, criticism of Lindbeck] (include performative. And all are called to this; church is special way, modelling: ass institution, doctrine, and people: body of Christ.]

Knowledge, persons and God

What implications do our proposals carry of our understanding of the person? We have averred that all knowledge is to be understood by reference to our knowledge of God, which is our most lively personal self-giving. What clues does this account of personal knowledge offer for the nature of persons as knowing subjects, and for our knowledge *of* persons?

[it may seem problematic to approach the question of persons via the question of a person's engagement in knowledge. Is there not much more to persons than their knowing, and will this not be concealed or foreshortened when our approach is through knowledge? To this it may be replied that our common theoretical understanding of persons (as found particularly among those who plan for and manage the life of society en mass in e.g. education and politics today) is already shaped by an approach through knowledge. It is shaped - albeit often unknowingly - by cartesian habits of imagination, and these represent precisely a conception of persons in terms (misleading terms) of their engagement in knowledge. What we are proposing is not to introduce knowledge as a key approach to persons, but to correct a false approach of precisely this kind.]

Here we leave behind cartesian ideas about the person in both respects. In cartesianism, as we have noted repeatedly, the knowing subject is something which in cartesianism we imagine to 'look on at'. In cartesianism, it is the subject of *theoretical* knowing which is taken as paradigmatic - as sharing in rationality of God. Or the agent of autonomous action. A dichotomy is posited first between the human individual and the world - between one who knows the world and the world which may be known; and then between the human individual as knower and actor - more precisely, between the individual as one who participates impersonally in(universal) truth and as one who performs individual actions and makes individual choices of a personal kind. The latter is here made more fundamental to the concept of a 'person'.

The latter conception (the person as one who makes choices and acts) is, however, associated practically with an evasive stance towards the person. It amounts either to a dismissive stance (in which the individual is located by reference to a familiar world of beliefs and values and 'managed') or a submissive stance (in which the individual overwhelms our own judgement and our personal integrity is subverted). In neither case is the true autonomy of the other affirmed: in the former case the other is denied the dignity of responsibility, in the latter case the other is denied the call to formation by humble receptivity.

In our own account, however, it is rather the person as subject of knowledge of God which is paradigmatic. Both theoretical knowledge and autonomous action can be understood by reference to this. And we can know this itself only by being drawn into the same knowledge. Correspondingly, the person is defined as the subject of knowledge of God, who is raised to such knowledge by God himself.

This defines anew the person as the *object* of knowledge. The person can be known as such only by being drawn into knowledge of God, which in turn raises us to the same personhood. To know a person is to put ourselves in the place of that person, in radical responsiveness towards God. It is to enter into the project of knowledge and enquiry with them, at once in receptivity and critical appraisal. The deeper, more lively the knowledge we enter into with them, the more we know them, in a subsidiary way, in critical apprenticeship. To know a person defines the nature of 'knowing personally'.

To attend to another person is to attend to a bigger world than any 'wider cultural horizons' which locate a person *within* them; and wider than our own horizons, possibly.

Refer to MacMurray - Self as Agent - perhaps in footnote? Bring in paradox of grace, and sin (via Newbigin, 1936?).

This knowledge of persons is centred upon radical responsiveness on their part and our own, out of which arise questions of limited context, yielding blindness, and questions of evasion - the image of God, which is imperfect (in its traditional meaning, an image means an imperfect representation).

There is mutuality here. We discover what it mean to be a person ourselves, through knowing with others. Trevarthen...

This more than God's footprints left behind: alive. So whereas we know God through footprints as signs, persons are already signs, but fractured. Human life is ambiguous. Evasion; and blindness of habit: Tournier on 'personage'. Such things mark us too.

At the centre of a theological understanding of the person is the incarnation. Central is Jesus Christ as knowing subject. As Baillie says, paradox of incarnation is central. Our paradigmatic knowing is about being drawn into Jesus' knowing of God. Zizioulas, Alan Torrance. This is to know 'in Christ', by the Spirit. It is to participate in hypostasis, in perichoresis. [Among other things, the dichotomy between the subject of theoretical knowing and that which is known in the world is now see in the setting of the from-to structure of radical responsiveness as about this vitality subsiding. It is understood by reference to hypostasis, not vice-versa.]

[recall Buber and addressing for ourselves; John Baillie: 'it is in Christ that we see God. We see him veiled and humiliated , n but it is nevertheless God that we see. The kind of directness for which we have contended in our knowledge of God is thus not at all interfered with, but is rather implemented, by the fact of Christ's mediatorship. This is what I have tried to express in the conception of a mediated immediacy. In Christ we know God not by argument but by personal acquaintance. In Christ God comes to us directly.' (*Our Knowledge of God*, p.196-7)

This cannot be known except by participation, which fulfils our personhood. [footnote on Justin Thacker, noting that this is *paradigmatic* for perichoresis] 'In him was life, and his life was the light of men'... now sons and daughters born of spirit.

He is the 'sign of signs' (John Marsh)

We have here a theological account of the person, at the heart of which lies personal knowledge of God to which God raises us. This is framed in the New Testament as 'eternal life'.

All knowing can be seen by reference to this, which defines its 'personal' character. Some knowing is less personal than others, in the sense of less lively, less self-disposing. The knowing achieved by human infants is personal, but subsides in some matters.[4]

This distinguishes it also from animals.[5]

human ''habitation of a world''... Martin Buber contrasts this with animals which have only 'a realm of life'. He writes 'An animal in the realm of its perceptions is like a fruit in its skin; man is, or can be, in the world as a dweller in an enormous building which is always being added to, and to whose limits he can never penetrate, but which he can nevertheless know as one does know a house in which one lives--for he is capable of grasping the wholeness of the building as such.'[6]

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[4] [footnote on Donaldson, Bruner, Trevelyan; refer back to Goldstein and Head.] Fundamental to this early human learning is the context provided by personal relationships and intentions, to which a child responds. Margaret Donaldson cites the evidence found by Jerome Bruner of an early 'mutuality' between adult and infant within a few months of birth, in the form of shared attention and the mutual interanimation of intentions, which Bruner identifies as the essential starting point for the acquisition of linguistic understanding. Colin Trevarthen, meanwhile, goes so far as to propose that the whole of human intelligence originates from such early interpersonal experience.]

[5] Psychologists studying human infancy have drawn attention to the difference between human acquisition of cognitive skills and the equivalent in animal life. I find this new, distinctively human 'openness' reflected in Jerome Bruner's account of infant behaviour and in particular, the emergence of 'open' systems of behaviour alongside automatic ones. [refer back to earlier footnote] Thus groping vs hierarchical: newborn animals can walk but our human mastery of the same skill involves something quite different, which is the 'voluntary act of walking'. Also relevant is the place of interpersonal communion:

[6] Martin Buber, "Distance and Relation", *The Knowledge of Man*, ed. Maurice Friedman, ..., 1965, pp. 59-71, pp. 60-61.

We find another description of human ''habitation of a world'' offered by the Christian theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg. He relates it to a unique openness or freedom which characterises human beings. He speaks of the ''unique freedom of man to move beyond every given regulation of his existence'' which constitutes his ''openness to the world.'' This leads on the one hand to the emergence, for humankind, of a ''world'' as such: ''One can say that man has a world, while each species of animal is limited to an environment that is fixed by heredity and that is typical of the species.'' On the other hand, "this cannot involve only openness to 'the world'. Rather, openness to the world must mean that man is completely directed into the 'open'... beyond the world...beyond every possible picture of the world.... Such openness beyond the world is even the condition for man's experience of the world...." 2

What is it that drives human beings into the open in this way? Something different, says Pannnberg, from
'the compulsion associated with animal instinct. The compulsive instinct in animals goes into action only when the triggering object is present. In contrast, the pressure of human drives is directed towards something undefined... it drives man into the open, apparently without a goal.'[7]
 [footnote on Buber]

Polanyi: summarising a paper he says 'I recognise here the unfolding from apparently sterile beginnings of highly significant beings: of the noblest fruits of creation. By evoking the spectacle of a universe which for billions of years had existed unseen, unheard, unfelt and altogether meaningless, expect to its Creator, awaking here and there in tiny clusters of matter to desire, feeling and intelligence - these clusters eventually even coming to participate in the Creator's understanding of the universe and to feel obliged to justify their action before him - I bear testimony to the status of man which I implicitly claim for man by this appraisal of the universe by myself.'[8]

Persons, communities and the Church

Personal knowledge and enquiry is to a large extend a matter of participation in a group, or variety of groups, with a certain culture or tradition of practice and enquiry. Such groups overlap and relate to each other in complex ways, and may be marked by 'dysfunction', blindness and evasion just as they may nourish wellbeing and creativity.
        The Church, by which is understood the body of people who find themselves drawn to participate in the relation of Jesus Christ to God, form a distinctive community. Within this community individuals are drawn to fullness of life in Christ which is a fulfilment at once of their unique personhood and freedom and of communion in knowledge, practice and enquiry with others. This community is formed by a Christian canon of wise doctrine and practice, with Christ at the centre. The Church and its membership always remains an eschatological affair. As such, the Church is called to model the true meaning of personhood and of community, functioning in this way as salt and light to the world.

[including particularity, canon, the church]
The knowledge and enquiry of persons is a matter shared with other people through participation in a variety of groups. This is cultural context; culture is a matter of persons sharing in traditions of practice and enquiry. It may be a matter of integrating the cultures of various groups, while in other

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[7] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, Philadelphia, 1970, . 8,9.

[8] Michael Polanyi, 'Persons', the seventh of an eight-lecture series at the University of Chicago, 1954, published in *Tradition and Discovery*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, 2009-10, pp.6-16, p. 15.

matters there are layers of culture, some deeper ones shared more widely among subcultures than others.

Here too the issues of blindness and evasion appear; cultures are not equal. Some are more enclosed an unaware of the demands of encounter with other cultures. Some are more driven by, say, fearful overwhelming and spiritual captivity, or proud pursuit of material vested interest, than others.

On the one hand is the calling of God to become a culture informed by the paradox of grace. We teach and learn from each other, shape and are shaped by each other, under God, in a reflection of the Trinity - finding unique identity precisely in relation, in hypostasis, in the mutual intepenetration of perichoresis.

On the other hand is evasion which forms false distinction on the one hand, and false union of submission on the other. Here is a distorted reflection of the Trinity, in which each element involves inner self-*contradiction*.

Central, then, is the community of people who respond to God in radical responsiveness.

It is a community of *persons* in *relationship*, not of individuals subsumed under a mass 'whole'. A foretaste of trinity.

It is eschatological (quote Webster) - reviewing forever what constitutes the proper form of church life as a sign in its provisional cultural context.

Here is a canon of community, which is *centred upon Jesus Christ* and the Gospel, and *witnesses to the meaning of community*, and

(1) centred upon Christ: It, once again, is ambiguous, and is corrected by its members (especially between cultures, and historical tradition) and also, sometimes, by those outside it. It is inclusive, but challenges assumptions which are evasive.

(2) Paradigmatic for community: salt and light. Walls on Latourette

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