

In the Deep Context of God

life and knowledge in Christ

Length of book: approximately 80,000 words. [In February 2011 Chapters 1,2 and 4 have been largely written in an earlier version but need substantial reorganising; Chapters 3 and 4 are partly written, Chapter 5 (the key chapter) is largely written, and Chapters 6 and 7 outlined and partly written.]

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Contents and structure introduced

This book identifies and challenges the habits of thought and imagination which domesticate the Gospel to Western culture but conceal this fact of domestication from attention and reflection. These habits have to do with how we understand *human understanding itself* - the act of knowing, and knowing action - and how we understand (when we advert to it) *the context of this knowing*. These habits are exposed and corrected when we grasp as paradigmatic, the act of knowing and its context as these arise *in our knowledge of God*. PART ONE thus explores knowing and its context as they arise in the Bible in relation to knowledge of God. Reflection on Jesus' life, death and resurrection (Chapter 1) and its biblical background (Chapter 2) *turns upside down* the standard conception of beliefs as arise in and shaped by a prior cultural context. Rather *God approaches us through both our beliefs and our culture as himself our deepest context*. In this approach, God breaks open our 'provisional' contexts including our cultural context, and reveals them in the light of its own deeper context. In this encounter, our provisional contexts come under judgement and change in character: they are transformed either into a sign of God's kingdom or an idol contradicting God. By framing the self-disclosing action of God in terms of 'signs' (rather than, say, a more explicitly personal, incarnational frame) I am able to present certain radical challenges to our modern understanding of knowledge and context, the relation between Gospel and cultural context, the nature of the sacred, and the logic of witness.

In PART TWO, this book draws out the implications of Part One for how we should understand *the act of knowing as such*, and *the context of knowing as such*, and also of *evasion* of knowledge. The starting-point is knowledge of God as exemplary of, and paradigmatic for understanding, all knowledge and its context. Therefore, the testimony of faith is firstly given regarding *the nature of knowledge of God* and of God

known as *our ultimate context* (Chapter 4). Such knowing is, by the paradox of grace, *an act of unqualified lively personal self-giving*, in radical responsiveness to the self-disclosure of God. However, fallen human beings find this act demanding and commonly yield to the temptation to evade it, either *dismissing* it or *being overwhelmed* by it. This account of knowing and evading God prepares the way for a general theory of knowledge (Chapter 5). At appropriate points throughout Part Two, the pull of (distorting) cartesian assumptions is identified and resisted.

In Chapter 6,.....

In Chapter 7,

Summary

PART ONE: *the drama of Gospel and culture in the Bible and beyond*

Chapter One

The approach of God our ultimate context

In Jesus of Nazareth we see God's approach in sovereignty: God acts in self-disclosure through the person of Jesus, his words and actions, his embrace of execution and his resurrection. Approaching us, God addresses us to the depths of our familiar worlds, assumptions and personal attachments. In so doing, God reveals not only himself, but ourselves and our world in a new light. This self-revelation arouses us to awe and worship, impelling us to seek and serve his will in reverent love.

We may speak of these things in terms of God who in Jesus Christ enlivens us with *knowledge of God, our ultimate context*. In his words and actions Jesus Christ reveals and embodies the approach of God in sovereignty as our ultimate context. In Christ, God engages our familiar contexts comprised of our habitual practices and assumptions, worldviews and personal commitments and breaks them open, animating them as signs pointing to the deeper context of his approaching kingdom. Relative to this deeper context, these familiar contexts are provisional.

We may understand in these terms (1) Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God in parables; (2) his acts of healing and liberation, as signs of that kingdom; (3) his radical exhortations regarding our attitude towards our enemies, wealth, the necessities of life, and self-preservation; (4) his teaching and practice in relation to the culture of family and community belonging; and (5) his teaching and practice in relation to his Jewish religious culture. Each of these concerns the personal activity of Jesus who is in himself the personal, incarnate sign of God.

Knowing God through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit

The knowledge to which God raises us is inseparable from *participation in the mystery of himself and his purposes for us and the world*. This knowledge is a matter of personal relationship to God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, enlivening within us a radical responsiveness which is at once receptive to and responsible before him in unqualified, lively personal self-giving - the offering of heart, soul, mind and strength. It is the paradox of grace, that this *act of submission* to God constitutes not passivity but rather the *most lively personal action in which we ever engage*. Further, our knowledge of and participation in the mystery of God *always remains* for us a matter of lively responsiveness to God as we seek afresh the

will of God and indwell deeply what God has revealed to us, oriented towards God's coming kingdom. Such knowledge is a matter of personal immersion through faith, hope and love in the eschatological mystery of God's kingdom.

Such knowledge of and participation in the mystery of God belongs first to Jesus Christ himself. It is into his vital relationship with God that we are raised by God. It is legitimate therefore to speak of us as knowing and participating in the mystery of Christ, while this remains fundamentally the mystery of God into which we are raised with Christ.

The drama of divine encounter

The approach of God through Jesus Christ precipitates a crisis for those approached and summoned to radical responsiveness. Faced with the demands (as they are experienced) of such responsiveness, people may rather be evasive. The approach of God consequently unfolds a drama; it becomes the occasion of judgement. In the New Testament this drama is portrayed as God calling people through the action of the Spirit from death to life, from ignorance to knowledge, from sleep to wakefulness, from darkness to light, and from blindness to sight, to which people respond either by embracing or by rejecting this call. This drama becomes itself a matter of reflection especially in St John's Gospel and in the 'Captivity' Epistles to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians.

Rejection of God's call is understood in the scriptures as a matter of blindness and evasion. Evasion takes two basic forms: (1) a dismissive stance in which we push away in rebellion the demands of transformation, or (2) a disoriented stance in which we experience these demands as overwhelming. Adopting the former stance, we deceive ourselves about God and misrepresent him to ourselves so as to rob God of power to challenge and transform us and our world in a demanding way. We may dismiss God either by rejecting him or (less obviously) by accepting him but in such a way as to capture and domesticate him to ourselves and our own familiar world. Adopting the latter stance, we yield ourselves to spiritual captivity, driven by phantoms secretly constructed by our own evasion of God. Either way, the 'open secret' of God is hidden from us by our own blindness and evasion. So too, the reality of ourselves and of our world is hidden from us: evasion of God is evasion also of ourselves and of our world.

This drama is played out in terms specific to our habitually indwelt practices and assumptions, worldviews and personal attachments as God addresses these to their depths. Breaking these open, God brings them alive as signs disclosing the reality both of himself and of themselves. However, these provisional contexts may prove the occasion rather of blindness and evasion, and harden into idols animated by our evasion of God. In this way the approach of God places under judgement our indwelling of habitual practices and assumptions, worldviews and personal attachments.

Chapter Two

Promise and fulfilment

In Jesus Christ, the Old Testament is seen to bear witness to the promise of God's approach in sovereignty now fulfilled in Jesus himself. Jesus himself understood this to be his vocation, revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. The same Spirit enlivened his followers to see this vocation fulfilled in his crucifixion and resurrection.

God's approach: the Covenant

The Old Testament tells the story of God calling his people to find their ultimate context in him and his purposes. It witnesses to the Word of God which is *transcendent* and *inculturated* in its engagement with humankind through God's chosen people. The culture of this people is not of itself divine; rather it is the

locus of God's ever faithful, covenantal initiative towards a people who for their part are fitful in their response. The drama of this divine engagement is played out in two strands:

- (1) Divine engagement, through God's chosen people, with other cultures and their religions through the biblical period - Canaanite, Egyptian, Babylonian - ranging from transforming renewal to polemical opposition.
- (2) Divine engagement with the religious culture of God's chosen people themselves, repeatedly deepening and correcting their response to God. This is now explored in relation to the traditions of temple, monarchy, religious law, priesthood and sacrifice, and racial identity. This is similarly a story ranging from transforming renewal and deepening to opposition and correction, and it has a growing focus on personal knowledge of God in righteousness.

God's approach: the New Covenant in Jesus Christ

In the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth those elements of Jewish religious culture outlined above are incarnated in a new and ultimate way, and their full meaning disclosed. We here explore, in turn, the fulfilment in Jesus of temple, monarchy, religious law, priesthood and sacrifice, and racial identity.

God's approach: The finality of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus

In Jesus' death and resurrection, God's self-disclosing approach takes on final, unqualified form. Precisely as the ultimate temptation of evasion arises for Jesus himself (seemingly abandoned by God) and for those addressed by him (who yield to this temptation, killing him), Jesus embraces God in faith. Here arises the ultimate, unqualified time of trial, in which the possibilities of despairing evasion and hopeful trust confront each other in a final way beyond human comprehension, and God's faithfulness urges the last word. By Jesus, we are ourselves drawn into the forever unfathomable mystery of this encounter.

Chapter Three

A transcendent, inculturated Gospel

Following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his followers - enlivened with the gift of the Holy Spirit - proclaimed the Gospel in the wider Graeco-Roman world. In the New Testament the Apostles address the worldviews, assumptions and personal attachments of people inhabiting this wider world, calling them to yield up themselves and their world to new creation in the deeper context of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Here the drama of divine revelation and human embrace or evasion testified in the Old Testament takes on new expression. This drama has not been superseded by God's final revelation in Jesus Christ; rather, it has its defining enactment in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and in peoples' response to the Gospel of God's sovereign approach here.

The same drama has continued throughout Christian history as the Gospel has been proclaimed in the cultures of Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and beyond, and we continue to participate in this drama today. As implied by Chapters One and Two, the approach of God's kingdom is not to be equated simply with the formal adoption historically of the Christian religion, even though these are naturally linked. This is because, as we have noted, God may be evaded not only by explicitly rejecting God, but also by adopting a Christian religion secretly domesticated to ourselves and to the worldviews, assumptions and personal attachments which constitute our provisional contexts - a religion powerless to disclose the reality of God our ultimate context and to transform our provisional contexts - or else by yielding to a spiritual captivity which is Christian only in name.

Typically, domesticated Christian religion comprises assent to credal propositions, conformity to moral laws, and participation in worship under appointed authority within the institutional church. Such religion is driven by the desire for divine protection for a personal and cultural life lived within the context of

habitual worldviews, assumptions and personal attachments. The Gospel calls us beyond such religion; it calls for the transformation of ourselves and the world comprising these provisional contexts, in the light of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ.

Modern culture

The drama of Gospel proclamation and response takes on a distinctive form within modern culture. By 'modern' culture is meant the culture of societies which have originated in medieval Europe with the novel vision of state-organised 'civilisation' replacing and reforming traditional culture, beliefs and customs. Philosophers associated with the European Enlightenment played a vital part in the formulation of this vision.

The setting for this novel vision was a European society informed in its institutions of power, its social norms and its imaginative world by Christian religion. Medieval Christendom had sponsored freedom in many respects from domination by sacral authority, opening the way for dynamic social change. When that society became ravaged by religious wars, however, a secure basis was sought for the future of this society elsewhere than in Christian religion. This 'modern' future was sought in the innately good and rational individual and in the state as trustworthy legislator, educator and enforcer of a programme of civilisation among such individuals.

Fundamental to this modern vision was the conception of the individual human 'self' as autonomous agent and knowing subject. While this conception drew upon a Western classical heritage, it form substantially informed initially by a Christian imagination. However, this imagination has since been eroded in modern Western culture, and the conception has become more absolute and more distorted. Today our cultural imagination is dominated by false conceptions of the human 'self', of 'knowledge', and of the 'contexts' we inhabit as knowing subjects.

This gives rise to the distinctive modern cultural form of blindness and evasion towards God (and thus towards ourselves and the world). Dominated by our modern imagination, when we find ourselves encountered by God, our *thinking about* this gets distorted to the point of failure. Our thinking *betrays*, rather than *faithfully testifying to*, our encounter with God. Modern thinking also tends to *pre-empt* recognition of God as encountering us in the first place. Moreover, it also colludes practically with the evasion of God in general, by concealing this for what it is and indeed legitimising it. All of this finds expression not only in modern discourse (especially the discourse of those who seek to manage public social and political life) but also in the social 'plausibility structures' of the modern world.

The dominance of the modern imagination, increasingly severed from its roots in Christian faith, is associated today with both a striking decline of church life, and the distortion both of Western culture in general and of Christian religion itself by contemporary ideologies and consumerism. These tendencies and their history are explored in more detail in Part Three of this book.

The Gospel engages human blindness and evasion in this characteristic modern cultural form. Thus it integrally discloses *ourselves*, our *knowledge* and the *context* of our knowledge in the light of God's self-disclosing approach.

A transcendent, inculturated Gospel

The approach of God our ultimate context breaks open every human context, including every cultural context. The Gospel of God's kingdom transcends any given culture, retaining always the power prophetically to challenge it; the Gospel can never properly be domesticated to any culture. Thus, ultimately culture is not the context of Gospel; rather *Gospel is the context of culture*. On the other hand, the Gospel always presents itself *in contextual, inculturated form*; it never stands apart from all contexts; it always engages and is mediated through our cultural and other contexts.

PART TWO: ***The theology of knowledge and its context***

Chapter Four

Knowledge, context and evasion in our encounter with God

To know God who approaches us in sovereignty as our ultimate context is to participate in knowledge and context of a unique kind. It involves acts of knowing and of inhabiting a context which are not only distinctive among such acts, but define the meaning of such acts. Seen in relation to knowledge and context as we commonly conceive them, these acts are paradoxical. In this Chapter we pursue such paradoxical testimony.

The mystery of God (in engagement with NT; Marcel; John Baillie; Foster, Richmond, patristics, Julian of Norwich, Chesterton, *Delighting in God? Wound of Knowledge?* Polanyi, Apzinski, De Lubac, Richard Niebuhr's 'God and other gods', Von Balthasar, Barth.

Experience of God Knowledge of God is knowledge 'by acquaintance'; religious language mediates experience of God. However, cartesian habits of imagination misrepresent experience as subjective. [The correction of this is explored in dialogue with P. T. Forsyth, Martin Buber, John Baillie and Denys Turner.](#) Their proposals can be understood by reference to our account of encounter with God in radical responsiveness.

Knowledge and its context as commonly conceived

In our habitual ways of thinking about knowledge, we picture (a) the knowing subject as standing over against, and looking upon, (b) that which is known; and we tacitly picture (c) ourselves looking on at each. Should the question of the *context* of knowledge be raised, we now picture this as analogous to a location or viewpoint before us from which a knowing subject looks upon what is known (or can be known) from this viewpoint, and which is distinct from knowing subject as such. As a result, we tend to conceive 'knowledge' either as objective, universal, context-independent knowledge or as a subjective, context-dependent 'way of seeing things'. These habits of imagination amount to a certain conception of that 'from which' and 'to which' our knowing is directed, and of the relation between them.

Knowledge, context and God's self-disclosing approach in signs

Biblical writers testify to a God who reveals himself in action in particular historical contexts. As he does so, he also reveals the world in the deeper context of himself and his purposes. Thus people are led at once to see God *through* the events and circumstances of the created world, and to see the world *through* or *from* his purposes. This is the biblical character of sign: in our knowledge of God our ultimate context, knowledge and context are inseparable as one living divine self-disclosure. Here knowledge, context and the relation between them are paradoxical when seen in relation to knowledge and context as they are commonly conceived. We shall now acknowledge a series of such paradoxes.

Knowing God

When we embrace God's self-disclosing approach, we embrace precisely the context of our knowing. This knowledge into which God draws us defines anew and transforms for us the very meaning of 'knowledge'. To know God is to be turned towards God in a radical responsiveness at once discerning and receptive. To be open to God's self-disclosure constitutes our most lively, self-giving personal act of both questioning and knowing, searching and finding, by God's grace. Radical responsiveness extends to waiting faithfully upon God when he is utterly concealed or 'absent'. These features of knowledge of God have been averred by various Christian authors.

God our ultimate context

When we practically embrace God in his approach as our paradigmatic, ultimate context, we embrace a context which is integral to the act of knowing itself. The defines anew and transforms for us very meaning of 'context'. Our ultimate context is personal and graciously self-revealing; invites us to respond in wholehearted self-giving; draws us into an eschatological mystery here and now in our provisional historical, cultural and personal contexts; and effects a continuing transformation and renewal of all such provisional contexts and the personal identity we realise as we inhabit them.

Evading God, and God's redeeming engagement with evasion

The radical responsiveness to which God's approach summons us is personally demanding, and may be met with evasion. Such evasion constructs its own characteristic objects of apprehension and context of apprehension. These involve both self-contradiction and self-deception. Evasion takes two basic forms:

- (1) *Dismissal*: We may dismiss the challenge presented to our habitual contexts and personal attachments by the approach of God as our ultimate context. Here we dissociate ourselves (in self-concealed intention) from the demands of God, and entrench ourselves in reliance upon a *false* orientation and *false* integration of the world. This represents a premature expectation of fulfilment of hope.
- (2) *Disorientation*: we may be overwhelmed by the challenge presented to our habitual contexts and personal attachments by the approach of God as our ultimate context, finding the loss of these unfaceable. Here we yield to spiritual captivity, driven compulsively by spectres and mirages. We despair (in self-concealed intention) of the world and of ourselves, in *dis*-orientation and personal *dis*-integration. This represents a premature expectation of the non-fulfilment of hope.

The drama of divine engagement and human response does not come to an end when God's approach is met with rejection. Rather, God embraces the person who evades the demands of radical responsiveness to his approach, summoning them to embrace themselves - precisely in their evasion - as does God himself. God's continuing engagement with those who reject him is integral to his approach in the first place; it is the redemptive aspect of his approach in an act of unqualified self-giving. Redemption may be understood as the gracious act of God in which he (1) restores human responsiveness to, and knowledge of, himself in the place of evasion, and (2) restores himself as the ultimate context for human life in place of the self-contradictory, self-deceived contexts constructed by evasion.

Truth and testimony, enquiry and dialogue

To talk of God is to bear reverent witness to God who, revealing himself, draws us into personal knowledge of and participation in his vital self. The same is true, however, of our own talk now of our 'knowledge' and our 'context' in relation to God: what we say of these is not a matter of detached observation but of testimony. It is not a second-order account, but also remains always an act of enquiring attentiveness towards the mystery into which God continues to draw ourselves and others: our testimony always carries the implicit question (to both ourselves and others) 'Look as see: is it not so?' The same applies to our talk of evasion: we raise the question of this in the first instance with ourselves and with the other whom we address, raising the possibility (as appropriate) of confession and conversion. Testimony can be described as an interpersonal performative speech-act initiated by God and mediated by ourselves.

Chapter Five:

Knowledge, context and evasion in the light of God

In Chapter Four we reflected on the knowledge of God as our ultimate context to which we are raised by God's self-disclosing approach. We reflected on the meaning both of 'knowledge' and 'context' in this encounter, which is paradoxical to our usual thinking about these. The question now arises: how may we understand knowledge and context in a coherent way so as to (a) honour the reality of God and our

knowledge of God as our ultimate context, and (b) give an account of knowledge and context in general, while (c) taking seriously the paradox which the former presents to the latter.

In Chapter Five we explore a way of answering this question. Everything in the world including humankind is to be understood ultimately by reference to God who upholds and renews creation as a living sign pointing to himself; we now affirm that, in the same way, all knowledge and every context is to be understood by reference precisely to the meaning these two terms have when God raises us to knowledge of himself as our ultimate context, engaging us through the provisional context of creation. That is, we explore what it will mean to allow our knowledge of God as our ultimate context fundamentally to recast our understanding of all knowledge and context, becoming their paradigm.

This task is of vital importance because, as we have noted, the misrepresentation of knowledge and context in modern thinking, especially in relation to God and to ourselves as persons, conceals the reality of these and colludes with their evasion.

Cartesian habits of imagination

What form does this misrepresentation take? In general, modern thinking assumes the existence of truth, while adopting as a starting-point a fundamental human 'self' who knows and asks theoretical questions about truth. This betrays, however, the deepest reality of truth and of ourselves as human beings. In reality God the creator is the foundation of ourselves and the world, not a human 'self'; and knowledge of God is the foundation of all knowledge, not theoretical knowledge of the world. When a human 'self' and theoretical knowledge are made fundamental, all sorts of false contraries are spawned in our thinking about God, ourselves and the world. Basic among these is a divorce between that **from** which we attend to the world (viz. ourselves as subjects whether in or transcending our context) and that **to** which we attend in the world. This divorce is central to what I shall call cartesian habits of imagination at the heart of modern thinking. While this divorce reflects quite well the experiences of theoretical knowing and categorical thinking, it distorts the reality of knowledge of God as our ultimate context. It also ultimately distorts theoretical knowing itself, spawning self-referential inconsistencies which suspend us between contrary objective and subjective accounts of 'knowledge'. When we take seriously the knowledge of God as our proper starting-point, we start from lively personal participation in an **irreducibly from-to** movement of personal relationship.

A theory of knowledge and context in general

To start from knowledge of God is to start from a disposition at once of radical attention and intention in which, by the paradox of God's grace, we give ourselves most fully in the act of receiving most fully. I shall call this a disposition of radical responsiveness. This disposition is dual: it is at once receptive and responsible in the liveliest way. Rising to this we at once value and evaluate, 'give weight to' and 'weigh', 'try to' and 'try' (in the sense of testing), and therein attend **from** reality as 'ground' and attend **to** reality as 'figure' in the most radical fashion.

Knowledge in general arises as this lively disposition is led to subside into other, quieter forms of practical and theoretical knowledge. Here, the relation between that 'from' which we attend and that 'to' which we attend settles down into that which is characteristic of the exercise of acquired skills on the one hand and of conceptual thinking on the other. Michael Polanyi's work provides valuable resources for understanding knowledge and context in these terms. Here we set his account in the context of radical responsiveness as a paradigm for all knowing. In signs, quieter knowledge comes alive as the medium through which God engages us.

Beyond Cartesian habits of imagination

This sheds light upon how distorted modern thinking about knowledge originates. Modern Cartesian habits of imagination, which draw upon visual metaphors relating to location and perspective in order to picture knowledge and its context, reflect reasonably - with certain limits - the experience of quieter theoretical knowing. However, in modern thinking they get adopted wrongly as a metaphor for knowing in general, and theoretical knowing (as it understands itself) is made the paradigm for all knowing. Seen in this context, our most lively knowing and contextual immersion are misrepresented, and so too - beyond

certain limits - is our theoretical knowing: the cartesian picture generates the inner contradictions and infinite regresses, as we have noted. In reality, theoretical knowledge is to be understood in the context of lively knowledge, and not vice-versa; cartesian habits of imagination thus represent a **logical inversion**.

The logic of evasion and redemption

Once the roots of knowledge are recognised in radical responsiveness, the place of love in knowledge, recognised in Christian tradition, is restored. However, this also revives **sinful evasion** as a fundamental issue. As we have seen, this takes two basic forms: it can either be dismissive or disoriented, either seizing upon false integration or seized by dis-integration. We can now understand this as follows: in evasion, the dual disposition of critical discernment and receptivity (which characterises radical responsiveness) is replaced by the pursuit of either critical discernment (in the former case) or receptivity (in the latter case) in isolation, in each case severed from the other and thereby distorted. Here, instead of being drawn to and enlivened by God through creation in free, loving attention and enquiry, evasion constructs from creation self-displacing phantoms - spectres and mirages - which bind us. The 'from-to' structure of our knowing and pursuing, and of the objects of our 'knowledge' and 'pursuit', take on a parallel distorted form.

We now see how knowledge and evasion (as described above) find unqualified, definitive meaning as they confront each other in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, and in our encounter with God in Jesus crucified.

Existence: God, ourselves and the world

Cartesian habits of imagination yield an implicit account of existence itself, in which this is defined by existence as encountered in theoretical or conceptual knowledge and understood by reference to such knowledge as paradigmatic. A different account of existence emerges when we acknowledge radical responsiveness as paradigmatic for all knowing. We may explore this by starting from the fact that existence, as denoting the act of 'standing out' ('ex-ist' means to 'stand out') - finds its paradigm in the most lively occasion of 'from-to' knowing in our encounter with God. Within this context we may understand created existence, and also the 'existence' which constitutes at once the disposition of evasion and its 'objects'.

Chapter Six

Logic, language and experience

The logic of question and answer

[in engagement with Pannenberg, Tillich, Collingwood, etc.] The foregoing can be framed in terms of the logic of question and answer. Cartesian habits of imagination misrepresent questioning as the act of doubting a concept. However, in truth questioning finds its paradigm in lively encounter with the mystery of God. Here, searching and finding have their most lively, definitive meaning, and interanimate each other. This may subside into quieter forms of questioning: the questioning implicit in skilful performance, and explicit theoretical questioning. Evasion (in the form both of dismissiveness and submissiveness) presents its own distorted logic of question and answer, which is engaged in redemption.

The logic of language: grammar and speech-acts

[in engagement with J. L. Austin and other Oxford Linguistic philosophers, Thiselton, Vanhoozer etc] Cartesian habits of imagination also lead to a modern misrepresentation of language and symbolic action and their logic. Modern thinking posits a false contrary between (a) grammar and empirical content, and between (b) performative speech-act and statement. However, it is in radical responsiveness to God that these elements of language have their most lively, definitive meaning, in mutual interanimation. Once again, skilful knowledge, conceptual knowledge and evasion and redemption can be outlined in these terms.

The logic of metaphor and paradox

Religious metaphor and paradox cannot be grasped by cartesian habits of imagination. Their true character can be understood only by reference to radical responsiveness before God, when this is taken as paradigmatic knowledge. Their character in this encounter is explored in dialogue with the work of Donald Baillie and Ian Ramsey.

Chapter Seven

Conversation, persons, and community

Conversation and interpretation

[in engagement with Gadamer] 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

[in engagement with Zizioulas, Carver T. Yu, Alan Torrance etc.] 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 extent 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.