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the phenomena.) However, even if there *is* no more than a rope, one still would have to regard the *concept* of a snake as 'real' in some sense, which in turn must have been acquired from some *real* snake. All this is rather mysteriously expressed by means of 'non-dual'.

10. In a sense, this is not surprising, since Shankara purports to do no more than systematise the Vedanta, viz. the Upanishads. But since the conceptual structure he uses for this system is ultimately derived from Mahayana Buddhism, a fluctuation in the 'reading' of his conception (to be discussed below) arises from this.

11. This 'being cut off' becomes conceptually clear particularly in the notion of *anavam* which the South Indian Shaiva-Siddhanta evolved. It denotes a 'framentation', 'isolation' of the individual (from *anu*, 'atom, fragment'), in relation to the all-pervasive Shiva. Compare also *Bhagavad-Gita* VII, 14: 'this is my *maya* consisting of material components; they will transcend it who take refuge with me.'

12. See for examples A. Ramanujan, *Speaking of Shiva*, Penguin Classics; C. Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Oxford, 1974; W. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion*, Oxford, 1968.

THE 'INDISPENSABILITY' OF THE INCARNATION

J. Astley

I

Professor Stephen Sykes's essay, 'The Incarnation as the foundation of the Church', is one of the most interesting papers from the critics of the 'mythographers' printed in the recent collection *Incarnation and Myth: The Debate Continued.* [1]In it he argues that 'the place of the incarnation in catholic orthodoxy is, in the first instance, in the form of a story' (p.115)—a 'true' story (p.117)—albeit a story with 'doctrinal implications'. Sykes argues that 'the language of the story is irreplaceable and necessarily temporal and sequential; but it is not, for that reason, as a whole mythological or poetic or metaphorical . . .' (p.116). He rejects Maurice Wiles's view[2] that understanding such a story (Wiles says 'myth') is a matter of finding some corresponding ontological truth, for 'in this case the myth becomes disposable'. More precisely he avers that:

> The incarnation is, in the first instance, an event in a story which renders who God is in concrete form. It is not a story which illustrates something which we otherwise already know, nor is it a story which is archetypal in the human consciousness. Rather it is a story whose meaning cannot be rendered otherwise than by the narrative. It is, literally, indispensable. (p.122)

Later he adds that, 'It is indispensable because it is in the end by means of stories that human identity is patterned' (p.123), and 'that it is by means of this, and no other story, that God desires that he shall be identified' (p.125). The incarnation, therefore, is a story—or an event in a story, incarnational theology, on the other hand, consists of 'a variety of different articulations of the incarnation, whose primary form is the story of God's self-identification with the human condition' (*loc.cit.*).

Now this is at first sight a most illuminating and fruitful position, and the importance of story in Christian theology has been stressed by a number of recent writers[3]. My concern in this paper, however, is to attempt to analyse and discuss the senses in which the incarnation story, or 'drama'[4], might be viewed as indispensable. Before embarking on that exercise, however, I should say that I fully accept the notion that the incarnation theme exists primarily in the form of a story or narrative[5], expressed best perhaps in some Christmas hymns, and that incarnational theology—*doctrines* of the incarnation—are secondary, more or less inadequate, articulations and explications of that story[6]. If this is true, it is as true of the 'two-nature model' in Christology as it is of the less orthodox 'revelation' or other models[7]. So the 'story ploy' can not be regarded as a straightforward defence of Chalcedonian

orthodoxy.

II

There are a number of ways in which the story of the incarnation may be regarded as indispensable, although some of them do tend to merge into others.

(a) It may have an indispensable evocative function. Thus the story of the incarnation may evoke for us a religious intuition, either in the sense of an experience of God (or Christ), or in the sense of a revelation of theological truth. Ian Ramsey argued at great length for the evocative power of all sorts of religious language. For him theology was largely a matter of telling stories until 'the penny dropped'[8]. Although Ramsey attempted to hold together the evocative and representative functions of religious discourse[9], there is no reason why we cannot claim that certain stories have the capacity of engineering a religious disclosure without arguing that the story must then serve to represent that which is discerned[10]. Perhaps the incarnation story functions like a mystic's mantra, inducing in us a religious experience by linguistic means. In this case its use is justifiable on pragmatic grounds,'if it works'[11]; incarnational *theology*, however, is only justified if it adequately articulates and represents what is disclosed in the experience which is evoked by meditation on the incarnation *story*. But there is no reason why the two should be related in any other way[12].

However, the relationship between the incarnation story and incarnational theology is usually regarded as being less 'accidental' than this.

(b) It might be argued that the incarnation story

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has a rather different evocative function, in that it can give rise to a commitment quite beyond the power of much incarnational theology. John Hick[13] has spoken of the truth of a myth—a mythic concept or image as well as a narrative myth—in terms of its capacity to give rise to an 'appropriate' commitment. Certainly the concrete language of the incarnation story is most at home among the 'first order' religious language of hymns, prayers and confessions in which people make strong existential religious commitments. By contrast, incarnational theology seems too abstract and recondite to give rise effectively to real commitment. We can 'believe in' the story; but our faith is only of the 'belief that' variety with regard to the doctrines.

(c) The latter distinction is clearly closely related to the notion that a story has, or evokes, an affective component that is more than, and cannot be reduced to, its cognitive meaning. Stories arouse emotions, doctrines rarely do[14].

(d) It is not always clear how far such views are separable from the claim that the story has an irreducible *cognitive* content. The notion of irreducible (religious) metaphors has been much discussed, and the incarnation story may be regarded as at least in part metaphorical[15]. On Max Black's 'interaction view' of metaphors our thoughts about the metaphor and the literal expression interact producing a new meaning that is the resultant of that interaction[16]. A metaphor, therefore, is no decorative substitute for a literal expression; nor is it a condensed or elliptical simile[17]. Interaction metaphors, according to Black, are 'not expendable'; for any literal 'equivalent' expression will fail 'to give the insight that the metaphor did' and there will be 'a loss of cognitive content'[18].

Earl MacCormac is one of those who argue that both religious language and scientific language contain metaphors that are not reducible to literal paraphrases. However,

> if by 'irreducible', one means that no way exists to understand the metaphor by analogy to ordinary experience, then irreducible metaphors are not even metaphors but are unintelligible gibberish. If, however, by 'irreducible', one means that no exact paraphrase exists, then it becomes quite possible for irreducible metaphors to play a legitimate role in language, for this second delineation allows for the analogous interpretation of a metaphor in ordinary terms even though such an interpretation may not capture the full meaning of the metaphor. Critics of language have acted as if irreducible religious metaphors were entirely beyond the possibility of understanding, forgetting that 'irreducibility' might prohibit an exact paraphrase, but not necessarily prevent a partial interpretation by analogy.[19]

Thus the cognitive irreducibility thesis should not be regarded as implying complete inability to reduce, but rather inability to completely reduce, the metaphor. In theology, as in many other areas of knowledge (e.g. science, metaphysics), metaphorical/analogical language is essential. For literal language is an inadequate medium for the representation of the meta-empirical objects of religious and scientific language games and the key ideas of metaphysical explanations of reality as a whole[20]. But the claims of coherence and clarity, and the need for inferential argument, demand some sort of partial specification of the metaphor (that does not reduce it to, or replace it by, a univocal term)[21].

We may note here that the theological drama in which God appears among the *dramatis personae* would be regarded by many as couched in a mythological form more readily reducible than the irreducible core of metaphorical/analogical language about God that it encloses. For to say that the 'living' and 'loving' God '*descends from heaven to earth*', is to use both irreducible religious analogy and reducible and avoidable *myth*.

(e) Another argument why the incarnation story cannot be translated without remainder into any other form lies in its character as a story. Sykes argues that the abstract nouns applied to God, e.g. righteousness, holiness, loving-kindness 'are not identifiable apart from stories which exemplify or illustrate what is being referred to'. Thus

> To speak of who God is with the precision required for the ordering of human response to him entails telling a story or stories in

which who he is is exemplified or illustrated. (p. 122)[22]

Perhaps Sykes is touching on an epistemological issue here. A person's character dispositions are only known to others through their expression in particular forms of observable behaviour[23]. Similarly, we can only know God's character through his acts, and these are spoken of in authoritative stories. Such *narratives* cannot be replaced by *descriptions* of God's character; for the latter are no more than second-order conclusions from the former, first-order, data. Their status is derivative and parasitic.

However, we should not fail to note the disanalogy between knowledge of God and knowledge of a man through their acts. For the expressions of the activity of God are not strictly comparable with pieces of human behaviour. In particular, God's creative activity results in the bringing into being, and sustaining in being, of the whole Universe. Unlike a human being's activity, it is not expressed in an observable change within the Universe. Human behaviour can be represented by stories; but how can this 'behaviour' of the transcendent, creator God be adequately 'storied'? Stories about God can only take the form of myths; they are necessarily anthropomorphic.

There is a sense, then, in which we may regard the parables of Jesus, and the parable that was Jesus, as indispensable for our understanding of the character of God. We need some authoritative stories. But we must recognise (a) that *the parables Jesus told* were *parables*: that was their particular status as stories, taken literally they were often untrue; and (b) that although some such stories were necessary, these particular parables could have been replaced by other similar ones. Surely more than this is meant by the claim that the incarnation story is indispensable?

(f) There is another form of irreducibility. a story, like a parable, often comes without any interpretative commentary. Like a good sermon it has holes in it to be filled in by the listener. He is the one who has to construe the story: drawing his own implications from it, applying it to himself and understanding it for himself. Then, and only then, does it become his story too—if he has the ears to hear and the wit to discern the character of the God whose actions are being narrated. There is here another, very real, sense in which the story cannot be translated without loss into another form (a set of assertions). For the hearer would then have lost his chance to participate. He would be receiving his theology second-hand, and would thus be denied the opportunity of drawing out for himself the theological implications of the story. He would not be doing theology, only learning somebody else's.

III

Now I do not know how many of these senses of indispensability Professor Sykes would recognise. He concentrates on analysis (e), but might well be willing to adopt some of the others in addition.

One of the difficulties in commenting on the claim that the incarnation story is indispensable is that the 'story of the incarnation' is not spelled out in sufficient detail. Only when this has happened can we sensibly comment on the status of its language and the sense(s) in which we might claim it to be 'true'. Certainly many of the 'mythographers' agree that the incarnation is a story, but go on to ascribe to it the status of a myth (a 'mythic narrative' employing 'mythic concepts'), treating it as 'a broad imaginative conception' ('motif') which should be understood 'as a basic metaphor' (J.H. Hick, *I M*, p. 48). It is this story, they argue, that has been variously interpreted in the history of Christian doctrine and needs reinterpreting today. Maurice Wiles's interesting attempt to translate the story into an equivalent ontological truth[24] is an attempt to construct such a doctrine for today. It fails largely because as a Christology it is not specific enough. It says a lot about Man in general, but not enough about Jesus in particular. The supposed parallel between the doctrine of incarnation—redemption and the doctrines of creation and fall is not close enough[25] Creation and fall relate the relationship between God and Man in general. But the incarnation at least is primarily about the relationship between

God and Christ[26]

Yet if the Christologies of Hick and Wiles seem to be reductions of the story of the incarnation, this is because they are deliberately *designed* as such. Their reductionism is intentional, rather than (just?) inevitable. For their authors wish to reject a number of implications of the story of the incarnation. Some of these implications derive from its supposed mythological form (e.g. the problem of the pre-existence of Christ). Others, however, are unrelated to the inadequacy of mythology (e.g. the issue of the uniqueness of Christian revelation and salvation). Hick and Wiles are deliberately attempting critical, corrective theologies.

Perhaps we might examine with profit the stories of the creation and fall as interpreted in much current Christian theology. Are they being 'reduced in content' compared with their classical narrative forms? Do they 'lose something in translation'? Of course, such phrases are not value neutral. What we should really be asking is whether anything *of value* is being lost in their contemporary interpretations. When the Genesis myths are interpreted in terms of the ontological dependence of the cosmos on God, there is clearly a loss of evocative and affective power, of dramatic form, etc. The notion of ontological dependence is abstract, prosaic, non-pictorial; it does not stimulate the imagination as readily as a creation story[27]. All this is loss. But there is gain as well; indeed that very loss may be viewed as a gain. For the mythological elements of the story have been pruned away, and with them the grounds for many misleading implications about the relationship between God and the world[28]. In the act of replacing the story by its 'equivalent' doctrine has the theologian not—to resurrect the often scorned analogy—sloughed off the husk to reveal the true kernel? The story of creation can do and say a lot of valuable things that the doctrine cannot, but it can do and say a lot of harmful or irrelevant things as well. This argument applies even more clearly to the fall, for today's received doctrinal understanding of the fall is even more reductionist[29] when compared with the orthodox story—and needs to be so.

IV

In conclusion we should note that there is yet another motive at work in the attempts of mythographers to dispense with (or reduce, or interpret) the incarnation story. And this motive arises from their view of the enterprise of systematic theology itself. For it is clear that many contemporary Christian theologians regard the theme of creation, rather than that of incarnation, as the key to the interpretation of Christian theology—and therefore as the foundation of theology, and indeed 'the foundation of the Church' (contrast Sykes, *I M*, p. 127). They wish, therefore, to interpret incarnation in terms of creation, recognizing that in the relationship of creation we already have a most intimate link between God and his world (including Man). Thus Christology is construed on the revelation model, the God thus revealed being the one who is already very close to his creation. We may note further how the motifs of the fall and the atonement are also fitted into a creation-dominated theology[30]. The 'moral and religious value of the incarnation'[31] is claimed by many to be identical with the moral and religious value of creation. Thus Geoffrey Lampe writes of 'creation and salvation as one continuous process'[32], for:

> Salvation is that part, or aspect, of the divine creative activity by which man comes to be informed by God's presence, made in his image and likeness, and led to respond with trust and willing obedience to the love and graciousness of his Creator.[33]

Such a creation-dominated theology has been criticised as a 'form of deism, according to which God never does anything at any one time that is genuinely different from what he does at any other time'[34]. For it views God as working primarily through the order of creation (general providence) rather than intervening in his universe by miracle, judgment or incarnation. However, such a position is surely not deistic[35]; it is, rather, radically theistic. Indeed it could be argued that it is the interventionist account of God that is more deistic. For if God is occasionally, ('specifically') present at space-time co-ordinates XX' YY' more than he is at AA' BB', then he is more

often then not 'specifically' (relatively) absent from his world. But the self-giving God of Christian theism is surely always as intimately present to his creation as he can be, although some parts of his creation—e.g. sacraments, agapeistic people, and supremely Jesus Christ—reveal him more clearly or respond to him more fully than others[36].

Such a theology, focusing as it does on the Creator-Father rather than the Saviour-Son, commends itself to many precisely because it is is non-interventionist and, in that regard, 'reductive'[37]. The Christian stories are, inevitably, interventionist in form, because of the logic of the unsophisticated concepts of God and the world that they contain. Many theologians are therefore willing to accept the 'reduction' that the translation of the orthodox dramas into their own doctrinal interpretations necessitates. Indeed they welcome it.

NOTES

1. Edited by M. Goulder, S.C.M. (1979). Hereinafter referred to as *I M*.
2. In J. Hick (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate (M G I)*, S.C.M. (1977), ch. 8.
3. Cf. R.H. King, *The Meaning of God*, S.C.M. (1974), ch.5; S.M. TeSelle, *Speaking in Parables*, S.C.M. (1975), ch.6.
4. Cf. the analysis in J. Knox, *The Humanity and Divinity of Christ*, C.U.P. (1967), ch. 1. For a recent popular account of the 'traditional' cosmic drama of Christian orthordoxy and its limitations, as viewed by one of the mythographers, see D. Cupitt, *The Debate about Christ*, S.C.M. (1979), especially pp. 30ff.
5. Ninian Smart has described a *myth* in a happy phrase as relating to a 'moving picture of the sacred'—i.e. as a 'form of *story*' (*The Phenomenon of Religion*, Macmillan (1973), pp. 79f.)
6. And therefore, presumably, reductions of it and replacements for it.
7. Cf. J. McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, S.C.M. (1966).
8. Cf. "The Challenge of the Philosophy of Language", *London Quarterly & Holborn Review*, CLXXXVI (1961), p. 249, "Persons and Funerals", *Hibbert Journal*, LIV, 4 (1956), p. 338.
9. Cf. "Letter to the Editor...", *Theology*, LXXIV, 609 (1971); *Christian Discourse*, O.U.P. (1965), pp. 69-71.
10. Cf. J. Astley, 'A Critical Analysis of the Religious Epistemology of Ian Ramsey', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Durham (1978), pp. 275ff. & 296f.
11. This may lead to an 'anything goes' attitude to religious language, of which Ramsey has been accused. Cf. *Religious Language*, S.C.M. (1957), p. 80; see N. Smart, "Paradox in Religion II", *Aristotelian Society Supp. Vol. XXXIII* (1959), pp. 221-225.
12. Ramsey's analysis of the evocative, engineering function of religious language has some similarities to the more recent views of Don Cupitt: Cf. *Jesus & the Gospel of God*, Lutterworth (1979) *passim* and *The Debate about Christ*, pp. 137f.
13. *God and the Universe of Faiths*, Macmillan (1973), pp. 166f, 175.
14. Cf. Hick, *I M*, pp. 47f.
15. Cf. Hick *M G I*, p. 177; *I M*, p.49. Both verbs and nouns may be used metaphorically: the 'descent' motif in the story of the incarnation is as metaphorical as the 'Light of Light' imagery.
16. M. Black, *Models and Metaphors*, Cornell U.P. (1962), pp. 38ff; Cf. I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, O.U.P. (1936), chs. V and VI.
17. Black, *op.cit.*, pp. 31ff.
18. *Ibid*, p. 46, Cf. M. Beardsley "Metaphor", in P. Edwards (ed. *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Macmillan (1967), Vol. 5.
19. E.R. MacCormac, 'Scientific and Religious Metaphors', *Religious Studies*, 11. 4 (1975), p. 405.
20. Cf. R.J. Kearney, 'Analogical Predication', unpublished D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford (1974), pp. 179ff; S. Pepper, 'The Root Metaphor Theory of Metaphysics', *Journal of Philosophy* XXXII, 14 (1935).
21. Cf. P.C. Hayner, 'Analogical Predication', *Journal of Philosophy*, LV, 20 (1958), p. 861; R.J. Kearney, 'Analogy and Inference', *The New Scholasticism*, 51, 2 (1977).
22. Cf. R.H. King, *op.cit.*
23. Cf. G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Penguin (1963), ch. V etc.
24. Cf. M.F. Wiles, 'Does Christology rest on a Mistake?', in S.W. Sykes & J.P. Clayton (eds.), *Christ, Faith & History*, C.U.P. (1972); *M G I*, pp. 161ff.
25. *Christ, Faith & History*, pp. 7ff; *M G I*, pp. 159ff.
26. Hick avoids the danger of over generalisation, cf. *M G I*, p. 184.
27. It can only be made to do so by means of pictorial, metaphorical expressions: 'the world hangs upon God', 'beneath are the everlasting arms' etc.
28. E.g. the belief that creation necessarily refers, or only refers, to the beginning of the Universe; the belief that creation and evolution are incompatible.
29. It could be claimed that systematic theology has not yet come to terms with the radical reductionism of liberal theology's treatment of the fall.
30. As, e.g., in the theodicy of John Hick, Cf. *I M* pp. 80f; *Evil and the God of Love*, Collins (1968), part IV; *God and the Universe of Faiths*, chs. 4 & 5.
31. Cf. Brian Hebblethwaite's essay of this title in *I M*.
32. G.W.H. Lampe, *God as Spirit*, O.U.P. (1977), p. 180.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 17; cf. pp. 45, 114, 222f.
34. E.L. Mascall, *Theology and the Gospel of Christ*, S.P.C.K. (1977), p. 203. The criticism is directed against Maurice Wiles.

35. Cf. M. Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, S.C.M. (1974), p. 38.
36. The point is well made in a comment on the rejection of the doctrine of *avatar* (descent, incarnation) in Sikh theism:

> 'Belief in avatar would suggest to Sikhs not a caring God, who restores order when the need arises but a casual one who lets things slide and then is compelled reluctantly to intervene' (W.O. Cole and P.S. Sambhi, *The Sikhs*, R.K.P. (1978), p.95)

37. It is less 'supernaturalistic' than the alternative and therefore arguably more Protestant than Catholic—cf. Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, S.C.M. (1968), pp. 192f. A similar interventionist/non-interventionist contrast arises in our understanding of revelation. This can be analysed in an 'interventionist' manner, with God deciding to reveal himself to Moses in this particular way, at this particular time. Alternatively, we may speak of Moses's 'discovery of', 'experience of' or 'response to', the God who is always and everywhere revealing as much of himself as he can (in so far as we can speak of divine 'revelation' in abstraction from the human appropriation of it). On both analyses, we should note, the initiative remains with God's self-disclosure.

CHURCH, EUCHARIST AND VATICAN II

Nicholas Paxton

> "One of the results of recent developments in theology and in the understanding of the Church is that almost all those who are concerned with these matters agree in the view that worship is the centre of the Church's life. There is a sound theological basis for this view, as a result both of the findings of New Testament scholars and also of the careful re-consideration of the nature of worship"[1]

These words of the Lutheran theologian Wilhelm Hahn, written in 1959, may have been an accurate description of the Lutheran Church's view of itself at that time; but they can hardly be said to have described most of the ecclesiology found in Roman Catholicism in the preceding century. On the contrary, the main thrust of the First Vatican Council's idea of the Church was to emphasise the teaching authority and hierarchical importance of the body of Bishops, with the Pope at their head; and, when R.C. Canon Law was finally codified into a book of 2414 canons (promulgated in 1917), the prevailing vision of the Church was very much a juridical one, of an ecclesial institution governed along lines based ultimately on Roman Law. Typical of this was its division into clerics, Religious and lay persons—the last-named being very negatively defined as those who were not clerics or members of Religious Orders. This view led, not only to the heavily clerically-orientated outlook found in Roman Catholicism between the Vatican Councils, but also to a very passive view of the eucharist as something which the president celebrated while everyone else just looked on and, if they wished, said their private prayers. Such a position led in turn to an idea of receiving Communion as an almost exclusively self-and-Christ encounter, to the great detriment of any awareness in most people of the communitarian aspects of the Church's life and worship.

It is from this situation that one is, thankfully, (i) able to trace the new vision which has emerged over the past half-century, and especially at Vatican II, of the Church as (ii) the New People of God, (iii) the sacramental body of believers, of whose activity (iv) the eucharist is the summit, and which is (v) animated by the Holy Spirit. Lastly I propose to offer some reflections on how the local Church may best be made aware of itself through the eucharist and on where the future may lead us—where Christ, the Head, may lead his ecclesial Body.

Developments before Vatican II

So first we would do well to see how it was that the juridical ecclesiology of "the Church as authority-structure" of the preceding century came by stages to be developed into the more open ecclesiology of "the Church as communion of the faithful" of Vatican II. For the Church is not just an organisational institution but a