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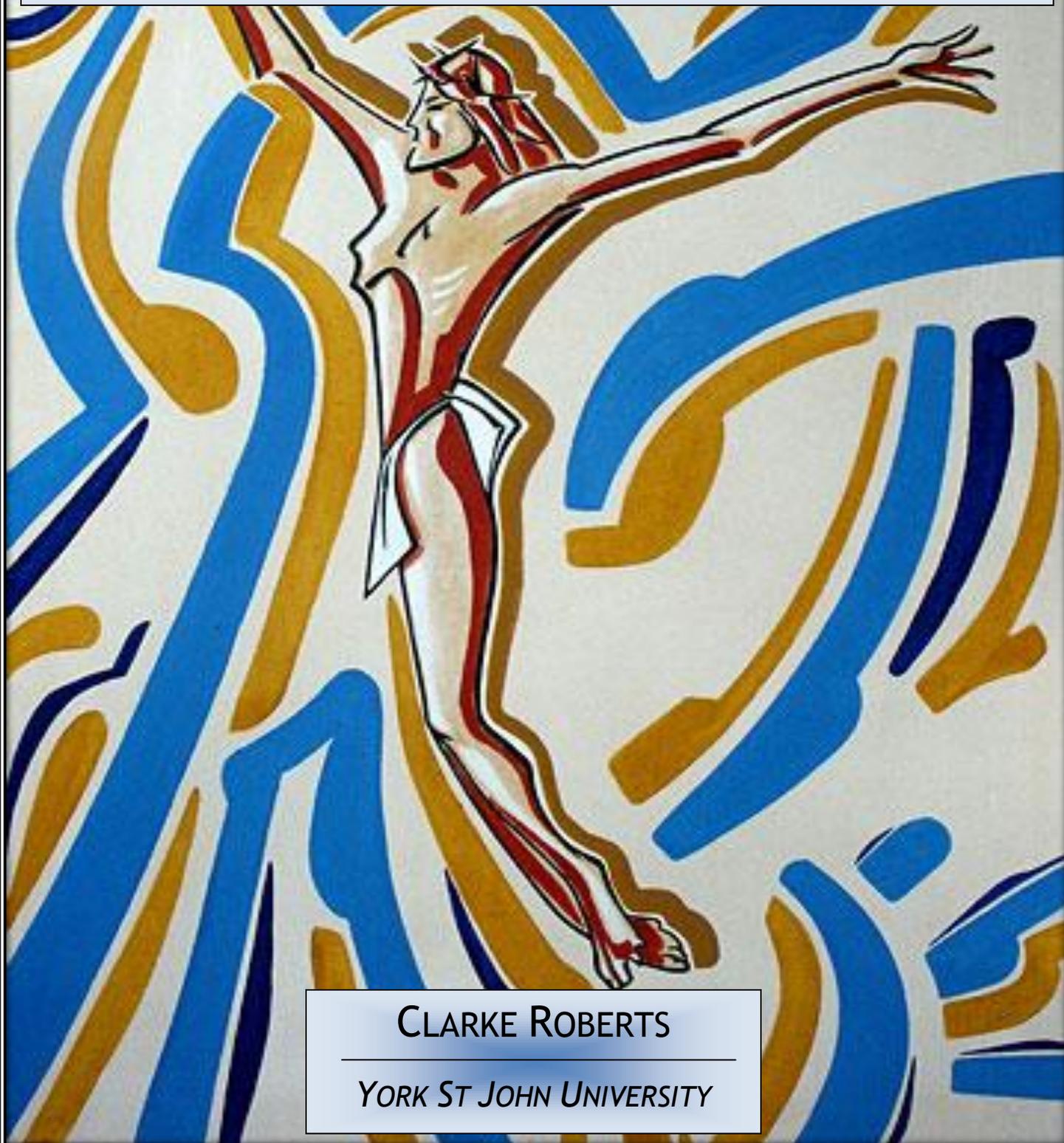
Study plus Learning Journal

An analysis of John Hick's approach to Christology; in
conversation with Brian Hebblethwaite.

Friday 24th May 2013

AN ANALYSIS OF JOHN HICK'S APPROACH TO CHRISTOLOGY

IN CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN HEBBLETHWAITE



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*To Oliver Davies, for inspiring me to ask the questions that matter.
To Ann Christie, for helping me find the voice with which to answer them.*

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

i) Abstract

The main focus of this research is in the area of Christian theology known as Christology; the study of the person and work of Christ (Christie 2012: 1). This research is centred on the Christology as offered by the liberal theologian John Hick, who places emphasis on Jesus' humanity and suggests that his supposed divinity is meant, in a merely metaphorical sense. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges presented to someone who is not Christian, is the notion of a person who, it is claimed in Christian dogma, was both fully human and fully divine. Hick's Christological conclusions are considered highly controversial as they demonstrate a dramatic shift from the traditional doctrinal claims. To one who is not of the faith, can his conclusions perhaps pave a way to a new understanding of Christianity? This research aims to find out.

ii) Keywords

Hick; Hebblethwaite; critique; liberal; conservative; radical; reinterpret; contemporary.

iii) Overall Aims of the Research

The research presented in this dissertation aims to offer a critical analysis of a radical liberal approach of one of the greatest philosophers and theologians of the 20th Century, John Hick, in conversation with one of his greatest retractors, Brian Hebblethwaite. The work of John Hick has always been highly controversial; this research aims to discuss Hick's Christological ideas with reference to conservative views and will aim to conclude as to whether or not the radical position offered by Hick is in fact an appropriate method of interpretation for a contemporary context.

iv) Methodology and Scope of the Research

As this area of research is concentrating on systematic theology, the study is based on academic critique and analysis of theological texts. *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*¹ (1993), the publication in which one may find Hick's Christology, will be the main focus of this research along with relevant essays that feature in the edited *The Myth of God Incarnate*² (1977). To offer a balanced critique of Hick's theology, the works of Brian Hebblethwaite will be used in opposition to the liberal view, along with other relevant conservative sources from the 20th and 21st Centuries. Hick's Christology will be separated into four key elements, each of which will be discussed and critiqued in turn; the analyses obtained from each of these discussions will ultimately aim to a conclusion that provides an answer as to which is the 'appropriate' method of interpreting Christology in a modern context.

¹ *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* will be referred to hereon as *The Metaphor*.

² *The Myth of God Incarnate* will be referred to hereon as *The Myth*.

Chapter 1

Setting the Scene

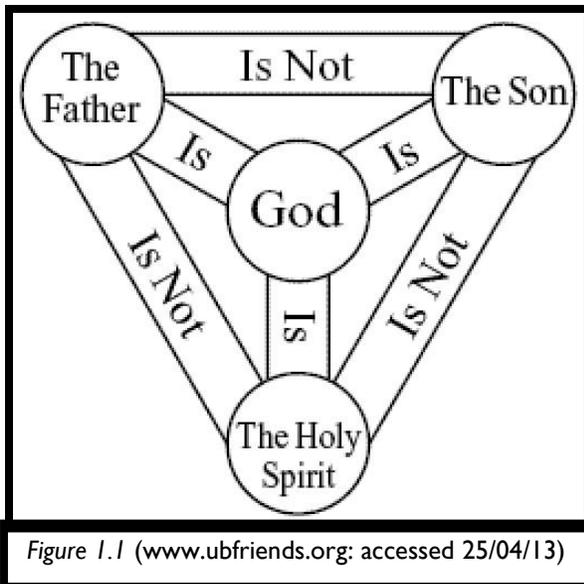
i) What is Christology? – The Classical View of Christ

Christianity, born out of Judaism, has at its centre, Jesus Christ. Jesus' life, death and resurrection provide the basis for the Christian faith, from its ethical and moral teachings, to its understanding of God and humanity's relationship with its creator. Traditional claims made about Jesus state that he was God Incarnate; God in human form sent to Earth to lead humans to salvation. But what exactly is meant by such talk? When one begins to unravel the cryptic language, so too does one begin their journey into the realms of Christological debate.

There is no denying that there existed in 1st Century Palestine, a man by the name Jesus, a man who by all accounts was a religious teacher and was ultimately executed under the rule of Roman Governor Pontius Pilate; historical fact supports this (Macquarrie 1998: 26)³. What historical records cannot answer, is the question as to whether or not the claims about this man made by his followers both then and today, are actually true.

Ideas about Jesus' theological significance have been in existence since the New Testament writings; as Morna Hooker suggests "...in a sense, *all* New Testament theology is Christology" (Hooker 2006: 75). However an agreed doctrine concerning the identity of Jesus was not in existence in any coherent or adhered to manner until the Council of Nicaea in 325CE, and later the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE; such councils were established in order to establish what should be considered orthodox belief and to counter numerous theologies that were deemed to be heretical (Farrington 2001: 116).

³Macquarrie makes reference to a small number of scholars who doubt the actual existence of Jesus, but comments that these movements have never gained popularity due to the overwhelming evidence that stands in favour of Jesus' actual being. See Macquarrie 1998: 26.



Perhaps the defining element of classical Christology to have emerged from the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon is the classic *homoousios* statement; deriving from the Greek term meaning “of the same substance”, this notion gives voice to the classical understanding of Jesus’ importance in Christianity and the way in which he relates to God. Taking the *homoousion*, the traditional understanding of Jesus, in conjunction with the theology

derived from John 1:1, is that God the Son existed as one with God the Father prior to his incarnation in human form – thus he was of the same essence/substance as God.

The diagram above (figure 1.1) is perhaps the best method of envisaging the classical view of Jesus’ position within the Godhead; as one can see, this traditional understanding also lends itself to the Doctrine of the Trinity which, as will be shown later in this research, is abandoned in John Hick’s Christology.

ii) Liberal vs Conservative

Liberalism, Liberal Protestantism or Liberal Theology is a framework of Christian theology that has its roots in the European Enlightenment of the 18th Century, due to the rising appeal to reason, logic and philosophy. This approach to theology however did not gain substantial following until F.D.E. Schleiermacher insisted within his work, that theology should be founded in “human feeling” and should relate more closely to the “human situation” (McGrath 2011: 82). One of the key elements of the liberal movement is the continuing reinterpretation and reconsideration of archaic language and apparently out-dated doctrine in order to make it consistent and coherent in the current contemporary context and the human situation. In extreme cases, doctrines considered to be irrelevant or unintelligible in the contemporary context are abandoned altogether.

In stark contradiction to this, the conservative movement in the contemporary context (or Neo-Orthodoxy⁴), seeks to preserve the traditional elements of belief within Christianity in direct response to the liberal movement, the opponents of which claimed it had reduced Christianity to an anthropocentric religion, rather than a faith with God at its centre (McGrath 2011: 85). Proponents such as Brian Hebblethwaite as demonstrated by the title of his work *In Defence of Christianity*, seek to reaffirm the uniqueness of Christianity and of Jesus by appealing to what is known as revealed knowledge; knowledge that is shown to us through God's will and action (Williams 2000: 131) – such knowledge is often thought to be gained through scripture, as it is often regarded as the 'inspired word of God' (Hodge 1995: 66).

Despite academic concessions being made to accommodate a variety of different views and ideas, there remains scepticism from each of these frameworks concerning the others' validity to its claims. The main objection from the conservative framework is that those within the liberal movement wander too far from the traditional Christian doctrines and fail to take them seriously (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 4). From the perspective of the liberal movement, objections to a conservative interpretation of faith are obvious; many doctrines appear unintelligible in any meaningful sense in a world in which scientific knowledge and technological advances appear to move humanity further than religion has ever been able to.

What is interesting to note however, as pointed out by a fellow student, is the rise in sectarian groups within Christianity which prescribe themselves to the conservative framework; the liberal movement appears to have succumbed to those who identify themselves with the 20th Century Liberation framework – taking the idea of an anthropocentric faith and instead of applying it to the individual, relate it to humanity as a collective. The notion of making humanity the centre of theology is perhaps the biggest critique the liberal (and in this case, liberation) movement has to offer against the conservative framework (see Gilkey 1987: 38).

⁴ This is the name given to the conservative movement by Alister McGrath (McGrath 2011: 85)

iii) Hick & Hebblethwaite – Outlined

Hick aligns himself with the liberal movement within Christian theology, and Hebblethwaite with the conservative. Hick however is different to many of his contemporaries and peers; his theology often appears to be so vastly different from the traditional concepts, that he may be placed in a framework known as ‘radical liberalism’. The reason Hick is so apart from many of his liberal peers is that his Christology (as will be shown) abandons the traditional Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds altogether, whereas the predominant feature of liberal Christology is a reinterpretation of Jesus’ divinity, not a complete move away from it (Christie 2012: 84).

In summary, Hick’s Christology consists of four main precepts: 1) the rejection of the ‘two-natures’ doctrine – on the grounds that it is a paradox and is unintelligible; 2) the suggestion that the incarnation of God in Jesus should be understood not as a metaphysical⁵ transformation of the divine to humanity, but instead in a metaphorical sense; 3) leading from the idea of incarnation as metaphor, the notion of Jesus as exemplar – his death serving as an example for all, in the quest for a higher state/level of humanity; 4) the rejection of the Christian claims to uniqueness and the embracing of religious pluralism.

Hebblethwaite, as already mentioned, seeks to preserve the traditional understanding of Christology that is outlined in the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds. Through apologies of his own and by using the conclusions from fellow theologians Hebblethwaite, in numerous works, can be seen to refute the liberal position that is adopted by Hick.

⁵ Metaphysics is defined as: “the study of the most fundamental constituents of reality” (Bowker 2004: 638).

Chapter 2

Hick's Christology

...to say that without explanation...Jesus of Nazareth was also God is as devoid of meaning as to say that this circle...is a square. (Hick 1977: 178)

The quotation from Hick suggests the foundation for his theological enquiry concerning Jesus' divinity/humanity and relation to God. It may be discerned from Hick's reference to the inability to call a circle a square, that he approaches Christology from a logical perspective and can at this point, provide an insight into his overall Christological conclusion.

i) The Two Natures of Christ

The creeds established at both the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon laid down what has now become accepted as orthodox Christian belief concerning the nature of Jesus. In so far that Jesus was of the same substance as God – *homoousios*⁶ – it is implied from this theological understanding that Jesus possessed two distinct yet inseparable natures; Chalcedonian orthodoxy tells us that Jesus was/is both fully human and fully divine simultaneously (Bettenson *cit.* Hick 1993: 47). The starting point for John Hick is to challenge this notion.

Hick argues that the Church has never fully explained how a person could contain both a fully human and a fully divine nature. Citing Frances Young, he argues that the formation of Chalcedonian orthodoxy in fact, created more issues in the understanding of the person of Jesus of Nazareth, than it did in providing clarity (Young *cit.* Hick 1993: 48). He argues that there exists no logical explanation to the 'two natures' doctrine. It could be suggested that the Church has merely asserted this way of thinking without considering the implications of such a dogmatic claim; Ann Christie hints at this naivety when discussing a contemporary revision of the *homoousion*. She cites David Frost and suggests that the attitude of the Church regarding this revision seems to have been

⁶ For further explanation on the *homoousios* statement, see pages 9-10.

“well they’ll know what we mean” (Frost *cit.* Christie 2012: 166); this mentality, it could be argued, is common not only of a contemporary Church but also of the council members at Nicaea and Chalcedon. For Hick, the explanations offered by the Church and the dogmatic creeds simply do not suffice. As Hick seeks to base his theology on reason and logic⁷, the apparent lacking of this in the traditional Christological affirmation is reason enough for him, to argue for a new understanding of Jesus.

Hick moves to discuss the two natures paradox by examining the notion of a 'two minds' understanding of Jesus' dual consciousnesses. As suggested by A.T. Hanson, this method of understanding remains consistent with the Chalcedonian orthodoxy whilst being "intelligible to modern minds" (Hanson *cit.* Hick 1993: 49). It is mandatory for the Nicene and Chalcedonian creeds to be the primary point of reference when entering into Christological discourse and so at first, Hanson's support for the two minds resolution appears to be reassuring. However, Hick still finds this approach lacking in providing logical clarity of Jesus' two natures.

Hick outlines the two minds model as offered by Thomas Morris in *The Metaphor*⁸. Naturally from the name given to this model, the two natures of Jesus are understood to be two distinct consciousnesses - one being the eternal mind of the Son of God (Jesus' divine mind), and the other the growing mind of the man (his human mind) (Morris *cit.* Hick 1997: 67). The divine mind encompasses all one would expect to find in such an entity, for example omniscience; the human mind shares qualities with every other human mind, in that it is shaped by upbringing and experiences - Jesus' human mind was "thoroughly human, Jewish, and first-century Palestinian in nature" (Morris *cit.* Hick 1997: 67).

The fundamental concept in Morris' theory is the notion that the human mind is contained within the divine mind (see figure 2.1 overleaf). The divine mind, it can be suggested, is the more dominant force in this apparent symbiotic relationship and is able to access the experiences collated in the human mind; these experiences were shaped as Jesus grew from childhood into his adult ministry and encompassed the

⁷ By virtue of his position within the liberal framework. See pages 10-12.

⁸ See Chapter 5 in *The Metaphor*.

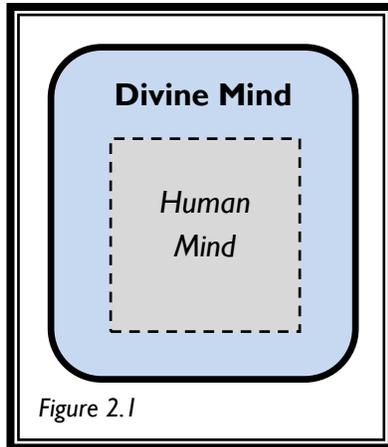


Figure 2.1

imagery he saw, the things he learned and the languages he spoke (Hick 1993: 49). The human element of Jesus' consciousness is unable to interact with the divine mind in the same manner as demonstrated by the latter, but on occasion is 'made aware' of its existence.

To those seeking to retain elements of Jesus' humanity/divinity, the two minds understanding discussed above would perhaps suffice one's curiosity. However,

Hick does not consider this theory adequate enough to satisfy his desire to make sense of, and understand the God-Man problem. Hick stresses that Morris is only concerned with the cognitive relationship between these supposed two minds and claims that such a view is one dimensional (Hick 1993: 51). The basis for Hick's comment regarding Morris' seemingly logical explanation as to the relationship between Jesus' human and divine minds is the suggestion that living consciousnesses are more than merely tools through which information is gathered and stored⁹ (Hick 1993: 51); they are in fact dynamic entities that process and interpret information gathered, in order to make decisions and perform other complex cognitive tasks, instead of just existing as pools of experiences. This one dimensional relationship between the human and divine as expressed in Morris' model, as suggested by Hick, cannot allow for a religiously significant account of an incarnation.

Morris is seen only to concentrate on the mind of Jesus and seemingly neglects to consider the importance of his actual being and life. Hick finds this reason enough to reject the notion of Jesus' co-existent divine and human natures being understood as two distinct consciousnesses, and is the first step taken in rejecting the two natures doctrine.

Kenotic theory is used in an attempt to explain Jesus' co-existent natures and states that in order for the divine to assume a human existence, it had to divest itself of divine attributes that would have otherwise prevented it from doing so (cf. Bowker 2004: 541).

⁹ Hick uses the term, noetic.

Kenosis as a theological theory appears complex. However in his critique, Hick easily demonstrates the flaws and apparent contradictions that are present within such an understanding. Kenosis – by virtue of its defence of the two natures – assumes that Jesus as the Son (the Second Person of the Trinity) was pre-existent in God's 'being' and entered the world in human form in the incarnation event. By doing so, it is implied that kenotic theologians seek to affirm the 'oneness' of God and to avoid any understanding that may appear to create a polytheistic problem; Hick argues that for one undivided entity to be both limited (human) and unlimited (divine) is yet another contradiction without plausible explanation (Hick 1993: 69).

It may also be asked as to why the attributes that Jesus 'let go' of were deemed of lesser importance than those maintained. Surely if we consider the implications of something being divine, it can be assumed that its importance and centrality to that divine being is paramount, on a level unrivalled by anything in a human realm of existence. If a 'divine' being, comprised of ontologically divine attributes, can be seen to not possess one of these traits, can it not then be suggested, that it is erroneous to make claims about its actual divinity? Surely for something to be divine it must possess *all* divine attributes, otherwise by virtue of definition, it ceases to be divine.

There appears to be no way of logically explaining how a fully human man could simultaneously have been in addition, fully divine. In the contemporary context, logic based on philosophy and science, has yet to demonstrate how the two natures paradox may be resolved. The continued demonstration of convoluted explanations that result in apparent contradictions is the basis upon which Hick rejects the two natures doctrine altogether.

Hick's main objection to the coherence of the two natures element of classical Christology lies in its apparent lack of logic and plausibility. 'Human' and 'Divine' are two terms that usually do not bear any relation to each other yet, within traditional streams of Christianity, such a relation is implicit in the understanding of Jesus' relationship to God and of his overall significance to the Christian faith.

Hebblethwaite's Critique

Brian Hebblethwaite answers Hick's critique by suggesting that theologies that are allowed to be constrained by contemporary scientific knowledge result in a "narrowness of vision", and thus affect the strength of one's theological conclusions (Hebblethwaite 1987: 25). Here it is clear that Hebblethwaite wishes to reinforce a more conservative understanding of Christian doctrine and theology.

Based on the allegory of a square-circle, for Hick, incarnation in terms of some form of metaphysical transcendence of the divine to the human is both implausible and illogical. It is this analogy that attracts critique from Hebblethwaite. He claims that no comparison can be made between speaking of a being who is both simultaneously existent as God and Man, and speaking of a square-circle; the basis for this objection to Hick's analogy is centred on the fact that the latter obvious contradiction is so-called, because 'square' and 'circle' are definitive terms with absolute definitions. When speaking of 'God' and 'Man', it is safe to say that these two terms are "far from being such tightly defined concepts" (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 61). To Hebblethwaite's own admission, this response does not provide an adequate critique of Hick's challenge to classic incarnational Christology; what is required is a "positive account and defence of the metaphysics of God incarnate..." (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 61).

For Hebblethwaite, an understanding of the Incarnation must be preceded by a serious acknowledgment and acceptance of the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ (Hebblethwaite 1987: 23). Like Hick, Hebblethwaite chooses to use Thomas Morris' model of Jesus' "two minds" in an attempt to explain the apparent paradox of his co-existent human and divine natures. Unlike his contemporary however, Hebblethwaite defends Morris' model against Hick's critique by suggesting that it is justifiable to concentrate solely on the nature of Jesus' mind:

...since what is at stake is the ultimate metaphysical subject of Jesus' life and action (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 64)

As Thomas Morris' model has already been described and discussed in detail previously, we will now turn to look at the other arguments used by Hebblethwaite in order to demonstrate the possibility of a metaphysical incarnation.

Hebblethwaite chooses to use part of Richard Swinburne's "defence of Chalcedon" (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 64) in order to explain how it may be deemed possible for Jesus to be both fully human and fully divine, simultaneously. Swinburne's *The Christian God* – in particular his chapter on the Incarnation – discusses how God the Son (presumably understood theologically as the pre-existent second person of the Trinity), seemingly acquired a human nature (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 64). At first glance, the use of the term 'nature' adds no further clarity to the issue at hand, however it is defined further by Swinburne as being made up of a human body and a 'human way of doing things'; the physical 'shell' of Jesus' body and the culmination of human experiences lived-out by the Son (the divine aspect of Christ's being) amount to what can be understood as the fully human aspect of Jesus. There appears here to be no complex relationship between the two natures; they are apart from one another yet reside within the same being. Hebblethwaite makes clear that this way of thinking about the metaphysical nature of the Incarnation is still unsatisfactory in providing a complete answer to the apparent problem; Swinburne's model is nothing more than a clearly elaborated version of the theory set out by Thomas Morris.

There is perhaps a final point to consider in Hebblethwaite's discussion and defence of the metaphysics of God Incarnate, and is provided by Peter van Inwagen. Put simply, Hebblethwaite uses the idea suggested by Inwagen that only a *Divine Person* could live in such a way that is understood to have been the expression of God in human form (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 66). Hebblethwaite is seen here to defend the kenotic model already rejected by Hick, based on an appeal to mystery; the workings of how the Son assumed a human nature is beyond any normal and logical comprehension (cf. Hick 1993: 71). Inwagen suggests how God succumbed to a totally human form of existence, which in turn allowed Him to relate to our condition which provided the knowledge and experience of the human condition, essential for the salvific hope to be fulfilled upon Jesus' death.

Hebblethwaite provides a number of ways in which the metaphysics of Jesus' two natures may be defended. The three theories outlined in this section have strong links together and if one considers them in succession, they may be seen to provide a strong critique of Hick's move to abandon a literal understanding of Jesus' co-existent humanity and divinity; when one reflects on the God-Man paradox, Hick's objections may be seen as justifiable when 'Human' and 'Divine' and their stark incompatibilities are outlined.

One may consider that an important part of what it is to be human is our lack of perfection and our 'ability' to sin; as Daniel Migliore aptly suggests, "we are 'fallen', sinful creatures" (Migliore 2004: 150). If Jesus is to be understood as a metaphysical transcendence of the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, benevolent and perfect God that Christianity places firm belief in, then Jesus' ability to commit sin must therefore be diminished – the issue can then be raised: if Jesus is unable to sin due to his divine nature, how can he still maintain a fully human aspect of his being? As demonstrated previously, Hick attempts to suggest a possible way in which this problem may be resolved¹⁰, but reaches the conclusion that even a theory as well-constructed and elaborate as Morris' cannot provide a realistic defence of the traditional Christian understanding of Jesus' two natures.

What we have, then, is a human Jesus who never did a sinful action but concerning whose inner moral life we can, on Morris' theory, say nothing; for any inner defects would have been systematically prevented from expressing themselves in outward actions. (Hick 1993: 57)

The above quote demonstrates the apparent contradiction present within Morris' theory and the basis upon which Hick moves to reject it. Another element raised by Morris' theory is the issue of Jesus' freedom. A characteristic that defines humanity is the (apparent) possession of free will, that is, to say humans have the freedom to make either morally good, or morally lacking decisions. As already expressed, if Jesus is to be thought of as possessing a wholly divine nature, then he was incapable of choosing to commit sin; this has an impact again on the notion of Jesus' co-existent human and

¹⁰ See discussion on pages 14-15 of the Two Minds model.

divine natures as for if Jesus lacked free will, how can he be considered to have been human? For Hick, Jesus must either be fully divine *or* fully human, he cannot be both. As Jesus needed to be familiar with the human condition in order to provide salvation, then emphasis on his humanity must be expressed; as divinity has been shown to be incompatible with a human nature of being, at this stage, Hick moves away from any understanding that professes an acknowledgment of Jesus' divine nature.

Hebblethwaite appears not to provide any sort of real reason as to why we must strive to maintain a traditional understanding of the Incarnation, more it is implied that we should do so because the faith *tells* us to. His quest to seek to preserve the metaphysical understanding of God Incarnate falls victim to the doubts raised by Hick. It is safe to say that even at this point there appears no definitive reason for a metaphysical reading of the Incarnation as Hebblethwaite suggests; the abandonment of such an understanding does not necessarily rid Jesus of his importance or standing within Christianity (Wiles 1977a: 9), more it changes it into a way that can perhaps be better understood in a contemporary context. The appeal of conservative theology to an understanding of Jesus' two natures as a divine mystery, is something Hick firmly rejects:

...we cannot save a defective hypothesis by dubbing it a divine mystery. (Hick 1993: 71)

ii) Incarnation as Metaphor

The use of religious metaphor is hugely important in the construction of Hick's Christology. Maurice Wiles discusses the idea of understanding the Incarnation as a religious myth in order to combat the apparent incoherence of the traditional Chalcedonian doctrine. One may define 'myth' as:

Narrations through which (amongst much else) religious affirmations and beliefs are expressed. (Bowker 2004: 671)

This definition is useful when attempting to understand how Wiles may attempt to explain traditional Christology. However as Wiles himself points out, the calling of something a myth does not "solve anything" (Wiles 1977b: 165), more it aims to change

the ways in which people consider the Incarnation, making them more astute to the “intellectual problems” surrounding the Incarnation.

The use of metaphor and myth in religion may be seen to have strong links to their use in linguistic terms; they seek to omit a literal understanding of a narrative by instead suggesting an alternative interpretation of it. Hick expands Wiles' idea by discussing the treatment of the Incarnation as metaphor. The initial strength of using metaphor is outlined:

The metaphorical stands in contrast to the literal use of language...metaphor is a form of non-literal or figurative speech...metaphorical speech is a use of language in which speaker-meaning differs from dictionary-meaning... (Hick 1993: 99)

Like with Hick's objection to the two natures paradox, the Church's failure to provide an adequate explanation as to how the Incarnation should be understood in a way that has so often been demanded of believers – with literality (Hick 1993: 101-102) – is what provokes his critique of a literal reading of the Incarnation.

Hick's aim is not to somehow 'prove' the Christian faith to be built on fallacy, more he is attempting to justify and rationalise archaic claims that have subjected Christianity to immense scrutiny in the face of Post-Enlightenment philosophy and science. For Hick, the use of metaphor achieves this:

[we] will not see the idea of God's incarnation in the life of Jesus as having a literal physical or psychological or metaphysical meaning. But this does not entail that it has no meaning. (Hick 1993: 104)

The use of metaphor does not devoid something of meaning, more in the case of Christianity and the understanding of the Incarnation, it gives it a 'new lease of life' so to speak, in a contemporary context; this claim may appear hyperbolic but a discussion of Hick's rationale as to the use of metaphor aims to support such a supposition.

Metaphor is widely used in language and in particular the metaphor of incarnation; it is used for example in “the qualities of a hero” and Hick draws on an example through which to demonstrate this (Hick 1993: 104). During the 1940s and the Second World War, Winston Churchill was often referred to as the British will to resist Hitler. Taking

this example, it is self-evident that Churchill did not literally incarnate the entire will of all British people to defeat the Nazi regime, but what we can be sure of is that Churchill lived and acted in such a way that may have been seen to reflect the collective resolve and spirit of the British population during the War (Hick 1993: 105); this is a clear case of metaphorical incarnation and may be extended to other examples. One could suggest that Martin Luther King incarnated the will and spirit of all those who faced oppression and discrimination not only in the United States, but also across the world. Of course he was not literally the combined spirit of all those people, but his actions and his life was lived in such a way that could be understood to have reflected such.

This metaphorical understanding of Luther King and Churchill may be applied in a similar way to Jesus when attempting to understand the notion of God Incarnate. In the same way that both Churchill and Luther King lived their lives and acted in ways that appear to have been an embodiment of a collective group of people, God's incarnation in Jesus may be thought of as being demonstrated in similar ways; John Hick discusses three ways in which Jesus was *metaphorically* God Incarnate¹¹. The first way is described as Jesus, throughout his life, "doing God's will" which in turn demonstrates God's acting through him; the second is described through the idea that as Jesus was doing God's will, he 'incarnated' the ideal of human life lived in openness and responsiveness to God"; the third way described by Hick is an allusion to Jesus' life of "self-giving love" which is an "finite reflection of the infinite divine love" (Hick 1993: 105).

The three points discussed by Hick constitute his metaphor for God's Incarnation in Jesus. As Hick himself points out, religious metaphors can rapidly become religious myths that add much more scope and dimension to a particular narrative and/or belief (Hick 1993: 105). If we refer back to the analogies of Luther King and Churchill, we see that the metaphor of incarnation may be applied in numerous instances and may – it could be argued – allow for any single person to potentially attain this metaphorical level of divinity.

¹¹ This discussion takes place on page 105 of *The Metaphor*.

Hebblethwaite's Critique

It is not the use of metaphor that is directly objected to by conservative theologians, as Ann Christie makes clear, such forms of Christology “are not considered to ‘fall short’ of orthodoxy” (Christie 2012: 62), more so they are “accepted by many as ‘allowable equivalents’ for the Nicene and Chalcedonian language” (Inbody 2002: 56). Wiles (in the case of religious myth) makes it clear that the use of such language should not be treated in the same way as fairy-tale or legend, more mythic language and metaphor is a “pictorial way of expressing truths” that are otherwise difficult to understand (Wiles 1977b: 154). From this, it can be argued that it is the task of the theologian to discern the truth behind such myths. The disagreements surrounding the conclusions as to what these ‘truths’ actually are, is what prompts discussion between those from opposing ends of the theological spectrum.

It is logical to assume that, given God's omnipotence, He has the ability to present Himself in numerous forms at numerous points in time. Hebblethwaite discusses this notion (as set out by Keith Ward) in his article entitled *The Impossibility of Multiple Incarnations* (2001) and begins by asking how God's incarnation within Jesus differs from any other possible incarnation of God in another human form. Based on the Johannine affirmation of the pre-existent *Logos*¹², Ward distinguishes between Jesus' relationship with God and humanity's bond with its creator:

...‘Jesus is human, but is not distinct in existence from God. He is God in human form, with a true human nature.’ (Ward 1998: 162)

Hebblethwaite adds:

Other human beings, however closely united to God by the divine love...‘will always be individuals distinct from God’... (Hebblethwaite 2001: 323)

Hebblethwaite can be seen to affirm that Jesus is different in *kind* to all humanity, an assumption that stands in direct contention with the *degree* Christologies offered by those within the liberal framework¹³. Degree Christologies suppose that Jesus is alike

¹² See John 1:1

¹³ A poignant example of this is found in John Macquarrie's *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought*.

every human being in existence, he only differs in the *degree* of his humanity; in terms of Macquarrie's Christology, Jesus is of a higher degree of humanity as he attained a 'perfect human state'. Christologies that profess Jesus' difference in *kind* are centred on the idea that Jesus is totally different from humanity, by virtue of his link to God.

So the first point to consider in Hebblethwaite's objection to the idea of multiple incarnations is the fact that Jesus' relationship to God is innately unique; the pre-existent Son's manifestation in Jesus' bodily form presents us with a one-time event in which the divine presence of God made itself intimately known to a human consciousness. It is this divinity – which Hick seems to neglect – that sets the 1st Century life of the Palestinian man apart from the rest of humanity; incarnation in Hick's terms is reserved for those who Ward has referred to as "distinct from God" (Ward *cit.* Hebblethwaite 2001: 323) or to put it in another way, those who are devoid of God's imminent divinity. The idea that Jesus may have possibly been but one example of an incarnation of God in human history stands in direct contention with what has been established in classical Christianity (Hebblethwaite 1987: 50); thus we have Hebblethwaite's second objection.

An immediate problem with Hick's Christology lies in the complete abandonment of Jesus' divinity in any orthodox sense of understanding; it can be seen to stand in direct contention with one of, if not *the*, major precepts upon which Christianity is built. If such a theological standpoint is adopted then is it fair to still refer to it as Christian or does it, like Arius, become heresy? The issue for Hebblethwaite in Hick's explication of the metaphorical Incarnation, is Hick's referral to Jesus' *relationship with God*; for Hebblethwaite the question of Jesus' relationship to God does not and should not enter the debate. "Incarnation is not a *relation* at all...'He is God in human form'..." (Hebblethwaite 2001: 325). The use of the term 'relation' suggests a subordination of Jesus to God when in fact, the orthodox understanding of Christology emphasises the fact that Jesus is of the same essence and substance as God; he *is* God, not a separate and subordinate persona.

So far as Hebblethwaite has agreed that the idea that any human may live a life that can be seen to resonate God's love and will, he has provided the distinction between these humans and Jesus (an affirmation here, of Hebblethwaite's *kind* Christology), thus affirming Christ's uniqueness and refuting Hick's metaphorical approach. With Hick's approach, one may come to conclude that any one of us, in principle, may choose to live a life that resembles that of Jesus and thus in turn, be considered to be God in human form (cf. Hick 1993: 98)¹⁴; this of course creates problems for conservative and orthodox theologians/believers. Surely the whole point of devotion to Jesus is that he was something unique and special that had not (and so far throughout history) been seen. Hebblethwaite enforces this point and insists upon the acceptance of Jesus as being one with God.

One must not forget that if we approach the entirety of Christianity from a traditional viewpoint then the absence of Jesus' divinity found in Hick's theology also affects another of the key Christian doctrines; if Jesus was not actually divine and was only a human living in the perfect response to God, how then may we explain salvation? Initially this question may be enough to end the discussion and to render Hick's Christology invalid. However, such a conclusion comes prematurely. Hick demonstrates how, whilst still maintaining complete humanity, he came and 'died for humanity'.

iii) Salvation as Human Transformation

The notion of atonement and salvation is perhaps the single most defining feature of Christianity besides the doctrine of Christ itself:

The term 'atonement' is so deeply embedded in Christian discourse that almost every theologian feels obliged to have a doctrine of some kind under this heading. (Hick 1993: 112)

Hick himself is not exempt from his supposition; considering his radical shift from the orthodox Christological position, it is reasonable to expect that his Christology features a discussion of atonement that does not remain wholly consistent with conservative Christian teaching. John Macquarrie points out the importance of considering an

¹⁴ An analogy may be drawn with the understanding of enlightenment in Buddhism.

atonement theory: "...one cannot write about the person of Jesus Christ without maintaining the closest contact with his work" (Macquarrie 1990: 400). One of the main issues with the doctrine of salvation is that it is not entirely clear how Jesus' life, death and resurrection (i.e. his work) leads to humanity being saved; it is not only a theological conundrum but also a logical one! Hick's metaphorical interpretation of Christ may help shed light on this issue.

For Hick, the term 'salvation' is used to relate to the Christian experience (Pannenberg 1995: 101); this experience is the process of human transformation and is discussed in chapter 12 of *The Metaphor*. One may be able to say that both Churchill and Luther King proved to be an example for humanity to follow as their lives were inspiring and carried through them an important message relevant to their respective contexts¹⁵; this thought may also be applied when considering Jesus and his death.

The traditional understanding of atonement is that Jesus' death may be treated as either sacrificial or as a ransom payment from God in order to cleanse humanity of its sins¹⁶; either way the violent torture and execution of Christ is the focal point for traditional atonement theory and it is this point that Hick rejects.

The basic fault of the traditional understandings of salvation...is that they have no room for divine forgiveness! For a forgiveness that has to be bought by...the giving of an adequate satisfaction, or the offering of a sufficient sacrifice, is not forgiveness... (Hick 1993: 127)

Hick argues that forgiveness is at the heart of Jesus' teaching and ministry and so attempts to construct an understanding of salvation that encompasses it without the need for an atoning death. It is important to note that Hick emphasises the fact that it is not directly through Jesus that humanity finds forgiveness, but through God himself; referencing the Lord's Prayer:

...we are taught to address God directly...to ask for forgiveness...there is no suggestion of the need for a mediator between ourselves and God or for an atoning death to enable God to forgive. (Hick 1993: 127)

¹⁵ See discussion of this analogy on pages 21-22.

¹⁶ This understanding is commonly known as *Satisfaction Theory*. See Migliore 2004: 183.

So if God is the primary source of forgiveness, what role does Jesus have? For Hick and indeed, according to many ordinary church-goers¹⁷, Jesus' life that was lived in a perfect response to the divine, can be treated as an example that serves all humanity and the event of his death inspires us to turn to God and request forgiveness for our sins. The willingness of Jesus to accept his death should continue to challenge humanity to attain a higher state of being in a way that "transcends the world" (Hick 1993: 132). As Luther King's example through life inspired others to stand up and heed his message and his death served as the pivotal point at which this message held its greatest influence, so too can Jesus' life and death be treated in the same way. The example set by Christ can resonate within all humanity and as Hick argues, across all faiths. The following of this example and the acknowledgement of Jesus as the perfect demonstration and thus influence of a life lived in perfect response to the divine is what [should] constitute being a Christian:

...we may say that to be a Christian is to be one in whose life Christ is the major, the largest single influence...for salvific transformation. (Hick 1993: 131)

Hebblethwaite's Critique

Hebblethwaite discusses the work of Donald Mackinnon who is noted to be dissatisfied with exemplar theories (Hebblethwaite 2005b: 92) for two main reasons: (1) Mackinnon argues that the "deepest contradictions of human life" require more than inspiration and enlightenment to be overcome and (2) an exemplar theory risks trivialising the work and death of Christ if we fail to acknowledge the lengths to which God was prepared to go to in order to provide salvation for mankind. The second of these rebuttals of Hick's subjective theory finds itself sympathy with Hebblethwaite. On discussing the work of Eleonore Stump:

[Stump]...*rightly* places the emphasis on God's own self-sacrificial love in action. (Hebblethwaite: 2005a: 124) (Italics added by author).

This makes clear that Hebblethwaite sees humanity's salvation as being made possible through the death of Jesus as it is an explicit event through which mankind is forgiven

¹⁷ See Christie 2012: 144.

which in turn, opens mankind up to transformation through divine grace. The death of Jesus then is constitutive of humanity's salvation, contrary to the liberal view that Jesus' execution is merely illustrative and inspirational for humanity. Hebblethwaite's argument is based on the notion that Jesus was metaphysically God Incarnate and thus when Jesus suffered, so too did God. For Hebblethwaite, the incarnation of God in Jesus is essential as it is through this unique event, that the "conditions under which forgiven humanity can be renewed" are created (Hebblethwaite 2005a: 124). God is the only medium through which salvation is attainable, thus based on Hebblethwaite's discussion, it can be concluded that Jesus *must* be God.

Despite the limitations to Hick's understanding of atonement due to his non-incarnational Christology, Hebblethwaite's understanding of salvation still lacks clarity as to how and indeed why Jesus had to be put to death in order for humanity to be saved. There appears no logical explanation as to why these two points correlate. Taking Hick's view as Jesus as exemplar, one may gain a more wholesome understanding of the significance of Jesus' death; it inspires humanity to become greater beings by following Jesus' example. Hick, in *The Second Christianity* states:

Salvation consists in human beings becoming fully human, by fulfilling the God-given potentialities of their nature. (Hick 1983: 79)

This becoming fully human is achieved through Jesus' example and living in relationship with God, this results in the transformation Hick refers to in the title for his chapter in *The Metaphor*.

One of Hick's major objections to classical Christology is the implications it has for the other world faiths; Christianity claims to be the only way for humanity to attain salvation. If this be true, then what truths do the other world religions hold? For Hebblethwaite and his supporters, the idea of Christian uniqueness is not an issue as they uphold the view that Jesus is the only way to salvation. Considering Hick's liberal position, the acknowledgment of the other world faiths and the truths they contain is what concludes his Christological discussion. In the penultimate section of this research, the relationship between Jesus and the world faiths according to Hick will be discussed. At this stage, it

is still unclear as to whether or not Hick's liberal position is the more appropriate method of interpretation for a contemporary Christology.

iv) The Issue of Exclusivity

The further influence of Jesus, then, as we may hopefully foresee it, will be both inside and outside the church. (Hick 1977: 183)

This quote from *The Myth*, offers an insight into Hick's hopes for the progression of religious pluralism. In a contemporary context, based on a literal reading of the incarnation, the issue that Christianity may be viewed as the only religion in existence to have been founded by God in person may be raised (Hick 1993: 7). This has a detrimental effect on the other world faiths as Christianity may claim an intrinsic superiority over them; Christian exclusivism holds that Jesus is the only path to salvation and that those who do not find truth in his ministry are "condemned and lost for eternity" (Driver 1987: 204).

Hick argues that all religions offer a path to salvation and that a failure to acknowledge this may alienate adherents of other faiths, which can ultimately "exacerbate human conflicts" (Hick 1993: 134). He makes the case for a common understanding of salvation and based upon his prior arguments concerning the nature and significance of Jesus, concludes his Christology by reaffirming how one may hold true to the idea of Jesus' specialness, whilst still maintaining the truth found in the other world religions.

Hick points out that each world religion has at its centre, the notion of humanity transitioning from a lower state of being to one of higher spiritual and [self] awareness; the Abrahamic faiths as well as the Eastern traditions prescribe themselves to this common factor, which Hick refers to as salvation (Hick 1993: 135). In order to allow for all religions to maintain their 'truths', we must accept their means of salvation as valid, whether through the aid of Bodhisattvas in Buddhism, or by direct adherence to the Torah in Judaism, or through following the example of Jesus in Christianity¹⁸; no single religious path to salvation is more or less credible than the other. The understanding of

¹⁸ The discussion of Jesus' example takes places on pages 22 and 27.

Jesus as discussed above¹⁹ makes way for an understanding of salvation that does not diminish the truths of the other great world faiths.

At this stage, what we know of Jesus (from Hick's perspective) is that (1) he was fully human; (2) any literal sense of his divinity has to be reinterpreted. From this, (3) we can see Jesus as an exemplar and his death on the cross serves as an explicit demonstration of the sacrificial and self-giving love that all humanity should strive to embody; upon witnessing his violent death, *humanity* is inspired to fulfil its potential to become 'fully human' and is in this capacity, transformed.

Point (1) rids us of the issue surrounding Christianity's claim to uniqueness and superiority and (2) provides an understanding of Jesus that may be likened to the understanding of him as seen in the Islamic Qur'an (cf. Surah 2:136²⁰). Point (3) explains how, following (1) and (2), Jesus can remain salvific for humanity; all three points in conjunction with each other can offer an understanding of how Jesus can maintain his specialness and salvific power whilst maintaining the truth of the other world faiths. The salvation offered by Jesus' example, need not hold truth only for Christians; Hick names the process of salvation *human* transformation and not *Christian* transformation for a clear reason. It can be suggested that Jesus' example serves as a universal message like that seen in the cases of Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King that may hold resonance for all humanity, regardless of their faith and religious convictions.

Whilst Jesus' life and death may serve as an example to all humanity, this is not paired with the requirement to maintain that Jesus is the sole means through which humanity may attain salvation. Hick urges further theological discourse to acknowledge that all spiritual paths and the differing means by which human transformation is attained, hold veracity for those who prescribe themselves to their respective tradition. It is a "better use of theological time and energy", not to attempt to prove the unique salvific power of Christianity, but instead to "develop forms of...doctrine that are compatible with...the independent salvific authenticity of the other great world faiths" (Hick 1993: 149).

¹⁹ Section i, ii, iii.

²⁰ Quranic passage accessed at www.4truth.net: accessed 13/05/13

Hebblethwaite's Critique

Primarily, Hebblethwaite may be seen to accept and agree with Hick's notion of religious pluralism, stating that it is a "hugely attractive way of coping with the diversity problem" (Hebblethwaite 2005a: 74). He makes the assertion that Hick's philosophy is "needed" in order to show acknowledgement of the 'truth' found in the various representations of what Hick refers to as 'the Real' ("an ultimate transcendent reality")²¹. However, this view is short-lived as Hebblethwaite quickly makes it clear that Hick's view is "unlikely to work" (Hebblethwaite 2005a: 74).

Hebblethwaite bases his critique on the idea that historic sources, upon which the key elements of Christian doctrine are founded, are infallible. He argues that Christianity's history is tightly bound together with a series of events that explicitly demonstrate God's imminent action within the world; the Incarnation being one such example (Hebblethwaite 2005a: 85). These historical events, as narrated in scripture, are to be treated, perhaps not strictly as 'literally true', as but with more veracity than that offered by a metaphorical understanding. Paul Tachin expands on this idea by claiming that liberalism as a theological framework, fails on its lack of acknowledgement of the apparent truth found in scripture, and joins Hebblethwaite in appealing back to scriptural 'evidence' to support Christianity's doctrinal and dogmatic claims:

...we take the self authenticating evidences internal to Scripture itself as the inspired word of God to be true which means accepting its claims that Jesus Christ was the incarnate Son of God. (Tachin 2011: 130)

Hebblethwaite asserts that the metaphorical understanding of the Incarnation, that allows for a Christianity that can openly engage with the other world faiths, is a "complete failure to appreciate what the doctrine...has been held to state" (Hebblethwaite 1987: 50). For Hebblethwaite, although he does not deny the claims made by other world religions, asserts the importance of accepting the Christian scripture as revealed knowledge and thus, denounces any attempt to question or critique it. The quest for pluralism, in the case of this conservative position, is futile as the Christian 'truth' is the only viable path to salvation.

²¹ For further discussion see Hick 1993: 140-143, 163 & Hebblethwaite 2005a: 74-75.

What must be acknowledged is that whilst Hick's position is radically different from that of the conservative view, the task of constructing a Christology that allows interaction between other religious beliefs is essential. John Macquarrie makes this point by asserting that a modern Christology must ask how Jesus can be seen to relate to humanity as whole, not solely Christians (Macquarrie 1990: 344). Tachin's argument against this task appears short-sighted and portrays what could be argued, as a negative portrayal of conservative theology as a whole (cf. Tachin 2011: 112); why in a multi-cultural, socially and religiously diverse world, should humanity not strive to seek common answers which, could potentially alleviate tensions within humanity that stem from theological disputes²²?

The common view of ordinary church-goers is expressed by Hick's affirmation of pluralism; it is the "popular attitude"²³ amongst those interviewed by Ann Christie (in her research into Ordinary Christology), and demonstrates a common understanding that, as Hick argues, the world religions are different paths to the same end:

...their [people in the sample] view was that people of other religions '*are praying to a greater being who in their view is to them what God in the Christian faith is to us*'.
(Christie 2012: 140)

Taking this point forward, the final section of this study will draw together conclusions from the discussion that has taken place throughout this chapter, and will aim to conclude as to which (if either) of the positions analysed, is the appropriate approach to Christology in the 21st Century.

²² See page 29.

²³ See Christie 2012: 141.

Chapter 3

A Christology for Today?

i) The Appropriate Christology for Today

The task of this research is to attempt to show, through a discussion of a liberal and conservative Christology, an understanding of Jesus that may be appropriate for a contemporary context. As demonstrated within this discussion, both opposing frameworks construct their arguments robustly, but base their theological conclusions on differing sources. The conservative view supported by Hebblethwaite, places its primacy with scripture and tradition, taking what is written in the New Testament accounts of Jesus in conjunction with the 2,000 year old Christian tradition and formulating its theology from the content of each. The liberal framework, by virtue of the definition offered by McGrath²⁴, attempts to construct a post-Enlightenment theology based on reason and experience that can, at any time, be re-imagined and rethought in light of newly gained knowledge through the realm philosophy and science.

Based on this principal, it may be suggested that Hick's position appeals to a more contemporary believer; it attempts to make logical sense of archaic ideas and to translate them in a way that is free from the strict constraints of scriptural authority. To suppose that somebody should believe a doctrinal assertion merely because 'it tells them to²⁵' is an argument that is seen wanting not only in the 21st Century, but also in the 20th Century and earlier. People have a thirst for knowledge and want to explore and understand the world around them (as is seen with huge scientific advances within the last 100 years alone), what Hick's position offers is a large pail with which to quench that thirst. It accepts the inquisitiveness of the human mind by demanding a logical explanation to seemingly illogical concepts, and allows for the flourishing of the natural

²⁴ See pages 10-11.

²⁵ Referring to the argument made on page 20.

sciences to co-exist with the innate sense of ‘the other’, common to so many within the human race²⁶.

Hick’s metaphorical understanding of Jesus, whilst it detracts from the conservative scriptural view, offers those living in a contemporary world a comprehensible way of understanding his significance (cf. Hick 1993: 163). Hick offers a view that still maintains his divinity (albeit on a metaphorical level) and explains, in light of this ‘new’ understanding, how Jesus can save not only Christians, but humanity as a whole. The approach adopted by Hebblethwaite and shared by numerous theologians along his ‘spectrum of theology’, alienates those who do not conform to the traditional understanding of Christ. Why should it be that traditions that outdate Christianity by a substantial margin, and their adherents, are excluded from the salvific and transformative power of Jesus? Surely if the commonly accepted view of ordinary theologians²⁷ is that expressed by Hick, then this provides support enough for his Christological conclusion. The exclusivist position demonstrated by Hebblethwaite and Tachin, and shared by a minority of church-goers, is shown to be highly negative towards the other great world faiths; if a theology is to be accepted then surely it must hold resonance with those who make a religion what it is: the believers.

In many ways, Hebblethwaite’s ‘defence of Christianity’ is in fact a futile effort, for Christianity is not being attacked by those along Hick’s theological wavelength. What Hick is offering with his radical overhaul of traditional doctrine is an extra lease of life for Christianity. It is no secret that the number of Christians is dramatically decreasing²⁸ and though the reasons for this may be open to debate, what one can suggest, is that it is the closed and exclusive nature of traditional doctrines that cause many people to turn from the Churches. Not only this, but the failure of the Church to fully explain complex theological ideas has undoubtedly played a part in the general decline of Christian ‘membership’. Hick’s clear answers to these complex problems can be seen to offer an open door to those who have difficulty understanding and making sense of

²⁶ See Calvin *cit.* Roberts 2012: www.clarke-roberts.co.uk accessed 14/05/13.

²⁷ This term (in this context), is used to refer to ordinary church-goers who have little or no formal theological education;

²⁸ In a British context: see Brown 2000: 3

these classic doctrinal assertions, and may, if given the opportunity, revive Christianity to a state previously seen throughout the Western World.

Jesus' example, by merit of Hick's theology, offers a hope for not only the potential revival of Christianity, but also the salvific hope for mankind. Through the understanding of Jesus as put forward in *The Metaphor*, the salvation of the entirety of mankind is made possible; whether through following Jesus' example or by following the Buddhist Dharma (not exclusively), the quest for a higher and improved state of humanity becomes an achievable goal for all. One does not have to be of any religious conviction to appreciate this common aim for humankind. Hick should be highly commended for the continued acknowledgement and appreciation of this goal, which he fought so valiantly for during his life.

ii) Conclusion

What this study has provided is an in-depth analysis of one of the most controversial theologies of recent times. By careful dissection of each key component, the liberal Christology offered by John Hick has been met head-on by the conservative position held by Brian Hebblethwaite. By virtue of the fact that Hick's understanding of Jesus can be seen to be more flexible with modern methods of thinking and biblical interpretation, it may be concluded that his approach to the age-old problem of Christology, is the most appropriate for a contemporary context to consider.

This research has demonstrated that despite constant objections from the established Church to his work, Hick's arguments are clear, well thought-out and embracing of a modern society. Taking this forward, one may wish to pursue a liberal understanding of the other key Christian doctrines; liberalism, in terms of theology, can open up new and exciting ways of thinking about religion that may continue to challenge our preconceptions of God and, to use Hick's term, the 'Real'. This being said, one cannot deny the strength of the conviction one feels through 'gut-belief'; if one holds what scripture tells us to be the absolute central focus of theology, then who are any of us to disparage the firm believer in traditional and classical ideas? It is left to the academic to ensure that an open and fair debate surrounding all ends of the theological spectrum

continues, so that we may discover more about ourselves, and about the relationship with our creator.

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- *A Comprehensive Listing of References to Jesus ('Isa) in the Qur'an* available at: <http://www.4truth.net/fourtruthpbworld.aspx?pageid=8589953017> accessed on 13/05/13.

Images and Diagrams

- *Cover image* [<http://www.jacquier.org/christ-en.html>]
- *Figure 1.1* [<http://www.ubfriends.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/trinity.jpg>: accessed on 25/04/13]
- *Figure 2.1* [Drawn by author using Microsoft Word].

Epilogue

Learning Journal

The following discussion acts as a personal reflection of the journey taken in researching and creating this dissertation.

i) Academic Reflection

My interest in liberal Christology began at level 1 after writing a discursive essay, analysing and discussing the work of John Hick (1993) and John Macquarrie (1990); two contemporary liberal theologians. It wasn't until after conversing with Dr Ann Christie, my theology lecturer and dissertation supervisor, that I feel my understanding of Christology as a whole deepened and became clearer. Her work on Ordinary Christology (2012) prompted me to question as to the importance and centrality of Jesus within Christianity.

The numerous meetings held between Ann and I, with which to discuss the progress of my research, made it clear to me that I needed to broaden my scope of reading; as convinced by Hick's work as I was, I wasn't able to fully appreciate its arguments until I had read conflicting theologies.

My work on Hick and liberal theology as a whole has inspired me to want to pursue a career in academia; it is wholly my expectation to attain an MA and eventually a PhD, and to one day have my own theological work published expressing the importance of liberal theology in a contemporary context.

ii) Professional Reflection

One of the biggest challenges I faced when embarking on this research was my apparent lack in effective time management. Meeting with Dr Christie highlighted this issue and through setting deadlines every fortnight, I was able to overcome this issue and complete the research well ahead of the deadline. I will be able to take the idea of

setting deadlines into my professional life as a prospective secondary school teacher (and eventually university lecturer), in order to ensure that important tasks are completed on time and to a high standard.

iii) Personal Reflection

The biggest impact this research has had, has been on a personal level. Before I began researching Hick's Christology, I was of little/no conviction of faith. What Hick and liberal theology have provided me with is a Christianity that I am easily able to access and make sense of, having been brought up in a society where I am taught the apparent infallibility of scientific experiment and discovery. It is the 'liberal Christianity' that I now profess belief in, following Jesus' example in the hope of attaining a better state of being/existence (cf. Hick 1993: 131). I feel that through educating others as to the nature of liberal theology, I can help alleviate some of the doubts and concerns that once plagued my understanding of not only Christianity, but religion as a whole.

iv) Bibliography

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