



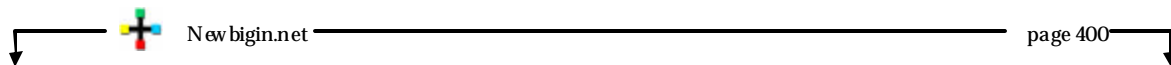
Human Flourishing in Faith, Fact and Fantasy

1988

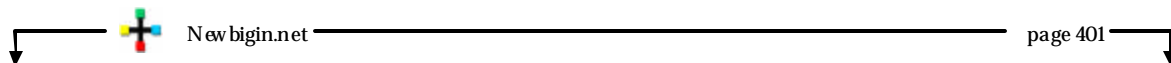
J.E. Lesslie Newbigin

Religion and Medicine, 7: 400-12.

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I apologise for sitting like this with my leg up. I think in this audience it's enough to say that I'm doing it under Doctor's orders. I think I also should apologise for being here at all. I have no competence as a medical practitioner, but, as I advance into the geriatric end of the spectrum, I am getting increasing experience as a medical patient and this is probably an excellent qualification for speaking and, let me say, since I'll be saying some things about the National Health Service as we go along, that as I have increasing experience of the



National Health Service as a patient, I cannot speak too highly of the devotion and care and skill which I meet at every contact with that service.

I've chosen this title – these three words – faith, fact and fantasy and I propose to treat them in reverse order because as we look at the healing scene it seems to me that the most prominent factor in the scenario is fantasy. What I'm referring to is, in the broadest terms, the widespread belief that there is in the nature of things some kind of inherent right for every human being to be free from sickness, pain and disability and that if in spite of these things there is sickness, pain and disease someone is to blame. Let me spell out what seem to be the elements in this fantasy.

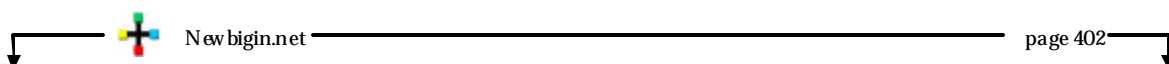
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The first and most obvious one is that the fantasy requires us to do our best to hide the fact that everyone of us is going to die. It is often said that in our age death plays the part which sex did in the Victorian era, it is the unmentionable subject, because death decisively refutes the fantasy and so we try to avert our eyes from it. We try to avoid facing the fact that not only is death unavoidable but also that it necessarily casts its shadow before it in the form of growing weakness and pain and disability. We try to pretend that these things are not part of a normal life, and we try to use the amazing technical skills now available to postpone to the very limit the death which we

ought to have been able to accept and even to welcome as a normal part of human life. Death is perceived in our culture as the final failure of our Health Service, rather than as the fulfilment of a truly human life.

The second element in this world of fantasy is that so long as we live in this world there are no limits to what we think we can achieve in the way of abolishing pain and postponing death. The right to freedom from pain and disease is absolute. But of course this is fantasy. When we claim this alleged right we close our eyes to the fact that choices are necessarily being made all the time, among limited resources; that an intensive care unit here to save the life of a premature baby, or a new kidney machine there, means that there is less for a mental hospital or a geriatric ward and less for things which fall outside the role of the National Health Service, but are nevertheless fundamental to a healthier society, things like better housing, better schools and less pollution of the environment. In the fantasy world these hard choices are out of sight. This baby has the right to live and therefore this intensive care unit must be available now.

And this is of course only one example of a more fundamental and far reaching fantasy. Those of you who have read the quite seminal book of Alastair McIntyre called *'After Virtue'* will have noted his remarks that the evidence for the existence of human rights in our society is exactly the same as the evidence for the existence of unicorns in the Middle Ages. They are widely believed to exist and no-one has proved that they don't. This concept of right is



mis-leading. A right is a strictly juridical matter. Rights have to be proved by legal process. Rights only exist within an accepted legal framework in which it is possible to state precisely who is the party that has the responsibility which corresponds to the claimed right. In other words rights exist as part of a socially acknowledged network of mutual responsibility and without that network to claim a right is exactly analogous to writing a cheque on a bank which doesn't exist. The cheque may very well express a want and, indeed, a need, but it does not constitute a right.

This brings me to my fourth point. This idea of natural human right, e.g. the right to health care, has power in our minds, not because there are any rational grounds for it in the way in which we understand the world of fact, but because it is a survival from an older way of understanding the world - that total way of understanding the world in which Europe was schooled during the thousand years of Western Christendom. In that view all human beings are bound together in a network of mutual responsibility. What it is to be human is to be within that network of mutual responsibility under the ultimate government of God, who has created us all in His image and who, therefore, requires of us that we treat one another in accordance with that immeasurable worth and dignity. That world view no longer controls our public life. It is not part of public truth as it is communicated in our schools and universities. It is regarded as a private opinion. And, therefore, the concept of human rights removed from its original foundations, its original context, remains a mere assertion devoid of rational basis, something which we can only assert, but which we cannot regard as being universally accepted.

McIntyre in that same book interestingly draws a parallel with the phenomenon of taboo among the Polynesian people. When Captain Cook and his friend first met the Polynesians they were puzzled by this phenomenon of taboo existing alongside what seemed to them to be astonishing moral laxity and the Polynesians were unable to explain the why and wherefore of these taboos. Undoubtedly they were a survival from an older view of the universe surviving by mere force of custom, and that view was confirmed when King Kamehameha simply by decree abolished the taboos and got away with it easily. There is an obvious parallel in our contemporary European world. Governments have simply ignored human rights and have been able to get away with it because, cut off from the total world view of what is the case, these remain simply as survivals of an earlier way of understanding the world.

The world view to which they originally belonged has been replaced. I'm now talking about the public way of understanding the world which constitutes the content of our public

educational system. The way of understanding the world now has a quite different centre. We no

longer teach our children that the central reality with which they will have to deal is God and His purpose. We no longer teach as a factual statement that the chief end of man is to "glorify God and enjoy him for ever." We teach the story of man, and I think I may be excused for using the exclusive word at that point. The central reality of history is the human person, armed with modern science and technology, and the history of the human race is the history of the development of these technologies, equipped and competent to impose his own purposes on the world, the problem solver for whom there can be in principle no final limit. Technology, the study of the means to impose human will on every aspect of nature, becomes either a god or a demon. When it is treated, as it often is, as that which can provide us with the answer to all our problems to free us from all ills then it is taking the place of God; but it becomes a demon because we perceive in many, many instances that, in fact it threatens our humanity. Both attitudes are foolish. I suspect that it is not necessary in this gathering to warn against the first danger of treating technology as God. It might perhaps be worthwhile warning against the second danger, namely a too great fear of technology. There are many in the contemporary break-down of confidence in Western culture who are tempted to go to the East and seek a way of returning to the womb of nature. The Eastern religions are being very much discovered in the contemporary failure of our Western nerves. I find it helpful to remember the delightful story of King Philip 11 of Spain, who had a project for deepening a river in order to make it navigable so as to open up the centre of his country for trade. He appointed a Royal Commission to make a feasibility study and, after consulting all the relevant authorities, the Commission brought him a unanimous report in the following terms "The project is not feasible since if Almighty God had intended that river to be navigated He would have made it deep enough when he created the world." And if we laugh at that it is because we know that there is no return to nature, because we know that we cannot abandon our calling - in the words of Scripture "to have dominion over the earth." What we have to do is to remember that that is only a delegated authority; that we are not masters of nature, but stewards, responsible to another whose purposes can alone determine what nature is to be.

Technology is neither God nor demon, but servant in the fulfilment of our divine calling. At the heart of the world of fantasy which I am trying to delineate is this picture which has replaced God, in the centre, with man as the problem solver, before whom nature is ultimately malleable, plastic, raw material for manipulation.

And fifthly, this fantasy picture of our relation to the natural world, man the problem solver, the manipulator, and the nature which is, as Moltmann says in one of his books, merely unclaimed property, this is at the heart of our delusion. We usually blame Descartes for it; whether that is just or not I wouldn't like to say. Believe it or not I was once in a taxi in New York and of course the taxi man was very conversational as always and I think his second sentence was

"Trouble with old Descartes, too much cogito not enough sum." I said "I perceive that thou art a philosopher." He said "You can't drive a cab in New York without being a philosopher."

Well, whether or not Descartes is to blame, it is true that the dualism which he introduced into Western thought is, I think, fundamental to our problem. Almost all our language embodies this dualism. We talk about the material and the spiritual as if they were two separate kinds of reality. It comes as a shock to most people to be told that in our Old Testament the same Hebrew word is sometimes translated body and sometimes soul. And yet we know, do we not, that the same person in a hospital bed is from one point of view a medical statistic and, from another point of view, a human person facing the issues of life or death. But it is one person. It is not a body with a soul attached to it. Every person involved in the care of the sick knows this, of course, and

yet, we are constantly encouraged to talk as if reality was not one but two, a so called material world, what Descartes called the *res extensa*, the world of extended matter on the one hand, and the *res cogitans* of Descartes on the other.

The truth, surely, is that we are part of this one world, and yet we talk as if we stood outside of it, as if it was simply inert stuff which could be observed, directed, analysed, manipulated and used for our purpose, a world which is available for any purpose which we like to impose on it because it does not itself embody any purpose. It is either inert matter or it consists of forms of life which have emerged out of inert matter and developed by random processes of mutation and selection and by elimination of the unfit. If in spite of this dominant vision which controls our public life, if we retain, as we do in this room, belief in God, we are faced with the question how God is related to this whole world of things and beings which we call nature, and of which, in spite of our Cartesian stance as observers and manipulators, we are also a part.

Contemporary theology, it seems to me, tends to answer that question in one or other of two ways which are broadly pantheistic and deistic. On the one hand there are those who speak of God's presence everywhere – His presence fills everything - there is nowhere where he is not and, therefore, if you are so rash as to say, like Jacob at Bethel, "Surely God is in this place," the answer will be "Yes, of course, but God is everywhere; you can't just say He is here". And if like the Israelites returning from Exile you say "God acted at this moment in the flow of world history," the answer would be "Yes, of course, but God is acting everywhere all the time and there is no meaning in talking about particular acts of God in history. God in fact does nothing in particular, but He does everything in general and like the House of Lords He does it very well."

The alternative is a deistic understanding of the relationship between God and the world of nature. In this view the world of nature is a closed continuum

operating strictly in accordance with the ascertainable laws of cause and effect, and even if it is conceived that God was the originator of this whole frame it is in the nature of the case that He cannot interfere in its working. God is spirit, the world is matter. God therefore does not impinge upon the workings of nature except by spiritual means and that is to say through the mind of the human person.

But that merely pushes the problem a little further back. It remains a mystery since the human cerebral cortex from which the human decisions flow is as much a part of nature and as much part of the continuing nexus of cause and effect as are the rocks and trees and the storms on the lake of Galilee.

But this way of seeing things leaves untouched the central feature of the modern world view – that the only purposes operating in the natural world are the purposes which human beings bring to bear on it.

I am characterising this picture as a world of fantasy. We know that the long road travelled by modern physics in the quest for the ultimate constituents of what we call matter has led to something not at all like what Descartes was talking about. The ultimate constituents of matter, as the modern physicists have told us, are not material at all. Matter is constituted by ever changing patterns of relationship between non-material entities. I was at a conference in Holland the other day and the Dutch philosopher, Van Peurson told us that he had asked an atomic physicist "How should I envisage the atom?" And the reply was "You must imagine a very complicated ballet with no dancers!" In other words there is nothing more ontologically ultimate than relationships. The whole of reality is constituted by mutual relationships. In the fine words of Zizioulas the Greek orthodox theologian, "Being is Communion." And that ought not to surprise us who believe that the origin of all things is in the mystery of the triune God.

Reality is not split into two closed segments, man and nature, mind and matter, spirit and body. Reality is one. I've recently been reading a fascinating book by a Chinese Christian philosopher Carver Yu looking at Western culture from the angle of Chinese traditional thought

as re-interpreted through the Christian faith - a fascinating study - and he suggests that the sickness of Western Society has its roots right back in the attempt of Greek philosophy to find the really real in self-existing substance - the search for substance for that which exists in itself - whereas the Bible will have taught us, says Yu, to find reality precisely in mutual inter relations, mutual openness, mutual communion. God, in other words, is not locked out of his world and He is not identical with His world. God summons His world ceaselessly to be and to realise its true being. Certainly the human mind cannot fully grasp how God acts in nature and history, but equally certainly we cannot fully grasp how it is that I, this thinking

person, can act or choose not to act in the physical world, whose every event is part of the nexus of cause and effect, since my brain and nervous system themselves are as much part of this nexus of cause and effect, as is any other part of nature, and yet I know that I can act, or decide not to act, with freedom.

And this brings me to my last element in what I call the world of fantasy. At its centre is the figure of the human individual, a sovereign power, who has rights enforceable against other individuals. In this view health is seen as an attribute of the individual and sickness likewise. Ethical questions are discussed in terms of the rights and duties or, more often, of the feelings and sentiments of the individual person. It is not seen that that well-being is a function of families and communities in their shared life together, and that moral choices are properly made only in the light of a belief about what kind of shared life we want. We've failed to see that the healing of relationships may be a vital clue to the healing of people. Our politics become a matter of balancing or failing to balance the conflicting claims of individuals for their alleged rights. And thus, to quote a recent leader in one of our quality newspapers: "Taxation of people's personal income in order to sustain the National Health Service is a limitation and a derogation from personal liberty." What nonsense! As though any kind of liberty could be possible without the community which sustains all of us. This individual (and I'm talking now of the fantasy world) existing apart from any dependence on and obligation to the communities of families and neighbours, and nation and world, this individual with a right to freedom from disease and pain and disability, a right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (to quote the most famous definition of it) is the centre figure in a world of fantasy. And let us now look at some of the facts.

II

When the National Health Service was set up it was believed that once health care was available equally to everyone in the nation disease would gradually be eliminated and the demands upon the Health Service correspondingly reduced. We know that something very different has happened. The cost of the Service has risen steadily and at an increasing rate, and this has had little to do with which party was in control of Central Government.

For example, during the sixteen years from 1959 to 1975, a period in which different parties ruled, expenditure on the National Health Service as a proportion of gross national product rose by 50%. But that period saw no decrease in the incidence of sickness whether measured by the number of days absent from work or by the number of claims for sick benefit. Moreover, in spite of the fact that the Health Service is available equally for all, innumerable studies have shown that there is a continuing and perhaps growing inequality in health between the rich and the poor. The morbidity gradient, that is to say the rate at which morbidity increases as one goes down the social scale, has not been reduced during all the years since the National Health Service was set up.

And, of course, if one looks at health in global terms and not merely in national, the disparities are even more enormous. In spite of the great achievement of the World Health Organisation in mobilizing resources on an international scale for the control and prevention of disease, the greater part of the human race is still out of reach of modern health care altogether. If there is indeed a right to health care, it is certainly not honoured, except for a very small part of the human race.

Very large funds have been spent and are currently being spent in providing countries of the so-called third world with medical facilities copied from those developed in Europe and America, but these benefit mainly the urban dwellers and the rich. For the millions who live in the villages of Asia and Africa it makes very little contribution to health. It is true that there have been amazing achievements which benefit all. For example the elimination of smallpox and the dramatic reduction of the incidence of malaria in a country like India. Yet the fact remains that anything resembling what we in this country would call proper health care is simply not available for the majority of the human race.

And now we are faced with the new and world-wide threat of AIDS – something which has appeared like a cloud "the size of a man's hand", but now threatens to darken the whole sky with a storm more grave than anything we have known for many centuries.

These are facts, in the presence of which our fantasies lose their power to convince. What has gone wrong? Is the secret of the trouble, to quote Michael Wilson, "That a system of medicine based on knowledge of disease cannot provide health." Is he fair when he remarks that George Orwell, in his famous novel 'Nineteen Eighty-four' did not need to include a ministry of health in his government. You may remember that he had a ministry of peace for making war, a ministry of love for practising torture and a ministry of truth for propagating lies. Wilson says that he did not need to include a ministry of health for promoting disease because we already had one. Is that unfair? Or is it true that there is something radically wrong with our accepted images of health and healing?

Here we have to begin to think thoughts outside the normal frame of thinking. We have to question the things that we accept without question. We accept them because they are part of what the sociologists call the plausibility structure - the structure of practices, customs and beliefs which determine in any society what ideas are plausible and what are not. We have to talk about our fundamental beliefs; we have to talk about faith.

III

Now clearly I am contrasting faith with fantasy. Many of our contemporaries would bracket them together. Faith, according to John Locke, who has had enormous influence on our culture is what you fall back upon when knowledge

is not available. If faith is a second-class substitute for knowledge (and that view remains operative in our culture) to say "I believe" means "I cannot say that I know." Facts which everybody knows are in a separate class from beliefs which some people hold. But this dichotomy between knowing and believing is part of the world of fantasy. It is fantasy because it imagines that there is possible a kind of knowledge which is immune from risk – immune from the risk of being wrong – a kind of knowledge which does not involve personal commitment, which does not involve putting my life on the line. And that perhaps is the most fundamental illusion of all in our society, the illusion of a kind of knowledge which does not involve faith. All our knowing rests on believing. We do not begin to know anything except by trusting ourselves to those who can teach us; to our parents who first showed us how to use words to mean something; our teachers who showed us how to exercise these skills over ever widening fields and who introduced us to the vast resources of knowledge and experience available in our cultural tradition. We begin

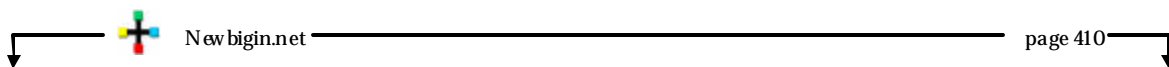
always by an act of faith and it is only so that we can hope to achieve that mastery which enables us in due course to criticise and amend and develop the tradition. Most of the time, in most matters, we simply accept the reigning assumptions of our society - what the sociologist calls the plausibility structure. Very rarely do we stand outside of it and question its fundamental assumptions. We can only do so from the standpoint of commitment to another set of fundamental beliefs, and such a commitment always involves risk – it always involves laying one's life on the line, but it is always the starting point for fresh exploration. Faith is not the cut off point at which you cease exploring, it is the starting point from which you begin to explore. As Augustine was so fond of saying "I believe in order to understand." What would it mean to explore the whole field of human flourishing from the starting point of the Christian revelation, accepted in faith, accepted as a starting point for our search? What concepts of health and healing does such an exploration uncover? What is human flourishing in the perspective of the Gospel?

Look at the whole ministry of Jesus with its culmination in His death and resurrection. It begins with His baptism in Jordan, where Jesus first appeared on the stage of public history as one in a company of sin-burdened men and women turning to God in repentance and hope. He the perfect, sinless one sees Himself as wholly one with them. He is not apart from them, Their sin, their sorrow, their despair, their longing He takes as His own, and in that moment He is given the assurance of His nature and His calling. He is the beloved son; He is the Lamb of God, who is to take away the sin of the world. At once there follows that mighty spiritual battle with the evil one in the solitude of the desert. It is the identifying and the unmasking and the rejecting of all the ways by which salvation, total welfare, must be achieved within the reigning world view. When we use a bland phrase like the reigning world view, or a technical phrase like the plausibility structure, we are obscuring the fact that what we are talking

about is something which has power, demonic power, it is part of that whole world of realities to which modern theology has been so blind and of which the New Testament speaks so freely – the world of what Paul calls the world of principalities and powers. Jesus identifies, unmasking and disarms these powers. He binds the strong man and then He comes back from the desert in the power of that victory, announcing the impending invasion of God's Kingly rule, and summons children and disciples to go with Him, and sets forth with them through the towns and villages of Galilee and Judaea to continue that work of identifying, unmasking and challenging the principalities and powers in all their manifestations, whether in personal sickness of mind or body, whether in the sickness of society, the corruption of lawful authority by pride, greed and hypocrisy. He carries that challenge right through to the end, into a very heart of the nation at the moment of its greatest political and religious tension. He stands before the supreme governor, acknowledging His God-given authority to judge and challenging him to recognise the truth and to judge according to the truth. He carries the challenge right through to the very end, and on the Cross itself He is still exercising His authority to forgive sin and so to free men from bondage. At the end, only at the very end, does he surrender - not to the powers that He has challenged, but to His Father in whose name He had challenged these powers, 'Father into Thy hands I commit my spirit.' and only then comes the great cry "It is finished." The moment of final surrender is the moment of decisive victory, the moment of the judgment of this world, the moment when the prince of this world is cast out. The Cross is the victory. the strange victory over the powers of evil, and resurrection is not of course a reversal of a defeat, but the announcement and affirmation of a victory, an affirmation given to those who had been chosen and prepared to be the bearers of this strange victory through the life of the world until its end. And so when He rallies them and sends them out to continue what He had begun to do, to announce and to embody in their corporate life the victorious presence of God's Kingly rule. He sends them out with a word and a gesture, and I think we have attended much to the word, but little to the gesture. The word "As the Father sent me, so I send you," and the gesture "He showed them His hands and His side." The

gesture that shows them what the manner of their going will be. And then He breathes on them His own spirit shares with them His own risen life, so that the body which bears, the marks of suffering and death, the marks of that conflict with the principalities and powers, will be the body that communicates the risen life of Jesus.

What then is the picture of health and healing which comes into focus if that is the starting point of our exploration? Not certainly health defined negatively as the absence of pain and suffering and disablement, not health as an end in itself. Rather what would have to be defined, surely, in much more dynamic terms. Perhaps a good model can be found in military practice and here again I am drawing on Michael Wilson. "Health," Wilson reminds us "in a military

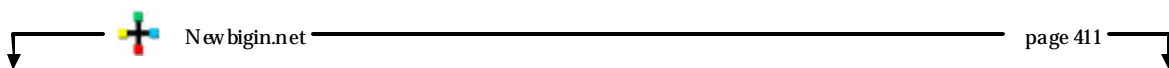


unit, is a matter of fitness for combat." Health is defined as fitness and fitness is a word which involves purpose. Fitness for something. In the little patch just outside the Winson Green Prison, where I minister, our members recently did a house to house survey to ask the local inhabitants a number of questions, including what were their most acute needs, and the first reply that we got was a request for a "Keep-fit" class. My immediate response was "Can you find out 'fit for what?'" It's surely a question that goes to the heart of our problem. There was a time, not very long ago, when every child in a Scottish school learned, as one of the first things to be learned, one of the first facts to be learned, that "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." Later on, and indeed all through life, one learned what are the ways by which one may reach that end. Life has a purpose. One expects to find the journey tough with torrents to be forded, deep swamps to be travelled through, mountains to be climbed and, eventually, the last deep river to be crossed. Health in that context is fitness for that journey.

In our society such teaching is not permitted, not merely doesn't happen, but is not permitted. The first statement of the Catechism is not regarded as a statement of fact; it is perhaps a symbolic way of expressing certain personally chosen values held by a minority in the community, and these values of course are optional. They are in a different class from what we call facts which are not optional, but which have to be reckoned with whether we like them or not. Values are by definition what someone wants. Facts are what everyone has to deal with whether they want them or not. Values are optional because a thing is valuable only in relation to the achievement of a purpose, and our plausibility structure does not include any factual statement about what the purpose of human life is. That is the most fundamental fact about our society, that our in society the public truth which we expect to be communicated through all our educational systems, excludes any factual statement about what the purpose of human life might be.

While, therefore, we may be ready to endure a degree of trouble and even pain for a limited and specific purpose as, for example, an athlete training for a big race, in the context of human life as a whole there is no reason why pain and trouble should be accepted. Health, well-being, is defined precisely as the absence of pain and trouble and disease. The focus of attention is on disease and how to remove it, not on the goal of human living, which alone can determine what is well being. So an organ transplant or a new drug attracts wonder, love and praise, more than a neighbourhood project, which enables suspicious strangers to become friends.

It's often been said that Britain was a healthier country during the years of the war than it has been before or since, and no doubt that was partly due to a well-thought-out food policy, but was it not also perhaps partly due, or even



more due, to the power of a shared purpose which enabled people to accept hardship and pain and even death, because they were incidental to the achievement of a purpose. It seems to me that there can't be in principle, cannot be a truly healthy society, without some shared purpose. Without that, the demand to concentrate on what is called the creation of wealth can only lead us

deeper into its opposite, namely ill-being, and this for two reasons.

Firstly because well being does not arise from the multiplication of immediate gratification and, secondly, because the invitation to the strong and clever to succeed without regard to the needs of the weak and the vulnerable, destroys the very foundations upon which human well-being rests. I fear that the call for an enterprise society could lead us to become a very sick society indeed. What in the end constitutes human flourishing, human well being? As Christians we know that we have no choice about where to look for the answer. We must look to Him who alone is true man, in whom alone the image of God is present without distortion or defacement. True flourishing for all who are called to be true human beings in God's image is to follow the way He went. It is the way for all, and for the few who may recognise it, it is for them in order to be for the sake of all. This governs our priorities, both in the life of the local congregation and in the work of Christian theologians and scholars. The local congregation, even when it is small and weak, when it accepts this calling can become a source of healing for a whole neighbourhood. Its members are mobilized for action on that frontier which runs through every human society and through every human heart, the frontier where the principalities and powers that rule this world are challenged in the name and in the power of its rightful ruler the, Crucified and Risen Lord. They form a community of action for God's justice in every part of life, but first they are a community of celebration of praise, a community which lives by grace and therefore becomes a source of grace abounding for those whose lives are short of grace. "Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven," they can rejoice in the grace of God and find in it, not an escape from life's battle, but supreme resources for fighting life's battles.

With such centres of celebration, or rather let me say without such centres of celebration where the risen life of the Crucified Lord is tasted enjoyed and shared, no welfare state will survive. Unless there are companies of people in every community who have love to spare for others because they have been dearly loved, the Welfare State will become only a battlefield of competing claims for rights.

If I may return for a moment to the request we had in Winson Green for a "Keep-fit" class, I would say that every true act of worship, every true celebration of Christ's death and resurrection in the Eucharist is a kind of "Keep fit" class. It is training us to be fit for the human calling, fit to follow Jesus the way He went through life to the end, in the end and beyond the end. That is true

human flourishing, and that christological centre must govern, not only the work and life of the local congregation, it must govern the work of the Christian scholars and theologians. There is a long engagement to be fought on the highest intellectual level between this Christian affirmation and the reigning plausibility structure which control our society. Christian theology has to unmask and challenge the fantasies which form such a large part of our contemporary world view. Of course we shall be a minority. That is not alarming. The plausibility structure is plausible, that is its very nature. We do not commend our Gospel by trying to make it compatible with the reigning plausibility structure. We point to the total fact of Christ and claim that it is from that perspective, from the perspective of that total fact, that we can begin to understand and practise true human flourishing.

I do not want to say that there is any easy way. There is, for example, a great deal of work to be done in seeking to understand, so far as the human mind can understand it, how God acts in the history of the world and in the history of men and women, how He acts, for example, in answer to prayer. There is a great work to be done in the field of epistemology to bring together the two long separated disciplines of natural science and theology, so that we may learn how to understand the world we live in and the life we lead in a holistic and not a dualistic, not to say schizophrenic manner. I don't want to suggest that these are simple matters, but I would plead that theologians undertake this task without timidity and without embarrassment on the basis of the faith that the decisive and determinative clue to all our questions has been given to us in Jesus

Christ. Both these tasks, that of the scholar and that of the local congregation, are needed. Neither is to be set against the other. The work of the scholars will lack credibility if it is not seen that the things they are talking about are realities in the experience of ordinary men and women, and the witness of the local congregation will be threatened when it is made to appear that the realities upon which it relies will not stand on the critical scrutiny of the scholars. I hope that our conference here will be an occasion for the mutual encouragement and guidance of one another in the common task of rescuing human flourishing from the world of fantasy and grounding it firmly in the faith of Christ.

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