



DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

Theology as Conversation

*The Significance of Dialogue in Historical
and Contemporary Theology*

A Festschrift for

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE

Edited by

Bruce L. McCormack & Kimlyn J. Bender

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Which Forms and Themes Should Christian Theology Uphold in Dialogue with Secular Culture?

Michael Welker

Translated by Stephen Lakkis

My experiences with Daniel Migliore are not only of those unforgettable theology courses which we presented together in Princeton, or of him as a charming dialogue partner in many of our personal discussions. His writings — which aim at the content of theological teaching and concentrate on its most important aspects — have also left a strong impression on me, especially his major work *Faith Seeking Understanding*.¹ *The Expository Times* is certainly justified when it writes: “This is theology with a sure and sharp pastoral touch . . . an ideal primer of doctrine for students.” Without Dan’s example, I would never have offered an introductory course into theology in Germany and would never have taken this approach to thinking about the essentials of Christian theology in discussion with today’s secular culture in the West — as I wish to do here.

The need today consciously to acknowledge the existence of a cultural ecology (in addition to a natural ecology) is one many observers of Western societies had already recognized some time ago. If this culture is to be both stable and creative, then a religiosity cultured in its forms and contents is vital. Yet many people (with the media industry leading the way) still see the content of religion as something which can be culturally manipulated in order to produce either entertainment or dismay at will, a mass for manipulation which can be used and abused to our hearts’ content. They do not see that religious contents deteriorate when subjected to reductionistic or dis-

1. Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991).

torting public presentation, and that they can lose their orienting power despite their strong opposition to such abuse. Indeed, a presentation which constantly empties them of meaning, trivializes, and distorts them can even transform them into destructive entities. Paul grasped this fact with his (at first) puzzling warning that “the good and holy law of God” can be transformed into a power which no longer allows us to recognize or curb sin, but instead aggressively strengthens it. Distorted religion can surface as a driving force behind the processes of stultification and increasing fanaticism. This does not only arise with extreme occurrences. When religion is regularly presented as banal, embarrassing, and ridiculous, or as inhuman and crassly irrational, then it becomes a culturally destructive entity.

Yet these processes of banalization and the systematic evacuation of meaning not only threaten religion from without, but also from within. Indeed, the self-secularization and self-banalization of religion is the greatest challenge facing all who work in theological and religious education. To combat this process, one must patiently and steadfastly uncover and convey the deep, enduring (but still thoroughly fragile) rationalities and consistencies of the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of humanity which are contained in the religious traditions. It is our task to help ensure that the orienting power of that knowledge of humanity in the religious traditions can also bear fruit today. In the following paper, I wish to name some central themes in the Judeo-Christian traditions which require such cultural-ecological care. But first, I will precede this with a few remarks touching upon some very elementary *forms of thought*, the ways in which they are made plausible, practiced, and cared for publicly. While these forms of thought play an important role today under the headings of “modernity and post-modernity,” they are rarely explained clearly.

I. Monism, Dualism, Pluralism

Not only in a general education, but also in a religious education, it is important to be able to deal with the differences between (a) monistic, (b) dual or dualistic, and (c) pluralistic forms of thought and orientation.

The monistic world-view still remains the paradigm of typical modern thought. It speaks of *one* reason, *one* rationality, it assumes *one universal* morality, and the final unproblematic unity of all reality. The modern, monistic world-view likes to see religion as yokelish, obsolete, as belonging to a past world. According to this position, religion does not belong to *the* rational

world-view — the only one which is right and true. Over against such a world-view, religious education must reawaken a sense for the importance of *differing* rationalities and symbol-systems in our cultures, social spheres and sciences.

One religious educator has reported good experiences using comparative art appreciation exercises with 10- to 12-year-olds. For example, he showed them an image of one of Salvador Dali’s famous melting clocks and a picture of a round, functioning wall-clock and then asked them to formulate and comment upon their impressions. But we have a wide range of other possibilities for reflecting upon different rationalities and symbol-systems. For example, one could use analogies between the different life journeys taken by those in biblical and current contexts: for example, reflections about modern careers in consultancy and management paralleled with Joseph’s career in Egypt. Such carefully chosen double-perspectives can help to break up and correct a naïve, but also historically developed, monism.

However, the danger of correcting a monistic view “of reality” is that it may produce a dualizing or even dualistic world-view, together with all its corresponding clichés: faith versus reason, the invisible versus the visible, the objective versus the subjective. Time and again, religious thought has happily sought to reinforce itself with such dualistic clichés, or has allowed others to push it in this direction. Of course, we cannot avoid living and working with dual orientations. However, ensuring that these dual orientations do not “freeze” into fixed dualisms is a great challenge which also needs to be faced, especially by religious education. A populist so-called “popular opinion,” different forms of fundamentalism, religious and ideological narrow-mindedness, and fanaticism all happily avail themselves of dualisms and often use mutual negations to stabilize themselves: “I am not what you are, and you are not what I am!”

Over against this orientation, religious education should help people to see the provisional aspects of all dual schemas, the partiality of interests, the advantages and disadvantages, the orientational achievements and dangerous reductions. “God and Man,” I and Thou, faith and reason, church and society, church and state — we are familiar with a multitude of (mostly harmless) orientational dualities which we encounter in religious and theological texts and which we must be able to engage reflectively. We should see them as perspectival limitations and not as finalized, ultimate representations of “reality.” Yet there are also potentially dangerous dualisms (friend/enemy, believer/unbeliever, heaven/hell, etc.) which we encounter, and

which might be sensible and understandable in times of persecution and struggle, but which also bring with them obstacles to our understanding, moral callousness, and aggressive attitudes. It is one of the great cultural challenges of our time not only to acquaint but intimately to familiarize ourselves with pluralistic configurations over against monistic, dual and dualistic orientations.

Pluralistic configurations are not to be equated with a diffuse “plurality”: an indeterminate and endless multitude of views and perspectives. One of today’s greatest cultural scourges is the equation, indeed, confusion of pluralism with a diffuse plurality of views, attitudes, opinions, lifestyles, etc. This type of indifferent arbitrariness, this type of relativism, is beyond opportunities for clear academic observation and our ethical capacities for control. Though it continues to occur, vague conceptions of “plurality” and “relationality” must not be confused with social, scientific, cultural, and economic pluralism. Pluralism refers to a particular *formal constellation* of differing spheres: a structured “community of communities.”²

The Judeo-Christian traditions offer a multitude of pluralistic structures, beginning with the pluralism of the canonical writings. As the Heidelberg Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, has shown,³ canonical traditions developed under the influence of traumatic experiences of discontinuity. In Israel, this was the experience of exile, of deportation; in the New Testament it was the event of the cross and resurrection. These radical experiences of discontinuity led to the need for interpretation, a need which could not be satisfied by just a single interpretation. What is required here is a limited number of perspectives, a “pluralistic library” (as Heinz Schürmann once stated) which repeatedly concentrates these memories and in doing so constantly resolves these concentrations in a multi-perspectival way. In this alternating process of problematization and re-concentration, the pluralistically structured canonical texts purposefully promote the quest for truth and the pursuit of new insights which orient us toward that truth.

2. Cf. M. Welker, “Was ist Pluralismus?” in *Wertpluralismus. Sammelband der Vorträge des Studium Generale der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg im Wintersemester 1998/99* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1999), 9-23; idem, *Kirche im Pluralismus*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2000); idem, “. . . And Also Upon the Menservants and the Maidservants in Those Days Will I Pour Out My Spirit? On Pluralism and the Promise of the Spirit,” in *Soundings* 78 (1995): 49-67.

3. Jan Assmann, *Fünf Schritte auf dem Weg zum Kanon* (Münster: Lit, 2000).

II. The Significance of the Canonical, Biblical Traditions and the Importance of a Culturally Formative Communal Memory

One of the great blessings which can guide “truth-seeking communities” is a form of memory, conditioned by the biblical canon, which I have termed “canonical memory.” It is important that this great achievement is made comprehensible, which in turn allows for the development of a sense for correctly understood, cultivated pluralism. Just as modern pluralistic societies seek to cultivate a balance between differing social “sub-systems” — such as law, politics, economics, education, the media, and religion — without placing them into a simplistic hierarchical order, so too in theology and in the church we hold fast to the pluralistic balance of the canonical traditions, even though we may privilege certain biblical texts and authors at particular times and in certain contexts.⁴

The great *historical weight* of the Bible and its impressive growth over more than a millennia also need explicit communication in our religious and secular environments. Again, it must be expressed more clearly in religious education that the Bible takes up and reflects upon a millennia of religious experience, worldly wisdom, vastly differing experiences of crisis and liberation, of threshold experiences, and above all of experiences of the breakdown of law, morality, and political conditions. Due to this basis, the Bible bears incredibly immense *cultural weight*: for better or worse, it has played a long and powerful role in the formation of both cultural and world history. It is a shame that for many, this is something which only first becomes apparent when visiting a museum. The cultural significance of the biblical traditions can also be differentiated into *existential, moral, and symbolic significance*.⁵

Yet above these aspects, the Bible also bears a great *canonical weight*, since in a wide range of ways the biblical traditions mutually refer to one another, stand in discussion with one another, and learn from each other. It is doubtful that they could ever be brought into a system or reduced to a single idea — nor should they. Yet they are in fact joined to one another in many ways, which is why we can speak of the “growth of the canon.” However, this great historical, cultural, and canonical weight is grounded in a *theological*

4. Cf. M. Welker, “Kommunikatives, kollektives, kulturelles und kanonisches Gedächtnis,” *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie*, vol. 22: *Die Macht der Erinnerung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2008), 321-331.

5. Cf. M. Welker, “Sola Scriptura? The Authority of Scripture in Pluralistic Environments,” in *A God So Near: A Festschrift in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. B. Strawn et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 375-391.

weight, in the contents of those biblical traditions, in their manifold witnesses to God and to God's work among humanity. It is God himself, God's revelation in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ, God in his creative, salvific, and uplifting actions, which gives the Bible its incredible force of presence.

If we wish to make the significance of the canonical biblical traditions and the importance of caring for and maintaining canonical memory clear to others today, then we should help them to become sensitized to the importance of communal memory and mutually shared expectations. Jan Assmann distinguishes between several forms of communal memory, especially between *communicative* and *cultural memory*. Communicative memory comes to us of its own accord whenever we move and live in human societies. Not only is our memory continually fed and shaped by the flux of our own experience, but it also occurs deliberately at home and school, through relatives and friends, yet also through the media and many forms of memorial culture. Thus while we differentiate our memories as individuals, we are also constantly bringing them into tune with those of others. This liquid, communicative memory is always being reconstructed. Great catastrophes and outstanding events can change it from one day to the next. Yet within communicative memory we also maintain what Assmann calls "cultural memory," a memory which upholds particular contents and particular forms, maintains their stability, and keeps special watch over them purposefully in order to steer communal orientation to the present and future. Cultural memory is a great good, a great achievement; it can adopt static and dynamic forms; it can be ideologized, and it can keep a living culture alive.

A third form of memory should also be pointed out in addition to communicative and cultural memory: that is, what I have called "*canonical memory*." This form of memory is directed by a *structured* pluralism of canonical texts (in other words, precisely the opposite of a diffuse and arbitrarily expandable "plurality" of texts!). It is exactly this structured, pluralistic composition of the (Jewish, Christian, and possibly also Confucian) canon together with that canonical memory which is oriented toward it which lend themselves both to concentration *and* creative self-critique. They simultaneously serve to maintain both communal orientation *as well as* difference of perspective. Canonical memory rejects the alternatives of stability or dynamism, preservation or renewal. It erects normative structures and transforms them. Conveying the great good of canonical memory is one of the main tasks of religious education today. This major task is addressed best when the power of the biblical orientations are displayed with regard to the

central contents of faith. But what are these "essentials," faith's truly indispensable contents? While I certainly do not claim to offer a definitive list of *all* the fruitful and central aspects of the doctrines of faith, I would like to suggest the following ten themes.

III. Top Topics in Theology

1. The first complex of most important themes lies in the area of the *doctrine of creation*. One of our central tasks here is to use the subtlety of the creation narratives (for example, in the Priestly texts) to correct abstract theism as well as the deism of the "first second" and other simplistic metaphysical images of God. Important here is the discovery that the creation narrative refers to two temporal systems: first *the days of God*, with the initial differentiation of light from darkness, and then on the fourth day (with the help of the heavenly bodies) the establishment of *days under the heavens*. This key insight allows us to shake that prejudice which sees the biblical texts as naïve and obsolete. "God's days" (which, while analogous to "days under the heavens," represent incredibly immense periods of time) are linked first to cosmic, then biological, cultural, and finally religious processes. In doing so, thoroughly evolutionary developments are included in creation, for it is not only God who acts but also the creatures. The creatures are expected to cooperate in the process of creation, though on a graduated scale. In a variety of ways, these insights, among others, can address and alter that prejudice which sees us dealing here with a naïve world-view. In this context, the analogies and differences to the cosmologies of the natural sciences can then be discussed in a fruitful way. Analogies and differences to the world-views of the ancient Near East can illustrate the millennia-spanning period of "human knowledge." Even the critique of widespread dualistic clichés (e.g., nature versus culture) or entrenched and unimaginative religious models (such as abstract religious models of dependence) can then be problematized in a fruitful way.⁶

2. Still in the area of doctrines of creation, a second "essential" complex of themes deals with the relationship between the *imago Dei and the divine call to human dominion*. In the course of unending ecological brutalism, we were told well into the 1970s that the biblical texts and the Judeo-Christian

6. Cf. M. Welker, "Was ist Schöpfung? Zur Subtilität antiken Weltordnungsdenkens," in *Jahrbuch der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften für 2006* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, Winter 2007), 84-88.

traditions wanted nothing other than to transform nature into “an object” which the human being (responsibly) has at his or her disposal. In opposition to this stance a critical countermovement arose led by Lynn White and others who proclaimed the biblical commission to human dominion to be the root of modern Cartesianism and the fundamental evil of modern cultural development. It is the Bible which must bear the blame for the modern, ecologically brutal “*maître et possesseur de la nature*” (Descartes)!⁷

This prompted the development of an unsatisfactory evasive maneuver which, with its focus on the Yahwistic creation narrative, attempted either to stress the “cultivation and preservation of creation” or interpret away those elements dealing with the use of violent force in the commission to dominion. These efforts were largely misdirected. On the one hand, we have a long Jewish and Christian history of interpretation which clearly illustrates how the *call to dominion* explicitly speaks the language of slaveholders and conquerors. The human being is expressly set above other creatures. On the other hand, this prioritization is balanced by the destiny of the human being in the *imago Dei*, in the image of God. Yet it is ancient Near Eastern, royal ideology which is expressed in this image: despite all their privileges, and while safeguarding their own interests, the human beings are still to seek justice and the protection of the weak. Thus we have here the construction of a complex ethos which spans a divide, a tension. Self-preservation, justice, and the protection of the weak need not (and must not) be mutually exclusive. The insight that human beings do not live up to their great destiny — that a renewal of the *imago* is needed — leads then into important connecting themes, such as Christology and pneumatology, both of which equally influence anthropology and ethics.

3. A third indispensable complex of themes in the context of the doctrine of creation is *the symbol of the fall and the doctrine of sin*. Here too, it is important that we first persevere under apparent inconsistencies, especially the one which arises in Genesis 3:22, when it is said of Adam that he “has become like God, knowing good and evil.” The Reformers could think of no other solution than to describe this as “divine irony.” Hegel and left-wing Hegelianism saw “the fall” as a “return to God’s image” and as confirmation of human autonomy: What could the human being want more than to know

7. See here Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 80–98; Christian Link, *Schöpfung. Schöpfungstheologie angesichts der Herausforderungen des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 1991), 358ff., 455ff.; M. Welker, *Creation and Reality: Theological and Biblical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), chapter 5.

the difference between good and evil? Dietrich Bonhoeffer was one of the few who clearly saw this as a certification that, after the fall, the human being could then distinguish that which is detrimental to life and that which promotes life, but *only from his or her own perspective* — a task in which they constantly fail. The Hebrew text characterizes the man as *’aHad*, as a “loner”; he has not “become the likes of us” (as Luther translates, seeing this as an ironic remark), but has rather become only “like *one* of us.” The early church speculated whether this meant isolation from the Trinity or from the heavenly hosts. But whatever the case, isolation was pronounced and then executed in their expulsion from paradise.

We have here a recognition of moral perspectivism, the relativity of our own world-views, and the deep need for orientation in our value systems — all of these points find a fruitful point of contact here. Yet a range of theologically, religiously, and morally explosive insights is also based here: that sin cannot be reduced merely to guilt but rather represents a fundamentally and systemically false orientation, and that the differentiation of sin and guilt allows us to correct a naïve moralism.⁸ The biblical traditions confront us with the fragility and fragmentary nature of our morality and our world-views, and confront us with the systemic distortions which go hand in hand with them — and thus with the need for continual reorientation. This reorientation occurs through the guidance of God’s law and God’s gospel.

4. The systemic distortion which accompanies the power of sin becomes clear in an especially dramatic way on the *cross of Christ*. With a view focused on the crucifixion, recent theologies of the cross have placed a primary stress on God’s suffering, compassion, and benevolence as well as God’s confrontation of death. While this is not false, it is one-sided and fails sufficiently to express the revelatory character of the cross. As Jürgen Moltmann displayed in his book *The Crucified God*, Jesus not only dies forsaken by God, but dies as an insurgent and blasphemer.⁹ He also dies in confrontation with the political and religious powers. The cross reveals a conspiracy between the world’s good powers: two forms of law (Jewish and Roman), imperial politics, the ruling religion, and public opinion immunize each other, indeed even mutually strengthen one another, in their opposition both to the gift of God’s goodness and to the very presence of God!

8. Cf. Sigrud Brandt, Marjorie Suchocki, and Michael Welker, eds., *Sünde. Ein unverstündlich gewordenes Thema*, 2nd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2005).

9. Jürgen Moltmann, *Der gekreuzigte Gott. Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik christlicher Theologie* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2002), chapter 4.

A theology which focuses on the cross is central for theologically exposing the endangerment of the world and the self-endangerment of human beings, phenomena which we are repeatedly forced to suffer in our times in the form of fascism, racism, ecological brutality, or in many other latent forms.

5. Yet by itself, the theology of the cross is hopeless and groundless if it is not perceived under the light of the *resurrection*. Here we find ourselves before a very sensitive issue, a place where the meaning and soundness of the religious world-view is repeatedly called into question. The main problem facing the theology of resurrection is the constant confusion of resurrection with physical resuscitation. Normally, when dealing with this confusion, physical resuscitation is simply dismissed as implausible. Yet this distorts the fact that the biblical texts do not actually speak of a physical resuscitation but of something quite different. It is only if we take particular texts in isolation — such as Luke's account of Jesus eating fish (Luke 24:43) — that we could pass off the resurrection as a physical resuscitation. However, any examination of the resurrection texts in their broader context simply excludes this type of confusion. At no point does anyone say: "Nice that you're back, Jesus!" Instead we see *proskynesis*, an awareness of God and worship, individuals testifying to a theophany, to a revelation of God! Yet, as the texts stress, there is also doubt.

The Emmaus Road narrative is particularly telling. The eyes of the disciples are closed. They do not recognize Jesus, which would be particularly unusual if we were dealing with a physical resuscitation. At the breaking of bread their eyes are opened, yet immediately "he vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31). This disappearance does not prompt in them a feeling that they had witnessed a ghostly event, but rather reminds them of a second *evidential experience*. "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). Certainty — that the Risen One is among us, with us, and that he lives! — grows from *various evidential experiences*. Yet he does not live with and among us as the pre-Easter Jesus did but rather, as the biblical texts state, "in spirit and in faith," as the resurrected and exalted Christ in a new "body of Christ."

Today, it is very hard to make this presence in spirit and in faith intelligible, but I believe that cultural memory and canonical memory can be helpful for a secularized "common sense." First and foremost: we must explain clearly that the resurrection is not a natural event, but rather something more comparable to a cultural event. Particularly helpful here is the sobering insight that when the biblical texts speak of the reality of the res-

urrection, they repeatedly (and quite consciously) hold tight to the agonizing tension between manifest presence (which could be mistaken for mere resuscitation) and appearance. The appearance of the Resurrected One is, and remains, connected with the testimony of witnesses. This does not make it a construction or reduce it to wishful thinking; rather, these testimonies refer back to the pre-Easter Jesus. The Resurrected One brings with him *the fullness of his person and of his entire pre-Easter life*.¹⁰ Presence "in the spirit and in faith" brings the wholeness and fullness of existence, which then sets free a wealth of connections with this life, and entwines people into this life in a variety of ways in the testimonies of the "disciples."

6. In their use of the image of the many-membered "*body of Christ*" as *the form of the Christian church*, the New Testament traditions both purposefully present and emphasize pluralistic orientations. Differing gifts and differing ways of life are called into service by the Resurrected One. Not only are differing connections to the life of Jesus Christ possible and tolerated, they are precisely the point of the post-Easter "body" in which Christ testifies to his presence. For some people, it is the attention given to children or table fellowship which is particularly important; for others, it is diaconal activity; still for others, the expounding of the scriptures; for others again, the confrontation of political and religious powers. A multitude of gifts are activated here and set into many fruitful relationships with each other. Many differing ecumenical models (hierarchical and democratic forms of church), differing forms of the imitation of Christ and their interaction can be conceived upon the basis of this church structure — yet also powerful forms of decay in proclamation, preaching, and mission. On this basis we can not only describe and critically differentiate liberating missionary and diaconal developments, but also culturally imperialistic manifestations of the church and Christian religiosity.¹¹

7. Even more difficult than the topic of the resurrection, yet no less important, is that of *Christ's parousia*, often called Christ's "second coming." As with other eschatological topics, it offers the possibility for illustrating a culture of communal expectation in addition to a culture of remembrance. The

10. Cf. M. Welker, "Theological Realism and Eschatological Symbol Systems: Resurrection, the Reign of God, and the Presence in Faith and in the Spirit," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, ed. T. Peters, R. Russell, and M. Welker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 31-42; Hans-Joachim Eckstein and Michael Welker, eds., *Die Wirklichkeit der Auferstehung*, 3rd ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007).

11. Cf. Andreas Feldtkeller and Theo Sundermeier, eds., *Mission in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 1999).

educational task here is to explain how the eschatological visions of a community also strongly determine its real culture and morals, and that our eschatological moods are subject to astounding fluctuations. One need only think back to the 1960s, to those feelings of the dawn of a new messianic era, or to the apocalyptic mood of extermination which arose during the 1980s. These changes in eschatological mood have been examined in finer detail as part of a large-scale discussion with the natural sciences and published under the title: *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*.¹²

Characteristic of Judeo-Christian eschatology is a double structure: an *eschatological complementarity*. On the one hand, we find an orientation toward progress, even if such progress is not linear or predictable but rather occurs through diverse developments. The Kingdom of God is "coming," yet it comes in such a way that it remains hidden to many. It shows itself in many actions of love and forgiveness, in many small steps so that one is unable to say definitively "it is here, or it is there." Eschatological progress mostly occurs in *emergent* developments of perfection ("Many small people in many small places, taking very small steps can change the face of the world"), in the careful, constant growth of a seed.¹³ Yet we see here only one side to eschatology.

At the same time, we look to an event which will be a definitive final state, an event which does not occur in this time. The parousia of Christ comes in all times! This denies all cultures and all views of history the possibility of declaring themselves absolute, of ideologizing their own values and their own achievements. It is the language of parousia which brings about this achievement of the "coming of the Son of Man with his angels, from one end of the earth to the end of heaven" (Mark 13:27; Matt. 16:27 and 24:31 par).

To a type of rationality which focuses on the "natural," this all sounds utterly fanciful. And indeed, the "theophany of the end times" is of necessity fanciful for a life lived in time. For the Son of Man will not come in one time or in one place but rather in all times and in all the world's places. For this reason, the images and visions of this event are necessarily pushed into the realm of the supernatural. From a clear eschatological rationality, these im-

12. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker, eds., *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2000).

13. Cf. Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 231-251; Michael Welker, "The 'Reign' of God," *Theology Today* 49 (1992): 500-515; Michael Welker and Michael Wolter, "Die Unscheinbarkeit des Reiches Gottes," in *Reich Gottes, Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie XI*, ed. W. Härle and R. Preul (Marburg: Elwert, 1999), 103-116.

ages and visions push all views of history and the world to their limits. "The earth and the heaven fled from his presence" (Rev. 20:11). Creation is replaced by a "new creation." These types of statements are what we find in the powerful eschatological images. This correction and limitation by end-times eschatology of ideas of progress (be they historical, moral, etc.) is indispensable if we wish to think of a reality which is not totally assimilated into an earthly context. Yet the correction of an abstract end-times eschatology is also indispensable. Those who doggedly demand only the "Day of Judgment," the Last Judgment of the world, and other such events in an ominous end-time have missed the religious message. It is for this reason that a complementary eschatology is indispensable. Present and (simultaneously!) future eschatology — the Kingdom of God is both present and "coming" — as well as the eschatology of end-times and eternity must always be understood in their difficult and demanding relationship to one another.

The continuity of eschatology with the actions of the pre-Easter Jesus and his presence as the Risen One are decisive here. The coming Christ stands in a line of continuity with the pre-Easter, the resurrected, and the present Jesus Christ! Those who — through faith, love, and acts of forgiveness — already share in Christ's life, also have a share in his eternal life which possesses a validity beyond the aspects of our earthy lives, and which is not lost with this life's end. While this is very difficult to convey, good, theologically oriented teaching should at least introduce us to these ideas.

8. The eighth large thematic complex lies in the field of *pneumatology: the doctrine of the Holy Spirit*. Here too, the biblical traditions offer good material for illustrating the defeat of monistic and dualistic forms of thought to the benefit of pluralistic structures. The key symbol here is the "pouring out of the Spirit." This symbol is thoroughly anti-hierarchical. The prophet Joel had already stressed how "women and men, old and young, menservants and maidservants" would testify to God with each other and for each other when the Spirit is poured out (Joel 2:28f.). We forget that this is sensational in a patriarchal society where men have the say; this is sensational in societies which compel the young into obedience; this is sensational in slaveholder societies (a given in the ancient world).

The Pentecost report in Acts 2 expressly picks up Joel's promise and radicalizes the pluralistic differentiation, establishing connections in this revelatory experience between differing nations and cultures and languages. The pouring out of the Spirit does not abolish the differences between these varying nations and cultures and languages, but rather allows those who are separated by these aspects together to hear of "God's great deeds." To appre-

ciate the great importance of this figure of the outpouring of the Spirit, one must see it against the background of the self-endangerment of the world under the power of sin. With the outpouring of the Spirit, God repeatedly steers against the world's own self-delusion. Time and again, the outpouring of the Spirit breaks up moral, religious, political, and legal oversimplifications and distortions. There is good reason why the third article of the Creed not only stresses the constitution of the community of saints but also "the forgiveness of sins" — liberation from the power of sin — as the primary work of the Spirit.¹⁴

9. While one can illustrate the importance of the Spirit and its outpouring quite well by contrasting it with communal self-endangerment and self-destruction ("sin"), its blessing and its importance can also be made clear by contrasting it with the effects of "the law," which (in its own way) seeks to put a stop to sin. "Law and Spirit" — here too we must be sure critically to distance ourselves from simplistic dualisms. Dualisms which simply identify Spirit with "good" and law with "bad" are not "standing firm in the Reformed tradition," but (to put it bluntly) are theologically and ethically crazy. The biblical, legal traditions are truly fascinating. A careful study of the "Book of the Covenant" (Exod. 20:22–23:19) can turn into a first class intellectual and cultural adventure.

At the center of the Book of the Covenant are legal conflicts: the theft of cattle, murder, manslaughter, etc. We can familiarize ourselves here with the basic elements of legal thinking, with its development and its refinement. It's like a beginners' course in law: How are difficult conflicts and legal problems dealt with legally? Surrounding these legal texts (which deal with the law and the administration of justice), we find a second group of legal texts which focus on the protection of the acutely and chronically weak. A law regarding slavery draws our attention to the slaveholder societies of the ancient world but also to Israel's peculiarity: Slaves are to be set free after seven years, so that even slaves are to be protected under the law! We find corresponding forms of laws in favor of widows and orphans, the foreigner, the poor and the oppressed. I have called these regulations "mercy laws" or the "mercy code of the law."¹⁵

14. Cf. here Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 165–184; Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John Hoffmeyer (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1994).

15. Michael Welker, "Erbarmen und soziale Identität. Zur Neuformulierung der Lehre von Gesetz und Evangelium II," in *Evangelische Kommentare* 19 (1986): 39–42; idem, "Moral, Recht und Ethos in evangelisch-theologischer Sicht," in *Marburger Jahrbuch Theologie* XIII, ed. W. Härle and R. Preul (Marburg: Elwert, 2002), 67–81.

By making mercy part of the content of the law, by placing the laws of mercy at the same level as laws regulating conflicts among equals, an incredibly normative dynamics proceeded from which our cultural history continues to live today. It is by no means a given that we should be shaped by a morality which is determined by the pursuit of justice and mercy, of justice and the protection of the weak. As is well known, Nietzsche ridiculed this morality and sharply attacked it. The Olympic ethos, which today's media constantly conveys to us (either directly or indirectly) stands in diametric opposition to this biblical ethos. It is one of our great educational responsibilities to ensure that this difference is not simply surrendered to the market game.

A third group of legal texts deals with the cult, the relationship with God or, more precisely, the ordered, public relationship to God and the search for the knowledge of God and knowledge of the truth. One cannot overestimate the importance of recognizing and doing justice to the inner dynamics of the biblical law with its pursuit of such knowledge, and with its pursuit of justice and the protection of the weak. We must deal with this task precisely in a religious culture which writes off the law as a mere "demand," or reduces it to the "ten commandments" with their (truly fruitful and important) community ethos. If religious education wishes to work on the most important interdisciplinary and interreligious issues, on the foundational issues facing our culture and the so-called "discourse of values," then it must discover the topic of the "law" and learn to engage it competently. Yet an intensive examination of the "law" actually takes us much further.

10. The Isaianic traditions which speak of a messianic savior or a "servant of God" upon whom "the Spirit of God rests" (esp. Isa. 11:2; 42:1; and 61:1), repeatedly deal with the triad of justice, protection of the weak, and the knowledge of God and the truth. However, the one upon whom the Spirit rests will usher in this fulfillment of the law not only for Israel but also for the Gentiles. Yet a range of normative conflicts are inevitable here since the Gentiles will neither simply be integrated into Israel nor will they simply adopt Israel's laws; rather they will search for justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God from out of their own traditions. Here we have the place where those important questions facing *the pluralism of norms and the correlation between different moral and legal systems, and even the question of the plurality of religions* are to be addressed. In the field of pneumatology, the relativity as well as the corruptibility of norms can be tackled without descending into relativism or normative arbitrariness.

On the one hand, in this light we see that even this wonderful law and its developmental dynamics can fall under the power of sin. The early textual

prophetic tradition (those prophets who “spoke in the Spirit”) had already made this more than clear; in the words of Amos, Micah, Hosea, and Proto-Isaiah: “You have a cult, you speak justice in the gate, but you misuse worship, and you pervert the law because you despise mercy for the poor and the weak.” Yet there are even worse distortions in which the self-concealment and self-immunization of evil are perfected. Even politics, law, and morality are used to conceal a society’s pitilessness and lack of mercy. An entire society completely immunizes itself against the prophetic vision and against the prophetic warning and call to repentance. In this situation, the outpouring of the Spirit becomes an act of God’s salvific intervention, renewing interpersonal relations and, in the words of the Reformation, bringing people back on “the path of Christ.”

The structural insights into the relations of *the law and the Spirit* are far-reaching. The distortions in this complex normative ethos (developed out of the pursuit of justice, protection of the weak, and the search for truth) are called into question by the renewing power of the pluralistic outpouring of the Spirit, leading both to its renewal and its perfection. This large topic also offers a good starting point for a proper dialogue with Israel as well as with other religions and moral traditions. On this basis, we can genuinely (and fruitfully) bring into contact with each other the differing ways of working on this ethos, the work on cultural and canonical memory, and the differing ways for maintaining communal memory and expectation, as well as the guidance of cultural developments. In such an exchange, not only individual but also communal partners, such as cultures and religions, can mutually challenge and enrich each other.

Faith in the Public Square

David Fergusson

Dan Migliore’s theology has been marked by an abiding concern to relate the convictions of Christian theology to our broader social and cultural life. In seeking to be faithful to the distinctives of the church, he has also sought to recognize and accommodate insights from elsewhere. This has resulted in his commitment to a generous orthodoxy, a respect for difference, and a lucidity of expression. By engaging with the secular and other faiths, he establishes conversations that are unfailingly courteous and often illuminating. This must in part explain why *Faith Seeking Understanding* has proved, at least here in Edinburgh, the most useful and enduring of textbooks for over a generation. In what follows, I offer a defense of the public significance of theology and church life which I hope is consistent with his exemplary practice.

Modern hostility to the intrusion of faith commitments in the public sphere is not hard to find. There is an argument that runs along the following lines. The provincial beliefs of one religious group should not be allowed to dominate the lives and social order of the majority who do not share these. To permit this is undemocratic, oppressive, and threatening to civic harmony. Our advocacy of ethical and political views should be on grounds that are in principle accessible and reasonable to all. Even when a religious party commands the allegiance of a majority of citizens, it cannot be allowed to ride roughshod over the commitments of the minority who are entitled to equal and fair treatment. This entails that a policy proposal based on a conviction about the universal lordship of Jesus, such as we find in Barmen 1, is seen as at best parochial and at worst theocratic. In a liberal democracy, it must be judged inappropriate, incomprehensible, in bad form, or even worse. This ar-