

## God: II Freedom

Herbert McCabe O P

In the previous article, (*New Blackfriars* October 1980) I spoke of the radical questionableness of the universe and suggested that it seems anomalous to ask "How come?" about individual events or things or whole classes of things and yet refuse to ask this question about the whole world. The belief that such a question is unaskable is based, firstly, on the fact that we have no answer to it, and, secondly, on the fact that the language in which it is asked is exploratory; we are using words in ways that are stretched beyond their familiar use. I suggested that both these things are characteristic of the creative growing points of our understanding whether in science or in the arts. To assert the existence of God is not to state a fact within an established intellectual system but to claim the need for exploration; it is to claim that there is an unanswered question about the universe: the question "How come the whole thing instead of nothing?"

By "creation" we mean the dependence of all that is, in so far as it is. We do not know what it is that it depends on, we do not know the nature of God. There is, as I suggested, a great gap between creation and making or causing in our familiar sense. Other causes bring things about in a "world without them", (X is brought about in a world with an X-shaped gap in it). What is caused comes about in a world in which it is in some way potential, a world, for example, containing what can be made into it, but there is nothing within which resides the possibility of the whole world before it is created. Creation is a matter of the existence of the world over against nothing at all.

In this article I want to look first at one very important feature of this difference between creation and other forms of causality; it concerns the question of human freedom and God's action. Then in a second part I want to look at the astonishing Christian belief that the unknown Creator, (while remaining unknown in the sense that we still do not know the answer to our question, we still do not know what God is), the reason why there is anything rather than nothing, reveals itself as love.

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It is a fairly common and really quite understandable view that whereas inanimate and irrational creatures are determined by the will of God in all that they do and in all that happens to them, human beings are to some extent free and to this extent independent of God's causal action. God, it is thought, has endowed man

with independence from him, so that a person may choose freely whether to serve God or love God. This, it is thought, accounts for the possibility of moral evil, and indeed of moral good. God could not make man free, independent and loving, without allowing him the possibility of not loving and of sin; but it is a greater thing to have free people, even if they sometimes sin, than to have automata totally dependent on God.

From what was said in the last article I hope it will be clear that this whole position involves a false and idolatrous picture of God. The "God" here is an inhabitant of the universe, existing alongside his creatures, interfering with some but not with others. If what I have been saying is true then we must conclude (I) that since everything that exists owes its existence to God, since he is the source of anything being rather than nothing, he must also be the source of my free actions, since these are instead of not being: there can be no such thing as being independent of God, whatever my freedom means it cannot mean not depending (in the creative sense) on God, but (II) this kind of dependence on God is not such as to make me an automaton.

I do not think that these are particularly easy thoughts, but it would be strange if thinking about God were easy and obvious. The view I am maintaining (which is that of Thomas Aquinas) is that God brings about all my free actions and that this does not make them any the less free. Failure to grasp this difficult truth has, I think, accounted for a very great deal of the muddle that western theology has got itself into during the last few centuries.

In order to understand this we must first of all look a little at the notion of freedom and then remind ourselves of the notion of creation.

An action of Fred I will say is free when it is caused by Fred and not caused by any other thing. I mean that if Fred goes berserk and slays twelve, a question might arise as to whether he did this freely or not. If it can be shown that he acted under the influence of the drug that I put in his coffee then to this extent we would say that his action was not free. It is free if *he* did it and nothing *made* him do it.

There are philosophers who claim that there are no free human actions, that all our activity is completely determined first by our genetic make-up and then various natural forces operating on us, just as the activity of a computer or a sewing machine is determined by its structure and the forces acting on it. I do not agree with these philosophers but I will not stop to argue the case with them here, except to say that it seems to me that if they were right it would be impossible to argue a case with anyone. If your words come from your mouth as automatically as the sounds come from a tape-recorder, then two people apparently engaged in discussion are in no different position from two tape-recorders

playing simultaneously: they are both contributing to the noise that is being made but cannot be said to be engaged in communication *with* each other. The noises they make could not, indeed, be counted as words at all. However, it is not my object to dispute with determinists, merely to note their existence and to note that, of course, for them no problem about God and human freedom would arise, because there is no such thing as human freedom.

There are, again, some rather more subtle philosophers who claim to be able to show that an action can be *both* free *and* caused by other things. For these, too, the apparent problem of God and human freedom does not arise. Free human actions could be caused by God just as they could be caused by genetic make-up and so on. I don't agree with this position either, but again will not pause to discuss it here.

Either of these positions would, so to say, get us off the hook of the God/freedom problem, either by saying that there is no such thing as freedom or else by saying that there is freedom but it is compatible with determinism and therefore God's determinism. I, on the other hand, want to take the hook by the horns.

A free action of Fred's, for me, is one that is caused by Fred and not caused by anything else; and yet I also want to say that it is caused by God.

Perhaps I should say, by way of removing a few red herrings from the hook, that I doubt whether there are any *completely* free human actions: we are all to a great extent determined by factors outside our control and in ways that we are not conscious of. People can be quite sure they are acting freely when in fact everybody else knows that they are acting under the influence of hypnotism or drugs, just as people can be perfectly sure they are dancing in Trafalgar Square with Mrs Thatcher in a purple bikini when in fact they are just having a nightmare. The fact that people can be mistaken about being free has of course no tendency to show that we are *all* mistaken: just as the fact that people can be mistaken about being awake has no tendency to show that we are *all* asleep. I want to maintain that there is a certain degree of spontaneity and creativeness in human action, something that comes just from Fred and not from anything outside him nor from the sheer structure with which he was born.

In saying that free human actions are uncaused I do not, of course, mean that they are random or arbitrary. Quite the contrary: random and arbitrary actions would, in my view, be unfree. There are always reasons and motives for free actions. You can say *why* Fred did this. We can even in English say "What made him do it?" meaning what reason did he have for doing it. When we speak of what made him do it in that sense we are certainly not denying that he did it freely. To assign a reason or motive to an action is not, however, to talk about the cause of the action; it is to analyze

*the action itself.* An action that was caused from outside could not be done for a reason, or at least not for the agent's reason. If by devious chemical or hypnotic means I cause Fred to eat his left sock, then *he* does not have a reason for doing it (though he may think he has), it is I who have a reason for his doing it, for the action is really mine, not his.

Free actions, then, are *uncaused* though they are *motivated* and done for reasons; and these motives and reasons do not take away from freedom but rather are essential to it. Free actions also frequently proceed from dispositions such as virtues or vices. You say of Fred that he did something out of the goodness of his heart or his pride made him do it. Such dispositions again do not detract from freedom, as can be seen by comparing them with saying, for example, that Fred scratched his head out of force of habit. Force of habit may well make an action unfree, but a disposition such as a virtue or vice, although, like a habit, it is acquired by practice and repetition, is precisely a disposition to *act freely* and *from yourself* in this way or that. If Fred does something enthusiastically out of the goodness of his heart or out of hatred his action is *more* fully his own, less imposed on him, more free, than if he does it reluctantly and in a forced manner, or automatically, out of force of habit.

So neither motives nor dispositions are *causes* of action; it remains that a free action is one which *I* cause and which is not caused by anything else. It is caused by God. From what we were saying last time it will, I hope, be clear that this is not the paradox that it seems at first sight, for God is not *anything else*. God is not a separate and rival agent within the universe. The creative causal power of God does not operate on me from outside, as an alternative to me; it is the creative causal power of God that makes me *me*.

Consider how we decide whether or not Fred acted freely in eating his left sock. We look round to see what might have accounted for his behaviour by acting upon him, we look for drugs and hypnotism and infection of the brain, we look for blind powers operating from below the level of consciousness. What we *don't* do is look for God. And this is not just because we have forgotten him or don't believe in him; it is because it would be irrelevant. To be free means not to be under the influence of some other *creature*, it is to be independent of the other *bits of the universe*; it is not and could not mean to be independent of God.

It is, of course, our image-making that deceives us here. However hard we try, we cannot help picturing God as an individual existent, even an individual person, making the world or controlling it like the potter making a pot or as an artist makes a statue. But the pot is in the same world as the potter, the statue shares a studio with the sculptor. They interact with each other. Or, to put

it the other way, the potter is outside the pot he makes, the sculptor is outside the statue. But when we come to the creator of everything that has existence, none of that could be true. God cannot share a world with us – if he did he would have created himself. God cannot be outside, or alongside, what he has made. Everything only exists by being constantly held in being by him.

I am free in fact, not because God withdraws from me and leaves me my independence – as with a man who frees his slaves, or good parents who let their children come to independence – but just the other way round. I am free because God is in a sense *more directly* the cause of my actions than he is of the behaviour of unfree beings. In the case of an unfree creature its behaviour is perhaps its own (in the case of a living thing) – for this is what we mean by a living thing), but is also caused by whatever gave it its structure and whatever forces are operating on it. We can give an account of the behaviour of the dog (or we would like to be able to give an account of the behaviour of the dog) in terms of such causal factors. And maybe we would go back and explain these causal factors in other more general terms of physics and so on. It is only at the *end* of such a long chain that we come to the end of this kind of scientific explanation and ask the most radical question of all: yes, but how come any of this instead of nothing? God does bring about the action of the dog, but he does so by causing other things to cause it.

God brings about my free action, however, not by causing other things to cause it, he brings it about *directly*. The creative act of God is there immediately in my freedom. My freedom is, so to say, a window of God's creating; the creativity of God is not masked by intermediate causes. In human freedom we have the nearest thing to a direct look at the creative act of God (apart, says the Christian, from Christ himself, who *is* the act of God).

We are free not because God is absent or leaves us alone, we are free because God is more present – not of course in the sense that there is *more of God* there in the free being, but in the sense that there is nothing, so to say, to distract us. God is not acting here by causing other things to cause this act he is directly and simply himself causing it. So God is not an alternative to freedom, he is the direct cause of freedom. We are not free in spite of God, but because of God.

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We have seen how this conclusion – inescapable, as it seems to me, if we really try to think about what could (and especially what could not) be meant by creation – is obscured for us by the image of God as an individual person in charge of the universe.

It is especially natural that we should have this image since, whether we are Jews or Christians or neither, our culture has been permeated by the bible, and the image of God as an individual per-

son is of course everywhere in its pages. A necessary image, as we shall see, for biblical purposes, and of course I would not seek to destroy it; but images, even biblical images, are no substitute for hard thinking, as the disastrous muddles and intellectual evasions generated by what used to be called biblical theology have shown.

I now want to look at a central theme of the bible, the idea that God *speaks* to us. The idea is that it is not just that we are on a quest for God but that God takes an initiative and speaks to us, in many and various ways to our fathers of the Old Testament and finally in Jesus of Nazareth as, so to speak, the last word.

At this point there has to be a slight change of gear. Hitherto I think I have been saying things that humanists would perhaps disagree with, but the argument with them would be on common ground. From this point on the thing gets more complex because from now on we are in the realm of faith. We only know of God speaking to us because the church hears and responds to this word. If you think that you do *not* hear and respond, then you will evidently have no good reason for talking of God's word. You may be an interested observer of the Christian debate but you will be an outside observer.

Essentially what I shall be doing in the rest of this paper is drawing out the implications of the idea that God speaks to us, and showing how these implications are drawn out in scripture, for this I believe to be at or near the very centre of the Christian gospel. It is not so much a matter of *what* God may be supposed to say to us, but of the very *fact* that he established communication with us. I shall suggest that implicit within the Hebrew idea of a God who *speaks* to us is finally that idea of closeness to God, indeed of the divinization of man, to which the church came to give expression in the doctrine of the Trinity.

But let us start at the beginning.

Implicit in the idea of God speaking to us is the *image* of God as an individual person, the person who speaks to Moses on the mountain, and this is the image of Yahweh repeated countless times in the Old Testament. This is the idea of God as the person in charge of the whole universe who has chosen a people as his own, has made a special covenant with them, and destined them for a special end. They are to share his righteousness and holiness which is manifested in justice between men, in overthrowing the gods of exploitation, oppression and discrimination and replacing them by justice and mercy between all men. If you could simplify so enormously complex a tradition as is represented in the Old Testament you could see it as a story of the defeat of the gods, the gods of this or that nation or people or race, and their replacement by man himself as bearer of the righteousness of God. It is not of course humanist in the sense of supposing that man himself *left to himself* will achieve righteousness and justice: justice is seen as the

*gift* of God to his chosen ones and requires their faithfulness to his law. To be without God is to be without hope.

Now, within this process, which must have seemed to the god-worshippers around them an impious programme of secularization, there is for the Hebrews the central theme of God's word to man: he *summons* them to freedom from enslavement to the gods, he *promises* the kingdom and so on. This idea, which is most naturally expressed in the form of an image of God as a person talking to another person, which (so to speak) brings God down to the level of the human person, already contains the possibility of a complete reversal of that image, so that man is raised to the level of God.

Let us begin with some reflections on love.

Supposing we say that one of the things that characterizes *love* as distinct from other forms of human relationship is that in a profound sense it implies an *equality* between the lovers. I hope you will see instantly what I mean but maybe it will help to say what is not meant. Evidently it is not true that lovers have to be of exactly equal height or equal intelligence or equal sensitivity to music. The equality I speak of is not an equality on some common scale against which they are both measured; it is, so to speak, an equality where each is the scale for the other. A large part of love is a recognition of this equality, a recognition of the other's existence as valid as one's own, a recognition that the other does not exist simply in function of you, but is *there* equally. It is an equality of value in some ultimate and irreducible sense of value. One of the things that makes this hard to express is that it involves a certain kind of circularity: the equality demanded by love is an equality that is best defined by love. The idea of love and the idea of this sort of equality are simultaneous. The law can enshrine equality just when it expresses solidarity in love.

Perhaps it is easier to see if we reflect on how fostered *inequality* is the enemy of love. Evidently there is an inequality and a relationship of deep dependence between parents and young children, but what characterizes the relationship as one of *love* is precisely the growing mutual sense of equality. The possessive parent who can only see the child in function of himself, the child who can only see the parent in function of himself, are both failing in love. These are just illustrations which I hope will evoke in you an understanding of what I mean. I speak of an equality which is not based on an objective scale against which both are measured but which is based in communication between the two.

Now if we are to say that love depends on equality, even equality in this rather difficult sense of the word, it is evident that whatever relationship there may be between God and creature it cannot be one of love. The relationship here is just as unequal as it is possible for it to be. There may be many other relationships;

we can think of God as caring for his creatures and doing good for them, beginning with the primal good of bringing them into existence and sustaining them in existence. We can think of God as source of all the value that is in them. We can think of God as rewarding them or ignoring their offences. We can think of him on the model of a kindly caring master instead of a frightening despotic master, but what we cannot do is think of him as giving himself in love to a creature.

Of course we use the word "love" in a hundred ways, and there is no reason why we should not speak of such a kindly caring relationship as one of love – and in fact in the scriptures it is clear that when God is said to love Israel it is usually just such a caring relationship that is meant. It is not meant (except in some hints e.g. in Hosea) that God is in love with Israel. This would be wholly impossible given the basic inequality between them.

This is, I think, a basic objection to the idea of God: the one that has haunted modern atheism since Nietzsche. Not that God is a cruel and dangerous boss but that he is boss at all. A kindly and considerate slavemaster is still a slavemaster, and for Nietzsche the relationship of God and creature could not be other than one of master and slave. God is rejected not in the name of human happiness but in the name of human freedom. I think, in fact, that the model of master/slave is too dependent on an idolatrous idea of God as an individual person to be sustained; it is not possible to use the word "slavemaster" literally of the creator – only another inhabitant of the universe could be a slavemaster – and it is not a very helpful *image* (even though, once more, it is quite biblical: "As the eyes of a slave on the hands of his Lord, so are my eyes ..."). But the essential point that Nietzsche is making seems to me quite valid: it is not really the model of slave and master but the fact that there cannot be a relationship of *love* between creator and creature. Not that *adult* love between equals that we just occasionally achieve ourselves. The God who is in total control of his creatures cannot be said to have grown up; he is a vast omnipotent baby.

In the face of Nietzsche's criticism there has been a deplorable and idolatrous tendency on the part of some Christians to diminish God. In order that God may *stand in relationship* with his creatures, he is made one of them, a member of the universe, subject to change and even disappointment and suffering. Even the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation is interpreted in these terms. Nietzsche, however, is quite right: if we take God seriously and creation seriously then, in the end, the creature is something like a slave – at least in the sense that the master/slave relationship is exclusive of adult love.

As it seems to me, the most important thing that Jesus said (and he does not only say it in John's Gospel but shows it and im-



plies it in a thousand ways) is something about himself: that the Father *loves* him. To say this is already to announce an equality with God, that special kind of equality that is implied by and involved in love. It is to announce that God has grown up, that he is capable of love. In Jesus the Father has found his beloved son, found an equal to love: not just a creature to treat well (evidently Jesus is not treated very well) but an equal to whom the Father can give himself in love. Of course I am speaking metaphorically here: it is not that the Father “found” Jesus or that God grew up, I speak of a growth in *our* recognition of what divinity implies. From the image of the individual person, Yahweh, we move not just to the source of all being, creator of whatever exists, but to the source of the love that sustains Jesus, as the love of a parent sustains a child and enables it to grow in spontaneity and freedom. We see Jesus not just as created, a creature within the universe, but, to coin a phrase, as “loved into existence” by the Father prior to the universe, from eternity (of course I don’t mean prior in time). We must not mythologize this as though the Father encountered the Son and loved him; the Son’s being-loved and his existence must be one and the same, for otherwise we have imaged God as two individual persons instead of one, whereas God cannot be *either* one *or* two individuals.

Before we start thinking that we have somehow suddenly hit upon an intimate knowledge of the domestic life of God let us remind ourselves of what we know and what we are saying: that God is creator and that the creator is capable of love because God loves Jesus – that is all. This second point that we say is revealed to us in the story of Israel and the church, centring and pivoting on Jesus of Nazareth, is not given to us as a piece of *information about* God, it is communicated to us *in the act* of God’s taking us up into his love. In other words, *that* the Father loves Jesus is revealed to us precisely in our being brought to share in that love between them: and this is the Incarnation. Jesus in fact actually reveals the Father’s love for him not in talking about it but in embracing us within it – he does talk about it too, but you could listen to the talk without receiving the revelation for *that* lies in responding in faith to the offer of love. That is why the revelation in Jesus, and in the scriptures that speak of him, does not remove any of our ignorance about God. We do not get to know more about him. We encounter him, we are in communication with him, and this means that *if* we do increase our knowledge it is a knowledge of *ourselves* that is increased.

The more we get to know about the Jewish background of Jesus the less original he appears as a teacher. Evidently he was original in the power of his teaching, the vividness of the parables, the sense of authority that he conveyed, but the content of his moral teaching is to be found in one place or another amongst the

rabbinic teachers of the time. Everyone has known for years that the Our Father is a chain of Jewish invocations (a mosaic, you might say) and the teaching about the subordination of the sabbath to man is not at all new in rabbinic tradition.

All this is essentially teaching about mankind and the value of people. It lays the foundation for a view of human behaviour, of morality. Not, of course, that we can treat the gospels or any part of the bible as a handbook of morals; we can't read off a moral code from the pages of scripture; but the vision of the dignity of the human that is there presented forms what I have called a foundation for a morality, and of course, it rules out certain ways of seeking to justify various kinds of abominable behaviour.

But my point is that if this is further information it is further information about *ourselves*, it is not further information about God. We are as much in the dark as we ever were about the nature of God, the answer to our ultimate question: How come anything instead of nothing? What is the point of the whole thing? This remains a mystery. So far as God is concerned what we are offered in the church and its scriptures is not further *information* but a share in his *life*.

This explains why, for Christians, Jesus is *in principle* unique. So far as information goes, so long as you have it, it doesn't matter where you got it from. It is the information itself that counts. And this is true for example of the moral insights provided in the New Testament. They could have been provided from elsewhere and for the most part were already available in Jewish traditions and also very splendidly in the Greek traditions. That is why there is no such thing as Christian ethics. There is just ethics. Christians may have contributed quite a lot towards our understanding of ethics (as well as contributing a certain amount to our misunderstanding), but ethics, like all other human knowledge, belongs to all mankind. It cannot be the secret doctrine of a sect. This, incidentally, is what Catholics are talking about when they speak of natural law: they want to emphasize that ethics is a matter of our common humanity, and not of some esoteric teaching.

What was unique about Jesus, therefore, was not a teaching he gave, but the encounter with God that he represented. If we are to enter into the mystery of God it is not information that we need, and in principle we could not have information — our language and concepts break down in the presence of God. What we need is to be taken up by God himself, to share in his knowledge of himself, a sharing that to *us* must just look like darkness. So that our faith seems not like an increase of knowledge but, if anything, an increase of ignorance. We become more acutely aware of our inadequacy before the mystery as we are brought closer to it.

So it is God's initiative that is needed. Not that we should speak more about him, but that *he* should speak to us. All this has

been confused by moralistic breast-beatings about the way we are all miserable sinners and in need of the grace of God. No doubt we are all miserable sinners, or anyway sinners and sometimes miserable, but it is not for this reason that we have to wait on God's initiative. It is because no one, however sinless, could know God except God. No one knows the Father except the Son, no one knows the Son except the Father ... Unless we are taken up to a share in God's self-knowledge there is just no way that a creature can answer his own radical question.

It is not sin that gets in the way, it is the sheer fact that we are creatures. The gap between ourselves and God is not simply a moral one, that he is good and we aren't, it is the metaphysical one, he is creator and we are his creatures.

Of course being miserable sinners doesn't *help*. It means that not only do we not of ourselves share in knowledge of God (that would be true of creatures anyway) but that when it is offered to us we *reject* it. There is for us, as it happens, no such state as simply an absence of divinity: we are either divinised or we have rejected divinity.

For this is what is involved in the gift of Jesus. God loves Jesus and loves him from eternity as his co-equal Son, owing his existence indeed to God though not created, but, as I suggested, "loved into existence". It is into this eternal exchange of love between Jesus and the Father that we are taken up, this exchange of love that we call the Holy Spirit. And this means, of course, that we are taken up into *equality*, the equality demanded by and involved in love.

Nietzsche was absolutely right. God could not love creatures; he still can't love creatures as such, it would make no sense. But Nietzsche omitted to notice that we are no longer just creatures: by being taken up into Christ we are raised to share in divinity, we live by the Holy Spirit, we live by the life of love which is God.

As I said earlier, this notion of our divinisation is already implicit in the Hebrew conviction that God speaks with us, that we are in communication with God. This already says something more than that we are his creatures, for in the end communication itself demands equality, in the end communication itself demands love. It is in this sense that the revelation that was protected by the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity was already implicit in the Old Testament. (It is of the greatest importance to stress this, for somewhere along that line may lead to the healing of the first and most tragic schism within the people of God, the schism between the Christian churches and our separated brethren the Jews, who mistakenly see the Trinity as tritheism.)

I am maintaining, then, that the Christian gospel is that we are given equality with God. It is important not to lose sight of either of those words: we are *given equality*. What we are given is the *div-*

*ine* life itself, the Holy Spirit – if we lose sight of that we will be speaking merely of some created gift, like moral excellence or some other human thing, and this could not be the foundation and implication of love, it is only if we really have equality with God that there can be love between God and us. At the same time it is an equality that is *given*. To lose sight of that would be to make ourselves God, to divinise ourselves.

But how can something be the gift of God without being his creation and less than he? Having said all this exciting stuff about the way we are divine, aren't we covertly taking it all away by stressing that this divinity is *gift*? Doesn't it have to be a second class divinity after all?

There is indeed mystery here, but it is not, so to say, an unfamiliar mystery, it is just the mystery we encounter when we try to speak of the relationship of Jesus and the Father. If the Father loves Jesus then there must be equality between them, yet evidently there can be no such thing as two individual Gods – the idea of God as a countable individual or set of individuals is one of the things ruled out if he is to be the answer to our ultimate question. What we found ourselves having to say *there* is that Jesus is indeed *from* the Father, owes his being to the Father, but is nonetheless not a creature but wholly equal with the Father. The traditional word for this is “procession”: Jesus proceeds from the Father but not by being created.

Now let us turn to our own divine life. Here again we want to say both that what we have is a *divine* life and that this is *gift* from God. Our case is not just the same as that of Jesus and that is why we speak of his divinity as *proceeding* from the Father, but of ours as *gift* from the Father. The difference rests on the fact that we have our first existence as creatures, whereas Jesus has his first *existence* as proceeding from the Father. In our case there is, so to say, a *recipient* already constituted for the gift of divinity, the human creature. In the case of the eternal procession of Jesus there is nothing there first to be divinised. So we say that we are *divinised* but Jesus is divine.

What we mean by the Incarnation is that this divine Son took on humanity; what we mean by our grace is that we human beings are given divinity. And it is *in* living the divine-life-we-are-given that we have what we call *faith* in the fundamental truth that the Father loves Jesus, that whatever is the answer to our fundamental radical question is *loving*, that God is love.

For although this discussion has been rather compressed and perhaps too sketchy I hope it is clear that all that I have been saying about what might seem remote and complicated speculations about the Trinity is nothing but a taking seriously of the astonishing idea that God is love, the astonishing idea that God is not a kindly boss, a lord in charge of the world, or even simply creator

of the world, but is love, the idea that our clue to what God is, our approach to the mystery, is to start not from power but from love.

To trace the line of the argument again:

- 1 God the creator cannot love creatures as such. To think he could is not to take love seriously, it is like speaking of someone loving his cat – except even more so.
- 2 But God loves Jesus. Hence Jesus shares equality with God. There cannot be two individual Gods any more than one individual God.
- 3 Jesus came forth from the Father as it is said in the New Testament: “the Father is greater than I”. He is sent from the Father both in his mission in history and in the eternal procession that that mission reflects.
- 4 We can say this only because *we* have been taken up into the mystery itself, taken up into the Holy Spirit, the eternal love between the Father and Jesus.

Or have we? If we have not, we have no right to say any of this, no right to say that God is love. In this sense all talk of the Trinity, and thus of God as love, is an affirmation or an analysis of the fact that we have faith, that we know by our responding to him that God speaks to us, communicates himself to us.

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The story of Jesus is what the eternal trinitarian life of God looks like when it is projected upon the screen of history, and this means on the screen not only of human history but of *sinful* human history. The obedience of Jesus to the Father, his obedience to his mission, is just what the eternal procession of the Son from the Father appears as in history. His obedience consists in nothing else but *being in history*, in being human. Jesus did nothing but be the Son as man; that his life was so colourful, eventful and tragic is simply because of what being human involves in *our* world. We for the most part shy off being human because if we are really human we will be crucified. If we didn't know that before, we know it now; the crucifixion of Jesus was simply the dramatic manifestation of the sort of world we have made, the showing up of the world, the unmasking of what we call, traditionally, original sin. There is no need whatever for peculiar theories about the Father deliberately putting his Son to death. There is no need for *any* theory about the death of Jesus. It doesn't need any explanation once you know that he was human in *our* world. Jesus died in obedience to the Father's will simply in the sense that he was *human* in obedience to the Father's will.

The crucifixion in this sense because it is the supreme expression of Jesus's humanity (that is why we have crucifixes, to remind us of what human beings are, when we try to forget) is the supreme expression of his obedience to the Father, of his eternal Sonship. On the cross he casts himself simply on the Father. It is

his prayer to the Father, the only prayer known to Christians, and the resurrection is the Father's response. The crucifixion and the resurrection are no more to be separated than prayer and response, than the two sides of a communication. The resurrection is the full meaning of the crucifixion.

And this communication of eternal prayer and response is what the Holy Spirit is – which is why Jesus speaks of sending the Holy Spirit in history when he is united with his Father. Just as the crucifixion/resurrection is what the eternal procession of the Son from the Father looks like when projected upon sinful human history, so the sending of the Holy Spirit (so that we share in the life of God, so that the mystery of the church exists) is what the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit looks like when projected on to that sinful human world. And the Holy Spirit appears in our world of course as catastrophic and destructive, as a revolutionary force making the world new, or the church new, the individual new, by reducing them first to chaos.

That (I'm afraid) is a very compressed sketch of what the Christian means to be saying when he speaks of God as Trinity. And in the end what it all boils down to is this central mystery that God is love.

One final point. I said in the earlier part of this paper that in human freedom we have the nearest thing to a direct look at the creative act of God, for God does not bring about our free acts by causing other causes to cause them, they are direct creative acts of God himself. But if what the Christians are saying is true, we see more than this in free human action, we see the life of God himself: men and women are capable of the love which *is* God.

This means that in the end *any* form of alienation between God and man is overcome. The Christian holds that in so far as the world receives the Spirit, in so far as it lets itself be destroyed and re-born in grace, the distance between God and man disappears. And this means that in the kingdom to which he looks forward when the love of God for mankind is fully revealed, when all are taken up into the divine life, not only will there, of course be no religion, no sacraments, no cult, no sacred activity set aside from human life, but there will be no God in the sense of what is set above or apart from man. God will simply be the life of mankind.

Then, but only then, we shall be able to blow the dust off all those books written by the atheists and humanists and even some of the curious works written by the God-is-dead theologians, and find that at last they have come true in an odd way. They all thought that talk of God was just a convoluted and misleading way of talking about man; what we will come to see when we come to the kingdom of divine love is that talk about man is then the only clear and luminous way of talking about God.