

# Introduction to Modern Theology

Four Lectures in Trinity Term 2013

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# Week 4: The End of Modernity and the Future of Theology

- I. Modernity and Post-Modernity
- Many accounts of Modern Theology let it end around 1980
- After that: Post-Modernity
- What is this?
- A) Some have in mind a specific movement led by largely Continental intellectuals (Jacques Derrida, Gianni Vattimo, Michel Foucault)
- Influential but not more than one *part* of current developments

# Modernity and Post-Modernity

- B) General sense of whatever comes *after* modernity is over
- No one major paradigm; plurality reigns
- Postmodern theology like a house to be redecorated with people supplying themselves with whatever they find in the spacious attic:
- Elements from historical theology (Patristic, medieval, modern), philosophical ideas, sociology, political theory etc.
- 'Anything goes' (P. Feyerabend)

# Modernity and Post-Modernity

- However: modernity was never homogeneous.
- Central problems of modernity continue: secularisation, pluralism, impact of global economic and political order.
- Post-modernity = new chapter in the history of modernity.

## II Theology Today

- 1. New challenges to belief in God (and the validity of religion)
- New atheism (Dawkins et al.)
- Generally increased secularisation in countries like the UK
- Theological response a): radical departure from traditional Christianity.
- Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* (1980): religion must serve human identity and it this cannot do today in its traditional alliance with metaphysics.

# Theology Today II

- Opposite approach: J Milbank (*Theology and Social Theory* (1990))
- Theology must come into its own and renounce its 'Babylonian Captivity' to secular thought.
- Sociological models are rivals to a theological understanding of the world, and theology will never be able to stand its own ground unless it abandons and confronts those.

# Theology Today III

- 2) The problem of religious pluralism
- Traditional view: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (Cyprian): no salvation outside the church.
- However, can this be maintained in a world where many religions live together?
- Broad strand in Modern Theology (since Schleiermacher) sees Christianity as *one* religion (out of many) albeit the most perfect one (Inclusivism: official teaching of Vatican II)

# Theology Today IV

- However: is Inclusivism enough? It maintains all the fundamental tenets about the absolute truths of Christianity while giving a consolation prize to other religions.
- J Hick (*God and the Universe of Faiths*, 1970): more radical pluralism needed.
- All religions reach out to the transcendent (the 'Real')
- Theology must adopt a perspective where this place of Christianity as one among many is accepted and recognised.



# Theology Today V

- Problem: While from a purely comparative perspective Hick may well be right, it's hard to see how it can be articulated from the point of view of the believer.
- Hick started from his own experience of multiculturalism in Birmingham but it's not obvious that his answer facilitates interreligious dialogue.