

• The Healing of Modernity: A Trinitarian Remedy?

A Critical Dialogue With Colin Gunton's 'The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity.' 1993.

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- *Die Moderne: eine trinitarische Antwort?*
- *La Modernité: une réponse trinitaire?*

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die postmoderne Wende hat neue Möglichkeiten für eine theologische Kritik der Moderne eröffnet. In diesem Rahmen artikuliert Colin Guntons *The One, the Three and the Many* eine trinitarische Antwort auf die Herausforderung der Moderne bzw. Postmoderne. Gunton diagnostiziert die Problematik der Moderne als Loslösung von der Welt und vom Körper, die Schwierigkeit, den Einen und die Vielen in Beziehung zueinander zu setzen, das Problem der Homogenisierung und der Wechselbeziehungen sowie den Verlust von Sinn und Wahrheit. Er schlägt ein trinitarisch-theologisches Heilmittel vor und ist darum bemüht, das Konzept der Wahrheit wiederzubeleben durch die Suche nach allgemeinen Transzendentalien, d. h. Vorstellungen, die, da die Welt Gottes Schöpfung ist, von allen geteilt werden können.

Gunton schlägt im Rahmen unseres Überdenkens von Geschaffensein drei Transzendentalien vor. Eine Theologie der Wechselbeziehungen erfordert ein richtiges Verständnis des Verhältnisses von Schöpfung und Erlösung. Gunton weist außerdem auf die Perichorese als eine Transzendentalie hin, die uns hilft, die göttliche Ordnung richtig zu erfassen. Drittens verweist er auf die Relationalität, eine Transzendentalie, die aus dem Gedanken der Sozialität hervorgeht.

Guntons Analyse der Moderne bzw. Postmoderne stellt ein wichtiges Beispiel für die Art kultureller Analyse dar, an der sich Christen beteiligen müssen. Allerdings ist zu bemerken, daß es einer stärker nuancierten Analyse bedarf, um diesen in großen Zügen vorgetragenen Ansatz zu ergänzen. Guntons Verständnis der Postmoderne als Spätmoderne ist zu unterstützen. Außerdem sind bedeutende Gemeinsamkeiten zwischen Guntons Theologie und dem Neocalvinismus festzustellen. Die von Gunton im Rahmen einer christlichen Antwort auf die Moderne / Postmoderne vorgenommene Zentralisierung der Schöpfungslehre ist richtig, doch ist anzuregen, daß die Beziehung zwischen Theologie und Philosophie sowie das Ausmaß, inwieweit die trinitarischen Transzendentalien eine adäquate christliche Antwort auf die Postmoderne ermöglichen, einer erneuten Untersuchung bedürfen. Ein Dialog zwischen der neocalvinistischen Sicht und Guntons Ansatz ist als potentiell fruchtbar zu bewerten.

RÉSUMÉ

Le tournant post-moderne a ouvert des pistes nouvelles à la critique théologique de la modernité. Dans ce contexte, l'ouvrage de Colin Gunton, *L'Un, les Trois et Le Multiple*, développe une

réponse trinitaire à la modernité et à la postmodernité. Le diagnostic de Gunton quant à la modernité souligne le désengagement du monde et du corps, le problème de l'articulation entre l'Un et le multiple, le problème de l'homogénéisation, la question relationnelle, la perte du sens et de la vérité. Gunton propose un remède théologique trinitaire. Il cherche à restaurer la notion de vérité en ayant recours à des concepts transcendants ouverts, c'est-à-dire des concepts qui peuvent être affirmés de tous parce que le monde est la création de Dieu.

Gunton propose trois concepts transcendants à notre réflexion sur notre condition de créatures. Une théologie de la relation présuppose une appréhension correcte de la relation entre création et rédemption. Gunton propose la périchorèse comme un concept transcendant qui nous aide à penser correctement l'économie divine. La substantialité est le second concept transcendant que Gunton nous propose: cela permet de penser correctement la particularité. En troisième lieu, il nous

propose le relationnel : c'est le concept transcendant qui résulte de l'idée de sociabilité.

L'analyse que fait Gunton de la modernité et de la postmodernité est un exemple significatif de l'analyse culturelle à laquelle les chrétiens doivent se livrer. Il est à noter toutefois qu'une analyse plus nuancée est nécessaire pour compléter cette approche sommaire et générale. Gunton comprend la postmodernité comme une modernité tardive. Il y a des ressemblances frappantes entre la théologie de Gunton et le néo-calvinisme. Accorder comme il le fait une place centrale à la doctrine de la création pour répondre à la pensée moderne et postmoderne est juste, mais nous suggérons qu'il faudrait réexaminer la relation entre la théologie et la philosophie et voir dans quelle mesure les concepts transcendants trinitaires fondent une réponse chrétienne adéquate à la modernité. Un dialogue entre le néo-calvinisme et l'approche trinitaire de Gunton devrait produire des résultats fructueux.

Reading a book like Zahrnt's *The Question of God*¹ alerts one to the extent to which the story of twentieth century theology is the story of a struggle to come to grips with modernity. Since the late 1970s the postmodern turn has however opened up possibilities for fresh assessment of the relationship between theology and modernity. Indeed, on all accounts, modernity, is in deep trouble. What is not agreed upon is the diagnosis of the malady from which it is suffering. In *The One, the Three and the Many* Colin Gunton attempts a theological diagnosis of the condition of modernity and prescribes a theological remedy²:

My aim is to make a theological assessment of our era. I shall look at the world which we all share, believer and unbeliever alike, through a focus provided by the doctrine of the God made known in Christ and the Spirit, and in a process of identification and

elucidation shall hope to illumine where we stand now, so laying the basis for an approach to a Christian theology appropriate to the time. (11)³

Gunton is a prominent representative of a current renaissance in trinitarian theology⁴ and in *The One, the Three, and the Many* he seeks to show that a trinitarian theology gives us real insight as to how to heal modernity. *The One, the Three, and the Many* thus embodies a major theological response to the (post)modern challenge.

Our approach in this article will be as follows. Firstly we will describe Gunton's analysis of the problems of modernity. Then we will look at his trinitarian remedies for the problems. After that we will assess his analysis, using neo-Calvinist comparisons and insights to compare another Christian tradition wrestling with similar issues to those that Gunton

raises. George Hunsinger has made the point that within the Evangelical tradition the neo-Calvinist theology of Bavinck and Kuyper provides a fruitful point of dialogue with postliberalism⁵. We believe the same is true of dialogue with Gunton's *The One, the Three and the Many*—the neo-Calvinist tradition of Kuyper, Bavinck and Dooyeweerd provides a fascinating point of comparison with Gunton's approach.⁶

I. The Malady of Modernity

Gunton does not discuss the precise chronological boundaries of modernity. He rightly recognises that modernity is not monolithic:

There is therefore no single idea of modernity so much as a family of dogmas and practices, among which I would include post-modernity ... Within and between them all there is a common direction, mood perhaps, and it is that which I shall seek.⁽¹²⁾

The first four chapters of *The One, the Three, and the Many* seek to analyse the crisis in which modernity finds itself. Gunton points out that modernity made great promises but in so many ways these have not been fulfilled; chapter one begins⁷ and ends with the same quotation from Pippin: 'modernity promised us a culture of unintimidated, curious, rational, self-reliant individuals, and it produced a herd society, a race of anxious, timid, conformist "sheep", and a culture of utter banality'.⁸ Gunton articulates the following themes as central to understanding this 'dialectic' of modernity.

1. The Problem of Disengagement

Modernity has fostered an approach of *disengagement* from the world and body and what Gunton calls 'an instrumental stance' towards them. By instrumental Gunton means an approach to the other which uses them or it as a means for realising our will and not as something that we are integrally part of. This sets reason against the world and encourages

the imposition of will upon the alien world rather than integration with the good order of creation. This modern disengagement has alienated humankind from the world so that renewed consideration of humankind as an integral part of the world is urgently required.

Throughout this text Gunton is alert to the fact that much in modernity is not new; here for example he parallels this spirit of disengagement with the ancient Greek Sophists, against whom Plato wrote his *Republic*. Plato and Coleridge alert us to the importance of a philosophy of engagement. If there is a new element in modernity's disengagement it is that it is disengagement in relation to the God of Christianity. The problem of disengagement is that it fragments life; 'person and world were torn apart'. (15).

2. The Problem of Relating the One and the Many, Unity and Particularity

Modernity shares with ancient Greek philosophy the struggle to relate *the one and the many*, unity and particularity. Heraclitus came down on the side of particularity (the many) whereas Parmenides championed unity (the one). For Gunton the struggle to relate these two aspects of the universe is central to the problem of modernity. As recent decades indicate the way in which this question relates to different visions for society (collectivism or individualism) is of great practical consequence; should the emphasis be put on unity or plurality, the one or the many?

This question is important because as the ancients recognised there is a link between knowledge of the universe and how we understand human society. However 'it is generally held in the modern world that there is no link between cosmic and social order. Indeed, one could define modernity as the era in which the human race has achieved, or attempted to achieve, an autonomy from the environment which consists in freedom from any form of natural determination.' (19,20) However, as Gunton argues, this disengagement from nature has been catastrophic in modernity. We urgently

need some unified understanding of the universe but the crucial question is can there be a unity that respects plurality?

The fact is that in the Western tradition the sense of unity in our cosmos has often been provided by a concept of God as mainly single and unchanging. In this way 'God' has been a unifying principle which has undergirded totalitarianism. It is against this single God of deism that Feuerbach and Nietzsche level their devastating critiques of religion. There are of course various ways in which God may be conceived to unify the universe which is why Coleridge sought a view of God which made space for the other.

To wrestle with the nature of 'the one' is thus to raise the question of God. In much modern thought the idea of God as *the one* has come to be regarded as synonymous with oppression of the many (Kant, Feuerbach, Nietzsche). Consequently modernity's sought after liberation of the many has been accompanied by *the displacement of God*. This element of modernity as reaction to Christianity is central to Gunton's theological analysis of modernity. His introduction opens with a quote from William Morris: 'Modernism began and continues, wherever civilisation began and continues to deny Christ.' (1)

This displacement of God is accompanied by a relocation of the attributes of God in aspects of the creation. The focus of meaning and rationality and unity now becomes the human mind. Paradoxically the modern choice for the many against *the one* has not led to liberty and respect for particularity; Gunton speaks of 'the monism of the finite individual' (32). The individualism of modernity has brought in its wake its own forms of slavery and oppression, incisively recognised by Havel, who argues that the West mirrors, albeit in a different way, the homogenising tendencies of the East. As Gunton says 'When God is expelled from the public square ... the outcome is not freedom, but a form of displacement that can only be called demonic.' (38)

3. *The Problem of Homogenisation: the Loss of the Particular*

Chapter 2 develops Gunton's analysis by focusing on *the homogenising tendency of modernity* or what Gunton describes as the loss of the particular. Modernity sides with plurality against unity but paradoxically ends up denying particularity. This is surprising since modernity lays great stress on the individual and the rights of the individual. However as Gunton points out, individualism and particularity are not the same thing since individualism easily becomes anti-relational and thus oppresses the other. Gunton comments that 'The paradox of individualism is that it often reveals a genuine and powerful concern for the particular which in practice achieves the opposite, and the anti-particularist logic of individualism has been pointed out recently by a number of writers.' (44,45) Havel points out that the consumer culture of the West leads to homogeneity, to a levelling which inhibits the particular. Existentialism, for example, stressed the individual but when the relational character of the individual is ignored this individualism easily collapses into its dialectical opposite. Polanyi and Jaki argue that while science depends upon particularity it often succumbs to a homogenising tendency. As Gunton says 'homogeneity is the spectre at the whole banquet of modernity, not merely in some of its courses.' (44)

The roots of this inability to cope with the particular go a long way back. Gunton sinks a few historical shafts and concludes that in modernity we still suffer from the residue of a Platonised anthropology (view of the human person) and a Platonised ontology (view of the world and especially in our understanding of creation). Plato's body-soul dichotomy with its privileging of the soul as the essence of the person was engrafted into Western theology through Augustine and others. In this way the *imago Dei* is Platonised; it comes to be located ontically in reason/mind and the dynamic of the whole person living in relation to God and others is undermined. The person as a

particular whole is undermined and thus so is relationality:

for on the Platonic view our particular reality is not shaped by all aspects of our relatedness to each other, merely by the inward or narrowly rational dimensions of our being. ... the person is pared down to abstract qualities supposedly held in common. Our personal distinctiveness ... become(s) irrelevant to who and what we truly are. (p49)

Anthropology is closely related to ontology, the view of the whole of reality/creation. Here Gunton speaks of the West's double mind and sees Christian theology as unfortunately following Augustine (Platonic) rather than Irenaeus in its understanding of the creation—redemption relationship. If one is to do justice to the particular then the view one holds of the relationship between creation and redemption is according to Gunton critical: "*The root of the modern disarray is accordingly to be located in the divorce of the willing of creation from the historical economy of salvation.*" (p55) For Irenaeus creation is held together by the Son and the Spirit whereas after Augustine that function comes increasingly to be performed by timeless, conceptual universals. This tendency to replace christology with universals generates a very different understanding of the relationship between universals and particulars. Rather than the particularising will of God the universals move to centre stage and the latter always threaten particulars by drawing attention to that which is universal.

At the end of the Middle Ages Ockham reacted to this universalising tendency by abolishing the universals thus leaving us with the particulars while denying that there are real relations between the particulars: "Ockham is thus a doctrine of the Platonic abstract particular deprived of the support of the forms What is generated is an intellectual vacuum". Gunton (57, 58) notes three features in Ockham's theology that proved explosive in combination: 1. He reasserted the priority of particulars. 2. He denied the

Platonic and Aristotelian way of relating them. 3. An arbitrary conception of the will in humankind and in God. Ockham's theology results in the world appearing as the arbitrary product of divine will and sets the stage, according to Gunton for a conflict of wills: 'the image of God as reason, or reason allied to will, becomes the locus of a rebellion against the very God in whose image it understood itself.' (58, 59)⁹ Human self-assertion fills the place of this unknown God and responsibility for ordering the world is transferred to the human from the divine. Buckley sees this move as exemplified in Malebranche (58). "To be human is not now to be chiefly a mind but an essentially rational and at least potentially divine will: or rather, as it so often turns out in practice, a multiplicity of wills competing with one another for dominance." (59)

The extent to which this anthropology is still with us is evident in the debate over artificial mind. You need a Platonic view of the person as essentially rational to argue that computers could become fully human/essentially human. Of course this ignores the relational nature of human being. A Platonic ontology lingers in much theology, especially of the more conservative sort which struggles to come to grips with the particularity of the three dimensional world in which we live. Of course modernity has reacted to this other-worldliness of mediaeval Christianity with a strong materialism. However as the ecological crisis evidences, modernity has struggled to develop a healthily engaged relationship with its environment.

Gunton looks at freedom and the aesthetic as practical examples of modernity's inability to really do justice to the particular. Using Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* as his starting point Gunton argues that individualism and moral absolutism can never deliver real freedom. The modern individualistic concept of freedom is irremediably unrelational. Essentially the Kantian moral programme involves setting up in God's place a plurality of finite wills each aspiring to divinity.

Gunton finds in contemporary aesthetics the characteristically modern inability to relate the subjective and the objective, 'the... difficulty of making sense of the relation between subjective making and shaping by the artist, and reception by the public, on the one hand, and the objective reality of the piece of material reality that is produced or experienced on the other.' (66) The result is that we tend to be forced to choose between object and subject, as is obvious in contemporary literary theory (Cf. for example current reader-response theory).

4. *The Problem of Relatedness*

In its homogenising tendency modernity reveals a pattern of displacement. God is displaced into humankind and the other person becomes the one whom one must escape from or rule over. This homogenising tendency of modernity manifests an inability to understand how particular things are related to each other. It is this theme of *the problem of relatedness in modern life and thought* that forms the focus of chapter 3.

Time and space are basic co-ordinates of human existence and the way we understand these is indicative of how we understand relationships between entities. Modernity affirmed time and place over eternity; it repudiated tradition and championed human agency over providence. The dominance of science with its focus on configurations within the structures we experience is another characteristic of modernity's this worldliness. Paradoxically the result is that we seem to be less at home in time and space. There is more leisure time in the West and yet we struggle so much with the stress and pressure of time. Banks in his *The Tyranny of Time* suggests that a culture dedicated to leisure has produced the reverse. According to one survey 4/5 people in societies like our own feel continuously rushed for time. Harvey speaks of time-space compression in modernity. The pace of life has speeded up and spatial barriers have been so overcome that the world seems in danger of collapsing in on us.

Modernity's stress on time and space is a reaction to the Greek equation of temporal with fallenness, a stress which much of the Christian theological tradition fell foul of. Thus Gunton refers to 'Christianity's false eternity'. For Origen, for example, the temporal order is a rather unfortunate teacher leading to salvation rather than something which is inherently good and redeemable. Augustine struggles to distinguish the temporal from the fallen and this manifests itself in his doctrine of the incarnation which tends to be a timeless presence in the temporal rather than a genuinely 'economic action'. As Gunton says, 'It is the positive concern for living in time that Christianity submerged in a false eternalizing of the divine economy, and which modernity has attempted to appropriate apart from Christianity. ... late mediaeval theology bears many of the marks of gnosticism, and that modernity therefore can be held to represent a form of liberation from gnosticism.' (84)

Modernity's reaction is however similarly problematic; Gunton speaks of 'Modernity's false temporality'. In Newton (influenced by Plato) real time has to be undergirded by an appeal to an underlying substrate of absolute time; in this way time becomes the image of eternity. For Kant we project time as a mental construct onto the world; it is not part of the being of things. In Hegel time becomes 'the realm of divine self-realisation by means of cultural achievement.' (87) In all these different ways modernity's understandable attempt to save time only succeeds in abolishing it! This is costly as demonstrated by Marxism and historical relativism. In the former the temporal process is closed so that what happens is bound to happen. We know too well the consequences of this view in this century.

The root of modernity's problem with time is thus theological. Modernity displaces eschatology to a position within the world. Creation and redemption become human achievements. We have developed a stress on the future as the place where it all happens. Projects and lives are not allowed to mature in their

own time, but must be catapulted into the future with ever increasing desperation because, as is well known, the future never comes. ... innovation replaces originality.' (90) Much modern theology has colluded with this shift by abandoning the orientation to a divinely promised future. Of course we need a strong reaffirmation of the present but the limits of human agency must also be made clear; finally the kingdom is ushered in by God alone.

It is important to remember that Gunton is aware of the advantages of modernity; in his opinion we should welcome the increased consciousness of the openness of time and the awareness of greater possibilities. These developments are however part of a broader shift that is deeply flawed. The closing down of freedom is seen in modernity's rejection of tradition. Tradition however is essentially a very positive thing: 'The use of tradition concerns the way in which later generations of thinkers and agents shall receive that which their predecessors hand on to them in process of time.' (95) Polanyi and others have demonstrated just what a flawed account of acquisition of knowledge this view of tradition is; it certainly does not liberate us to be fully personal. In modernity's negative attitude to the world Gunton detects a renewed form of Gnosticism in which human rationality and freedom are set against the material world.

5. *The Problem of Meaning and Truth*

The result of the dialectic of modernity is that *meaning and truth have become deeply problematic* in modern life and thought. This is Gunton's focus in chapter 4. This loss of meaning is epitomised for Gunton by the postmodern denial of the possibility of objective meaning and truth. Subjectivism, relativism and emotivism abound in late modernity. Wayne Booth relates the increase of aggressive confrontation in modern political dispute to the death of rhetoric. As Gunton says 'Given loss of confidence in argument, the noisy and potentially violent demonstration is all that remains.' (103)¹⁰

Postmodern relativism has interna-

tional implications; in this respect Finkelkraut speaks of the rehabilitation of the foreigner and the condoning of racism, militarism and totalitarianism in the name of cultural equality. He identifies the source of this malaise as the nihilistic relativism of postmodernism (106). Gunton discerns the development of a 'pluralism of indifference' in modernity which does not tolerate any position which makes claims of truth: 'Radical relativism implies an imperious claim for its own truth which is viciously intolerant because it is undiscussable in terms of the ideology in which it is propounded.' (106) Paradoxically modernity, which aimed to defend the objectivity of truth has led to widespread doubt as to whether truth exists at all!

But relativism is no new doctrine. The two poles of Protagoras' thought were theological agnosticism on the one hand and epistemological and moral relativism on the other. Thus Don Cupitt's recent articulations sound very much like republications of the doctrines of Heraclitus in Protagorean form. As Gunton says of the parallels between postmodern relativism and ancient Greek thought: 'It is yet more evidence of the way in which certain fundamental—perhaps I could say transcendental—possibilities for thought were laid out by the Greek mind once and for all.' (107) Modern relativism differs from antiquity in its relation to Christian theology and to science. Modernity is a conscious return to Hellenism in reaction to Christendom in which certainty is sought in those disciplines likely to achieve mathematical-like certainty. For us that has become above all else science. The Greeks tended to see in human rationality something divine and in modernity as Craig has argued a doctrine of the image of God tends to operate unconsciously with the image being located in reason (rationalism), emotion (romanticism) or human activity (Hegel). Science has come increasingly to be pulled into the uncertain boat of the humanities, as is particularly clear in Rorty's pragmatism. However as Gunton, following Craig, notes, 'Pragmatism too, the giving

of priority to practice over truth and theory, derives from the same tendency to the divinization of the human that underlies the modern reassertion of Hellenism against the Judaeo-Christian tradition.' (111)

Gunton identifies Kant as a key figure for understanding the fragmentation of culture in the postmodern situation. Kant relegated the concept of God to a realm of which we could have no knowledge and mediated Newtonian metaphysics and Humean scepticism by locating the transcendental bases of all thought in the structures of the mind. The human mind fills the space of the displaced deity but, it does so in different ways for different spheres of culture. In science the mind provides the framework of concepts by which the reality presented to the senses is ordered. In ethical thought the practical reason acts like God in prescribing and describing the laws of behaviour. Artistic judgements are subjective and based on feeling which is entirely personal.

That means that the realms of science, ethics and art are understood in radically different ways and that the very possibility of a universe of meaning, a world and experience making overall unified sense, is lost to view. Crucial here is the fact that science, ethics and art are rendered intrinsically problematic because their basis is to be found in different realms of being. There is modern fragmentation in a nutshell. (116, 117)

Gunton also relates the postmodern subversion of community and rationality to Kant's rootless concept of the will—it refers only to itself —, which in turn is a response to the inadequate theology of the Christian West. In Irenaeus' understanding of creation God's will is free but not arbitrary; God's will is achieved through a community of love. In Augustine and his successors love is made subordinate to God's will which becomes arbitrary. This results in a concept of truth which denies plurality and against which modernity reacted.

Gunton concludes Part 1 by noting that modernity is a reaction to the era of

Christendom. It rejects Christianity's understanding of the transcendent basis of reality and uses much Greek thought to define itself in opposition to central Christian doctrines so that it is less original than people often suppose. God is displaced and the human mind moves into central position. Pentecost is inverted in what amounts to a new Babel!

II. A Trinitarian Remedy

In Part 2—'Rethinking createdness'—Gunton seeks a theological remedy for the crisis of modernity. Modernity's loss of the concept of truth has been mainly disastrous and for Gunton 'the responsibility of the theologian—whose concern is with the universal dimensions of meaning suggested by the concept of God—is to seek for ways to rehabilitate or reinvigorate the concept of truth.' (129) For Gunton the root of the problem is theological so that the solution is to be found in a renewed theological vision which understands modernity but moves beyond it.

1. *Trinitarian transcendentals*

Gunton sums up our present situation as follows:

the search for absolute rational truth led, through Kant's critique and the work of his great successors, to a suspicion of the very idea of objective truth and in turn to an insidious because absolute and unrecognised form of the very thing that was rejected. (131)

Postmodernity has its own homogenising metanarrative which rules out the possibility of a universal and objective truth which is nevertheless the work of fallible humans. How do we escape the dilemma of being forced to opt either for the one or the many?

One response has been the quest for non-foundationalist rationalities. In theology models along this line have been those of Barth, Wittgenstein and Cupitt. Gunton is cautious of this approach; they too easily evade the challenge of being universal and objective. He suggests that the way ahead lies in a quest for 'non-

foundationalist foundations'! (134) Foundationalism sought after a false certainty. We need rather to seek the sort of certainty Polanyi refers to, a certainty which allows one to believe what one holds to be true while knowing that it conceivably could be false. Gunton argues that 'Polanyi is seeking a conception of created rationality rather than the divine reason aspired to in the tradition. It is a rationality appropriate to created knowers in a world with which they are continuous.' (135)

Gunton pursues this type of rationality under the aegis of a quest for *transcendentals*. Transcendentals are notions which give some way of understanding what reality truly is. These must be open and should not be thought of as forms through which being displays itself—lest being be thought of as prior to God—but as 'notions which can be predicated of all being by virtue of the fact that God is creator and the world is creation.' (137) Gunton briefly reviews the history of this discussion of transcendentals ranging from the Presocratics to Aquinas and Kant—what is required is an alternative approach which eschews the weaknesses of this tradition. Thus it is important for Gunton that these transcendentals should be open: 'An open transcendental is a notion, in some way basic to the human thinking process, which empowers a continuing and in principle unfinished exploration of the universal marks of being.' (142) The quest is for universal concepts but not so much for conceptually tight ideas as for suggestion-rich ideas. In this respect Gunton appropriates Coleridge's notion of ideas as dynamic notions related to the ultimate aim of something. This type of idea often only emerges in apparent paradox. Such ideas also embody the interaction of the universal and particular, they are mediatory. Gunton strongly affirms Coleridge's sense that the Trinity is the idea of ideas, but stresses the difference between an idea and a transcendental. Unlike an idea a transcendental is a mark of all being. Ideas generate transcendentals. Gunton argues that content-wise the transcendentals we are

looking for will need to transcend the absolute opposition of objectivism and subjectivism, absolutism and relativism.

Gunton's aim in the rest of the book is to 'use the trinitarianly developed transcendentals to throw light on the contested questions which the earlier chapters showed to have been so unsatisfactorily treated in both the ancient and modern world.' (150) Gunton holds the doctrine of the Trinity closely together with the doctrine of creation: 'a renewed doctrine of creation is possible on the basis of a doctrine of God which in some way writes plurality into the being of things.' (151)

2. A Theology of Relatedness

Chapter 6, 'Towards a theology of relatedness' applies this trinitarian approach to the problem of the present (space and time) which Gunton analysed in chapter 3. How do we develop an adequate understanding of space and time? What theological proposals will enable an appropriate integration of time and eternity, the finite and the infinite? 'The quest is for an open metaphysic, or rather for a theology of creation which enables us to locate ourselves in reality without taking away that freedom and openness to the new without which we are not truly human.' (157)

Fundamental to the attaining of such a metaphysic is a correct understanding of the relationship between creation and salvation/redemption or what Gunton calls divine *economy*. Once again Gunton finds Irenaeus a useful model; against Gnostics who divorced creation from redemption he argued that 'the different aspects of God's agency formed a unity through time and space ... Time and space are given their distinctive dynamic of interrelatedness by God's creating, upholding, redeeming and perfecting activity.' (159) Under the influence of modernity much modern theology stresses salvation at the expense of creation. Thus christology tends to be abstracted from its broader context. Gunton rightly stresses that different views at these points have enormous practical consequences: 'different conceptions of the

divine economy bring in their train different ways of understanding God's relatedness to time and space. Those different emphases in their turn bring varying accounts of what it is to live in the world.' (160) A correct understanding of the difference between God and creation plus his sustaining of and commitment to the created order are vital.

Gunton proposes *perichoresis* as a transcendental which can help us to think correctly about the divine economy. Economy is the idea, *perichoresis* the resulting transcendental. *Perichoresis* opens up various possibilities for thought because is full of spatial and temporal conceptuality and it implies that in eternity Father, Son and Spirit share a dynamic reciprocity. How does *perichoresis* help us to understand the world: 'It is that we consider the world as an order of things, dynamically related to each other in time and space.' (166) Evil is a distortion of the dynamic but does not abolish it. *Perichoresis* can help us to understand personhood better:

persons mutually constitute each other, make each other what they are. That is why Christian theology affirms that in marriage the man and the woman become one flesh—bound up in each other's being—and why the relations of parents and children are of such crucial importance for the shape that human community takes. Our particularity in community is the fruit of our mutual constitutiveness: of a perichoretic being bound up with each other in the bundle of life. (169, 170)

Perichoresis gives us a better understanding of tradition: 'If there is a *perichoresis* of times, it should be necessary to treat none of the dimensions, past, present or future, as absolutely fallen or absolutely redemptive, but as all alike in potentially positive interrelation with us as we are.' (171) Gunton also argues that much modern physics and cosmology also teaches the perichoretic character of the universe. Reaction to the abuse of the environment in modernity is in danger of failing to recognise the difference between person and world; a perichoretic

response would enable one to understand the connectedness without levelling the differences.

3. *A Theology of the Particular*

Perichoresis is a transcendental which enables us to explore the relatedness of reality. Is there a transcendental which enables us to articulate the particularity within reality? This is what Gunton explores in chapter 7: 'Towards a theology of the particular.' The modern age needs, according to Gunton, a theology which gives a central place to the particular. In this sense Lessing's scandal of Christian particularity is an advantage: 'We could, I believe, make far more of the narrative particularities than we do, and glory rather more in the scandal of the one crucified for the sins of the world.' (181) Gunton finds the beginnings of a theology of the particular in a theology of the Spirit. The Spirit is associated with crossing boundaries—it brings God into relationship with the world and the world into relationship with God—and with maintaining and strengthening particularity. By virtue of these features Gunton argues that spirit could function as an idea in Coleridge's sense of the word.

Spirit is for the most part limited to the personal world, to God and human beings. 'It has to do with that unique feature of persons, their ability to transcend themselves, to think and act beyond the present and the place in which they are set.' (184) Hegel gave spirit a transcendental status and understood it in a very dynamic way. The problem of Hegel's idealism (modalist view of the Trinity) is avoided by recognising that spirit is illuminating as a qualification of the person and not of creation as a whole.

Theologically, it is a way of speaking of the personal agency of God towards and in the world; anthropologically a way of speaking of human responsiveness to God and to others; cosmologically a way of speaking of human openness to the world and the world's openness to human knowledge, action and art. (187)

Spirit is however not properly a tran-

scendental since it is not a universal mark of being. It does not 'assist us to understand the structure of an atom or the evolution of the material universe, to eat or to grow a cabbage or appreciate a work of art.' (188)

The Spirit's particular office is to realise the true being of each created thing by bringing it into saving relationship with the Father. Gunton relates this to particularity at the heart of the being of God i.e. in the eternal Trinity the Spirit's function is to particularise the *hypostases*, and he thinks that a renewed notion of the *substantiality* of God might help us towards a theology which highlights particularity. Particularity at the heart of the creator establishes the particularity of created beings. From this perspective the substantiality of God resides in the divine persons and the relations by which they mutually constitute each other. Thus it could be argued that the decision in the Western tradition to translate *ousia* by *substantia* undermined the full weight of the concept of person because it effectively introduced a stress on the underlying reality of God rather than on God as a communion of persons.

By substantiality Gunton thus means that God is what he is only in relationship. Western theology has often lost this emphasis so that abstractness rather than concreteness has become its characteristic.

The time has therefore come to raise again the question of substance ... and to claim that people and things, in dependence upon a God understood substantially and not abstractly, are also to be understood as substantial beings, having their own distinct and particular existence, *by virtue of and not in face of their relationality* to the other ... Everything, however, hangs upon the notion of substance that we develop. (194)

Gunton goes on to argue, having reviewed something of the history of the notion of substance, that '*hypostasis*, meaning substantial particular, variously taking shape as person and thing and constituted relationally, acquires the

status of a kind of transcendental.' (209) The development of such an understanding of substance would enable us to resist the homogenising tendency of modernity. The theological shaping of this is critical.

Substantiality is the gift of the creator, given in Christ in whom all things cohere. But, considered in the light of the Spirit's distinctive form of action as the perfecting cause of creation, that substantiality is not fully given from the beginning but has to achieve its end. It is something that by divine and human agency is to be perfected through time and in space, and so is given from the concrete future that constitutes the promise of particular perfection. That is the way in which the creation forms the framework, inscape, for science, art and morality. ... the created world in its teleology forms, or rather should form, the framework for the growing towards perfection of its human inhabitants. (208, 209)

4. *A Theology of the One and the Many*
Perichoresis and substantiality, the two transcendentals we looked at, suggest the trinitarian concept of *sociality*, whose central concept is shared being; 'persons do not simply enter into relations with one another, but are constituted by one another in the relations.' (214) The being of God is a being in communion and analogously this helps us to understand human society.

Biblically creation is of communal beings in three senses. Firstly the world is called into otherness to and relation with its creator. Secondly the human creation is being in relationship. Thirdly the world is what it is by virtue of its relation to the image bearers. The church in this context is called to be 'the medium and realization of communion.' (217) Unfortunately the church in our era has more often been an institution than a community.

Gunton argues that this theology of ecclesial communion has ontological implications. Too much modern theory, represented by thinkers like Hobbes, Locke and Kant, neglects the social dimension of reality. Hegel recovers this

but, according to Gunton, his concept of social being too easily collapses into a suppression of the particular. Once again Gunton finds a better approach in Coleridge, for whom social being of the kind embodied in a true ecclesia is the deepest expression of human reality. Gunton notes in this respect that 'It is significant here that the Bible has given us a word for social relations which allows neither a purely individualist nor a merely legal construal. It is that of covenant. Covenant expresses above all the calling of the human race into free and joyful partnership with God, and so with each other.' (222)

Contra Hardy Gunton argues that sociality is an idea rather than a transcendental. This idea of sociality yields an ethic of transformation but decidedly not one which buys into the modern myth of fulfilment and in which individual self-centredness is central. This ethic operates rather through the logic of gift and reception and is thus focused on the well-being of the other. It takes the whole of life seriously. Gunton quotes Perkins' delightful point that, 'if we compare worke to worke, there is a difference between washing of dishes and preaching of the word of God: but as touching to please God none at all.' (227) 'It is for such reasons that the practice of both art and the proper dominion of the natural order are trinitarian imperatives, for both are ways of fulfilling the command of the creator to those created male and female in his image.' (228)

Sociality is an idea and relationality the transcendental that emerges from it. Both God and the world have their being in relation: 'to be created is to have a direction' and this can become disoriented but cannot be undone. Redemption involves recovering the direction of the particular to its own end and not re-creation. Gunton concludes his masterly diagnosis of modernity thus:

Redemption thus means the redirection of the particular to its own end and not a re-creation. The distinctive feature of created persons is their mediating function in the achievement of perfection by the rest of

creation. They are called to the forms of action, in science, ethics and art—in a word, to culture—which enable to take place the sacrifice of praise, which is the free offering of all things, perfected, to their creator. Theologically put: the created world becomes truly itself—moves towards its completion—when through Christ and the Spirit, it is presented perfect before the throne of the Father. The sacrifice of praise which is the due human response to both creation and redemption takes the form of that culture which enables both personal and non-personal worlds to realize their true being. (230,231)

III. Assessment and Discussion

It will be obvious from the above that evaluation and discussion of Gunton's trinitarian response to modernity/postmodernity will not be quickly closed. There is much detail that needs careful evaluation, not all of which can be done here.

1. *The Importance of a Christian Evaluation of Modernity / Postmodernity*

The One, the Three, and the Many is a most important book. It embodies the faith-seeking-understanding conviction that the gospel is the key to the whole of life. As Buckley has shown a fatal temptation for Christians in modernity has been to try to argue for Christian truth on the basis of starting points other than that of the gospel¹¹. At best this leads to a shaky synthesis of Christian and non-Christian perspectives, at worst to capitulation of Christian to non-Christian viewpoints. Gunton rightly argues that we ought to respond to modernity and postmodernity by rehabilitating the notion of the gospel as true, and to use its light to help us understand modernity. In common with postliberalism this rightly and radically reverses the tendency in modernity, even among Christians, to start with modernity and let it show us what is true in the gospel!

The gospel is worldviewish at its core in the sense that it relates to the whole of

life and gives us a perspective upon the whole. Religious neutrality, as Clouser¹² has so clearly argued, is a myth, and one's religious beliefs will fundamentally shape one's understanding of modernity. Christians must therefore, if they wish to develop a Christian understanding of modernity, follow the sort of path that Gunton pursues; starting with faith and seeing how this illuminates modernity. The alternative is to allow one's understanding of modernity to be shaped by other religious beliefs¹³.

Modernity is the context within which we have grown up and do our scholarship. Gunton helpfully keeps us alert to all that is positive in modernity and this is important. There has been some very significant progress in modernity and this should be guarded and developed. However Gunton relentlessly and correctly brings us back to the paradoxes of modernity; there are these advances but ... This kind of broad cultural analysis from a Christian perspective is crucial if we are to discern the battle lines in our culture and avoid simply bowing to the idols of our day in our *Christian* service. In this respect *The One, the Three and the Many* is a beginning rather than an end and in this sense is to be joyously welcomed. Modernity has been/is an extraordinarily powerful movement which has swept all before it. Many Christians have been like Benjamin's angel, swept forward while facing the rear and never really waking up to the situation. As a result so much Christian action and thinking has been powerfully formed by modernity, very often without Christians being aware of its influence. We have too often fought against modernity beneath the Cartesian umbrella!

If we are to escape such a nightmarish vision then we need to know what is going on in modernity. We need large scale cultural analysis from a Christian perspective. And that means wrestling with concepts of time, space and society as Gunton does. In this respect I find *The One, the Three and the Many* reminiscent of Dooyeweerd's *Roots of Western Culture: Pagan, Christian and Secular Options*.¹⁴

Indeed the similarities between Gunton and the sort of neo-Calvinism¹⁵ that Dooyeweerd represents are notable. Both recognise the importance of a Christian starting point in the search for truth. Both diagnose an urgent need for the recovery of a biblical doctrine of creation and for seeing redemption as the fulfilment of creation (see below). Gunton's stress on the whole of life as service of God is also central to neo-Calvinism. Gunton's recognition that modernism begins where civilisation rejects Christ and the idolatrous immanentism that results from the displacement of God ties in closely with Dooyeweerd's analysis of the absolutisation of an immanent aspect of the creation once God is displaced. Both want to affirm order in creation but not in a static way. Both are alert to the negative effect on Western culture of certain theologies. Both are intensely aware of the need to rethink 'time' from a Christian perspective. And so we could continue. There are also important differences between Gunton and neo-Calvinism, and we will note some of these below.

Unfortunately there is no sign of these links in *The One, the Three and the Many* or in its bibliography. The similarities are close enough to suggest that a dialogue between Gunton and neo-Calvinism would be most fruitful. In what follows we will explore the similarities and differences between Gunton and neo-Calvinism as part of our critique of Gunton. The differences should not however detract from the importance of this type of analysis of modernity from a Christian perspective. Take biblical studies for example. As Gunton shows in his *Enlightenment and Alienation*¹⁶ biblical criticism is very much a child of the Enlightenment and if we are not careful we will be imposing a Kantian type epistemology and Enlightenment prejudices upon the Bible. Evangelical biblical scholars have by no means been exempt from this temptation, often assuming a modern epistemology and nevertheless seeking to arrive at conservative conclusions. As Gunton makes clear, much good has come out of biblical criticism but too often it has

been shaped by alien and distorting ideologies. If we are to avoid the problems while capitalising on the gains then we have to do the hard work of sifting through the evidence, determining where the influence of modernity has been distorting and where its genuine insights lie. But of course, we can only do this if we develop a keen sense of the battle lines of modernity/postmodernity.

2. *The Need for More Nuanced Analysis*

Gunton rightly sees what is being called post-modernity as late modernity¹⁷. He quotes Sardar who comments, 'Whereas modernism tried to come to terms with the "other" by excluding it, postmodernism simply seeks to render it irrelevant. The underlying fear of it continues unabated.' (69) Gunton is right I think in asserting the continuity of modernity and postmodernity and in arguing that the postmodern loss of truth and meaning follows logically from modernity. Like Plantinga¹⁸ Gunton finds the roots of the creative anti-realism of postmodernity in Protagoras, with Kant being the major modern figure to make human, rather than God's, knowledge creative. As Plantinga¹⁹ says:

For suppose we begin by thinking that it is we human beings who are responsible for the way the world is; it is we ourselves that form or structure the world in which we live. The it is an easy step to the thought that we do not all live in the same world. The Lebenswelt of Richard Rorty or Jacques Derrida is quite different from that of Herman Dooyeweerd or C.S. Lewis; and each of those is wholly different from that of Bertrand Russell or Carl Sagan.

Consequently Gunton's analysis of modernity is simultaneously one of post-modernism. Generally I am comfortable with this but the broad brush terminology—modernity/postmodernity, and the one and the many—does alert one to the dangers of large scale analysis. In terms of the breadth of argument in *The One, the Three and the Many*, ranging so quickly from Heraclitus to Havel, the book is rather small. In areas Gunton's case

requires more substantiation, and certainly it needs to be complemented by more surgical analysis of the different threads of modernity²⁰, and how these different elements relate to postmodernity. Finkelkraut, to whom Gunton refers, argues, for example, that postmodernism represents the triumph of Herder's romanticism²¹. Whether that is right or not, it does alert us to the need to explore in detail the dynamics of the different elements of modernity and how they play out in so-called postmodernity. Consider also Gunton's intriguing argument that too strong a stress on the One in Western theology is related to the oppression of the many. This may well be the case but in the Old Testament a strong stress on monotheism is the basis of a polity expressing concern for the orphan and the widow²². Gunton refers in this respect to Feuerbach and Nietzsche's critiques of religion as a source of oppression. Gunton argues that a trinitarian theology will avoid such an unhealthy stress on the One. Ingraffia by comparison analyses Nietzsche's, Heidegger's and Derrida's critique of theology and argues that they critique ontotheology but not biblical theology, which avoids the problems of ontotheology²³. These are complex issues but they alert us to the need for more thorough examination of some of Gunton's points.

Once again the neo-Calvinist tradition is instructive. Both Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven sought to do this kind of more detailed analysis, Dooyeweerd in terms of the ground motive of nature and freedom, and Vollenhoven in terms of periods, perchronic traditions and interweaving storylines²⁴. According to Dooyeweerd idolatry replaces God with a creature. This absolutisation of part of created reality necessarily calls forth the correlates of what has been absolutised, thereby setting up a polarity or tension between two extremes within a single ground motive. 'On the one hand, the ground motive breaks apart; its two antithetical motives, each claiming absoluteness, cancel each other. But on the other hand, each motive also determines the other's religious meaning, since each is

necessarily related to the other.²⁵ Dooyeweerd outlines four religious ground motives that have controlled the development of western culture: the *form-matter* ground motive of Greek antiquity, the Christian ground motive of creation, fall and redemption through Christ in communion with the Spirit, the Roman Catholic ground motive of *nature-grace* which seeks to combine the above two, and the modern humanistic ground motive of *nature-freedom* which seeks to synthesize the previous three.

Vollenhoven, like Gunton, stressed the way in which the basic solutions of the pre-Socratics recur in the history of philosophy. Seerveld describes Vollenhoven's problem-historical method as follows²⁶:

... that is Vollenhoven's method for writing the history of philosophy: tracing the sins of the Pre-Socratics out to the hundredth generation. ... From the records available Vollenhoven finds certain kinds of interpretations, types of conceptions, recurring again and again, generation after generation, new ones springing up and old ones petering out but many holding strong, naturally combined with the peculiar personality of a new thinker and with the changed spirit of a later era, but structurally at bottom the same old attempted interpretation of reality. So arises a kind of topography of the development of Western thought ... the structural inheritance of a thinker and the contemporary milieu of a thinker give you the two axes needed to plot his or her position.

The Reformation, according to Vollenhoven, marks a radical break which made possible the grounding of theoretical thought biblically. By means of such immanent and transcendent critique Vollenhoven sought to map out the history of western philosophy in immense detail. It is this sort of surgical analysis that is required of the postmodern turn. Of course it would be wrong to expect Gunton to even attempt such detailed work in one book. Indeed, *The One, the Three and the Many* can be seen as a call to such work, and in this respect the neo-Calvinist tradition has much to offer.

3. Creation and Redemption

In one sense Gunton's response to modernity/postmodernity can be summed up by saying that we need a biblical doctrine of creation. The entire second half of *The One, the Three, and the Many* is entitled 'Rethinking Createdness.' Gunton rightly recognises that how we construe the creation-redemption relationship is pregnant with practical implications. Gunton invokes Irenaeus in support of holding redemption closely together with creation and seeing the former as making possible the perfecting of creation.²⁷ Clearly the way Christians understand this relationship will shape deeply their attitude towards culture and determine how they think about space, time etc. The different Christian understandings of the Christ-culture relationship²⁸ are at root different perspectives on how grace relates to nature, or we might say how redemption relates to creation. Incipient Gnosticism has often plagued the Christian tradition and Gunton rightly argues that in this respect aspects of modernity can be understood as reactions to an inadequate doctrine/s of creation. It could be argued that to go wrong here is to set the response of modernity in motion. Much contemporary Christianity has still not resolved this issue. Think for example of the common Evangelical emphasis on the salvation of the soul and its often abstracted christology. The atoning death of Christ is seen as irrelevant to the creation!²⁹ At the other extreme immanent modern theologies have merely succumbed to modernity's secularism in the reverse way. The right response is to reform our doctrine of creation along biblical lines.

Once again the similarities to neo-Calvinism are astonishing. Similarly to Gunton, Seerveld argues that we need urgently to attend to the doctrine of creation if we want to promote the healing of modernity. He writes:

Perhaps the most redemptive message we people of God can bring to our world in crisis is an articulate confession of CREATION. Given the mindless, technocratic bent of our hypertropic civilization, I

believe it is especially the Good News of CREATION which may get through to the leadership of our secular culture ... I should like to recommend that we give concerted priority in our generation to a biblically CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF CREATIONAL ORDINANCES.³⁰

And neo-Calvinism has long insisted that if Christians are to understand and be constructively involved in our culture then a proper understanding of the creation-redemption relationship is crucial. Neo-Calvinists argue that creation, fall and redemption are total in the sense that they affect all of creation. Wolters (1996:10) articulates the distinctiveness of the neo-Calvinist worldview as follows.

One way of seeing this difference is to use the basic definition of the Christian faith given by Herman Bavinck: 'God the Father has reconciled His created but fallen world through the death of His Son, and renews it into a Kingdom of God by His Spirit.' The reformational worldview takes all the key terms in this ecumenical, trinitarian confession in a universal, all-encompassing sense. The terms 'reconciled,' 'created,' 'fallen,' 'world,' 'renews,' and 'Kingdom of God' are held to be cosmic in scope. In principle, nothing apart from God himself falls outside the range of these foundational realities of biblical religion. All other Christian worldviews, by contrast, restrict the scope of each of these terms in one way or another.

In another context Wolters writes that '[b]iblical faith in fact involves a worldview, at least implicitly and in principle. The central notion of creation (a *given* order of reality), fall (human mutiny at the root of all perversion of the given order) and redemption (unearned restoration of the order in Christ) are cosmic and transformational in their implications.'³¹ Following in the Reformed tradition of Bavinck and Kuyper neo-Calvinists stress that grace is the medicine that heals nature.

In the process of rethinking createdness Gunton and neo-Calvinism go different routes despite the similarities

—Gunton argues that perichoresis can help us to rethink createdness whereas neo-Calvinism argues for the law-idea as the route to go. These, as we will argue below, are not insignificant differences, but nevertheless, the basic concerns remain the same viz. to find a way of affirming the creation as truly good and for thinking rightly within such a perspective about the space-time context in which humans live.

It should also be noted here that Calvin too contains the resources for which Gunton appeals to Irenaeus. In *The Theater of His Glory* Susan Schreiner shows convincingly that Calvin holds redemption and creation closely together and teaches that through redemption God is reclaiming the whole of creation³². Calvin does not possess as strong a sense as Irenaeus of the dynamic development in creation, but the integrality of the two is clearly there, and Calvin is alert to the human responsibilities for creation.

4. Immanentism

Gunton is perceptive in his analysis of how the displacement of God leads to the role of deity being usurped by something immanent to creation. A favourite contender for this position has been human rationality and Gunton rightly relates the relativism of postmodernity to the logical consequence of such displacement. Yet again the similarities with neo-Calvinism is notable. The philosophical implications of immanentism are central to Dooyeweerd's analysis of modern philosophy. He goes to great lengths to critique the pretended autonomy of human thought and to analyse the tensions set up in thought when aspects of the creation order are absolutised once God is displaced.

5. Theology and Philosophy

Once one gets into more detailed evaluation of Gunton it becomes obvious that he is dealing with a lot of philosophy. A most important point which emerges from his analysis is the often very negative effect of secular philosophy upon theology. Think of the devastating implication

of Platonic anthropology and Greek views of time and matter upon theology. This raises the question of the relationship between theology and philosophy, but that is something which Gunton does not address in *The One, the Three and the Many*. Gunton appears to assume that theology is the universal Christian science and that its role is to construct new transcendentals etc. But where does philosophy come in and how does it relate to theology? And can theology function without philosophy? Indeed if theology willy-nilly carries within its theory construction ontological and epistemological scaffolding, what sort of scaffolding should it utilise? While we are seeing a revival of systematic theology, of which Gunton is an important source, any idea of systematic philosophy from a Christian perspective still tends to be regarded with suspicion. And yet what we have in Gunton's work are proposals for developing a Christian ontology, i.e. a framework for understanding the world in which we live.

Once again the comparison with neo-Calvinism is fruitful. In the early years of this century Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven concluded that the inner reformation of the sciences along Christian lines required the development of a Christian, systematic philosophy. Both used the law-idea as the connecting point between Scripture and philosophy, and attempted to develop ontological and epistemological insights that could facilitate and help Christians in developing redemptive theoretical insights. We cannot here expand on the shape of those insights but the point is that the emerging trinitarian paradigm and neo-Calvinists recognise the need for theoretical frameworks that can facilitate understanding of our world.

Within the Reformed tradition Cornelius Van Til made much of the trinitarian analogy philosophically, as does Gunton.³³ However, Van Til's use of this analogy has been criticised as due to the unhealthy influence of the British idealism of Bradley and in danger of becoming an abstract theologism.³⁴ Suffice here to note that in our quest for an adequate

response to modernity/ postmodernity we need to explore the relationship between theology and philosophy and scrutinise the philosophical scaffolding we utilise.

6. Trinitarianism

Gunton's approach to modernity/ postmodernity presents itself as trinitarian and is part of the renaissance of trinitarian theology. The doctrine of the trinity is portrayed as containing the resources to heal modernity³⁵. Here the contrast with the neo-Calvinism of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven is noticeable. It does not deny the truth and importance of the Trinity but it has generally not looked to the doctrine as a resource in the same way as proponents of the emerging trinitarian theology³⁶. Indeed neo-Calvinism has generally been suspicious of attempts to argue from the nature of God to truth about the creation, stressing that the laws for creation hold for the creation and that while God's character is consistent with those laws they do not hold for him as they do for creation.

Exploration of the tradition of transcendentals and comparison with the law-idea of neo-Calvinism would require another article³⁷. Suffice it to point out that Gunton and neo-Calvinism are after similar things. What Gunton means by non-foundational foundations is very similar to what neo-Calvinists mean by creation order. The right (Christian) starting point is required to discern these co-ordinates but they truly hold for the whole of creation and are in this sense objective and relevant to all humans.

For nearly a century now neo-Calvinists have worked at relating the philosophy of Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven to all areas of life. This in the area of arts and aesthetics a considerable body of work is emerging. Encouragingly similar signs are present in the emerging trinitarian paradigm, with articles being written on the trinity and art, etc. Although one can argue that the trinitarian paradigm is the renaissance of an ancient perspective this application to different disciplines and areas of thought is comparatively recent. Once again a dialogue between the two

traditions would be beneficial as both make real attempts to understand God's world from an integrally Christian perspective.

My hunch is that the sort of transcendentals that Gunton proposes will not go that far in providing Christian scholars with the ontological and epistemological framework that theoretical work and Christian practice requires, and in this sense I think the neo-Calvinist tradition has more sophisticated tools to offer. Suffice it to take two examples here. In Gunton and Van Til's thought the doctrine of the Trinity is presented as solving the perennial philosophical problem of the one and the many. Two aspects of this appear problematic to me. Firstly such an approach involves abstracting the idea of particularity and universality from the idea of the trinity, and secondly it is hard to see how the trinity in particular solves this problem. Would it make any difference if there were two persons in the Godhead or four; all it would seem is required is that there are more than one.

Our second example is perichoresis. It is a dynamic, interactive metaphor which usefully alerts us to the communal nature of humans and the divine. However is it true that '[t]hat is why Christian theology affirms that in marriage the man and the woman become one flesh ... and why the relations of parents and children are of such crucial importance for the shape that human community takes'? Perichoresis *alone* does not alert us to the centrality of marriage and family life in a perichoretic world. Indeed, especially in the light of the homosexual debate the link between perichoresis as a transcendental and the institution of heterosexual marriage becomes a matter for debate. Relationality and community are central to life but that they find their appropriate expression in heterosexual marriage and family life is derived from what we know of God's ordering of creation and not directly from perichoresis. As Spykman³⁸ says, 'The continuing normativity of the creation order is reinforced by the comprehensive biblical witness on the question of marriage and divorce. ...

Originally and abidingly marriage is meant to be an exclusive bi-unitary covenant between husband and wife. This is the Will of God. Marriage is for good and keeps. This is the norm, rooted in the creation order.' Furthermore does not the love command at the centre of Scripture's ethics already alerts us to the centrality of relationship in life, so that there are easier ways to get at the communal nature of humans than the rather abstract notion of perichoresis.

This example would seem to suggest that the insights of trinitarian analogies need not conflict with a neo-Calvinist emphasis on creation order. However, if trinitarian analogies are not to become speculative abstractions then they need to be complemented by a biblical doctrine of creation order. Intriguingly, Irenaeus contains a strong sense of creation order. He writes, '[God] ... has created the whole world ... and to the whole world [God] has given laws, that each [creature] keep to [its] place and overstep not the bound laid down by God, each accomplishing the work marked out for [it].'³⁹

Conclusion

Gunton's *The One, the Three and the Many* is an exciting and important example of the sort of work Christians must engage in if we are to contribute to the healing of modernity/postmodernity. Although he paints with a broad brush I find his diagnosis of the malady of modernity convincing. More controversial is his proposal that a trinitarian approach of the sort he proposes has sufficient resources to point a way beyond the impasse of modernity/postmodernity. In this article we have noted the close similarities between Gunton's trinitarianism and neo-Calvinism. However neo-Calvinism takes creation order as the link idea between Scripture and philosophy, whereas Gunton identifies the trinity as the idea of ideas. Certainly

from a Trinitarian perspective, the world will be seen as created by, and related and unconditionally obligated to, God the

Father who is the one from whom its purposive ethical order derives. The world will, further, be seen as caught up and transfigured by the redemptive activity of the Son in which creation's original purpose is renewed and consummated. Finally, as the sphere of the operation of the Spirit, creation ... will be seen as realities in process of transformation through reorientation towards the purposes of God which they are newly empowered to serve.⁴⁰

However this is not the same as developing trinitarian transcendentals. As we have suggested the danger of such transcendentals is that they become abstract and speculative. For this to be avoided they will need to be anchored in a biblical understanding of creation order, such as that developed by neo-Calvinism. There is much to be gained, I suggest, by a dialogue between Gunton's trinitarianism and neo-Calvinism, both of which are rightly trying to respond to the challenge of modernity/ postmodernity along integrally Christian lines.

- 1 London: Collins, 1966.
- 2 References to *The One, the Three and the Many* are indicated by page numbers after quotes.
- 3 The book is chiastically divided between the diagnosis of the condition and a corresponding suggested remedy.
- 4 See Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T& T Clark, 1991), Christoph Schwöbel ed., *Trinitarian Theology Today* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995). For a useful overview of this renaissance see Thomas Thompson, 'Trinitarianism Today: Doctrinal Renaissance, Ethical Relevance, Social Redolence', *CTJ* 32,1 (1997), 9-42.
- 5 George Hunsinger, 'What Can Evangelicals & Postliberals Learn From Each Other?' in Timothy R Phillips and Dennis L Okholm, eds. *The Nature of Confession. Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* (Illinois: IVP, 1996), 134-150. For a general overview of postliberalism see William C. Placher, 'Postliberal Theology', in David Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians*, 2 vols, (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1989), 2:115-128.
- 6 This is not to suggest that Gunton is a postliberal theologian. There are differ-

ences and points of agreement between Gunton and the postliberals. It should be noted that in our comparison of Gunton with neo-Calvinism we will focus on the development of the neo-Calvinist tradition by Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven, Seerveld, Wolters etc, rather than on the earlier work of Bavinck and Kuyper.

- 7 More or less, see p.13.
- 8 Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 22.
- 9 Ockam is a significant figure on the threshold of modernity. Gunton relies much on Blumenberg's analysis at this point.
- 10 Cf. also MacIntyre's characterisation of the breakdown of communication in disputes about moral questions.
- 11 Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, (New Haven and London: Yale, 1987).
- 12 Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991).
- 13 Neo-Calvinists emphasise this in their view of the antithesis. See, for example, Herman Dooyeweerd, *Roots of Western Culture*, (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), 7-15.
- 14 Toronto: Wedge, 1979.
- 15 See Albert Wolters, 'Dutch Neo-Calvinism: Worldview, Philosophy and Rationality', in Hart, H. et al. eds. *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1983), 113-131, for a description of key characteristics of neo-Calvinism.
- 16 Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1985, 111-152.
- 17 See Craig Bartholomew, 'Post/Late? Modernity as the Context for Christian Scholarship Today', *Themelios* 22,2 (1997), 32.
- 18 Alvin Plantinga, 'Christian Philosophy at the End of the Twentieth Century,' In: S. Griffoen & B.M. Balk, eds., *Christian Philosophy at the Close of the Twentieth Century. Assessment and Perspective*, (Kampen: Kok, 1995) 31-34.
- 19 Ibid., 33.
- 20 It should be noted that Gunton's *Enlightenment and Alienation* contains more of this sort of analysis.
- 21 Alain Finkielkraut, *The Undoing of Thought*, (London: Claridge Press, 1988).
- 22 I am indebted to Stephen Williams for this point.
- 23 Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory*

- and *Biblical Theology*, (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).
- 24 For a description of Vollenhoven's approach see K.A. Bril, *Westerse Denksystemen* (Amsterdam: VU, 1986) and Albert Wolters, 'On Vollenhoven's Problem-Historical Method', In: J. Kraay & A. Tol, eds., *Hearing and Doing*, (Toronto: Wedge, 1979), 231-262.
 - 25 Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 13.
 - 26 'A Note on Philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam', *Reformed Journal* 8,2 (1958), 16-17.
 - 27 Gunton has explored the relationship between Christ and creation in his *Christ and Creation*, (Carlisle, Grand Rapids: Paternoster, Eerdmans, 1991).
 - 28 See R.H. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (London: Harper Colophon, 1975).
 - 29 See Gunton *Christ and Creation* for a nuanced discussion of the relationship between Christ's atoning work and the creation.
 - 30 Calvin Seerveld, 'Response to the Address of Dr Houston', Unpublished response at colloquium at York University, 1975.
 - 31 'Gustavo Guittérez', in J. Klapwijk, et al., eds., *Bringing Into Captivity Every Thought*, (Lanham, NY; London: University Press of America, 1991), 237.
 - 32 Susan Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, (Michigan: University Microfilms, 1983), 139-179.
 - 33 See, for example, Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967). Gunton does not refer to Van Til.
 - 34 I am indebted to Richard Russell for this information.
 - 35 Some are arguing that the doctrine of the Trinity is today's article of the standing or falling church. See G. Wainwright, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity. Where the Church Stands or Falls', *Interpretation* XLV,2 (1991), 117-132.
 - 36 John Bolt of Calvin Theological Seminary recently argued for a more strongly trinitarian approach. See his *Christian and Reformed Today*, (Ontario: Paideia, 1984). See also George van der Velde's response: 'A Trinitarian Framework and Reformed Distinctiveness: A Critical Assessment of Christian and Reformed Today', CTJ 22, 104-114. Vollenhoven makes more of the doctrine of the Trinity than does Dooyeweerd, but he too is cautious on the use made of it philosophically. See Dirk Vollenhoven, 'The Unity of Life', (Commemoration lecture for the Utrecht chapter of the SSR held on October 13, 1955. English translation forthcoming in a Vollenhoven Reader, edited by John Kok.)
 - 37 See Norman Kretzmann, 'Trinity and Transcendentals', in R.J. Feenstra & C. Plantinga, eds. *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement. Philosophical and Theological Essays*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 79-109, for a sense of the philosophical background to the debate about transcendentals.
 - 38 Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 183.
 - 39 I am indebted to Ray Van Leeuwen for this point. The quote comes from Irenaeus' *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, paragraph 10.
 - 40 J.B. Webster, 'God', In: D.J. Atkinson & D.H. Field, eds., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, (Leicester, Illinois: IVP), 5.

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