

# Issues in Thinking about God

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# Week 5: God and History

- C.T. McIntire, *God, History and Historians*, NY (OUP) 1977: a reader of important primary texts
- W. Brueggemann, *Hope within History*, Atlanta, GA 1987 (extremely stimulating *theological* book written by a leading OT scholar)
- H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, London 1960: By now classical re-establishment of time and history as central themes in NT theology.
- F.G. Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound. God, History, and the Religious Community*, Oxford 1994

# God and History I

- Bible has strong element of *historical* interaction between God and humanity.
- Old Testament: narrative of the covenant
- New Testament: eschatological interpretation of the Christ event
- Ensuing question: what about the time between his first and his second coming?

# God and History II

- What is the relation between theology of history and thinking about God?
- How is it a response to modern challenges to theology?
- If God is the Lord of history, he himself must be *in some sense* historical.
- History in modernity has become the single most important category for human self-understanding.

# God and History III

- Historicism has two faces:
- Tendency to relativism; critical towards tradition.
- Also: belief, hope, and expectation that history delivers truths about human nature.
- Search for 'laws' underlying historical developments.

# God and History IV

- This interest was inherited from Christian theologies of history.
- Modern philosophies of history (Hegel, Marx, Comte) 'secularise' those theologies.
- Some have therefore criticised them as clandestine theologians (K. Lowith).
- Theologians have sought to capitalise on this dependency.

# Wolfgang Pannenberg

- WP (ed.), *Revelation as History*, 1968
- WP, *Theology and the Kingdom of God*, 19669
- S.J. Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, New York/Oxford 1990
- E. Frank Tupper, *The Theology of WP*, Philadelphia 1973

# Pannenberg II

- Modernity depends to heavily on the meaning of history, it has to recognise the need for theological interpretation of it.
- Revelation since 1800 essentially understood as God's self-revelation.
- Influential school identifies this with the Word of God (Barth).



# Pannenberg III

- God's revelation is history in its entirety ('indirect revelation').
- Its fulfillment is anticipated in the Christ's resurrection (eschatological event!)
- Theologian thus enabled to interpret history from its anticipated ('proleptic') end point.

# Pannenberg IV

- Strengths:
  1. Mediation between God's role in history overall and his specific revelation in JChr.
  2. Historicism is taken seriously yet its theological roots are pointed out.
  3. Christ event is eschatological though not the ultimate end.

# Jacques Maritain (1882-1973)

- JM, *Philosophy of History*, 1957
- W.J. Nottingham, *Christian Faith and Secular Action: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Jacques Maritain*, 1968
- P.A. Redpath (ed). *From Twilight to Dawn: The Cultural Vision of Jacques Maritain*, 1990.

# Maritain II

- Studied philosophy and the natural sciences in Paris
- Influenced first by Spinoza, then by H. Bergson
- 1901: meets Raissa Oumansoff (they get married in 1904)
- From the beginning of WW II M. stays in America.
- Instrumental in drawing up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the UN (1948)

# Maritain III

- M. approaches history as a philosopher
- But: critical of philosophies of history that are non- or even anti-Christian (Hegel; Comte)
- Christian theology provides vital clues for an appropriate interpretation of history
- Bible offers a framework for a teleological understanding of world history
- 'Laws' can be discovered.

# Maritain IV

- Does he offer more than a Christianised version of the liberal, progressivist narrative?
- Does this narrative convince?
- If so, does it depend on theological foundation?
- How much does the historical origin of these ideas in Christianity say about their current validity?
- Does history reveal God or does theology of history make God a predicate of history?

# Gustavo Gutiérrez (\* 1928)

- GG, *A Theology of Liberation*, 1971 (ET: 1988)
- *We 'affirm that, in fact, there are not two histories, one profane and one sacred, "juxtaposed" or "closely linked." Rather there is only one human destiny, irreversibly assumed by Christ, the Lord of history. His redemptive work embraces all the dimensions of existence and brings them to their fullness.'* (*A Theology of Liberation*, 86)

# Gutiérrez II

- Main thrust of his argument: salvation history must not be detached from secular history.
- This is aimed ultimately at practice, not theory.
- The point of understanding God's involvement in history is to become part of it.
- God is found through human practice - therefore God and history



# Gutiérrez III

- Official Vatican critique: Kingdom of God cannot be identified with social struggle.
- Liberation theology arose because the Church had failed to see this unity!
- How can identification of God with historical development avoid making God a projection of own ideas and ideals?
- How can it avoid 'baptising' historical developments?

