



The Archbishop of Canterbury

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Address to St Paul's Theological Centre

Part 1

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Thank you very much indeed Graham, and thanks to all of you for the opportunity to be here again. It's not a new thing to come and take part in the School of Theology and it's something I always look forward to enormously. I hope that the time ahead for you will be a real enrichment of heart and mind as you explore theology in this year coming, and I hope that what it will do is what theology ought always to do, which is to make you a more joyful disciple.

In a sense I almost feel I have to stop there. "What's theology about? It's making you a more joyful disciple." It's not perhaps the image you always have of theology. People look at a book labelled 'theology' and the first reaction is often panic – flat panic. "Why does it have to be so complicated?" Well, I shan't this morning and try and explain to you why it has to be so complicated, but I will try and open up a bit why people *do theology*; what it's about, why it matters and why actually you may find yourself doing it without noticing.

That's one point I'd like to make right at the very beginning. You can have this picture that theology is a specialism: it's for bright people, or indeed rather sad people who have nothing better to do with their long winter evenings; it's something which is all about theory rather than practice; it's a specialism, it belongs in a corner. But, as a matter of fact, you can find yourself – you *will* find yourself, I dare say you *have* found yourself – doing theology without quite spotting it. Some of you may just remember a 17th century comedy by the French playwright Molière. At one point in that someone explains to one of the main characters that he's been talking prose all his life, and he's terribly impressed – he never thought he was doing anything as clever as talking prose. But it's the same, I think, with Christians. You find you've been

talking theology all your life. At any point at which you find yourself asking “What’s this about? How does this connect? How do I make sense of this for myself or somebody else?” you’re actually doing theology.

Because that’s the heartbeat of it. It’s connecting up the bits, making sense, finding words for something that is going on. I really want to underline at the beginning that the *something going on* is the very core of it all. That’s why theology is not just about theory, it is about what our humanity is and is becoming in the life of faith. So that one of the first theological questions is a really rather basic one: what one earth is going on?

Let me take you to a familiar text in the Acts of the Apostles, the story of the very beginning of the Christian community in Jerusalem, the day of Pentecost.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2.1-4)

What’s the reaction? People at large are amazed and perplexed. They asked one another “What does this mean?”, or the original Greek might be translated as, “What on earth is this about?” And of course the reaction of the cynics is that the Apostles had been on the bottle all night.

What’s going on? Some new kind of human experience, some new kind of human togetherness, has suddenly erupted into the world. A kind of human experience, a kind of human togetherness that allows people to speak to strangers in their own language. Whatever exactly that means, whatever exactly went on on the first day of Pentecost, that’s what people remembered: suddenly insiders were able to speak to outsiders, suddenly barriers dropped with a great crash. Something new, some new kind of connectedness appeared.

What’s that about? You can’t just say “Wow!”. You’re a human being, you’ve got a mind. You need to think about it, you need to talk about it. And so on the day of Pentecost, Peter gets up and he talks about it. He does some theology. He says, “Okay, what’s going on? Let me tell you what’s going on. Let me make some connections for you”. He explains how the visions in the Old Testament of an outpouring of the breath of the Lord into his people will come one day in such a way that it becomes universal. “That’s what’s going on” he says. “I’ll tell you a story, I’ll make some connections, I’ll give you some words to hang it on and we’ll take it from there.”

There’s another side to this, of course, which is that if nothing much is going on, nothing much will happen theologically. Theology overflows – bursts out in flood – when there’s a lot going on. Which is why in the very first ages of the Christian church there’s a lot of theology – and sometimes a very confusing lot of theology. But it’s because there’s a lot going on. People are aware that their universe is expanding all the time, that there are more things to come to terms with, more connections to make. Which is why the theology in the New Testament isn’t set out in nice numbered bullet points. It’s not a

sort of PowerPoint presentation. It's lots of people scratching their heads and burbling away to each other and saying "Does that make sense? Hang on, yes I know – oh... no" and putting it all together.

That's how St Paul writes. And I always like to remind people it's quite important to remember that St Paul didn't know he was writing the New Testament. He was certainly inspired by the spirit of God in his writing, but he didn't think "Right, I've got to write a chapter of the New Testament today". He sat down and he prayed and he thought and he scribbled and some of his scribbling is wonderfully clear, poetic, profound. And with some of it you feel he's just digging the hole a bit deeper – like the wonderful passage in 1 Corinthians where he's writing about why women should cover their heads in churches. After a long and rather complex argument says, "I don't know, we just don't do it, okay?", and then moves on to another subject. But it's all theology. It's all trying to come to terms with what's happening and if not much is happening, not much gets said.

Let me take you to another bit of the Acts of the Apostles. By one of those wonderful chances of Providence, this passage was the New Testament reading for morning prayer today in the Church of England, as I'm sure you all know. This is at the beginning of the 19th chapter of the Act of the Apostles.

Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?"

"John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. (Acts 19.1-6)

Not much was going on with these people, who'd received some form of baptism – an acknowledgement of their sinfulness like the baptism that John the Baptist had practiced before Jesus arrived on the scene. They'd acknowledged their sins, they'd brought their lives before God, they tried to turn their lives around. But nothing much was *happening* in them yet; they weren't yet being transformed by the Holy Spirit. It's when that starts happening that they need the new words – they need the language of the Holy Spirit. And Paul comes along and says "Right, something is going to happen, and believe me you are going to need to talk about the Holy Spirit from this point on".

So, "what on earth is going on?", the first theological question. Out of that comes theology, making the connections.

Now I used a word a couple of minutes ago: transformation. And I think that is key to how theology works in the New Testament. Some things change – as I say, the horizons have expanded, you're living in a new world, and it's not surprising that St Paul talks about the "new creation". When anybody comes alive

in Jesus Christ it's as if creation began all over again. There's a new creation, the world is changed. Coming to terms with – finding words for – the nature and the scale of that change is where particularly Paul's energy goes.

You can see how the connections begin to get made. Here we are, like those people in Ephesus, overcome, swept away with a new kind of praying, a new kind of communicating with God and with others. Pouring out incomprehensible words of praise to God, and reaching out to strangers – the Pentecostal experience affirmed again and again in the story of the earliest church in the Acts of the Apostles. You're finding a new way of talking to God. And Paul in his letters, especially in Galatians and bits of Romans but also in 1 Corinthians, says that the heart of this is that we're able to call God "Father". We have an intimate family relationship with God that nothing's really prepared us for. Beneath and behind all the outpourings of prayer and praise – the experience of tongues, the experience of healing and miracles – within all that is the basic new thing: we can call God "Father". When Paul tries to define what the essence of the life of the Spirit is, that's what he comes to again and again.

But how does that happen? Well, it happens in connection with the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth – a man roughly Paul's own age, perhaps a few years older; a man well within the living memory of people around; and a man who somehow managed to make the entire universe look different. Part of that difference is that he opened up for the entire human race a new way of relating to God as Father.

Well there's a puzzle for a start. It's not every travelling rabbi and wonder-worker who changes the way you see the universe. You've got to find something a little bit more to say about Jesus of Nazareth than that he was a rather remarkable bloke and pity he's not with us any longer. You've got to say more. How much more? Where are you going to find the language for that? And that's where Paul starts pushing the boundaries, like all the writers of the New Testament. The newness, the transformation, the new universe, is connected mysteriously with what went on around Jesus. When Jesus died he didn't stay dead. And he's not staying dead – it's not just a matter of the fact that he was as an individual raised to life again, but that somehow when he began to live again life just flooded the entire world.

That flooding of the entire world is the work of the Spirit. Somehow Jesus is about the way the Spirit arrives. But the Spirit we're talking about is the Spirit of God. So, here's a human being who is somehow letting loose the breath of God into the world. Once again, say what you like about him but he's not just an interesting dead bloke. And more and more the language pushes at the boundaries. You watch I think with fascination how Paul's language pushes away at these boundaries. Listen to what he writes at the beginning of the first letter to Corinth:

We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, Jews and Greeks, Christ the anointed Jesus, the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1.23-24)

In the second letter to Corinth, which I have to say is one of my "Desert Island" books of the Bible, one of the ones I will always want to hand, there he writes about glory:

What was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. If what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts? (2 Corinthians 3.10-11)

He moves into that great image in 2 Corinthians 4:

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4.6)

What do we say about Jesus? We say that in him the glory, the radiance, of God is displayed. And not just displayed – it's somehow at home in him, it lives in him. You turn forward to Ephesians and Colossians and the boundaries are being pushed still further. If this is a human being in whom the glory of God actually lives habitually – and somehow when you look at Jesus you look at a man who's so connected with God that you can't drive a wedge between him and God – that means that this man, who is roughly Paul's own age and died within his memory, was around at the creation of the world. This man was associated with the beginning of everything. And it's because he's associated with the beginning of everything that he's associated with the new beginning in your life. It's as if Paul is making the greatest possible connection between what changes in your life and mine through faith, and the change that is creation itself – from nothing to something. The new creation, the new horizon in your life and mine that faith brings is, through Jesus, linked up to the very beginning of all things.

Now that's theology, that's making connections, that's trying to answer the question "what on earth is going on?" as faith comes alive, as you discover new connections with God and with one another. You associate those changes, those transformations with what happens in Jesus. You start asking well what on earth can I say about Jesus that is adequate to the scale and the depth of this change? And that's one way of saying that theology is, in large part, about conversion. Theology is the result of conversion, the result of experiencing a new world. I don't just mean conversion in the sense of changing your mind about something, or even acknowledging your sins and moving on. It's about that sense of a new frame of reference. Theology is the effort to map that new frame of reference into which you are brought. So, as I say, when you reflect privately, personally, on how you connect up bits of your life, how you think about your relationship with God, it's theology you're doing.

Now, you read some books about theology and you get the impression that, for the first 300 or 400 years of the Church's life, what was going on was that a lot of people with rather too much brain and too much time on their hands just made up a lot of complicated stuff about Jesus – almost to keep them off the streets. They developed more and more elaborate theories and more and more difficult language about it, and what we need these days is to get back to the simple language of the scriptures. But the thing is, the simple language of the scriptures which is very seldom as simple as some people would like it to be. The simple language of the scriptures pushes you into asking more and more big questions. You can't just stop the frame and say "Okay, that's enough thinking." And it's not as if this is thinking for its own sake – that's why I talk about "making sense". When we try to make sense of our lives it's not just theory, is it? It's finding a picture of our lives that we can live with. It's finding a sense of where we belong and how. Not just theory, not just speculation, but really discovering what we might be in the light of the new framework.

The simple language of scripture includes not only St Paul's more complicated riffs on various themes but also includes the extraordinary (and I mean *truly* extraordinary) beginning of St John's Gospel – that slow almost stately unfolding of the connection between the beginning of everything and the beginning of your new life:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humanity. A light shining in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it. (John 1.1-5)

Then a few verses later:

This Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1.14)

That's theology. And that magnificently calm, focused exposition is of course where Paul's sometimes more extravagant metaphors and similes lead us – to that recognition that when you look at Jesus you look at that energy in which the whole world holds together and through which the breath of God is breathed into you. Theology.

So theology certainly gets its impetus, for a Christian, simply thinking about Jesus and the Spirit. Which is why, of course, one of the central issues in theology has always been and no doubt will always be the doctrine of the Holy Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Because the new world into which Christians are introduced is a world where you call God "Father" because of Jesus and through the breathing into you of God's own Spirit. You can't avoid the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It's not just something locked up in the text books, not something which is again one of those technical things that anoraks like to explore. It's about who you are, the doctrine of the Trinity – who you are, and where you live. You live in the middle of all that, in the middle of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and your theologising is mapping where you are – "spiritual sat nav" as you might say. Finding where you are in that great unfolding of divine life around you – the outpouring of the Father's love, the adoration that the Son gives to the Father, the breathing out of the Spirit to fill the whole creation – in there, that's where you live. That's where we are now, here, this morning.

But of course there's a little bit more to theology. We've entered the new world, we are in a new frame of reference, the horizons have shifted. But we're not in this just as a lot of individuals who've had an interesting experience. Somehow or other in this new world where connections are made, the kind of connection that's made between us is so profound and so unusual that you can't just reduce it to, as it were, lots of people sitting in a row. The connection between people is really, really deep and creative. In this community of the new creation, the new world, we are depending on one another all the time at a level we'd never have expected. That of course is a bit of a shock, in the ancient world and the modern world. If what you think is ideal is being independent, well, forget it. Because what you're into now is a deep form of dependence on your neighbours. How does God go on breathing his spirit into you, the spirit of Jesus? He breaths it into you through the work and witness of the person next to you.

In the early Church, as in the modern Church, the person next to you isn't always the person you've chosen to be next to. And you may find real surprises in who is breathing God's spirit towards you. That's why St Paul again thinks: now what do we have to say about the Christian community in this light? Not just an assembly of individuals, not just members of a kind of religious club – it's much more like the different bits of the human body. Your human body is not a kind of committee composed of representatives of the hand, representatives of the foot, representatives of the stomach, all sitting round a table and discussing things. Where one of them can leave and you don't notice if the authorised representative of the interests of the stomach gets up and leaves the table while the hands and feet go on talking to each other, so to speak. It doesn't work like that in the human body.

To paraphrase St Paul, but not too radically, when I've got a cold, I've got a cold – not my nose. When I have a heart attack, I have a heart attack – not just a little organ in here somewhere. In the body, everything affects everything. And that's why our membership in the community is not just like being part of a club where you don't notice if somebody goes off. If bits of your body start disappearing, as Paul tells us 1 Corinthians, you really notice quite soon. And if one bit of the body says "Well I can get along perfectly well without the others" you soon find out your mistake.

So that's another level of theology. How do we think about our life together? How do we think about the way in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit bind us together in dependence on each other? Giving and receiving all the time the essence of our relation to one another as Christians; giving and receiving the flow of the spirit between us, what St Paul at the end of the second letter to Corinth calls "the communion", the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. And it's a very strong word in Greek, 'koinonia', the commonness, the togetherness, the involvement together that the Spirit gives us.

So our theology of what and how Jesus is, our theology about how the Spirit works, takes us forward to our theology of the Church – the Church, of course, first not as an institution that we sign up to, but the Church as the togetherness of people in the Holy Spirit, giving and receiving. We so often, it seems, need another word for "Church" don't we? Say the word "Church" and however hard we try, images come into the mind. Images with spires and stained glass – and frequently, I'm sorry to say, images of boring people. But getting back to the excitement of a new discovery in the New Testament, it's a word that wasn't used in this way before. Paul's looking for a word for an assembly of people taking responsibility for each other, living from each other's giving, from each other's generosity: that's Church. And our theology of the Church always I think has to get us back to that sense of an excitement about a new discovery once again, a new way of being together.

Following through from that again, that's where the whole business of Christian ethics or Christian morals starts from. Paul never seems to think that you can talk about Christian behaviour just as a matter of the rules that are laid down from heaven. He wants us to think how we need to live if our basic reality is giving and receiving with each other. All that he has to say about justice, and generosity, and faithfulness in marriage, and the care of the poor, and constantly resisting the temptation to faction and party spirit, all of those things which matter so much to him – all of them are about what it means to be bound together in this way. All "morals" is working out what Church means for the Christian. A slightly unusual perspective perhaps. We may tend to think "Church belongs there", and maybe "Church tells us what to do". But

what Paul is saying is: no; morals – the way we live – is actually working out what it means to *be* Church. It's not just something the Church tells you. It's part of working out what it is to live in that environment, being the body.

I suppose it's in that light that the three strands that the School of Theology is involved in, Bible and faith and life, really do come together, but perhaps more of that later on.

So far I've been describing what I think is going on in the pages of the New Testament. Behind those pages are communities around the Middle East, around the eastern Mediterranean especially, who are rather like those first people who watched what was happening in Pentecost: bewildered and amazed. They don't quite know what's happened to them. They've been overtaken by something, plonked down in a new environment, and they're trying to get their bearings. Every single writer of the New Testament in their very diverse ways is trying to help people get their bearings. Paul, the most eloquent and copious of them, John perhaps the most profound. But it's just as true of Matthew, Mark and Luke, telling the story of Jesus in such a way as to leave the clues and the trails that make the connections for us, make the connections with the history of the Jewish people, the connections with our experience now. And all the briefer writers, Peter and James and the writer to the Hebrews, all of them trying to do that mapping exercise.

So a little bit of history, if you'll bear with me, about the first generations of Christians after the New Testament. By the end of the first Christian century, when everything in the New Testament was pretty much settled, you didn't yet have a system of belief, you didn't yet have a creed. But you had what I'd call a set of signals by which Christians could recognise one another. They had this vocabulary in common. And although nobody had a Bible between covers at the end of the first century (for one thing it would have cost a fortune at that time, and you'd have had to have that much in terms of handwritten scrolls – you couldn't just slip it into your inside pocket, there were no Gideon Bibles in the first century), nonetheless this is what you'd hear read when you met for worship. And if you travelled or met somebody who came from another community in another city you'd recognise the signals: "ah yes, you've been listening to St Paul haven't you? Yes, you use this language of the gifts of the Spirit as well. Yes, you talk about the new creation just like we do". Forgive the awful analogy but it's that kind of Masonic handshake element – that is how it works in the first century. People travel, people recognise one another, they recognise the same sort of language, and the connections are beginning to come together a bit more systematically.

But of course at the same time as the second Christian century gets underway, problems begin to arise. Some communities want to say: well, all this New Testament stuff is very interesting, but maybe we can do better. Maybe we can clear things up a bit more, maybe we can tie up the loose ends. Or, very often, drop the difficult bits. So in the second century you have one lot of people who say: hey, come on, the New Testament is much better than the Old Testament, why don't we just drop the Old Testament? I mean look at God in the Old Testament, what a so-and-so. He's cruel and capricious and all the rest of it. He's everything Richard Dawkins says he is (whoever the Richard Dawkins of the second century was). So, come on, let's just cut to the chase here and stick to Christian scripture. Unfortunately Christian scripture contains quite a lot of reference to Jewish scripture so we'll have to do a little bit of surgery on

Christian scripture as well – and you end up with what a scholarly friend of mine once referred to as “St Paul’s postcard to the Romans”. You end up with a very much reduced bit of Christian scripture – all the bits that don’t create problems. The rest of the Church looked at this group and said: that *can’t* be right. Okay, so the Old Testament creates some problems for us. Well, that means we just have to work at it – what we don’t do is take the shortcut of just amputating.

There were other people who said: now Paul talks a lot about the great tension between flesh and spirit and we all know what that means, or we think we do. So why don’t we just avoid the tensions of keeping flesh and spirit together and say God is really interested in the spirit. And actually, when you think about it, why should God create bodies at all? Because bodies are embarrassing and unsightly and problematic and they take us in all kinds of directions we shouldn’t go. So maybe bodies are just a big mistake – God made spirits and somebody else made the stuff.

What you might call a spiritual version of Weight Watchers in the second century had a great deal of traction. A lot of people said: yes, that makes some sense, the Supreme God, mysterious and remote, made a world of spirits and unfortunately some idiot came along and messed it up by creating bodies. Again, most of the Church looked at these groups and said: well, whatever is right, that *can’t* be right. Because it does say, right at the beginning of the whole story, that God made the lot. God is responsible for the flesh as well as the spirit. If God made our bodies we’ve got to make sense of our bodies not just our spirits. It won’t really do to think of God as some sort of incompetent administrator, who delegates work to malicious or stupid inferiors who make things he doesn’t want made – as if the end of the year report comes back to God and he says, “You made what?!” God made the universe – the lot. And that’s our agenda.

So theology as it evolves through the second Christian century has two big bits of agenda. One is making sure you keep the whole of scripture together, you don’t just amputate the difficult bits in the Old Testament or even the difficult bits in the New Testament. You work. I remember that wonderful episode of *Fawlty Towers* when Manuel is left in charge of the hotel and the builders come in and Manuel says at one point “You workmen!” Well I think that’s the message of the second century: you workmen, you get on with it, don’t just take shortcuts. Get the Old Testament, the Jewish scriptures into the picture.

The second bit of agenda is, don’t go around trying to cut the universe into little bits. Remember, God made the lot. God can make sense of it so we’ve got to try. Once again: you workmen. Work at the relation between flesh and spirit, between body and soul. Don’t just think they’re two separate things spinning off into their own worlds.

In the second Christian century those two great dissident movements I’ve described, Marcionism (cutting off the Jewish scriptures) and Gnosticism (driving a wedge between flesh and spirit), they were powerful, they were widespread, but bit by bit the rest of the Christian body coalesced around a set of arguments and concerns and theologies that rule them out. That’s all to do with the process in the second Christian century of gradually settling the bounds of the Bible. “The Bible”, as something whose contents are absolutely clear, comes into focus as the second century goes on. We’re all inclined to think when we reflect on the inspiration and authority of scripture that there was always, as I say, a bound copy

somewhere. Historically, people had to discover the bounds and limits. They had to recognise the bits that belonged and the bits that didn't. It took a while, but by the end of the second Christian century there was a canon of scripture. A canon: literally, a rule.

The rule is, these are the books that belong. These are the books you can reliably turn to. And all the other things that are on the market, all the things that people keep on digging up in the sands of Egypt and proclaiming loudly in the tabloids "have changed the face of Christianity" – there was one last week, you probably noticed, saying that Jesus had a wife – these things keep appearing, and there were loads of them around in the second century. They're the station bookstore literature of the second century, lots of Christian eccentrics writing eccentric Christian books. And against all that the Church said: no, no, no. We know what the first generation sounds like and looks like. We know somehow, we recognise (a very important word again) in the writings of Paul and John and the others what we're about. This is our world, forget all the rest. It may look attractive, it may look sexy, it may look exotic, it may look interesting, it may even look simpler. But it isn't. So all those gospels of Bartholomew and Judas and Mary Magdalene, all those amazing works that were dug up in Egypt in the 1940s at Nag Hammadi with names like *The Third Treatise of the Great Seth*, all of that stuff right down to the book of Mormon, you might say, to all of that the Church says "No".

We just don't recognise that as being our world, the world of liberty with Jesus Christ, the world of the breathing out of the Holy Spirit, the world of reconciled life together. No. We're not interested in a simplified Bible with the difficult bits left out. We're not interested in a universe in which God is only concerned with souls. We're not interested in becoming a little elite group of very, very wise and spiritual people who know the real stuff. We want this language to be everybody's.

The way in which the word "catholic" comes to be used in the second century tells us a lot. "Catholic" means "everybody's". The catholic church is the church that's open to all comers, not just the elite. And you could say that the development of an agreed theology, an agreed limit for the Bible, an agreed way of understanding the structures of the community in the second century, it's about the catholic vision. We are agreeing all this not to shut ourselves off, but to make sure that there is a territory open for all comers.

Then, briefly, going forward a few more years, another kind of problem begins to come up the outside track. By the third Christian century (don't worry, only seventeen to go!) people are thinking about the exact status of Jesus, the exact relationship of Jesus to God the Father. People are beginning to say: well that's a really complex area where we need, again, more work. Will it do to say that Jesus, the Word of God is the very, very first thing that God makes? Well, could be. It says in *Proverbs 8.22* "*the Lord created me at the beginning of his ways*". Sounds promising – and that at least solves a problem. Instead of really having to tussle over how the infinite invisible eternal unchangeable God could possibly be really *in* Jesus of Nazareth, you have a kind of second level God that you can just about fit into Jesus of Nazareth. Sounds interesting. Sounds a good theory. It solves a few problems. And in the third and the fourth centuries, that's where the energy was in theology. How do we cope with that? We've got a very tempting and apparently very rational way of coming at it – but, somehow, follow that through to the end and it won't quite do. What's all this about a kind of second level God? It does say in the first chapter of John's Gospel "*the Word was God*" – so surely God doesn't have deputies? And actually,

what we want to say about Jesus is that the full unconditional creative freedom of God is what's happening in Jesus, not some second level supernatural power, but God – God the creator.

So second, third, fourth century – that's where theology is pushing. Let's get clear that when we talk about Jesus, it's God we're talking about. Not some hyper-angel, not some superman, not some slightly watered down version of God, but the infinite creator of the universe. And when you've said that, you've created another problem (this is why theology is, as I say, lively – furiously lively – in the early Church). You've created another problem: how do you put that infinite divine splendour together with a human being who suffered? Who died? Because we can't say that God suffers and God dies. So how do you put the divine and the human together in Jesus? You've got another 100 years' worth of argument there.

So it goes on until about the middle of the fifth Christian century when with certain sense of exhaustion the great majority of the Christian Church says: I think we may just have got it about as good as we can get. And by that time you've got a mountain of creeds and definitions and so forth which look to us, as I said earlier, a bit anorak-ish, a bit theoretical. But all of them come out of this passionate concern: let's say about Jesus that which does justice to the life that Jesus brings. That's the issue all the time. Not definitions for their own sake, but how can we say enough about Jesus to make sense of how great the change is in us? Say of Jesus that he's anything less than God, and actually the change in us doesn't make sense. Say of Jesus that he's really God but not human, and you miss out the way in which Jesus reshapes human life from inside, sharing our experience and transforming it from within. Say of Jesus that he's more human than divine, and you've lost the radical newness. All of it is about, as I say, our experience as believers in community, in prayer.

So the Nicene Creed and the definition of the Council of Chalcedon and the long-lined creed of the Council of Sirmium and all these things which are daily familiar to you – all of this is about making sense of who we are once again. So right back to where I started, that's theology: mapping who we are and where we are and what we have to say about Jesus and the Spirit and the community. So as to map who we are and where we are in not only a truthful but an energising and vitalising way.

Because in connection with all the theory, or the apparently theoretical stuff going on, Christians are imagining and singing and praising and working out what they say in their worship together, so that the doctrine goes hand in hand with an advance in the language of worship. Quite often what you find yourself saying or singing in worship impacts back on the way theology is developing. We can forget that, as if somewhere over here is somebody doing theology, and somewhere over here is somebody singing hymns. In the early Christian centuries they really did belong together. You will find writers in the fourth century saying: you know, that may sound good but that's not what we sing on Sundays. And what we sing on Sundays is part of the agenda, part of the raw material of doing theology. Just as, from time to time, you also get it working the other way – an enthusiastic congregation singing something on Sundays and the theologian saying: hang on a moment, do you realise quite what you're saying there? So there's a real dialogue going on between the world of worship and the world of thinking.

For my money, when that's going on that's when theology is really alive and interesting – when new and deep things happen in theology, the interweaving of those two worlds as part of a single enterprise of discovering where we are in the new creation.

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