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Editor's Note

It is something of a pattern in theological circles, that we expect to encounter new 'readings' of theology and its place in the world, that call us to think afresh about topics and themes that are so familiar. Radical Orthodoxy sends out such a call. It is an ambitious project that "attempts to reclaim the world by situating its concerns and activities within a theological framework." Two articles in this issue explore the landscape of radical orthodoxy's proposals and offer some reflection on the energetic agenda of this postmodern theological alternative. A review of Cynthia Crysdale's recent book *Embracing Travail*, takes up the difficult matter of how suffering and pain fit or fail to fit into our theological understanding of the world. At the heart of the discussion is the taxing question about the relationship between good and evil.

The majority of our membership will receive this 'publication' by email. We do continue to send out some 'hard copies'. It is difficult to assess whether the electronic version or the paper version will be more likely to be read. Whatever the case I trust that those who do read it will find the contents of this issue informative and provocative for their own theological reflection.

The section on membership news and notes is smaller that it has been in times past. I am sure this is not because of less activity among the membership. Let me encourage you to send in news and information about your current work, publications and activities, for the Spring issue. I have included a page at the end of the newsletter that you can fill out, copy and send to me by email or regular post.

The minutes of the Annual Meeting in Edmonton last May, are included in this issue. Please note that the CTS/SCT meetings are scheduled to take place at Laval University, Quebec City, May 24-26, 2001.

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Radical Orthodoxy;

Joanne McWilliam

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"Radical Orthodoxy" has as its best known exponents, Phillip Blond, John Milbank, Catherine

Pickstock and Graham Ward, with a number of more or less like-thinking disciples. Radical Orthodoxy (hereafter R.O.) acknowledges that it has its own vocabulary, "the word made strange...a new language...less tainted with the over-familiarity of too many Christian words." 1 R.O. sees itself in continuity with la nouvelle théologie or pre-Vatican II, but rejects its acknowledgment of the validity of secular knowledge. And, while having much in common with Neo-orthodoxy, it distinguishes itself from Barthianism in avoiding the "plodding exegetical". 2 The R.O. theologians function within current philosophical discourse and, as post-Heideggerians, "work within the space Heidegger assigns them".3 Further:

[W]hile conceding, with post-modernism, the indeterminacy of all our knowledge and experience of selfhood, [R.O.] construes this shifting flux as a sign of our dependency on a transcendent source which 'gives' all reality as a mystery. 4

The Introduction to Radical Orthodoxy, 5 co-written by Milbank, Pickstock and Ward, can be assumed to represent the school accurately. R.O., they write, "seeks to reconfigure theological truth", to offer an alternative to the contemporary world which "promotes materialism which is soulless, aggressive, nonchalant and nihilist"6. Ubiquitous nihilism is R.O.'s target, to be found wherever a discipline is not "framed in a theological perspective" because "these disciples...define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing".7 R.O. sees itself 'orthodox' "in recovering and extending a fully Christianized ontology and practical philosophy" and 'radical' in rethinking the tradition by returning to "its patristic and medieval roots". 8 Whether the patristic -- especially Augustinian -- tradition is well interpreted can be questioned, but that question will not be addressed here.

The R.O. theologians agree in seeing the beginning of the contemporary perversion in Duns Scotus' departure from true Thomism. Aquinas, they argue, taught that nothing can be predicated univocally of God and creation, rather creation participates in the being of God. But Scotus, by asserting the 'univocity of being' that the participation of God and creation in being differs only according to their mode of being, made 'being' into an idol 'above' God. 9 The seed of 'onto-theology' (metaphysics) started there and emerged full blown with Suarez in the sixteenth century. R.O. claims, however, that there is "no onto-theological communality" between the Creator and the creation. 10 Instead it identifies "the ontological difference [between Creator and creation] in terms of analogy and participation...the fulfilment and preservation of beings in Being".11

In rejecting nihilism R.O. goes beyond realism as ordinarily understood (the existence of a world independent of the mind) to insist that 'appearances...exceed themselves'. Created being, precisely because it is created, participates in God; there is no 'God-free' area. R.O. understands creation ex nihilo as ruling out any dichotomy or dualism in reality or in our knowledge of reality. Thus, reason and revelation, nature and grace, Christ's humanity and divinity are not only not opposed to each other, they cannot be distinguished from each other. They cannot be 'other', because no reality exists "outside and apart from God", nature has been "recovered" for God. 12 To suppose that there is a reality apart from God is 'immanentism', always a pejorative term for R.O. "When the word immanence ...is used...it refers...to a world

that believes itself to be wholly sufficient unto itself." 13 By immanence R.O. means far more than the denial of a transcendent Creator. It rejects the claim of a natural order or secular realm; to ascribe reality, therefore, to anything apart from its participation in God is to be self-deceived and deceiving.

The world is God-given and revelatory and here the notion of 'perception' comes in. 14 Blond writes, "[T]here is a world whose reality and disclosure constantly refuses any secular attempt to describe it." 15 It is perception which "reveals an account and a description of reality that can only be theological (emphasis Blond's)". Using Merleau-Ponty's 'visible/invisible' terminology, Blond writes of "the higher order of the visible which is the invisible...reality at its profoundest level". 16 Despite its denial of the natural order and insistence on the invisible (transcendent) as the most real, R.O. is not anti-materialist: "for the Christian understanding of 'creation' there is no 'spiritual' aspect of the world that in any way transcends our created (material, social and linguistic) condition." 17

R.O. is consequently strongly incarnational and that with a Neo-Chalcedonian interpretation. 18 Of the group, Milbank has written most specifically on christology in two chapters of The Word Made Strange, 19 "A Christological Poetics" and "The Name of Jesus". By 'poetics' Milbank understands "the realization or manifestation of the beautiful", 20 and sees humanity as fundamentally poetic being, the self constructed by "making meaningful objects". 21 Using Jungel's understanding of the parables as 'poetic utterance', Milbank writes,

The words of Jesus are thus 'strongly poetic' in that they establish a new possibility of truth...While Jesus's [sic] whole being seems to be directed toward the production of such verbal works as opening up the situation of man in relation, it is equally the case that he aims to recover from his more concrete works a plenitude of significance. 22

The Cross is poetic as well as an ethical act -- the plenitude of charity as "creative goodness", a metaphoric and negative sign. Jesus assumes the burden of sin, and his death is "[t]he incorporation and transfiguration of the ugly". 23 Christ's person is now "present only in and through his work, [and] "our ...fulfillments of Christ's intentions...belong among Christ's own proper words". 24 Continuing this ecclesial approach in "The Name of Jesus", Milbank argues that Jesus' 'personhood' is "the total shape of his actions and words" 25 Because "[a]ny 'real' human identity resides...in the effect upon others" Milbank asserts that Jesus' personhood "can only be finally specified as the entire content and process of every human life". 26

Milbank adopts an unusual reading of Augustine's Trinitarian theology. He rejects the judgment that it is as radically interior and he is strongly critical of Rahner. Milbank writes, "Augustine [says] ...that we only have participatory access to the eternal by remaining within (emphasis Milbank's) the structure of space, time and human language." 27 Milbank argues that Augustine "stresses...a mediation of Trinitarian presence only via finite image", that is, voice (Father) and Spirit as dove and flame. He goes on to say that Augustine "elides" person/essence...[T]here is a single essentia/persona necessarily repeated twice--once as a relation and second as a relation to this relation." 28 This interpretation of the Trinity is worked out in great detail in The Word Made Strange.

For R.O. reality is linguistic, 29 deriving from the linguistic and aesthetic character of the Trinity. Thus, the Son/Logos is "an infinite aesthetic plenitude of expression"³⁰ and the Spirit, "constituted by the paternal-filial difference" operates within "an aesthetics of reception".³¹ Catherine Pickstock in After Writing, argues for "the mainly doxological character of language"³² and the pre-eminence of speech over writing. She works out her thesis in a detailed examination of the medieval Roman rite, praising it because --among other things-- it was so closely bound to and reflective of its culture. It is a complex and dense book, beginning by challenging Derrida's reading of Plato and ending with a theology of the Eucharist.

Much more needs to be said about R.O. It is not without its critics. See Radical Orthodoxy? A Catholic Enquiry, Laurence Paul Hemming, ed. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) and Modern Theology 15/4 (1999) with articles by Wayne Hankey, Frederick Bauerschmidt, and Nicholas Lash. Nevertheless, it is an interesting and challenging version of post-modernism.

Endnotes

1. John Milbank, "Postmodern Critical Augustinianism", Modern Theology 7 (1991) 228
2. Radical Orthodoxy 2. R.O.'s use of scripture has a whiff of proof-texting.
3. Wayne Hankey, "Theoria verses Poesis", Modern Theology 15 (199) 393.
4. Catherine Pickstock, After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) xii
5. Radical Orthodoxy John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, eds (Routledge: London and New York, 1999).
6. Radical Orthodoxy 1.
7. Ibid. 2
8. Ibid. 2
9. Phillip Blond, Post-Secular Philosophy 6.
- 10 Post-Secular Philosophy 23.
- 11 The Word Made Strange (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 42.
- 12 Post-Secular Philosophy 7, 29.
- 13 Post-Secular Philosophy 58.
- 14 Taken from Von Balthasar and Merleau-Ponty's la foi perceptive
- 15 Phillip Blond, "Theology and Perception", Modern Theology 14 (1998) 524.
- 16 Ibid. 529.
- 17 The Word Made Strange 155.
- 18 To my eye, there are passages in the R.O. theologians' writing which fly in the face of Chalcedon.
- 19 John Milbank, The Word Made Strange, But see also Graham Ward, and Catherine Pickstock
- 20 The Word Made Strange 123.
- 21 Ibid. 125.
- 22 Ibid. 135.
- 23 Ibid. 137.
- 24 Ibid. 140.
- 25 Ibid. 156.
- 26 Ibid. 164, 156.
- 27 "Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo European Soul", Modern Theology 13, (1997) 464

28 Ibid. 471.

29 See John Milbank, "The Linguistic Turn as a Theological Turn", The Word Made Strange 84-120.

30 John Milbank, "The Second Difference", The Word Made Strange, 187.

31 Ibid. 188.

32 After Writing xiii.

Radical Orthodoxy. A Brief Overview and a Few Questions.

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Radical Orthodoxy (RO) is a new and often excitingly provocative movement that promises to make a substantial impact upon contemporary theological inquiry. The movement is made up mostly of younger thinkers, British or from the USA, Anglo- or Roman Catholic, who are concerned to explore further the line of thought opened up by John Milbank's Theology and Social Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). There, we recall, Milbank argued against the modern belief that secular views of reality are neutral and basic. On the contrary, secularism is as contingent as any religion; it is an anti-theological tradition rather than simply a reflection of the way things objectively are. Secularism founds the politics of modernity as one of libido dominandi rather than progressive emancipation. Secular social theories, which postulate an original violence, directly challenge the church's metanarrative, which reveals an original peace, receptivity and plenitude. Secular reason irrationally and violently relegates religious inquiry to the peripheries of scientific and humanistic discourse.

At present, the key texts of RO are small enough in number that it is still fairly easy to get a grasp of the basic literature. This includes Milbank's The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) (cited here as WMS); Catherine Pickstock's After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) (AW); the manifesto collection of essays by twelve RO members entitled Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology (London: Routledge, 1999), edited by Milbank, Pickstock, and Graham Ward (RONT); and a collection of RO essays and critical responses, Radical Orthodoxy? - A But, of course, this is not quite the same conception as that, say, of Thomas Aquinas (a favourite theologian of RO). According to Thomas, theology is a queen with handmaids (ancillae). Other sciences may operate on principles that have little or no theological warrant in themselves. The object of theological science encompasses and incorporates the objects of all other sciences, the truths of which it can acknowledge and incorporate without necessarily re-interpreting them. Such a view is not that of RO, for which any "attempt to regard a cosmos independently of a performed reception of the poetic word" must be abandoned (WMS 50).

One might think that, since the collapse of modernity has been prompted by the recent linguistic turn, theological discourse is now beholden to post-modern philosophy. On the contrary, the

linguistic turn is actually a Christian insight, "the delayed achievement of the Christian critique" of "antique" substance metaphysics (WMS 97). Application of that critical insight was inhibited fairly early on in Christian history by the rationalistic language theories of the church Fathers (WMS 88). However, as RO frequently asserts, it is with Duns Scotus' univocal concept of being, which encompasses both created and uncreated realities in one conceptual scheme, that the folly of examining reality independently of faith began in earnest. Scotus begins the decline into modernity (e.g. AW 121ff.), which is completed in the Kantian dualism of faith and reason (RONT 21ff.).

RO seeks to overcome this fallen history by framing all disciplines within a properly "theological perspective" (RONT 3). After the opening programmatic essay by the book's editors (essential reading!), the remaining essays of RONT develop Christian critiques and accounts of twelve different areas, such as aesthetics, music, friendship, sex and politics, amongst others. Both WMS and Pickstock's AW construct theological theories of language. AW is a sustained argument for the view, portrayed first by the later Plato and confirmed by Christianity, that language is primarily doxological rather than referential. WMS attacks the misconceptions of modern and secular-post-modern views of language that arise in many areas, from morality to politics, Christology to environmentalism.

The "theological perspective" adopted by RO is quite distinctive. It is one that originates in the Platonic tradition, is "completed" by Christianity, and then refined by the linguistic turn. One might call it a post-modern participationist Christian ontology.

Its Platonism (sometimes expressed in ways that remind me of a post-modern version of liberal Catholicism's Incarnational Principle), pushes it always beyond the surface of things to their depths, beyond the finite sign to the infinite that it manifests. The ontology is post-modern, however, in re-conceiving participation in terms of performance. We humans are linguistic beings who participate in divine linguistic Being through our cultural-linguistic productions (WMS 2, 142; see ROCE 16). Revelation therefore happens through us, rather than over against us, extrinsically.

It is this ontology that I want to focus on in raising a few critical concerns. In the first place, I wonder if claims for the ontology are not made a little too strongly, suggesting that no alternative way of construing reality will do. The RO view is frequently presented with such thin argumentation that it is rather as if we should take it as largely self-evident (see Blond's numerous "of course"s in RONT 220ff.). The theology of Karl Barth is rejected because, it is claimed, his exegesis remains within the modern dualist framework. As a result, Barth had to abandon reason for a discourse of 'pure faith,' which condemns him to an "exegetical straightjacket" (ROCE 38), to the "ploddingly exegetical" (RONT 2). Nothing in such criticism counters the impression that it is not Barth's exegesis and theology that is wrong so much as his ontological assumptions. And if that impression is correct, then I would suggest that this gets things massively the wrong way around. A more orthodox view is that theological practice is guided primarily by Scripture, and theology's interpretation of Scripture is guided, among other things, by past theological interpretations of Scripture, so as to constitute an ongoing hermeneutical tradition of inquiry, in Alasdair MacIntyre's sense of the phrase; one, that is, which fosters fruitful debate between conflicting interpretations. It is necessary to situate

scriptural interpretations within the ecclesial tradition because, whilst the text of Scripture certainly cannot be made to support just any doctrine or practice, its meaning is underdetermined. To be sure, it 'contains' - to use a metaphor from an older hermeneutic - some fairly evident patterns, principles and precepts, but these need to be construed so that they hang together as a canonical whole; they cannot, without danger of distortion, be individually and directly applied to the Christian life. Such a construal, or metanarrative, if you will, is itself but a preliminary move. To put flesh on its bare bones, theologians use Scripture imaginatively and more indirectly, and must also often borrow conceptual tools and ideas from sources other than Scripture. Non-Scriptural borrowings include, at the most general and abstract level, ontological and metaphysical notions. With their help, a theologian constructs what John Webster, following Charles Taylor, has called a moral ontology, an extensive account of the reality within which humans act.

On this view, ontological constructions serve scriptural interpretation and ecclesial practice, in order that we may more closely conform to our Lord. Christians have read Scripture well, and the church has produced saints, within a wide variety of ontologies, some of which have not been participationist in anything like the RO fashion. Theologians develop their moral ontologies in order to help Christians inhabit the world of Scripture in a particular time and place. Some ontologies are more successful in fulfilling this function than others.

The question is whether the RO ontology serves the church successfully. A Christian-Platonist ontology of the RO type has it that all created realities are fundamentally signs, in and through which one discerns the divine, the deeper reality lying within or behind them. Everything created points beyond itself to a deeper, purer reality. This tends to shift theological attention away from the messily sinful and concrete realities of creation to a controllable, abstract realm. Perhaps this explains the aridly intellectualistic discussions of music and art in RONT by Pickstock and Blond. I have discussed the ecclesiological problems associated with such an ontology at length in my *Church, World and the Christian Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000). Here, though, my concern is with another significant problem, namely the ability of such an ontology to distinguish between a life of following Jesus Christ and other ways of living. In the work of some members of RO, Christianity seems to be distinguished from other traditions not so much by its Lord, but by its (RO-type) ontology. Consider the weak distinctions made between Platonism and Christianity in AW. Or Milbank's two Christological essays in WMS, where he develops an account of revelation through poesis, through human cultural production. From this he argues that ecclesiology is prior to Christology, so our conception of Jesus Christ should conform to "definitions of the character of the new universal community of the church" (WMS 148). The gospels, on this reading, are primarily ecclesiological narratives rather than stories about Jesus and our salvation in him. As a consequence, the material decisiveness of the concrete narratives of Jesus are lost for theology, and his particularity reduced merely to his proper name (WMS 150). Jesus then becomes the "divine overtaking and fulfilling of all human purposes...he becomes the adequate metaphoric representation of the total human intent" (WMS 136; not incidentally, this seems a rather Rahnerian kind of approach).

Ironically, it may be that Duns Scotus, the *fons et origo mali* for RO, could offer a useful ontological foil to this, if he is read more charitably. Most contemporary commentators seem to agree that Scotus' univocal concept of being is rather more light-weight than RO assumes, in the

sense that it is a logical, rather than a metaphysical assertion. Scotus argues that being is fundamentally a simple concept (not a reality) and, as such, is applied univocally to all beings, including God. The sole metaphysical distinction Scotus makes is one between finite and infinite being, i.e., between Creator and creation. Finite and infinite are thus radically different. When we say, then, that God exists and this desk exists, we are saying nothing metaphysical. Our limited intellects force us to rely upon logical, univocal and simple concepts. But Scotus explicitly denies that there is a generic concept of being that encompasses God and creation (*Deus et creatura in nullo genere sunt*); it is not, pace Philip Blond, that God and creation participate in something metaphysical we call Being. Some theologians, such as Thomas F. Torrance (*The Hermeneutics of John Calvin*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), and Colin Gunton (*The Triune Creator*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), have developed from this an account of Scotus' ontology that preserves the integrity of creation, the primacy of Scripture, and the particularity of Jesus Christ, better than RO seems to be able to do.

Whether one is for or against it or something in between, RO is a welcome force within contemporary theology. It pushes us to reconsider those basic issues we so often take for granted, and to re-examine past thinkers we too often ignore. Internal disagreements suggest that RO will not, hopefully, become a school of thought. Whether it falls apart sooner or later, though, it has been, and presently still is, a very good thing, and if you haven't looked much at its productions as yet, you should know they are well worth the effort.

Membership News and Notes

Michael Bourgeois, has recently published "The Work and Well-Being of Women in American Social Christianity: The Case of Codman Potter (1835-1908)," Union Seminary Quarterly Review Vol. 53, Nos. 3-4 (1999), 125-51. He is the recipient of a Science and Religion Course Program Award for 2000, from the Centre for Theology and Natural Sciences, Berkeley California. Recently he was appointed Chair of the Theology and Faith Committee, The United Church of Canada.

Nicholas Healey, has published a new book, *Church World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge University Press.

Philip J. Lee, published an article "The Contemporary World: Where the Battle Rages", in *No Power But of God; Political Theology: The Christian's Relation to the State*, St. Peter Publications, Charlottetown, PEI, 1999. He is currently engaged in research on the theme of; 'The Gospel and Neo-Conservative Economics'.

Mark McKim, has been elected Chair of the Board of Trustees of Acadia Divinity College, Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

Mark Parent, in 1999, was elected a member of the Legislative Assembly, in the province of Nova Scotia, and was appointed Adjunct Professor, at Mount St. Vincent University, Bedford NS. Meanwhile he continues to do research on the subject of 'Time and its Impact on Western Society.

John G. Stackhouse, Jr., the Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology and Culture at Regent College, Vancouver, is the editor of a new volume, *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* (Baker, 2000). This book features articles by Alister McGrath, Stanley Grenz, Kevin Vanhoozer, Stephen Williams, and John Stackhouse; and responses by Roger Olson, Trevor Hart, and J. I. Packer. John's own book, *Can God Be Trusted? Faith and the Challenge of Evil* (Oxford) was released this year in paperback.

Book Notes

The Unwanted Vibrancy of Suffering: A Reading of Cynthia Crysdale's *Embracing Travail*

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Cynthia Crysdale's *Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today*, is a hopeful and critical reflection on human suffering in the context of Christian understandings of the cross. Crysdale considers suffering and the cross from the perspective of the victim, as a place of encounter with God, of transformation and recreation, rather than as a place of desolation and dead ends. I read Crysdale's theology of the cross as a theodicy which denies to evil and suffering real and effective being. In my view, this theodicy of the cross works against her constructive proposal of the cross as a liberating practice of embracing travail.

I will first outline the dominant interpretation of the cross that Crysdale critiques, and then her constructive proposal of a liberating practice. Crysdale resists interpretations of the cross as redemptive suffering. For her, this is a harmful ideology that obscures suffering and perpetuates victimization of the socially powerless. Crysdale's constructive proposal shifts the interpretation of redemptive suffering to the question of the meaning of suffering, which proves to be a provocative and bottomless question.

The interpretation of Jesus' crucifixion as an act of redemptive suffering is the dominant narrative of the cross in the Christian tradition. After writing a book that challenges this interpretation, Crysdale finds herself at a loss for words when her daughter, Carolyn, concludes her stories about a week at a Christian summer camp by asking, "I just don't get the part about Jesus dying for our sins. What does that mean?" (151). Crysdale intends to challenge the "common sense" of redemptive suffering, yet as her story suggests, this is a difficult narrative to uproot; it is repeated in Christian teaching to children and adults, in hymns, and in liturgies of communion. Such an interpretation gives intrinsic religious meaning to suffering as salvation. This often means that those victimized in public and domestic violence are encouraged to bear their suffering as a sign of virtue. Anselm's enduring story of why God became man--Jesus pays a debt of sin for humans owed to God, so vast that only a God-man could bear the weight and violence of it--turns suffering into a marker of guilt and shame. And when women are accused, through Eve, of bringing sin into the world, and a God-man redeems humans through his suffering, a particular group is stigmatized as guilty and weak. These "pathologies" of the cross, Crysdale contends, implicate the church in the perpetuation of evil (95), thereby making the cross a symbol of domination (108). In other words, the dominant Christian narratives of the cross silence questions about suffering. Victims are encouraged to bear suffering rather than to resist suffering and its social and interpersonal causes.

For Crysdale, the cross can be restored as a liberating symbol only if it is pondered as the crux of human suffering. The ambiguity of this project is conveyed in Crysdale's description of her constructive proposal: embracing travail. To embrace means "to encircle, to clasp, enclose; to include, comprise; to take in with the eye or mind" (OED). Thus, rather than focussing on human guilt and powerlessness, Crysdale reads the cross as emblematic of how humans can bear suffering--embrace and mourn suffering--in an expectant way, in hope of resurrection. The word 'travail' is equally suggestive; blending notions of pain, trouble, and suffering with exertion and work. It implies that bearing suffering is its own kind of agency and endurance. Suffering is a peculiar kind of work. Travail is also the work of childbirth, which Crysdale experiences as "the simultaneity of joy and suffering" (2) Finally, travail is an old word for travel, with its connotations of movement, change, excitement and anxiety. For Crysdale, embracing travail is a practice that bears witness to the gospel as a story of transformed suffering. Embracing travail, we relive this story. In suffering, we hope (and work) for transformation.

Crysdale's notion of embracing travail reinterprets the gospel story into contemporary language and categories. Embracing travail has two basic movements: i) the redemption of the True Self and ii) a conception of suffering as non-violent resistance ending a cycle of violence between perpetrator and victim. Crysdale develops a psychological and philosophical notion of Jesus as the revelation of the True Self through a reading of Sebastian Moore's *The Crucified is no Stranger* and the ideas of Bernard Lonergan. The social or interpersonal aspect of embracing travail as ending the cycle of violence is based on Walter Wink's ideas, and Sharon Welch's notion of a feminist ethic of risk.

i) Imagining Jesus as the revelation of the True Self, Crysdale represents the crucified Jesus as a vision of how sin distorts the True Self. In his life and ministry, Jesus reveals that human beings are poised between a limited bodily existence and an infinite erotic spirit, between actual and potential. The abjection of his true self--Jesus crucified--exposes the kinds of destruction the self can suffer. Jesus' death bears witness to human alienation as a "disjunction between the inherent orientation of the human spirit--toward discovering intelligibility, knowing truth, knowing and choosing value, and falling in love--and the inability to actualize this potential" (128). His death reveals two possible inflections of sin that truncate the self: an inward turn of self-destruction and an outward turn of violent actions against others.

Human limitation and transcendence are like two weights placed on scales. Guided only by human mores at the apex of the scale, the two weights drift and sink out of balance. The sin of pride gives greater weight to transcendence, while the sin of too much limitation sinks the scale in the opposite direction. This imbalance, described by Crysdale as "pathology," "alienation," and "brokenness," can only be righted by God at the apex of the scale, holding the human weights of limitation and transcendence in balance, transforming "human knowing and willing through transcendent love" (147). Without the reorientation of God's love, we are caught in a system of violence.

Crysdale uses a rather intriguing paradox to describe God's grace and the moral conversion it both initiates and sustains: "the undertow of transcendent love" (138). Undertow suggests danger, possible death and loss of self. I think Crysdale intends to suggest the drowning of a self

too attached to destruction and hopelessness, and a rebirth to a risk of transformation and new life. Unlike the idea of transcendence and the self's orientation beyond itself, the word 'undertow' connotes a terrifying yet possibly vivifying submergence into the inherently good self: "the eros of the human spirit is part of one's being, and...authenticity, valor, dignity, and integrity lie not in conformity to some set of standards 'out there' but in being true to oneself" (140). The undertow of God's love pulls us under into our best selves, and enables us to choose values of "truth, honesty, beauty, health, love, [and] communion with God" (138). This goodness in ourselves, that Crysdale believes we either accept or reject, has nothing to do with evil. Good is the opposite of evil; good and evil are unmixed integers, and therefore evil can be rejected, particularly when its irrationality is recognized. This means that suffering (which Crysdale terms evil) has no value in itself: it is not final: "pain, sacrifice, and the cross...are by-products" (138). Elsewhere, Crysdale clarifies what she means by the cross as a by-product of communion with God. Jesus' death and resurrection represent suffering as a consequence of his union with God, not as the vehicle or means of union with God (123).

ii) Suffering is also a form of resistance. Jesus' death gives us a model to imitate, a way to stop the cycle of revenge and violence by suffering evil, rather than perpetuating evil (29). As Crysdale clarifies with one of her typically apt stories, this does not mean offering oneself as victim for target practice, but it does call for non-violent intervention against violence, and bearing pain if one's efforts result in failure. Such a practice of non-retaliation is sustained by an awareness of God's solution to the problem of evil: God offers "the possibility that love will make of evil the occasion of goodness" (149). This possibility is an ethic of risk: God, like a polestar above and beyond us, guides our efforts in an infinite task of transforming suffering. It is a practice sustained by the idea that evil is contingent and tractable, in Crysdale's words, "ultimately powerless" (9) and "ultimate non-being" (32). This is to say that "no wound is unhealable" and no human transgression is outside the forgiveness of God. A radical conversion from evil is possible only through God, in whom we achieve a new vision of empowering forgiveness and healing.

In working with Crysdale's text, I have come to appreciate its vibrancy, subtlety, and most of all its spirit of dedication to the human crux of suffering. However, I want now to question Crysdale's ideas about suffering and evil from my own sympathies for the tragic perspective, as developed by Kathleen Sands in *Escape from Paradise: Evil and Tragedy in Feminist Theology*, which I find misrepresented in the body of the text and discounted in the footnotes. I will consider what difference a serious consideration of the tragic perspective makes to Crysdale's argument.

Crysdale discounts a tragic perspective because it regards evil and good as mixed together rather than as opposed, and because it claims that evil and suffering have perdurable being. In other words, evil and suffering have intractable effects, and confront us with irrecoverable losses and irreconcilable contradictions. In a tragic perspective, redemption is a movement within enduring liabilities and damage. Bernard Schlink's *The Reader* 22 Bernard Schlink, *The Reader*, Trans. Carol Brown Janeway (New York: Vintage Books, 1997). is a novel about a German man, born in the 1940's, who later confronts the collective guilt of his generation, whose parents and mentors had varying degrees of Nazi involvement. He speaks of transformation and damage: "The tectonic layers of our lives rest so tightly one on top of the other that we always come up

against earlier events in later ones, not as matter that has been fully formed and pushed aside, but absolutely present and alive. I understand this. Nevertheless, I sometimes find it hard to bear." Evil and suffering are human realities that limit the fragile goods we can have or imagine. A tragic perspective does not imagine all things in the world as good, but rather perceives the world as sacred, a "cruel radiance" (James Agee) of beauty and affliction. One does not sublimate the other; rather, both are coincident in truth. And both can be occasions of God's grace: "only beauty and affliction are sharp enough to pierce the soul" (Simone Weil). Suffering and evil are negative values, not as absolutes but as particular and enduring contingencies of human lives. The tragic perspective, though in contradiction with a Platonic classical idealism that equates being with goodness, nonetheless depends on the idealistic perspective to make claims for what is right and wrong, and why things ought to be different.

Crysdale does consider aspects of what I have described as the tragic perspective, but only to say that these things are not ultimately real. She claims the certainty of God's solution to evil; evil is tractable, and penultimate to the good. The words she uses to describe the damage of suffering convey this. Suffering is evil, distortion, pathology. This pathologizes human experiences of chaos, disorder, pain, ambiguity, irrationality and uncertainty. Claiming an essential goodness as truly human pathologizes human restlessness and vulnerability. Within this framework, suffering is asserted as meaningful only when the resurrection morning can be glimpsed in it. Crysdale writes: Without resurrection love, the suffering of the cross is entirely meaningless. It is only within the higher viewpoint of resurrection that one can grasp the solution to the problem of evil. And just as Jesus' death is only intelligible in the light of the resurrection, so our suffering is only meaningful within the purview of religious conversion. The corollary is, of course, that any suffering is potentially meaning-full, even though it may be experienced as meaning-less" (155-156).

For Crysdale, suffering is "meaning-full" only when transformed into the good. This is consistent with her idea that while it is possible to read the gospel as a story of "painful betrayal, grief-stricken helplessness; and victory of dominant powers over God's presence in the world," the truth about the gospel is "the victory of God over evil, the forgiveness of sins, and the healing of wounds." Good overcomes evil; healing overcomes wounding; good and evil are absolutes, and utterly opposed. But in situations of human captivity and torture, of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, these assertions of overcoming sound unreal. Even though Crysdale tells stories about people who suffer violence, these are always examples of suffering in moments of transformation, subsumed "within the higher viewpoint of resurrection." Because she denies the reality of suffering as a negative value in human life, she excludes from a properly Christian view of things an understanding of suffering that is static, repetitive, untransformed. She excludes social contexts and personal histories that endure destructive resurrections of evil, in which healing and recalcitrant pain, transformation and perdurable liability, are both real. Because Crysdale denies the negative value of suffering, she reads Jesus' crucifixion as a by-product of communion with God, rather than simply as a terrible fact of his humanness and its "infinite fragility" (Weil). Pathologizing human suffering is the risk of seeking a whole and clear goodness in God as the only way to seek human good.

A story might explain how I perceive the effect of Crysdale's theodicy of the cross. As children, my two younger brothers and I made a dam in our creek, building a wall out of rocks and clumps

of earth. A small stream, running over grasses and small rocks was transformed into a round clear pond. A tiny waterfall poured into a weedy murky patch of water just beyond it. We tossed our excavations into this weed patch, along with anything else that floated into our clear pond: twigs, dead crayfish, mutilated frogs. Periodically, one of the three siblings fell out of favour with the other two, and the outsider would inherit the weed patch beyond the pond.

A clear ideal of goodness has many advantages: it is possible to make unabashed judgments of what is good and evil; one has a kind of certainty, a polestar. As I mentioned, the tragic view implicitly depends on the norms of good and evil held by the idealistic view. Yet the tragic perspective returns us to ambiguities, and reminds us that there are no ultimate solutions to evil and suffering, only possible responses. Because Crysdale rejects the partial and fragile goodness of the tragic view in favour of a clear pond of whole goodness, certain realities are tossed into the weed patch beyond, left in their twisted messiness, forgotten by the translucent waters. Yet the disorder Crysdale rejects, the unwanted vibrancy of suffering and evil, sustains her vision of a clear and bounded pond. How can ideals be part of our practice without denying vital error, irrationality, contradictions, ambiguity, disorder, suffering? This question hasn't been satisfied for me as I read Crysdale's *Embracing Travail*, yet I imagine it is a question that animates Crysdale's thinking.

Canadian Theological Society/société théologique canadienne

May 24-26 - 2001

Laval University - Quebec City

Annual General Meeting

Canadian Theological Society

University of Alberta, Edmonton

Saturday, May 27, 2000

(minutes)

- I. Call to order by Anne-Marie Dalton, 8h35 am.
- II. Pamela Dickey-Young and Doug Harink moved the adoption of 1999 minutes. Carried.
- III. Business arising from the minutes. Michael had indicated that Ian Ritchie is still interested in helping with developing the web-site. CCSR has a web-site onto which we could attach our own information. The contact person is Nicola Denzey.
- IV. It was asked that the minutes be put into the CTS Newsletter. The papers could also be housed on the web-site in the archive section.
- V. Doug Harink recommended that the Vice-President of CTS become representative on the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion (CCSR) in order to provide continuity to that position. This would be a three year term, and so the Vice-President would stay on as CCSR representative while rotating through as Vice-President, President, and Past-president of the CTS. Once that term was done, the new Vice-president of CTS for that year would become representative of CCSR. (Practically, this means that every third Vice-President of CTS would also become its representative to CCSR).
- VI. The executive tele-conference went well in January of 2000. It was recommended that a similar format be followed for the coming year.

VII. Representatives of the Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada (HSSFC) gave their report. Travel grants have generally been increased. Future Congresses will be held in Quebec City in 2001, Toronto in 2002, Dalhousie in 2003, and Manitoba in 2004. The Congress has about 25,000 members. Lobbying efforts are needed in order keep the current funding. The Human Resources scandal in Ottawa has caused greater scrutiny of what HSSFC is doing and so it is important to keep politicians, etc. informed of the importance of the work that we do. The HSSFC fees will likely go up by \$2 a member and \$.50 for students. The theme for 2001 is either (1) Identity, Culture, and Society, (2) The Role of the Intellectual at the University, or (3) Plagues and Viruses. It was also noted that there are women representatives on HSSFC.

VIII. Donald Stoesz presented his budget. Savings were realised this year as a result of holding the winter executive meeting by teleconference as well as the e-mail format of the "Call for Papers," Newsletter, and other communication with members. HSSFC has changed their year-end format to September to September, and so we still owe some money to them for our fiscal year (1999-2000). It was recommended that fees for 2001-2002 go up to \$60 for full members, \$35 for associate members, and \$25 each for students and retired members. This is to be ratified at the 2001 annual meeting. Fees will stay the same for 2000-2001. Budget was accepted.

IX. Someone asked about who the honorary members were in CTS. (Perhaps this could be put in the newsletter).

X. There were 12 submissions for the student essay prize. Scott Dunham was the winner. Someone asked about getting the name of the prize winner in the combined programme. It was noted that there are some logistic problems with this because it takes time for the essays to come in as well as the readers to submit their evaluations.

XI. The journal, Religious Studies and Theology, has agreed to publish the student essay prize. This would be done upon the student's consent.

XII. The dates for next year's CTS meeting (2001) is May 24-26 in Quebec City (Laval University).

XIII. The candidates for the new CTS executive are Cynthia Crysdale for Vice-President, Myroslaw Tataryn and Maguerite Abdul-Masih for Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) representatives for the 2000-2003 term.

XIV. Question was raised about the appropriateness of someone teaching in the United States becoming the president of a Canadian society. It was noted that Cynthia had done her graduate work in Canada and has been an active member of CTS for a long time. It was on this basis that she was nominated as vice-president.

XV. Candidates were accepted as nominated by the nominations committee. Carried.

XVI. It was moved to adjourn the meeting at 9h50.

Respectively Submitted,
Donald Stoesz, Acting Secretary

..... See information sheet below

Membership News and Information November 2000
Information for CTS Newsletter/Bulletin d'Information de la Communiqué SCT

Name/Nom: _____
e-mail address _____

Recent Publications/Publications recentes:

Current Research /Papers/Recherches Poursuivies/Communications a des Congress, etc.

New Appointments/Nouvelles Positions:

Completion of Graduate Work/dissertations/Achevement des Etudes Superieures:

In addition to the information above we would be glad to receive news about recent or upcoming conferences and other events, local or international, which would be of interest to our membership. Please feel free to send along any information items which you think would be of interest.

Vous etes cordialement invitÈ a vous exprimer en francais. Les renseignements qui nous sont soumis en francais seront publiees en francais.

**Please return this form by March 12, 2001 to:
Veuillez remettre avant 12 mars à:**

**John Franklin
133 Southvale Dr.
Toronto, ON M4G 1G6
franklin@ultratech.net <<mailto:franklin@ultratech.net>>**

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