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THE THEOLOGY OF CHARLES EARLE RAVEN: A 'SCIENTIFICALLY ACCEPTABLE THEOLOGY'?

Charles Earle Raven (1885-1964) was an outstanding liberal theologian and in the eyes of an American Episcopalian, James A. Carpenter, "one of the few really great theologians Anglicanism has produced"¹. Raven was also a distinguished historian of science and a naturalist as well as a passionate advocate of pacificism². He devoted much of his life to the reconciliation of science and the Christian faith and significantly when it was desired to publish a book on science and the Christian faith in the World Christian Books series, it was to Raven that the editor and publishers turned³. In addition to this book, which was published under the title *Christianity and Science* (1955), his most impressive books on this topic were *Science, Religion and the Future* (1943), which was reprinted as recently as 1968, and his Gifford Lectures *Natural Religion and Christian Theology* (1953), which represent the crown of his work, delivered and published after his retirement from the Regius Professorship of Divinity in Cambridge.

Raven, who held the Regius Professorship from 1932 until 1950, wrote an account of his religious experience in his book *A Wanderer's Way*, which was published in 1928. His life has been described in a lengthy memoir by Ian Ramsey⁴ and a full-length biography by F.W. Dillistone⁵.

1. Development of Raven's Religious Thought

We are fortunate that we can trace many of the factors that influenced Raven's religious and theological development. He tells us that his father seldom went to church and "it seemed he didn't need it"^{6a}. His mother, on the other hand, had a quiet and deep faith, and when she was not ill, went to church and her son went with her. However, the curate at a children's service warned him of the pains of hell and it ensured that in his mind the wrath of God eclipsed his love^{6b}. This no doubt explains why subsequently Raven was unable to come to terms with the Biblical teaching on the wrath of God.

At the age of thirteen Raven went to Uppingham School and he was confirmed at sixteen. He wrote that "the actual service thrilled me to the core"^{6c}. However, in his view he finished his

schooling "without any real understanding of Christianity either in theory or in practice"^{6d}. He went up to Cambridge in 1904 and three years later gained a first class honours in the Classical Tripos. During his first eighteen months at Cambridge he was, in his own words, "a pure pagan"^{6c}, but he used to attend the College Chapel with his best friend, Samuel Henry Hare⁷ who during "his student days won his way to an intense and vital faith in Christ"⁸. However, in August 1905 when Raven was alone in the Lake District on the summit of Great Gable, he experienced for the first time a moment of ecstasy⁹. This was followed in the Christmas vacation of 1905/6 by an experience which transformed his life not only bringing moments of rapture but somehow lifting his whole life onto a new level. "Suddenly", he wrote^{6e}, "the whole world seemed to be transfigured" and "the next two terms were spent in a haze of happiness". He had "the sense that for a moment time had stopped, that suddenly the visible world had become transparent, that the eternal reality, beyond and behind the things of sense, had been unveiled and in an instant of rapture had unfolded him into union with itself"^{6g}. From that moment onwards Raven realised that religion simply could not be brushed aside and this may have contributed to his decision in the following year to transfer from the Classical Tripos to the Theological Tripos. However, the study of Christian doctrine with Prof. Bethune-Baker did not make it easy for Raven to accept traditional Christian claims.

When Bethune-Baker became Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity in 1911 he established a course entitled 'Lectures introductory to the modern study of Theology' of which H.E. Wynn¹⁰ has written "it would not be wholly a parody to describe[it] as an introduction to all the skeletons in the theological cupboard. As guardian of the studies of candidates for the Christian ministry, he saw it as his inescapable duty to prevent them passing through Cambridge with comfortable ecclesiastical assumptions uninvestigated ... He was convinced that cost what it might, men of religion must face the facts that are not easily reconciled with their accepted system of belief".¹⁰ Bethune-Baker felt that the concept of miracles in the usually accepted sense of 'violations of nature' did not do justice to the Judaeo-Christian concept of the divine consistency¹¹. It is, therefore, not surprising to find Raven writing in 1923; "The new physical sciences have rendered untenable the traditional ideas of authority, of the supernatural, of miracles, and in fact of the whole method of God's operation"¹².

One other member of the Divinity Faculty who exercised a great influence on Raven, as Dillistone^{5a} has pointed out, was H.M. Gwatkin, who had been Dixie Professor of Ecclesiastical History since 1891. He had been a strong candidate for election as the first holder of the Chair in 1884 but he had been passed over in favour of Mandel Creighton, in part because he was "vaguely credited with liberalism

in his theological views"¹³. His obituary notice in *The Times* said "he was well read in German theology and did not eschew its best influences". Theologian, mathematician and entomologist, Gwatkin was a man after Raven's own heart. "His learning, enthusiasm and generosity", Raven later wrote in his preface to *Apollinarianism*, "were an inspiration and remain an ever honoured memory to generations of students". Gwatkin rejected the "distinction that Aquinas drew between a kingdom of nature and a kingdom of grace governed by different laws"¹⁴ and Raven followed him in rejecting the distinction between nature and supernature.

The person, however, who was to exercise the greatest influence on Raven was Mr. J.H.A. Hart, who was a Fellow of St. John's College from 1902 to 1919. He was not ordained until 1929 and in subsequent years was to embarrass rural clergy and at least one archbishop by his partiality for conversing in Greek and Hebrew¹⁵. Raven studied the New Testament with him and he subsequently described him as "a theologian of brilliant originality and one of the most generous friends I have ever known". Raven characterised Hart's faith as being "heterodox in some respects... Here was a faith utterly free from cant or convention, a passion for truth which would accept no formula as final". "Intellectually", said Raven, "there is no one to whom I owe more"^{6h}.

If Raven's studies in divinity made the acceptance of orthodox Christian doctrine difficult, so did the studies he undertook in genetics. Largely as a result of the controversies over Darwinism in the previous century, by the time Raven went to Cambridge there was a complete breach between scientists and theologians. Christian thinkers had adopted a naive dualism in which the physical and biological world was assigned to science and that of 'mind' and 'spirit' to religion¹⁶. In a lecture in 1954 Raven described the situation thus:

No one who was at Cambridge in my day at the beginning of the century, certainly no one who did the crazy thing I did and undertook to study Christian theology and also genetics in the same post-graduate year, finding himself in the position of a circus-rider trying to ride two horses and ignoring the fact that they were going at top speed in different directions, no one who went through that experience would doubt that at Cambridge in that day it was very nearly impossible for an honest and intelligent youngster to be a scientist and a believer. That is not an exaggeration. The scientific concept of the universe in the year 1904 insisted that man, by the exercise of a purely quantitative technique in the categories of physics and chemistry and the procedure of the laboratory, could arrive at a complete and objective and accurate picture of the

universe itself; and that given a few more years of non-interference from these superstitious believers, it would be possible to complete an analysis of the whole physical universe; and that having analysed it, it would then be possible not only to grasp this sorry state of things entire, but reshape it to the heart's desire. We as scientists were sent out into the world believing that on the analogy of a great machine we could not only interpret the physical universe but look forward very speedily to being able to interpret life and our own human species, since we, like Descartes' animals, were mere automata, robots, interpretable in terms of the physics and chemistry of our structure¹⁷.

Prof. Bateson under whom Raven studied genetics "saw himself possessed of a religion that should free men of religion"^{18a}. His general position can be judged from the concluding words of his inaugural lecture as Professor of Biology at Cambridge:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is certain that two blue-eyed parents cannot produce a brown-eyed child; and it will soon be certain (we already have abundant evidence) that two kleptomaniac parents cannot produce an honest child. What then will happen to your laws of Moses; what will happen to your legal and juridical process? You would not think it fair to sentence a man of my shape if having received that shape from my ancestors I cannot run a hundred yards in ten seconds¹⁹.

The deterministic theory of heredity so vigorously championed by Bateson represented a challenge to Raven's developing religious faith. In the years to come Raven made it his aim to reconcile his scientific convictions and his religious experiences.

Raven left Cambridge in 1908 and spent a year as Assistant Secretary for Secondary Education under the Liverpool City Council. This year was to be the most crucial period of his life. He had not resolved in his own mind the relationship between heredity and determinism. Natural history had been his hobby since childhood and as an undergraduate he had spent most of his vacations in the pursuit of moths⁶¹. While he was at Liverpool he continued his studies on Lepidoptera and this brought him into contact with a tobacconist, Mr. F.N. Pierce who was a noted authority on Lepidoptera. He also ran an immense boys' club and organized an undenominational children's service on Sunday evenings^{5b, 6j}. Here Raven sensed the presence of God: "God came far nearer than he had ever done in a cathedral"^{6j}. Save once for a bet at Cambridge Union Society, he had never spoken in public but it was in Liverpool that

he gave his first lecture, significantly on the subject of evolution, and in the hall of a Congregational Church he gave his first religious address^{6j}. However, the decisive event in his religious development occurred when on a bank holiday he went to visit his friend S.H. Hare, who was now a curate at Stoke-on-Trent. Hare was ill and as Raven wandered up to his friend's room thinking of their love for the countryside and music and all beautiful things, the place seemed unutterably dismal. He entered his friend's room:

I found him and behold he was not alone. No other phrase will express it^{6j}... Since I had seen him, he had found Jesus, and the effect of the discovery was manifest. His whole direction and outlook were altered under the new influence: there was a joy and quiet confidence in his face, purpose in his life, sympathy and strength in all his actions. Jesus was alive and present to my friend as he had been to the eleven in the upper room. He was alive and present to me.^{6k}

Raven was self-critical of the experience but it could not be gainsaid:

There was nothing strained or fantastic, abnormal or supernatural about it. Quite literally it was as simple and obvious as if my friend had with him a revered and sympathetic colleague who listened to our talk and influenced our every moment by the atmosphere of his presence^{6l}.

From that moment onwards Raven never had any doubts about the reality of Jesus. So when in 1909 he was offered the office of Dean of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he accepted and that acceptance involved a decision to take Holy Orders. In Raven's conversion experience there was an overwhelming sense of the presence of Jesus and it was to be his concept of Jesus which was to dominate his theology.

During 1917-8 Raven was a chaplain to the Forces in France and this experience was to leave a profound impression on him and may account in part for his antipathy to German theology. He became aware of the presence of Jesus in a new way: "He was never absent and I never alone, and never save for an instant or two broken by fear"^{6m}.

Raven later said that "man's religious experience is essentially indescribable, a moment of ecstasy and abasement for which neither words nor symbols are adequate"²⁰. In Raven's eyes mysticism was the fundamental element of religion and he quoted with approval Whitehead's dictum 'religion is the vision of something which stands beyond, behind and within the passing flux of immediate things'²¹.

Mystical experiences cannot be forced or anticipated: 'suddenly we know not when or why, the presence breaks in upon us'²¹. Raven opposed Barth's theology because he felt that it neglected "the conviction of humanity that in its moments of supreme experience, there is real worship, real guidance"²². However, it was supremely his experiences in France which, in his view, made Barthian theology untenable:

If Dr. Barth had been himself in the trenches instead of ministering to a congregation in Switzerland, I do not believe that his theology would have taken its present form. If he had known, the direct effects of gas and bombardment, if he had experienced the loneliness, the horror, the cowardice, the self-abasement and won through to the conversion, the faith and joy which followed it, he would recognise that his theology for all its power and sincerity is as one-sided as his exegesis of St. Paul²³.

While Raven was not alone in considering that Barth's theology was essentially a 'theology of the study' and not of the real world, he never seems to have asked why Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, who had also served as a military chaplain in France, did not find that his experience of war made Barth's theology untenable. In fact, after the war Hoskyns moved away from his early Catholic modernism, mainly as a result of reading the second edition of Barth's commentary on the Epistle to the Romans²⁴.

Thus, Raven's somewhat arid studies in divinity, his mystical experiences, his studies in genetics and his service as a military chaplain all contributed to making him one of the outstanding liberal theologians of the day.

Along with other liberal theologians Raven believed that the scientific method had reshaped man's understanding of the universe and so the fundamental task of the church was to re-interpret her doctrines in the light of this new situation^{18b}. So he conceived that the aim of theologians was to develop a "scientifically acceptable theology"^{23a} which began not with the "dogmas about God, but with the facts of religious experience"²⁶.

Raven's approach to theology, however, was not without its critics and from 1931 onwards he was aware of the growing influence of Karl Barth in British theological circles. In 1943 Raven, adopting the epistolary style of C.S. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters*, delivered a scathing and bitter attack on continental theology in his book *Good News of God*. To this book Franz Hildebrandt wrote a well-argued reply in a book entitled *This is the Message*. Hildebrandt put his finger on the essential difference between Raven and himself when he wrote:

The one needful thing I find missing in the *Good News of God* (is) the fact that the Good News is his revelation not our conception, his own word coming down from heaven, carried by his messengers, the prophets and apostles and embodied in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments²⁷.

The same point was made by Daniel Jenkins when he said in criticism of Raven and the other liberal theologians that the neo-orthodox theologians had "a different conception of the nature of theological truth from theirs. As we understand them, they are not concerned as we are to assert the absolute once-for-all character of the Gospel revelation, and its necessity of marking off its truth from that of the world"²⁸. Raven, in fact, believed in progressive revelation and, citing John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth", he said "Christendom ... by its Scriptures was committed to a belief in ... revelation still incomplete"^{29a}. Writing in 1928 he had written "It is not surprising that whereas a century ago men described religion in terms of revelation and the gift of God, nowadays they treat it from the standpoint of human experience"²⁹. There was thus a fundamental difference between Raven on the one hand and Barth and Hildebrandt on the other concerning the nature of revelation and this constitutes, in my view, the fundamental reason why Raven rejected the theology of Barth.

2. Principal Ideas in Raven's Theology

2.1 Christology

Just as Raven's religious experience was dominated by an experience of Jesus Christ, so his theology was Christocentric. It is not without significance that his first theological publication was a series of lectures on the Incarnation and its interpretation in the light of modern thought, which were published under the title *What think ye of Christ?* (1916), while his first major work was *Apollinarianism* (1923), which had the sub-title 'An Essay in the Christology of the Early Church'. Like every present day theologian Raven had to consider whether in the light of New Testament criticism it is possible to build a Christology on the Gospels. Raven's own studies convinced him that it was possible to know sufficient of the historical Jesus from the Gospels to build a doctrine of the person of Christ^{30a}. Raven valued the Fourth Gospel highly holding that its author was an old man who looked back upon Jesus whom he had loved in days long past but vividly remembered^{30b}. In *What think ye of Christ?* Raven expressed his conviction that "on grounds of both historical and literary criticism we can accept the traditional account of the Fourth Gospel and use it along with St. Mark

and Q for the study of the life of Jesus"^{30c}. Fifteen years later he wrote that the Fourth Gospel "looks like a work of memory, enhanced and on occasion distorted by years of reflection and religious conviction. Its author ... may well be John of Zebedee described in the other Gospels. His work is an artist's impression of the unique personality, whom he has known, served and loved"^{22b}. Raven thought that the Fourth Gospel was written about A.D. 70 but published at or after its author's death, in Trajan's time or about A.D. 95^{22c}.

Throughout Raven's writings there occurs the problem of the relationship of the Deity to the humanity of Jesus. "While Raven's contemporaries were wrestling with the problem of this doctrine, whether with the aid of 'kenosis' or by other means", wrote A.M. Ramsey³¹, Raven answered the question without fuss or travail by something near to the identification of the divine and human". The difference between Jesus and other men Raven considered to be essentially one "of degree rather than of kind": Jesus "transcends us as the perfect does the partial, as the image of God does those who are spoiled copies of that image"^{30d}. At first Raven was hesitant to speak about the pre-existence of Jesus, preferring to base his faith on the Gospels rather than the credal statements of the Church^{30e}, but later he was happy to affirm that "the Fourth Evangelist's emphasis upon his pre-existence, his Sonship, his incarnation as the eternal Word is right", although Raven added "this does not remove him from our species"^{22d}.

Raven was aware that in asserting that the difference between Jesus and other men was essentially one "of degree rather than of kind", he was almost certainly guilty of a technical heresy. To this he replied that in the early period of the Church's history Christians in fact accepted that the difference between Jesus and other men was one of "degree" and that Athanasius in his *De Incarnatione* "does not hesitate to urge pagans to accept the divinity of Jesus on the ground that they already accepted the divine inspiration of other men"^{30f}. The view that this difference is one of "kind" means "if pressed to its logical conclusion ... a denial of the Incarnation, since a Christ who differs from us in kind is ... simply not a man at all"^{30g}. Acceptance that this difference is one of degree does not mean that "all men are potential Christs" nor "does it mean that we can or ever could be his equals"^{30g}. "His relation to us will be that of a 'perfect round' to the 'broken arcs', of the white light to the myriad hues of the spectrum ... In Jesus will be the fullness of that Logos of which we by virtue of our humanity possess what Justin Martyr called 'seeds'. The perfect Man is for us men the Incarnate Son of God: he could not be so unless we were in our measure also sons — prodigal sons — of the same Father"^{29a}

It was Raven's Christology which provided him with the key to the understanding of the relation of God to the universe. As we shall see later (Section 2.3) he made use of the concept of emergent evolution and he criticized L.S. Thornton, who also employed this concept in his book *The Incarnate Lord*, for his failure to admit "the divine humanity of Jesus"^{22e}.

Raven's Christology has not been without its critics and Bartlet considered that Raven did not answer what he considered to be the crucial question whether Christ in the centre of his personality is human or divine³². For his part Raven felt that it was futile to press this question if, as he believed, "God and man are one in Christ"^{22f}. "If the question be pressed whether Jesus is human or divine in the innermost core of his being", wrote Raven, "we shall reply that this again is based on a misleading analogy, the assumption that the problem is one of contact between two individuals, and that as between full human personality and the universal reality of God the analogy is demonstrably false. God is not an individual: even personality is a term so inherently associated with human limitations as to be inappropriate: the personality of the Incarnate is human-divine, and not the less human nor the less divine by reason of the perfect fellowship or union of the two in him"^{22g}.

Raven shared the general tendency of liberal modernists to blur the distinction between God as Creator and man as creature³³ and his critics felt rightly that "he was apt to confuse the *affinity* of God and Man with something that suggested *identity*"³¹. "God is indeed revealed in the perfect manhood of Jesus", wrote A.M. Ramsey. "Yet perfect manhood is not itself Deity, and it is no disparagement of the work of the divine Logos in the human race if we insist, far more than Dr. Raven seems to allow us, upon the sheer *paradox* of the Incarnation as the act whereby one who is Creator took upon himself creaturely, finite and mortal existence". Ramsey realised that Raven would regard such a statement as being Apollinarian, but he urged that "so far from being Apollinarian it is inherent in the New Testament testimony"³⁴.

Ramsey also considered that Raven had no doctrine of election³⁴, but, in my view, a more severe criticism of his theology is that he blurs the distinction between God and man. This leads to an inadequate view of the holiness of God, which in its turn results in an inadequate view of sin.

2.2 Soteriology

The doctrine of the Atonement was closely related in Raven's thought to the doctrine of the Incarnation, for he viewed Jesus not only as "the expression of deity" but also as "its instrument in fulfilling the divine purpose"^{29b}. That purpose was "to bring

men through the influence of love into the same relationship with God as he himself possessed, to make them sons of God because sharers (*sic*) of his own Spirit of Sonship"^{30h}. Just as he had virtually identified the deity and the humanity in Jesus, so Raven came virtually to identify the Incarnation with the Atonement.

Raven held that the doctrine of the Fall as traditionally understood had a place in theology entirely out of line with its place in the thought of the Apostle Paul for whom it was "by no means a fundamental concept"^{25b}. Raven contended that in Romans 1-3, Paul never suggested that all mankind is corrupted by Adam's sin and that even in Romans 5:12-14 he has in mind the primary guilt of Eve rather than the abiding effects of the Fall. "St. Paul makes it clear that death, when once introduced as a punishment for Adam's disobedience, became universal: but he explicitly states first that until the giving of the Law there cannot be sin in the full sense and secondly that even those who did not sin as Adam had done were still subject to death. It is hard to believe that such ambiguous language would have been used if St. Paul had held strongly or clearly the traditional doctrine of the Fall"^{25b}.

Although Raven rejected this doctrine he knew that the fact of sin must be taken seriously, since it involved separation from God^{30l}. Man needs to be delivered from the burden of sin and this becomes possible as we love Christ and our lives are transformed³⁰ⁱ. "If man is the image of God", wrote Raven, "then potentially every one of us should reflect as in a glass the splendour of the divine. As men it is our privilege to cleanse the mirror of our soul and turn it so that heaven's own light can fall upon its surface. For all of us the mirror is blotted by sinful actions, distorted by pride: in all of us God's image is hard to trace"^{30j}.

Raven at least in his early days held an exemplarist view of the Atonement: Christ, he wrote, "knew that only an agony of the fiercest pain and scorn and failure that men could ever pass through ... would make his appeal for love irresistible"^{30k}. "Man could only be brought to realise the depth of his own wickedness and yearn for a way of escape, if he were confronted by a single example of the grim consequences of evil, and that the cost of such an awakening must be death of the innocent"^{30l}. Writing in 1931 Raven noted that "Anselm's theory of Atonement represented the spirit of the age at its best"^{22h}. Raven developed this thought further after he had read Aulén's *Christus Victor*, which was published in English that year. He concluded that the history of the doctrine of the Atonement was a response to the characteristic needs of the age^{25a2,3b} and so there was need for a new concept of Atonement to meet the present age. He recognised that such a concept had yet to be developed but thought that it would be "in terms of unity and the opening chapters of the Epistle to the Ephesians"^{25a2}.

Raven can be criticized on the ground that he uncritically accepted Aulén's so called "classic view of the Atonement" and seems to have completely ignored Camfield's very damaging criticism of it³⁵. However, my main criticism is that Raven's understanding of the Atonement is exegetically dubious. In maintaining that the idea of the wrath of God is "a misinterpretation of the Father's character"^{29b} and in failing to take note of the Pauline statement that we were once "enemies of God" (Romans 5:10), Raven is in fact minimising the alienation of man and God. In his general approach Raven appears to have been influenced by Wescott and Hort who regarded 'reconciliation' as involving a change of attitude of man to God and not also of God to man³⁶. In Raven's account of sin there is no recognition that although the impress of the Creator remains on his creation it has been blurred by sin. Although Raven recognised that when Paul wrote 'the creation was subjected to futility' (Romans 8:20) he had "in mind the story of the curse upon the earth and its human inhabitants in Genesis 3"³⁷, Raven does not appear to have recognised that in some ways creation was bound up in sin and its consequences. For these reasons Raven's hamartiology must be deemed inadequate.

In order to refute the doctrine of man's depravity as traditionally understood, Raven cited many references to eternal life in the Fourth Gospel. If man can experience in the present world life of a quality to be called eternal, "then the antithesis between nature and supernature becomes absurd, and the total corruption of the natural must be abandoned"^{25c}. Raven appears to have ignored the fact that "from the beginning to the end of his Gospel, John emphatically points to *faith* as the way to the reception of salvation"³⁸. Man must be born again if he is to experience the life of the age to come (John 3:16).

The Pauline emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ as the appropriate response to the Gospel is also missing in Raven's description of the Church as "the fellowship of those who live in Christ and by him are incorporated into his body that is the Church. No initiation except that of sharing in his sufferings can admit us to it: no sacrament save that of daily dying and rising again can sustain use in it: no priesthood but that of the Christ-possessed ministers to it: those who are led by the Spirit of God, be they Jew, Turk, infidel or heretic, are within its membership: all mankind belong to it having eyes they see, if their lives display the fruits of the Spirit, if they have love one towards another"²²¹. One agrees with Visser 'T. Hooft and Oldham that such a concept leads logically to an inter-religious community³⁹.

2.3 *Christ and the Universe*

The doctrine of Christ forms for Raven the key to the interpretation of the total cosmic process. Dillistone has argued that Raven regarded evolution as being "capable of bringing into a single harmonious system the traditional faith of Christendom and the amazing new understanding of the universe which modern science has discovered"^{5c}. I would agree with Carpenter's criticism of Dillistone at this point for this is a misplaced emphasis. "For Raven it was precisely the doctrine of Christ which illuminated the concept of evolution. Though that concept threw enormous light on the doctrine of Christ, providing a chief interpretative tool for the understanding of Christianity, the meaning of the evolutionary process itself derived from the doctrine of Christ"¹. In Raven's eyes "life abundant is both the goal of evolution and the purpose of Jesus"^{25b2} and Christ's sacrifice was "the culmination and consummation of the whole creative-redemptive process"^{25c2}. Christ is "the climax and illuminator of the universe, the archetype and the goal of the life of man"^{3c}. Almost at the end of his life, Raven expressed his ideas in words which in both conception and language are comparable to those of the French Roman Catholic palaeontologist Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin whose biography he had just written⁴⁰:

In these great sentences (Ephesians 4:13-16) the biological principle of symbiosis, a new principle at the level of the universal human divine community, has found expression. For us it is the coinherence, the Christification, of mankind in a single organic personality. Like the atoms in the molecule, like the cells in the living creature, like the chromosomes in the zygote, like the analysable elements in the integrated individual, like the several members in the family-life of our dreams, the particular men and women thus combined by the unifying energy of the love of God in Christ emerge as a veritable incarnation of his Spirit in the world. Just as love has been disclosed as capable of release from the twin distortions of exploitation and sentimentality, as a new fulfilment of past aspiration and present creativity, and as the attribute of God himself, manifested for us in terms of our humanity by Jesus and made universally available as we share his Spirit, so now we catch a glimpse of the vast and differing peoples of the world transformed in Christ into the fellowship of a true commonwealth, sharing the same loyalty, serving the same cause, and inspired by the same love. Such a community would live as Jesus lived, in the world but with God; its individuals would find in their membership one of another their own freedom and fulfilment, and its unity would discover for them in the changes and chances of our mortality the permanence of the abiding values and the reality of eternal life"^{37b}.

Raven felt that any materialistic interpretation of evolution was inadequate. In his book *The Creator Spirit* he interpreted evolution in terms of 'emergence', a concept which had been developed by C.L. Morgan in his Gifford lectures, *Emergent Evolution* (1923) and *Life, Man and Spirit* (1926). In this account of the evolutionary process genuinely new levels (or 'emergents') came into being which were not explicable in terms of previous levels. Life and mind were such new emergents. But if this is the case they were in continuity with the lower levels. The process of evolution he believed was the result of the divine activity in nature. But it was essentially an immanentist concept with no clear picture of purpose, direction or goal. Although these ideas were accepted by Raven and Teilhard de Chardin, their overtly immanentist overtones have prevented the acceptance of Morgan's views by many theologians⁴¹.

Although the concept of emergence as a scientific theory still figures in some evolutionary thinking, it has not been widely accepted⁴². Raven regarded it merely "as supplying the least unsatisfactory schema of the evolutionary process"^{22j}. It was rather in the general description of creation set forth in Romans 8:18-39 that Raven saw an account which "a scientist could accept as congruous with his own insight into evolution"^{3d}.

Cairns⁴³ has suggested that Raven has made a creative contribution to the problem of evil and suffering by regarding the power of God as not being physical power raised to the 'n th.' degree but rather the suffering power of love. Creation is not a thing once for all completed, but a continuous process in which through the travail pangs of nature and mankind "the sons of God" are being brought to birth. While one can be grateful for this stress on the suffering power of love, regrettably one feels that Raven reinterprets rather than expounds Paul's thoughts in Romans 8:18-39 and that in this passage Paul is not setting out "an account of creation" but rather showing in Nygren's words that "the redemption of mankind is also to be the redemption of creation"⁴⁴.

2.4 Pneumatology

In Raven's writings there is a discussion on the relation of the Holy Spirit to the world in general. Unlike some of the Fathers, Raven preferred to speak of the Spirit, rather than the Logos, in connection with the divine activity in nature and in the human race; and he went further in describing the Spirit not only as the author of what is good and true but as identifiable with those human qualities and potentialities which others prefer to call 'the divine image'. He valued highly the description in the Nicene Creed of the Holy Spirit as 'the Lord and Giver of Life' and wrote "that in our faith in the Holy Ghost as the Giver of Life we have warrant for believing that he is operative not only in the edifying of the

saints, but in the whole process of evolution; that we should enlarge our conception of him by tracing his works, as the Greek Fathers did those of the Logos, in the whole self-revelation of God; that we should claim nothing less than the whole sphere of experience as the scene of his activity; and that doing so, we should set our faces not only against the dualism of natural and supernatural, but against a conflict between scientific and religious truth"⁴⁵.

Raven's doctrine of the Holy Spirit has been severely criticised by W.D. Davies who suggested that Raven's doctrine leaned "more to Stoicism with its *pneuma tou kosmou* than to that energy full of power, strength and life that he is designated by *to pneuma to hagion*. The Spirit in Paul is not 'the manifestation of the same Godhead in the cosmic process of which humanity is for us the consummation and Jesus the crowning glory (*The Creator Spirit*, p.28)'; it is on the contrary, however unsatisfactory such language must be, a gift poured forth from on high; it is supernatural, it retains the sense in Paul as in the Old Testament of 'a specially given energy'⁴⁶. Raven sought to refute these criticisms^{25d2}, but the fact remains that Raven's doctrine was a *re-interpretation* of rather than an exegesis of Scripture. There was thus a conflict between Raven's broad theological understanding and the requirements of rigorous Biblical exegesis, for in the New Testament "the term Holy Spirit refers almost exclusively to the new order, the new age, the new community in Christ"³¹.

2.5 *The Doctrine of the Trinity*

Raven's attitude to the doctrine of the Trinity developed over the years. Writing in 1916 he felt that the historic definitions of the Christian faith as expressed in the Creeds "enforce on us precepts as to the pre-existence of Jesus and his relation to God as to the second Person of the Trinity, when we feel that such subjects are within the realm of speculation and possibility rather than of certainty"^{30m}. "We do not admit", he wrote, "that metaphysical doctrines have in themselves much religious value, as long as Christ's uniqueness and completeness is maintained. No doubt they have some independent worth, and a proper place in the Christian scheme of things, provided their importance is not exaggerated. But it is abundantly plain that far too much attention has been and still is devoted to them and that this undue emphasis is positively injurious to Christianity. For not only does it give unbelievers cause to blaspheme our faith as a thing vainly imagined and most presumptuous, and to instil doubt into the hearts of many who else would confess Christ openly; but it distracts the attention of the orthodox from Jesus to the Trinity, fosters an unreal conception of his significance, and prevents the appreciation and use of the truth of his manhood"^{30m}. A few years later Raven referred to "Life, Light and

Love, the great Johannine Trinity" as representing "an entirely different conception of God, a conception which alone enables men to pray 'Our Father' and alone gives an adequate explanation of the motive of the Incarnation"⁴⁷. This somewhat unguarded language led Green to suppose that Raven wished to substitute Light, Life and Love for Father, Son and Holy Spirit⁴⁸, a supposition which Raven vigorously refuted, pointing out that "no such analogy between the Johannine categories and the Persons of the Trinity is suggested. Light, Life and Love belong to the unity or 'substance' of Godhead"^{2k}.

By 1928 Raven was able to adopt a more positive attitude to the credal statements concerning the Trinity: although he preferred to use the term "mode" to avoid any idea of tritheism, he accepted the use of the term "person", if "person be stripped of all that denotes an individual or separate self"^{29c}. Subsequently, he discovered to his great surprise that Karl Barth also proposed dropping the term "person" in favour of "mode"^{25d2}. Raven was very conscious of the dangers of tritheism and felt that William Temple in *Christus Veritas* emphasized "dangerously the distinction of the Persons of the Trinity"^{18c} and that Bishop Gore in his book *The Reconstruction of Belief* gave the impression that he was maintaining "a concept of God as of three individuals enthroned in a spacial heaven, one of whom sends us the second that he in turn may send the third"²¹. There was an element of truth in these criticisms for there was a tendency in Anglican theology, as Ramsey admits, to use the term "person" loosely in a way that was rather suggestive of tritheism⁴⁹.

3. Raven's Influence

Both Maa Warren⁵⁰ and Ian Ramsey⁴ have testified to Raven's great influence as a preacher. Although none of his major books was translated into other languages, he was in his day immensely influential as a theologian. However, he is largely neglected today and A.M. Ramsey in his survey of Anglican theology from 1889 until 1939 in his book *From Gore to Temple* devoted only just over one of its one hundred and ninety two pages to Raven's theology. This led Raven to complain that Ramsey "treats Christian truth as if it were measurable by the disputations of the patristic age or of the Reformation" and "that subjects which seem to many of us absolutely vital — the commending of the faith in relation to the new social order and new cosmology — are rarely even mentioned"⁵¹.

Raven was one of the few theologians who was concerned with the relationship of science and the Christian faith. At a time when those scientists who were Christians wrote books defending the truth of the Bible⁵², Raven sought to bring scientific and religious truth into a harmonious whole. He had considerable influence on C.A. Coulson who was to become not only one of the world's most

distinguished theoretical chemists but also Vice-President of the Methodist Conference⁵³. During a good part of his life he devoted as much attention to religion as to science and his book *Science and Christian Belief* was to achieve wide circulation, especially when it was reprinted in the Fontana series. In many ways he was a disciple of Raven, believing in Raven's words that "life abundant is both the goal of evolution and the purpose of Christ"^{54a}. Moreover, his understanding of creation very clearly betrays the influence of Raven:

For evolution, the story of man, traced for us by the scientist, is seen as the travail of God's energy, creating man in his own image. No wonder it is shot through with pain and sacrifice and blood, like the travail of a woman with a child. All things may be part of a great design; but it is a living, growing, developing pattern, if God is in it. Here, and here only, is the beginning of our understanding of that 'sublime law of sacrifice' which Fabre saw throughout the animal world; and, no less, of that 'groaning' of the whole physical creation which St. Paul has described for us in his letter to the Romans. For creation, and Nature, and man, these are not what God does, but what he is. The only interpretation that will do justice to them is in terms of love and sacrifice, linking them all together in the bond of God's being^{54b}.

The liberal tradition in theology has continued to exercise an influence on scientists such as A.R. Peacocke and L.C. Birch. Peacocke has acknowledged his debt to Raven⁵⁵ and, although Birch like Raven rejects "the concept of God's operation in the universe as a series of fitful interventions from a supernatural sphere overlaying the natural"^{56a}, he has been influenced by the process philosophers more than by Raven^{56b}. However, many practising scientists who are Christians are either followers of Raven's arch-enemy Karl Barth⁵⁷ or else conservative evangelicals. R.E.D. Clark, who was one of the founders of the Research Scientists' Christian Fellowship (RSCF) has acknowledged his great debt to Raven for his criticism of mechanistic evolution in *Science, Religion and the Future*⁵⁸ but the publications by members of the RSCF⁵⁹ maintain the antithesis between nature and supernature which Raven regarded as "absurd"^{25c}. They seem to have been considerably influenced by the historian of science R. Hooykaas⁶⁰ who said in reviewing the first volume of Raven's Gifford Lectures "A synthesis of science and theology into one system, as seems to be Dr. Raven's ideal always ended in the adulteration of both. However, that there must be a perfect *harmony* between them has been the conviction of the great founders of modern science who share Dr. Raven's love for the Book of Creation"⁶¹.

Raven's *Apollinarianism* (1923) was his one work of pure theological scholarship and it remains, in the words of Dr. Henry Chadwick, "a landmark in the study of a great subject"^{5d}. His biography of Teilhard de Chardin did much to bring Teilhard de Chardin's ideas to the attention of English-Speaking people. However, although these ideas now have little appeal to the practising scientist, they still have some appeal in theological circles⁶².

4. Conclusion

Anyone who studies Raven's writings cannot but be impressed by the width of his scholarship, his passionate desire to commend his Christian faith to others and his aim to present a unified view of truth. However, Raven's presentation of Christian doctrine involves its re-interpretation and one does not know what criteria are employed in deciding which doctrines should be re-interpreted and the manner in which they should be restated. Moreover, Raven's concern for unity leads him, as Dillistone appreciated to over-simplification and a neglect of ideas that did not fit into his scheme^{5e}.

A number of detailed criticisms can be advanced against Raven's theology and these in the main arise from the fact that his broad theological understanding is in conflict with the requirements of rigorous New Testament exegesis. However, my basic criticism would be that his theology is subjectivist, a criticism he himself rightly levelled against Karl Barth⁶³: every opinion must be held on the basis of some authority and it is not clear what constitutes Raven's authority. Romans 8:18-39 is in many ways a key passage for Raven but although he recognises that Paul has in mind the story of Genesis 3, he completely neglects the implication that the creation is in some way bound up with man's sin. This is particularly surprising, since Sanday and Headlam, whose commentary Raven cites^{37c}, recognised that "creation ... had been enthralled to death and decay by the Fall of man"^{36b} and Raven regarded the "truth and relevance for us of Paul's interpretation" of this passage as being "in the best sense prophetic"^{37a}. Likewise Raven rejected the notion of God's wrath as being incompatible with the nature of God, yet both wrath and future judgment are present in the Fourth Gospel⁶⁴ to which Raven appealed in order to refute the traditional doctrine of man's depravity as well as in the Epistle to the Romans. One is left with the impression that Raven's own deep faith in Christ is in unresolved tension with his "liberal" views concerning the authority of Scripture and of the historic Creeds.

Raven represents a fine tradition in English theology and if in the end his theology is judged deficient, it is because the universe does not permit the enlightened reconciliations to which he devoted so much effort. His virtual identification of deity and humanity in Jesus and the identification of the Incarnation and Atonement leads in the end to an unsatisfactory view of God, man and sin and it seems, at least to the present author, that Raven merits Anselm's rebuke "You have not yet considered what a heavy weight sin is"⁶⁵.

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- 7 Strangely, Dillistone (ref.5) makes little reference to this friendship apart from describing Raven's visit to him when he was a curate at Stoke-on-Trent. Raven did not mention his name in his autobiography *A Wanderer's Way* and Dillistone presumably did not identify him. Nonetheless Dillistone's neglect of him is surprising since Raven said "His influence on me was certainly stronger than of any others save my mother and my wife"⁶⁶. Hare was one year older than Raven but he entered

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