

Year 3 (2012): Week 6

GUILD SEMINAR

Week 6: "The Image of God"

Overview:

1. Prayer
2. Notes on Retreat
3. "Aufhebung"
4. A Three-Stroke Understanding of Humanity

As time may permit

1. Words and Their Meanings in Theology
2. Markers of a Faithfully Reasonable (Scientific) Christianity

Aufhebung

This is a concept from German Enlightenment Philosophy.

The word “Aufhebung” is a noun derived from the verb “aufgehoben,” which has two meanings:

1. To abolish or nullify
2. To lift up

Aufhebung is a three stroke process in which an idea or value is first affirmed, then struck down (“nullified” / “abolished”), then reconstituted at an even higher level. The meaning of the first two strokes still contribute to the greater meaning of the third.

Let’s work with some examples.

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Baseball

Who has heard of Tommy John?

He was a pretty good pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers, winning 16 games in 1973. That's the first stroke: affirmation.

Second stroke: In 1974, he suffered an injury to ulnar collateral ligament in his pitching arm, an injury that in that day and age meant the end of a career. But the Dodger's surgeon had an idea for a new approach, in which the ligament from the elbow was replaced with a tendon from elsewhere in the body. He had the surgery and for 18 months was out of baseball, working to rehabilitate his arm. Second stroke: nullification.

Third stroke: In 1976, John returned to baseball, working back into form and winning 10 games, an incredible accomplishment. Then, in 1977, his record was 20-7, and for the next four years a pretty good pitcher had become one of the best pitchers in the game. He pitched in the major leagues until 1989. Third stroke: reconstitution on a higher plane. Through the process of surgery and rehabilitation, he had become a better pitcher.

Aufhebung.

E Pluribus Unum

From the passage of the Declaration of Independence, through victory in the Revolutionary War, and the adoption of the Constitution, the United States became a country. The motto *E Pluribus Unum* ("out of many, One") was included, in 1776, on the first seal of the United States, suggesting that out of many colonies and states, a single country had emerged. First stroke: affirmation of union.

There was a problem: the Constitution was self-referentially incoherent. Slavery, which it acknowledged, was inconsistent with the deeper principles of human rights that the Constitution guaranteed. This tension festered, then boiled when, in 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. Within a month, South Carolina seceded from the Union, claiming that inasmuch as the states had voluntarily formed the union at its inception, they could voluntarily withdraw. President Lincoln said this action was illegal, and soon the nation was engulfed in civil war. Second stroke: nullification of union.

The North prevailed, slavery was abolished, and the union was reconstituted on a more secure and higher plane: more secure, in that now the question about voluntary secession has been settled, and higher in that the incoherence slavery had represented had been removed. Third stroke: having been broken and put back together, the nation emerged stronger than before.

Aufhebung.

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Gospel

This pattern is rather basic to the gospel.

It is in the Sermon on the Mount.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

It is in this invitation:

“If any would come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever would save their lives will lose them, and whoever loses their lives for my sake will find them.”

It is in this promise:

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and you will be exalted.”

Aufhebung: affirmation, cancellation, reconstitution on a higher plane.

Barth and Aufhebung

Karl Barth is renowned for his use of this “pattern of affirming, cancelling, and reconstituting on a higher plane.”¹ The Barth scholar, George Hunsinger, explains that Barth had been exposed to the concept as a student in reading the philosophy of Hegel, and made it a recurring pattern throughout his theology.

It was a perfect fit, according to Hunsinger, because the pattern’s “underlying metaphor would seem to be ‘incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection’.”

¹ Hunsinger, *Karl Barth*, 85–86.

Aufhebung and Gospel

The thousands of pages in Barth's theology are an extended exploration of meanings and implications in those three core themes. Reading Barth, at every turn we are face to face with the Incarnate, Crucified and Risen Lord.

The Incarnation, signified by Christmas, is the great doctrine of world affirmation. The maker of the world so loved the world as to visit it in the person of his only-begotten Son. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 RSV). In Barth's words: "He makes [our] situation His own."²

The Passion, Good Friday, is the Incarnation's antithesis, a cancellation. "He came to his own home, and his own people received him not" (John 1:11 RSV). If the Incarnation affirms the goodness in creation, the Passion signifies the darkness that threatens to engulf it. Barth's term for it is *das Nichtige*, the "nullity" or "nothingness."³

The Resurrection, Easter, manifests God's reconstitution of creation, through the crucible of the passion, on a higher plane. It is the event and sign in history marking the triumph of Christ and the ascendancy of the coming world. "We have beheld his glory" (John 1:14 RSV).

According to Barth, the pattern of affirmation, cancellation and triumph constitutes the truth of Jesus Christ and, through Christ, of all creation. The world, belonging as it does within Christ's dominion, is "drawn into the darkness and light" of his own mystery.⁴

² Barth, CD IV.1, 158–59.

³ Barth, CD III.3, 289.

⁴ Barth, CD 1.2, 471.

A Three-Stroke Understanding of Humanity

In his first edition, Migliore offered this summary of Christian faith's three-stroke understanding of humanity:

“The Bible and Christian theology give expression to this mystery of the honor and terror of human identity in three related affirmations: we are created in the image of God; we are sinners who deny and distort our created being; and we are forgiven sinners, surprisingly enabled to begin life anew by the grace of God and to move toward the final transformation of life promised in the resurrection of the crucified Jesus.”⁵(DM, first edition, 120)

In a nutshell, this is a story of the:

1. Goodness
2. Peril
3. Vindication

... of humanity as created in God's image.

Let us notice that this understanding of humanity arises from the core affirmations of the Christian intellectual tradition. As Migliore writes:

“Knowledge of God and knowledge of ourselves . . . are intertwined. We cannot know God truly without being awakened to new self-recognition, and we cannot know our true humanity without a new awareness of the majestic grace of God.” (DM, 139)

⁵ In our second edition, this passage reads as follows: “The Bible and Christian theology give expression to this mystery of the honor and terror of human identity in three related affirmations: we are created in the image of God; we are sinners who deny and distort our created being; and we are forgiven sinners, enabled by God's grace to begin life anew in faith, to serve as Christ's disciples in love, and to move in hope toward the promised fulfillment of life in the coming reign of God.”(DM,139).

The Christian Understanding of Humanity



Questions for Discussion:

Can we think of other theories or pictures of humanity that are currently widely shared through our society?

What difference does it make how we think about ourselves and one another?

Questions for Discussion:

Which parts of this picture of humanity does the church currently tend to emphasize through preaching, liturgy and teaching?

Are there parts of the picture that need more (or less) emphasis?

Humanity in the Image of God

Created Humanity	Fallen Humanity	Christ the Redeemer	New Humanity in Christ
Open for Relationship with God	Prone to False Pride and False Self-Abnegation	Priest	Faith Lives Beyond False Pride and Self-Abnegation
Open for Relationship with Others	Prone to Domination and Servility	King	Love Lives Beyond Domination and Servility
Open to God's Kingdom	Prone to Resignation and Presumption	Prophet	Hope Lives Beyond Resignation and Presumption

In this chart, we see Barth's strong influence on Migliore's account of humanity, along with Migliore's own characteristic emphases.

Words and Their Meanings in Theology

This is an effort to clarify our use of the words “univocal,” “equivocal,” and “analogical.”

We are using these words to characterize the relation between the meanings of the same word as it applies in different contexts. If the meanings are identical, we say the use is univocal. If the meanings are unrelated, the use is equivocal. If they are different, but in some sense kindred, the use is analogical.

Word	First Context	Second Context	Meaning	Term
Tall	Buildings	Basketball Players	Identical	Univocal
Hot	Vacation Destinations	Convection Ovens	Unrelated	Equivocal
Good	Parking Places	Peaches	Kindred	Analogical

Shaquille O’Neal and the Empire State building are both tall, each in their own context. The word “tall” in the two instances means the same thing (notwithstanding the fact that a building that was only as tall as Shaquille O’Neal would be considered very short), so the use is univocal.

Last year, ski vacations in the Rocky Mountains were hot because of record snowfall. An oven is hot and ready to cook at 350 degrees. There is no discernible relation between “hot” as an attribute of ski resorts and ovens, so its meaning is equivocal.

A good parking place is one that is safe, dry, inexpensive, and nearby. A good peach is sweet, juicy, and soft without being mushy. Here the meanings of “good” in the different contexts are not identical, so their use is not univocal; but they don’t seem to be altogether unrelated, either. Once familiar with the distinction between a good peach and a not-so-good one, we would know how to apply the same distinction between good and not-so-good to parking places. The meanings here of “good” are different, but kindred. This is what, in this context, we mean by analogical.⁶

⁶ For this way of using the distinction between equivocal, analogical and univocal, see F.C. Copleston, *Aquinas* (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 134; also see Hunsinger, *Karl Barth*, 43–44, where Hunsinger distinguishes univocal, analogical and equivocal as three modes of reference in theological language, with Barth insisting on an analogical understanding over and against literalists and expressivists.

Now let's work with the difference between "literal" and "metaphorical."

The literal meaning of a term is its primary and most obvious meaning.

For example, David was at one time literally a shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11). Jesus, as far as we know, was never a shepherd in that sense, but he is sometimes called a shepherd, too (John 10:11). We will call that use metaphorical; that is not to say that it is equivocal. Quite the contrary: by our earlier definition, metaphors are not equivocal at all. This important point requires elaboration.

The gospels make frequent appeal to readers' metaphorical imagination. Jesus doesn't seem so much to preach as to paint pictures—some in stories, some in flesh and blood. Often, these pictures are meant to bring to light God's mysterious disposition and God's ways of doing business with the world. To what shall we compare the kingdom of God? It is like . . . an old betrayed and heart-sick father sprinting down the path to greet the son he had given up for lost. (Luke 15:20); or a woman lighting a lamp and sweeping under the furniture for a lost coin (Luke 15:8); or a sleepy husband stumbling out of bed in the wee hours of the morning to find out who is banging at the door (Luke 11:5). These are metaphors for God. Jesus also uses metaphors for his disciples; he calls them the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13) and "light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). You are going out as "sheep among wolves," he warns, so be "wise as serpents" while remaining "innocent as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

The literal meaning of a term, its primary and most obvious meaning, is given with what we might call the term's native context. These gospel metaphors trade on that primary meaning while applying it in a variety of artful ways to a new context, where something other than, but kindred with, that literal sense is clearly meant. Jesus uses the audience's understanding of the relation between literal sheep and literal wolves to inform its understanding of the mission field; so, these metaphors are loose analogies.⁷

⁷ This is admittedly an oversimplification. A complete account of the relationship and the distinctions between analogy and metaphor would require much more careful parsing. For our purpose, where the task is to answer the objection of equivocation, and the need is to show that our uses of terms in different contexts have "kindred" meaning, naming metaphors as "loose analogies" will hopefully suffice.

Literal

- David the Good Shepherd
- Primary and Obvious Meaning
- Meaning Given with Native Context

Metaphorical

- Jesus the Good Shepherd
- Meaning Extended to New Context
- Loose Analogy to Literal Meaning

Markers of a Faithfully Reasonable (Scientific) Christianity

Several weeks ago I sketched my own proposal for the parameters of a Christianity that is both faithful to the gospel and reasonable in its acceptance and appropriation of science. It went something like this:

Science Requires and Faith Permits	Science and Faith Permit but do not Require	Christian Faith requires and science permits
Non-literal interpretation of Creation in Genesis	Literal interpretation of a variety of other Biblical events, including Virgin Birth and many miracles	Literal interpretation of Resurrection at Easter.

The following pages are excerpts pieced together from the penultimate draft of my doctoral dissertation, where I lay out this position.

With little fuss or fanfare, the Episcopal Church at its recent 2006 General Convention reaffirmed the traditional Anglican position that “acceptance of evolution is entirely compatible with an authentic and living Christian faith.”⁸ This statement prompts some obvious questions. What is “living faith”? When is it “authentic”? Our method makes heavy use of the notion of an intellectual tradition, which is a collection of doctrines and theories centered on a “core.” Considering, then, the Anglican tradition, which beliefs, doctrines, affirmations would constitute the core?

Our proposal for the core includes the doctrine of the Incarnation, which is affirmed weekly through the recitation of the Nicene Creed:

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.⁹

It includes the Passion of Christ as a saving act of God, which is the basis for this

Palm Sunday collect, setting the theme of Holy Week:

Assist us mercifully with your help, O Lord God of our salvation, that we may enter with joy upon the contemplation of those mighty acts, whereby you have given us life and immortality; through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹⁰

And it includes the Resurrection, whose meaning and significance are well

expressed in the Easter preface to the Eucharistic prayer:

But chiefly are we bound to praise you for the glorious resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; . . . By his death he has destroyed death, and by his rising to life again he has won for us everlasting life.¹¹

⁸See introduction, note 2.

⁹ The Book of Common Prayer, 358.

¹⁰ Ibid., 270.

As to the centrality of these beliefs for living faith, one need only consider the crowded churches for the feasts of the Passion (Palm Sunday), the Resurrection (Easter), and the Incarnation (Christmas Eve). Sunday worship, moreover, is a weekly act of profound thanksgiving—ευχαριστια—for the Passion by light of the Incarnation and Resurrection. We can safely say that, by Anglican tradition, Christian faith lives in the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the Christian particulars are central for this tradition. Belief in God, and in God as the world's Creator, comes with and through these matters having more particularly to do with the gospel of redemption. It is interesting to note in this connection that the church holds no great festival to celebrate creation—neither of the world, nor humankind. It does designate a feast for God—Trinity Sunday—which is the contemplation of God as known in the Spirit through the Son. God the Creator is known through God the Savior; thus, Anglicanism has taken hold of Paul's first principle for Christian teaching: "No one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). The Book of Common Prayer is indeed an evangelical book, and Anglicanism is a thoroughly christocentric and trinitarian tradition.

If our selections seem conventional, that is our intention. We are addressing grounds for the Anglican tradition's assertion that its beliefs are compatible with evolutionary science. It is important in this regard to show that "compatibility" does not rest on the more or less discreet rejection of doctrines that an average Sunday worship-goer would recognize as central. We want to be clear that this is not the

¹¹ Ibid., 379.

case. That does not mean that all our historical-critical positions would be obvious to that hypothetical person in the pew. In the interest of clarity and candor we will speak next to some of these positions, showing also that they are consistent with our core doctrines. Beyond those issues we will then make what is perhaps our most important case: not only does evolution not require rejection of our central doctrines, the opposite is more nearly true. It is when and as we are clear about what the Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection of Christ mean for our understanding of the world and God that we find greater harmony between scientific and religious understanding.

There is the question of equivocation, because the words that name our central doctrines can be assigned a bewildering variety of meanings. Daniel Dennett contends that modern science-minded religious believers practice equivocation on a grand scale, and in making this argument he singles out some prominent Episcopalians for supporting illustration; thus, he claims, the suggestion that religious belief is compatible with evolutionary science is vacuous.¹² The strength of Dennett's argument is not at issue here, for it seems to us that he has raised a valid and obvious concern. The possibility that Anglican assertions of science-religion compatibility are vacuous has been raised by others, including Philip Kitcher in a recent book, *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*. Interestingly, Kitcher's book opens in the same way as this work, with the symbolic fact of Darwin's burial in Westminster Abbey; but whereas our thesis has the burial as fitting, Kitcher is far from sure that he agrees. He wonders whether our

¹² Dennett, *Breaking the Spell*, 205–10.

acceptance of Darwin's science "leaves central religious doctrines and cherished beliefs about ourselves unperturbed—whether, in short, that memorial in the Abbey undermines the institution and the values the site represents, whether, in the interests of accurate representation, Darwin really should be disinterred."¹³ Murphy, too, has placed us on guard against theology that keeps the terms of traditional theism, but so alters their meaning that "only the words remain."¹⁴

Let us address this challenge, at least in part, by stipulating that there is a concrete meaning in the doctrine of the Resurrection. Were it not for Paul, we might even be tempted to insist on calling the resurrection of Jesus a "literal" event. In our earlier discussion we established that the literal sense of a word is its primary and obvious meaning, the one closest to common sense. There is an obvious meaning of being alive, and an obvious meaning of being dead. With those obvious meanings in mind, a Christian core belief in resurrection entails accepting that Jesus was alive (though mortal), then dead, and then alive again, though now immortal and incorruptible.

Neither might the gates of death,
Nor the tomb's dark portal,
Nor the watchers, nor the seal,
Hold thee as a mortal.¹⁵

¹³ Philip Kitcher, *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

¹⁴ Murphy, *Theology*, 14.

¹⁵ "Come Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain," *The Hymnal 1982: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1982), Hymn 199.

Literalism about Jesus' resurrection is not sufficient, though. Reading Paul, we realize that a literal concept of resurrection cannot quite suffice for Christian understanding, given the change from mortal to immortal that comes with the transition from death to life. When we speak of "life" in two such different contexts, we are doing so analogically rather than univocally. Paul offers a clear analogy: as life in a tent is to life in a house, so is life before and after resurrection. "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1). The comparison suggests that there is a similar, but different meaning of "life" before and after resurrection, and that the difference is between less and more, instability and permanence. We could also say, as Paul does, that it is the difference between perishable and imperishable, weak and powerful, dishonorable and glorious (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Thus, the problem with assigning a literal meaning to resurrection is not that it claims too much, but that it doesn't claim enough. We require a concrete, literal-and-then-some, understanding of the doctrine of the Resurrection.

Perhaps this discussion prompts a question: What about Christmas? If we are assigning a concrete meaning to the event behind the resurrection stories of Jesus, what about the event behind the stories of his birth? Both the Easter and Christmas stories appear to be heavily laden with imaginative and symbolic content. Do we require a literal-and-then-some understanding of the virginal conception of Jesus, too? Our answer is no, because the doctrine of the Incarnation does not depend upon a virginal conception. (Whereas the doctrine of the Resurrection *does* require a

resurrection.) Jesus could have been born in the usual way and still by act of God be the Word made flesh, full of grace and truth. Double Agency permits that.

Although in academic circles this is an old chestnut, scarcely requiring comment, for the average person in the pew it is still probably a departure from her conception of the true meaning of Christmas. Readers are referred to Raymond Brown's handling of theories about the origin of the tradition of the virginal conception of Jesus. One theory Brown considers is that the tradition is a theologoumenon, an "historicized" symbol of a theological doctrine, a fiction that translates the doctrine into historical terms. Applied to the belief that Jesus was virginally conceived, the theory of a theologoumenon holds "that the belief that Jesus was God's Son in a unique sense has been historicized (made *geschichtlich*) in the infancy narratives where he has no human father";¹⁶ that is to say, it is a way of affirming the doctrine of the Incarnation. The other theory Brown considers is that the virginal conception was indeed a literal occurrence; he suggests that the evidence somewhat favors the latter theory. Our point here is that either theory is consistent with the doctrine of the Incarnation.

We can take this opportunity, then, to point to some clear markers in our consideration of the ancient question of how literally to accept the Bible, given our concern to continue in an authentic and living faith while accepting the science of evolution. It is not a simple question: authentic and living faith requires a literal or otherwise concrete interpretation of some parts of the biblical account; solid science necessitates a non-literal interpretation of others. For the sake of science, the story

¹⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 24–25.

of Adam and Eve must receive a non-literal interpretation; that fact can establish one end of a range. As a matter of core concern for Christians, the passion-resurrection narrative must have a concrete meaning; that gives the other end of the range. The Christmas narrative falls somewhere along the spectrum between those two poles. Science, arguably, does not exclude a literal interpretation of it; nor, arguably, does authentic faith require one.

These considerations can help specify some meaning to the claim of Episcopalians to affirm both authentic, living faith and evolutionary science. Having in mind the range encompassing the creation, birth and resurrection narratives, we can say that: (1) The scientific evidence is such that to affirm a literal interpretation of the Genesis creation accounts is beyond the pale of what might well be called “authentic and living science.” At some point on a spectrum, consistency with science ends. At some distance beyond that point, one finds young-earth Creationism and other notions drawn from a literal interpretation of Genesis. (2) The centrality of the resurrection for Christian faith is such that anything shy of a concrete, “literal-and-then-some” interpretation of it is beyond the pale of Christian faith. At some point on a spectrum, Christian profession ceases to be authentic; at some distance beyond that point, we find equivocation over the doctrine of the Resurrection.¹⁷

¹⁷ Although we are disposed to accept a literal empty tomb, this is not an argument for its indispensability. The empty tomb might just as well be a theologoumenon, “historicizing” the fact of Jesus’ resurrection. It is for the fact itself that we stipulate a literal-and-then-some interpretation, not its literary rendering. What one means to rule out here is the reduction of “resurrection” to an event in the faith of the disciples alone, as though it were not first an event for Jesus himself. Incarnation→virginal conception; Resurrection→empty tomb. In both cases our

In sum, whatever may be the other Christian merits of thinking that includes a literal interpretation of the Genesis account, such thinking can no longer be identified as scientific. By turns, whatever may be the philosophical, scientific and theological virtues of thinking that does not include a literal-and-more interpretation of the Easter proclamation, such thinking can no longer be identified as Christian. Within those poles, there is wide latitude for competing positions: theological, philosophical, and scientific. If the meaning of the Christmas stories falls within this range, so do questions about the power of natural selection in relation to other factors that may be driving evolution. Simply identifying these two markers leaves most of the important science-theology questions unanswered, but it does establish one set of limits that can help clarify a claim to affirm both a living Christian faith, and evolution.

interpretations of the doctrines are consistent with literal readings of the texts, but do not require them.

