

# Towards a 'Trinitarian Political Theology'

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Christian political commitment needs an adequate theology to sustain it, for political ethics which lack a sound theological framework will soon become unbiblical. It is the conviction expressed here that the doctrine of the Trinity provides such a framework for Christian politics. The Trinity is the touchstone of Christian truth. Political decisions can thus be tested for their Christian authenticity by the extent of their faithfulness to a balanced doctrine of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## Theology and Politics

I begin with some basic presuppositions which we do not have the space to elaborate, but can only state. First, the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to all Christian theology.<sup>1</sup> Only a Trinitarian understanding of God gives adequate justice to the totality of the divine revelation in Scripture.

A second presupposition is the conviction that the Christian faith is relevant to politics. This needs some qualifications: for example, we must not say that theology and politics are indivisible, as though it were impossible to think of any aspect of the faith without its political implications. That would be to reduce Christian theology to an exclusively political theology, and that in turn impoverishes our understanding of God. But neither are we saying that politics and theology can make do with a relationship 'on speaking terms' but no more. Christian faith has definite and unavoidable political consequences, and the two cannot be kept apart without resulting in a dualism between Christ and the world, which denies the Incarnation.<sup>2</sup> Besides the Incarnation, there are other Christian doctrines which support the view that what we believe about God is directly related to political decision-making. The doctrine of creation gives to man delegated responsibility to order and control the world. This comprehensive stewardship must inevitably include the political dimension of life. To deny a relationship

1 Karl Barth was surely right in beginning with the Trinity, in distinction, for example, to Schleiermacher, for whom the Trinity was an appendix to theology rather than its fountain-head. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* T. & T. Clark 1961, Vol. I, Part 1.

2 H. Richard Niebuhr deals with the twin problems of reductionism and dualism between faith and the world in his book *Christ and Culture*, Harper, 1951.

relationship between theology and politics is therefore to sever a foundational link between an understanding of God as creator and the ethical responsibilities he places upon us as his creatures.<sup>1</sup>

Similar conclusions can be drawn from two other doctrines: redemption and eschatology. It is not possible to separate world history from salvation history: God's purposes are for the redemption of the total created order. Redemption can never be exclusively individualistic: it envisages the salvation of the whole of reality, including therefore the political.<sup>2</sup> Eschatology speaks of a transformation of this world through the Kingdom of God, which calls for change, social and political, in the hope of the fulfilment of God's purposes.<sup>3</sup> To deny a relationship between theology and politics is thus to sever further links between political ethics and both redemption and eschatology.

### Developing Trinitarian Politics

The creative, redemptive and eschatological works of God each involve the totality of his trinitarian being. There is a sense in which he puts the whole of himself into everything he does. The relationships within the Godhead of love and mutual interaction work in balanced co-operation and perfect harmony between Father, Son and Holy Spirit in every work of God. Therefore all theology, and the ethics that derive from it, should reflect this understanding of God. This means that ethics, and specifically political ethics, should have a trinitarian framework. Let us now develop this more explicitly.

A political ethic that looks to the fatherhood and sovereignty of God should also be able to balance that with the redemptive and eschatological contributions of the Son and the Spirit. Similarly a political ethic which looks to the redemptive work of Christ for its inspiration must harmonise that with the ways in which the Father and the Spirit are involved in the process of liberation. Thirdly, theology and ethics which take as their starting point the 'eschatological gift' of the Spirit<sup>4</sup> by drawing into present reality the promise of the future kingdom, can only be truly trinitarian if at the same time equal consideration is given to the Creator God who is Lord of history and the Saviour who redeems it.

Brief biblical consideration of the inner relationships between Father, Son and Holy Spirit indicates the need to balance different political axioms. For example in the relationship between Father and Son there is a balance

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- 1 Genesis 1:26-28. See for example G. Spykman in James W. Skillen, *Confessing Christ and doing Politics*, APJ, Washington 1982, p 58. Skillen makes a similar point, p 97.
  - 2 Romans 8:19-20. 'Christ redeemed our total existence and redirected it to God' (B. Goudzwaard, *A Christian Political Option*, Wedge, 1972, p 3).
  - 3 This is Moltmann's main thesis. See for example J. Moltmann *On Human Dignity*, SCM, London 1984, p 109.
  - 4 Moltmann's phrase. See for example, J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, SCM, London 1977, p 34.

between authority and submission: the Father is always in control in his sovereign power and the Son is always surrendered to his Father's will (John 8:28, 29). Both of these qualities act together in harmony with one another. Complementary to this activity is the love that is exercised by the Father along with his authority and the dependence exercised by the Son in trustful response (John 5:19, 20). Political ethics therefore must work out how to complement authority with love. Another balance in the relationship between Father and Son is seen in the combination of glory with suffering: the triumphant power of an Almighty God in counterpoint with the willingness of the Son to suffer and to die in weakness (Phil. 2:6-11). This is further enhanced by the balance between God as the law-giver and the Son as the one who obeys the law in freedom. In political terms this points to the need to combine order with freedom and power with service. The doctrine of the Trinity is of particular relevance to the use of authority and our response to it, as will be seen more fully below.

Similar balances can be seen in the relationship between Father and Spirit. The transcendence of the eternal God harmonises with his immanence in the Spirit who is present in the Church (John 14:17). It is the Spirit who mediates the fatherhood of God (Gal. 4:6, 7). The Father is the giver of gifts and the Spirit is the imparter enabling the Church to engage with the purposes of God (1 Cor. 12:4-13). Once again the sovereignty of God is complemented by his Spirit who inspires and motivates love, community and relationships (Eph. 4:3).<sup>1</sup> Christian politics needs both transcendence and immanence if it is not to be reduced to baptising secular presuppositions, nor to becoming irrelevant to concrete reality. Discussion of Liberation Theology below will highlight the importance of this.

Consideration of the relationship between the Son and the Spirit points to the harmony between the Son who is glorified and the one who glorifies the Son by revealing the truth about him (John 16:14). In the political arena this teaches us that true glory should always be given and never grasped for itself. This is a temptation both for reactionary and revolutionary politics.<sup>2</sup>

Trinitarian political theology therefore will seek ways of combining order with justice, power with love, authority with service, triumph with suffering, grace with action, law with freedom and so on. The temptation however will always be to look to one or other of the persons of the Trinity for theological justification of political action to the detriment of the other two persons of the Godhead. Trinitarian politics, whichever starting point it chooses, will recognise that an adequate political ethic will only arise from a proper balance of the dynamic contributions of all three persons of the Godhead in loving, mutual and equal relationships. This in turn will make use of the doctrines of creation, redemption and eschatology in due

1 Moltmann, *ibid.*, ch. VI.

2 Paul Lehmann considers that all power needs to be set free from the 'futility of its self-absolutization'. See P. Lehmann, *The Transfiguration of Politics*, SCM, London 1975, p 250f.

proportion. We will now look at three attempts to relate theology to politics and ask how successful they are in inspiring a political ethic which is truly trinitarian.

### **Calvinism and the Sovereignty of God**

Calvinism aims to unify the whole of life under a single all-embracing system of principles derived from God's revelation in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Calvin began his treatment of 'Civil Government' with the premise that men live under the two-fold government of Christ's spiritual kingdom and earthly civil jurisdiction. These are distinct but not antithetical, since civil authority is itself ordained by God with an authority delegated to it by 'divine providence and holy ordinance'.<sup>2</sup> The magistrates are ordained ministers of divine justice, and the fact that they abuse their power does not mean that obedience and reverence are not due, although Christians are not obliged to obey if that means disobedience of God. Legitimate sovereignty is only preserved when authority is exercised for the glory of God in conformity to Scripture. Scripture bears witness to the law which is written into the consciences of all men and therefore rulers stand under God's judgment if they ignore this divine law. However, bad kings must not be overthrown by political revolution since this would be 'inverting the order of God', and thus be resisting God himself.<sup>3</sup>

Reformed theology has developed Calvin's theology of authority into a doctrine of 'spheres', each of which is directly responsible to God.<sup>4</sup> God has ordained the institutions of marriage, family, education, work, the State, etc. as separate spheres which are each answerable to God with specific and distinct laws governing them. God is sovereign over them all, which means that any one sphere cannot claim authority over another unless it be decreed by the grace of God. This preserves civil liberties, enabling each sphere to exercise exclusive independent judgment and authority under God. However, the way in which the theology has developed since Calvin has been criticised by Moltmann, for example, as tending to confirm the 'status quo' and as leading to an uncritical political idolatry.<sup>5</sup>

It is not difficult to see how reverence for the orders of society, providentially established, can lead to an uncritical acceptance of authority.

Calvin may rightly be credited with an active and positive approach to political involvement, and he himself was not afraid to criticise rulers. However, the dualistic tendency in Calvin's eschatology, which separates the present and the eternal, does not allow it to bear sufficient relevance to

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1 A. Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1982, p 19.

2 J. Calvin, *Institutes* ed. J. T. McNeill, Westminster Press, Grand Rapids 1975, Book IV, ch. XX, p 1485.

3 J. T. McNeill, *Calvin: On God and Political Duty*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1956, p 84.

4 A. Storkey, *A Christian Social Perspective*, IVP, 1979, p 140f.

5 J. Moltmann, et al, *Religion and Political Society*, Harper, 1974, p 40.

this world. For Niebuhr this opens the door to a 'separatist and repressive note'.<sup>1</sup> The strength of Calvin's approach should be in avoiding political idolatry, since the final source of authority is God the Creator. Political opportunism should also be ruled out since all initiatives are ultimately with God in his grace. Authority is 'office', a stewardship of responsibility for the good of all men and this brings power under the realm of service and gives love political shape.<sup>2</sup>

The emphasis on the need for obedience and submission to the will of God is reinforced by the insistence that judgment belongs to God. This may have historically opened the door rather too wide to forms of authority which claim divine appointment while at the same time justify denial of civil liberties. Further, as long as redemption is considered primarily in individual terms, authorities can feel justified in turning a blind eye to corporate and structural sins which disfigure God's creative order. Roles and structures can easily be justified beyond the point where they are misused in imposing the divine right of rulers.

That this can be a consequence of Calvinism can be clearly seen in the use made of it by the Dutch Reformed Church to justify apartheid in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> A sense of divine purpose drove Afrikaner nationalism to set up a theocratic utopia of 'order', in which every person and tribal grouping had his rightful 'place'. The notion of divine providence was used to give their national history the seal of divine approval. Separate development was seen as part of the divine purpose. Kuyper regarded God's created order as establishing different levels of human development which must be accepted and incorporated into the way the world is governed.<sup>4</sup> It is not difficult to see how the whole complete system of separate development becomes justified on the basis of the will and purpose of God. Some, like Alan Boesak, himself from the Reformed tradition, would no doubt argue that this is a distortion of Calvinism. What it does, however, is to make providence, in Berkouwer's words, a 'piously disguised form of self-justification'.<sup>5</sup> Afrikaner nationalism thus became an ideology: its vision became too dogmatic and turned into totalitarianism.<sup>6</sup> This is not, of course, what Calvin or Kuyper would have intended. But it does illustrate what happens when the authority and sovereignty of God are over-emphasised, leading ultimately to a view of power that is overbearing and absolutist. In reality the sovereignty of God should combine with the love of God to exercise power *for* others in service rather than power *over* others in repression. The Trinity also teaches us about relationship and community in open freedom. Once relationships have broken down between

1 Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p 218.

2 B. Zylstra in Skillen, *op. cit.*, p 47.

3 John W. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 1979, p 199f.

4 A. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p 31f.

5 Quoted by de Gruchy, p 31f.

6 *Ibid*, p 212.

government and people the political system inevitably disintegrates. The important contribution of Calvinism is in giving those in power the duty to exercise their authority under the sovereign will of God but never beyond it. Interpreted rightly that should limit the ambitions of the state and replace pride with a more realistic humility.<sup>1</sup> However an emphasis upon the unchanging Lordship of the Creator can result in politics that baptise the status quo and lack the dynamic of change.

### **The Theology of Hope and the God of the Future**

Approaches to political ethics which look to eschatology have other problems of balance.<sup>2</sup> Of course the whole theme of eschatology ought to be trinitarian: the Kingdom moves forward towards a consummation of that which the Father has created, the Son has made possible and the Spirit fulfills. But in focussing upon the future, political ethics can easily take its eyes off the unchanging and transcendent God of creation and order, over-emphasising the re-creative ministry of the Spirit in anticipating and actualising the Kingdom of God. Let us see how this happens with Jürgen Moltmann.

Moltmann transfers the 'question of God' onto an eschatological level. He opens up revelation in a dialectic which finds ultimate unity in the future. History becomes an open process, created and fashioned in hope by the promises of God.<sup>3</sup> Only in this way, Moltmann claims, can we deal with the contradictions between the whole meaning of God and the present realities of suffering. The cross expresses this contradiction supremely; but it is precisely in the cross that God is revealed! Furthermore, the resurrection contradicts the cross. So the promises of God contradict existing reality and in their own way lead us towards the future they announce.<sup>4</sup> Revelation is recognised therefore as a promise and is accepted in hope, a hope which enables us to face the contradictions and transform them in line with the promised future. For Moltmann, it follows that theology itself is a political question because it arises out of our attempt to grapple with the real suffering of this world and the demand it makes for concrete answers. The 'missio' of the Church is to draw the hoped-for future into the present in order to overcome its injustice and oppression.<sup>5</sup> But this does not collapse eschatology into the present, since there is always a 'not-yet' about the promises of God. Liberation is never established, for God is always seeking to recreate the 'negatives' of history in hope. For Moltmann this anticipatory role for theology does not 'define' it once and for all. It is set

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1 Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p 98.

2 Moltmann more than any other attempts to make eschatology the governing concern of all theology.

3 J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, SCM, London 1967, p 224-229.

4 *Ibid*, p 139f. Resurrection sees a 'future for the very earth on which the cross stands' (*ibid*, p 45).

5 *Ibid*, p 283f.

free for a critical role, and can challenge politics with the transforming power of hope.<sup>1</sup>

The re-instatement of eschatology is an important corrective to approaches which empty it of its significance historically by translating it into either apocalyptic or subjective terms. Moltmann's understanding of God in suffering is also important for the political nature of theology. His Trinity is an unfolding 'economic' model, which works out the meaning of the Kingdom in the history of God himself. However the attempt to make eschatology the governing factor in revelation does not enable us to take the past or the present of God seriously enough for what they can teach us in their own right. Moltmann wants to include the past and the present in our knowledge of God, but they are understood only for what they give to the future and only in terms of an unfolding history of God. We have seen however that it is important to maintain that there is that about God which is 'wholly other', transcending history and enabling us to speak of God's eternal changelessness. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* lies at the basis of that dimension of God. Moltmann would want to maintain that doctrine; at the same time he sees the need to dispense with Greek metaphysical presuppositions which have been traditionally employed to interpret it. He wants to remove himself as far as possible from the monarchianism which results from such a view of transcendence, and to work out an economic trinitarianism which is revealed in the history of God.<sup>2</sup>

Once again therefore we see the need for a balanced doctrine of God. Moltmann says very little about what can be learnt from the God of creation, and he is much nearer to Liberation Theology in emphasising the need for change. But rather than a revolutionary approach he prefers a dialectical-critical approach which is open and free. The problems for this come in the making of decisions and the choice of priorities. Moltmann prefers to look for symbols (such as democracy) in humanism, liberalism and the enlightenment, rather than relying on the Scriptures to provide them.<sup>3</sup>

Openness to the future enables theology to be more critical and less inclined to baptise ideologies with divine approval. However it could be said that Moltmann fails to balance the need for change with the need for order. His idea of transcendence is too temporal and too narrowly defined in historical terms.

### **Liberation Theology and the God of Revolution**

Liberation Theology looks to the salvation or 'liberation' of the work of Christ as its primary inspiration for radical political change. At first sight it

- 1 Moltmann's theology is well analysed by M. D. Meeks, *Origins of the Theology of Hope*, Fortress, 1974.
- 2 J. Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, SCM, 1981, p 129f.
- 3 Miguez Bonino considers Moltmann's position as merely a restatement of liberal values. See J. Miguez Bonino, *Revolutionary Theology Comes of Age*, SPCK, London 1975, p 144f.

seems to take both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit seriously. So have we found the balanced theology that we need to be truly Trinitarian in our politics? We will look at this theology rather more closely than the others, although space constrains us to be selective from its broad and ambitious canvas.

Let us look first at its doctrine of God in creation and eschatology. The purpose of the creation narratives is to illustrate the potential that God has placed in man for a total humanity. It is towards that goal that liberation must be directed.<sup>1</sup> This needs the re-creation of the whole of reality – nothing less, in Boff's words, than the 'cosmic-human-divine realisation' of God's historical purposes.<sup>2</sup> The momentum of creation is forwards. The goal is the creation of a 'new man' who is able to assume responsibility for this world. Man has been set free to create and recreate humanity to be human.<sup>3</sup> Liberation must be total, from all alienations, including the political and social. A new man is to be created who can change structures in conformity to the will of God to build and re-build history. Man as 'Lord of Creation' is seen as the creative subject of history, and is given responsibility for the liberative project of salvation.<sup>4</sup> Although 'creation' is the starting point, the thrust forward to salvation puts more emphasis on the Exodus narrative as a paradigm of liberation, and soon leaves behind whatever creation can teach us in its own right. The emphasis is more on re-creation, but this involves not so much the grace of God alone, but rather man himself taking hold of the reins of history. He is the Hegelian protagonist in the process by which reality is transformed.

In consequence Liberation Theology cannot accept a view of revelation that is *a priori*. Rather it begins with the facts of history, reality and experience and works from these to an understanding of God. We do not begin with God's grace (though we cannot ignore it!), we begin with the situation and a commitment to liberation.<sup>5</sup> The emphasis shifts once again from God's eternal changelessness to his immanent suffering in the concrete world of poverty and injustice. The absolutes become absolutes of total commitment to the utopian vision of liberation. Truth is known in the historical reality of experience. Politics therefore becomes a matter of expediency. There seem to be no universal norms; it is the objective of social change which gives us our priorities.<sup>6</sup>

The understanding of eschatology in Liberation Theology is governed by the 'liberative project' which envisages the total transformation of all reality. This is not apocalyptic, idealistic or subjective. It envisages the

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1 For example, L. Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator*, Orbis, 1978.

2 *Ibid*, p 207f.

3 This is a strong theme in G. Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Orbis, 1973 – see esp. p 157f.

4 *Ibid*, p 174.

5 This is a praxis-based approach to revelation. Gutierrez describes theology as 'critical reflection on historical praxis' (*ibid*, p 145).

6 Spelt out by Miguez Bonino, *op. cit.*



realisation of a human Utopia – which is a vision of the possibilities of this world and present historical reality. There is nothing ideological about the utopian vision – it speaks of a wholly new order that we are building now, and defines the project and goal of liberation for the present.<sup>1</sup> The resurrection is seen as the eschatological event that brings the final reality of history into history. It brings promise into reality, and gives us an 'eternal optimism' that the old will become new. For Gutierrez it unveils the future human being: the goal becomes the starting point and liberation becomes a possibility.<sup>2</sup>

The conviction that man can realise the eschatological purposes of God by his participation in the liberative project puts the emphasis on the 'now' rather than the 'not yet' of divine fulfilment. In an impatience to see liberation there is a great temptation to grasp at history in order to bring about hoped-for radical change as soon as possible. But we can never absolutise the project of liberation, because ultimately liberation is about God's consummation in history of his purposes and not of human anticipation of the Kingdom.

It must be said that Liberation Theology corrects some of the problems we found with theologies that depend too much on the sovereignty of the creator God. It emphasises the need for change if the re-creation of man and society is to be radical enough. It takes history seriously and engages with reality in such a way as to make complacency or acceptance of suffering impossible. No-one can say that it lacks vision and conviction. But it seems to us to lose some of the important insights of the other approaches, especially in failing to take seriously enough the sovereignty and grace of God. In relocating God in historical reality it leaves to one side the thought that God challenges historical experience with eternal truth. We have already seen that reducing revelation to history empties the doctrine of creation of its significance and impoverishes the doctrine of God.

Instead of 'order' the priority becomes 'justice' – but what kind of order is envisaged in a just society? To prevent itself becoming too romantic and vague about this Liberation Theology needs a more vigorous understanding of the Lordship of the eternal creator to enable it to develop a clearer understanding of order and authority. This would give it a doctrine of God which is not derived purely and simply from the Jesus of history. It would enable it to put its ideological preference for Marxism in a wider context. Without a strong doctrine of God, liberation becomes too man-centred, Christology is weakened, the Kingdom becomes too ideological and transcendence becomes too temporal. To take God's sovereignty more seriously would enable it to balance the need for change with the need for order. It would qualify the potential of man with the priority of grace; and it would de-ideologise the revolution with the transcendence of a God who is above all as well as in all and through all.<sup>3</sup> By not taking eschatology

1 Boff, *op. cit.*, ch. 7.

2 Gutierrez, *op. cit.*, p 232f.

3 Lehmann argues well for the necessity of transcendence in politics.

seriously enough with the 'not-yet' of its vision, Liberation Theology fails to engage critically enough with itself. It brings God so much down to earth as to reduce him to the 'God of the poor' who has no relevance outside a framework of oppression and injustice.<sup>1</sup> This reductionism of God and Kingdom theology needs a more serious eschatology. It needs to be more open to the future to prevent it from baptising ideologies and programmes with divine approval and then taking history into its own hands. Perhaps that is why there is so little about the Holy Spirit in Liberation Theology.

To return to the way in which this works out in South Africa, there are those who say that the corruption of those in power is endemic to the extent that change is so necessary and urgent as can only be achieved by violent revolution. Impatience for change however can lead to the grasping of it, which in turn produces the violence which destroys the very change that is necessary. This process is fuelled by a brand of Liberation Theology which calls for total identification with the struggle of the oppressed and an almost uncritical 'solidarity' with the revolution.<sup>2</sup> The 'Kairos Document' of 1985 is uncompromising in this respect, assuming that there is no alternative to the revolutionary overthrow of the present government. However, it is not difficult to see how an uncritical acceptance of the necessity of violent revolution would not be true to trinitarian politics. The importance of change must be balanced by what we learn from the sovereignty of a Creator God and the eschatological perspective which invites hope in the power of the Spirit and prevents us taking the Kingdom into our own hands. Boesak uses much of the terminology and assumptions of Liberation Theology to insist that 'black people should have the right to interpret both history and their present situation in their own terms'.<sup>3</sup> However he does qualify this with the thought that God's will cannot be identified with everything blacks do and that all cultures need to be judged.<sup>4</sup> Change of structures may often be necessary provided that critical awareness of ideological influence is maintained, and there is a clear understanding of what form of government will work once the revolution has overthrown the present system.

This problem of 'goal' is a further reason for a strong eschatology and for recognising the Kingdom of the Spirit who inspires and motivates love. It is important for all revolutions to know what they are aiming to achieve, otherwise Lehmann's warning will come tragically true that 'all revolutions end by devouring their own children'.<sup>5</sup> It is only the Spirit of freedom who can set the revolution free from the seeds of its own destruction.

- 1 A criticism frequently made. See for eg. B. Mahan in R. Metz and J. Schlick (eds), *Liberation Theology and the Message of Salvation*, Pickwick, 1978, p 147f.
- 2 This is well documented by Richard J. Neuhaus, *Third Way* vol. 9, No. 5 (May 1986) p 10-12.
- 3 A Boesak, *Farewell to Innocence*, Orbis, 1977, p 65.
- 4 *Ibid*, p 97.
- 5 Lehmann, *op. cit.*, p 1.

South Africa illustrates well the need to balance an understanding of the fatherhood of a Creator God who exercises authority with love; the Sonship of Jesus who calls us into freedom and repentance, and the Spirit of hope who brings us through suffering and resurrection into the kingdom promises of God. De Gruchy comes nearest to this in asserting that these three dimensions need to be held together: the sovereign providence of God as the foundation of history; the redemptive grace of Christ; and the sociopolitical implications for the present of God's ultimate purposes for the world.<sup>1</sup> Unless these dimensions are allowed to complement each other, movements for change will only turn into chaos and one tyranny will be replaced by another.

### **Trinitarian Political Theology**

We are now in a position to summarise our observations and suggest ways of developing a truly Trinitarian political theology. We have seen how none of the approaches we have considered achieves the balance needed to give due weight to all three persons of the Trinity in their creative, redemptive and reconciling work. This leads one way or another to an impoverished doctrine of God and to the ignoring of important political insights gained from other approaches. How did Jesus achieve the balance?

Rather than seeing Jesus as governed by his understanding of the Kingdom, as in Liberation Theology, it is surely better to regard him as primarily theocentric. This means that his ethical teaching can be seen as a consequence both of God as creator *and* of God as coming Lord.<sup>2</sup> Jesus' eschatology is governed by his faith in the creator and Lord of history, the one who is past, present and future. God's will therefore confronts us, both in the demands of his eschatological rule and as the will of the creator. The new order is a dynamic re-creation of this present order. In this way ethics is integrated, rather than separated into creation ethics and eschatological ethics. This frees our understanding of the Kingdom from its dependence on eschatology and enables us to see it more broadly in terms of God's dynamic presence revealed in strength.<sup>3</sup> This in turn enables us to take past, present and future seriously: it is already established that God reigns, but that reign presses in upon man in the present to make a decision for God; and yet the Kingdom is also future because it is yet to be consummated in the ultimate purpose of God. This understanding of the Kingdom speaks of a sovereign creator who demands allegiance, a suffering servant whose authority is in his humility, and a life-giving Spirit who sends us out in mission towards the future of God.

It could be said that Jesus chose the term 'Kingdom of God' because it incorporated all that he wanted to say about God, man and history. He

1 de Gruchy, *op. cit.*, p 197.

2 This is Hans Beld's approach - see B. D. Chilton (ed), *The Kingdom of God*, SPCK, 1984, p 144f.

3 B. D. Chilton, *Regnum Dei Deus Est' SJT*, Vol. 51, p 261f.

maintains the creative Trinitarian tension between the need for a restored relationship with the Father who is also our creator, the sonship we enjoy as we follow him in repentance and obedience, and the dynamic hope of the promise of the Spirit. For Jesus, the Kingdom and God were far greater than either history or politics!

It remains for this Trinitarian understanding of the Kingdom to be translated into relevant political ethics. Moltmann fails here because his economic Trinitarianism envisages an unfolding 'history of God' which loses touch with an understanding of the power and authority of God. Freedom is the controlling factor in his interpretation, paralleled in our own experience as we move from being servants (in relation to the Father) to being sons (in relation to the Son) to being friends of God (brought about by the Spirit).<sup>1</sup> But we cannot leave behind the understanding of ourselves as servants, just as we cannot abandon the nature of the power and authority of God in moving towards his love in freedom.

First of all, we have seen the need to recognise that as part of the created order God the Father has established patterns of law, power and authority which must be incorporated into our political understanding. This will help us to decide what structures of government accord most closely with the Father's will. For example, as we have seen, the structure of authority within the Trinity is based on 'power for' not 'power over' each of the other Persons within the Godhead. It is not authority imposed or demanded by the Father, it is accepted freely within the mutual relationship of love and service that constitutes the Trinity. However, we also recognise that all creation is fallen, and that sin is endemic both individually and structurally. This means that no government or system is perfect, and that implies the need for change. Sometimes that change may need to be radical, although the Sovereignty of God will be maintained as a governing factor in working out both the need for change and its objectives. Furthermore the eschatological 'not-yet' of the Kingdom should prevent a pre-emptive approach to revolutionary politics and help us to maintain an important critical role towards all programmes and man-made systems.

If we fail to be truly Trinitarian our political decisions will always be out of step with the Kingdom. We need continually to work for political ethics which are true expressions of Jesus' vision of a Kingdom created by his Father, made real in his own life and ministry, and sustained by the Spirit towards the 'eschatological Kingdom of glory in which people will finally, wholly and completely be gathered into the eternal life of the Triune God.'<sup>2</sup>

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1 See J. Moltmann in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*.

2 *Ibid.*, p 213.