**Analogy or Dialectic? Reflections on the Philosophical Theology of Ingolf Dalfeth**

_Douglas Hedley_

«... behind the veils of sense, which perplex and distract us, burns the serene glory of the Divine presence: that beyond the spectacle of failures and conflicts which flow from selfishness glows the prospect of a holy unity passing knowledge – a holy unity which shall hereafter crown and fulfill creation, as one revelation of infinite love, when the Father's will is accomplished and He has summed up all thing in Christ, the things in the heavens and the things upon earth.»

I have known Ingolf Dalfeth most of my adult life since meeting him at a conference on Literature and Theology in Durham in 1986. His cheerful presence and mischievous sense of humour instantly dispel the familiar cliches of the German Professor; his energy and charisma have helped forge groups and networks of philosophers and theologians throughout Europe and North America. Dalfeth is a contemporary philosophical theologian of rare insight, stupendous learning and humane wisdom; and is moreover, I think, a pivotal thinker for contemporary German theology. He has integrated various strands of philosophical reflexion into a formidable and commanding theological vision.

The history of German theology, and Lutheran theology in particular, is one of the most remarkable phases of European culture since the 18th century. To think of the _Tübinger Stift_, where Ingolf Dalfeth was _Studieninspektor_, is to grasp how deeply German poetry, thought and science have been linked to theology. I wish to consider a theme in Dalfeth's thought which long obsessed _Stiftler_ like Hölderlin, Strauss, and other great minds in German Theology from Ritschl to Bultmann: _mythos_ and _logos_. His approach to this theme shows how deeply Dalfeth is indebted to a dialectical vision of Christian faith from Luther. Yet also, like Melanchthon, Dalfeth is concerned to explore this faith with the tools of the modern world. Since Vatican II and the increasing prominence of the US as a centre of theology, and more recently the institutional decline of confessional theology since the 1990s, one may ask whither Protestant German Theology? I hope that Dalfeth's recent move to California does not symbolise

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the emigration of the great tradition of Lutheran Systematics across the Atlantic.

My first ever visit to Germany was to Dalferth’s Swabian *Heimat*. As a language student at the Goethe Institute in the picturesque Blaubeuren, I vividly recall my first impression of Tübingen. I subsequently spent many years in Germany. But having arrived as a young adult, it remained a much loved but foreign country. My reflections on Dalferth’s theology should be understood in this light. I share his concern for a robust doctrinal theology. I also share his concern that this robust doctrinal theology has to be appreciated anew by successive generations of theologians. My own theological roots lie with Richard Hooker and the Anglican tradition of S.T. Coleridge, B.F. Westcott, and Austin Farrer. But I share with Dalferth a rejection of traditional scholastic inferential natural theology. His theology is the articulation of the basic cognitive, conative and affective forms of the Christian faith as the shape in which Christians apprehend the presence of God. In my own *Living Forms of the Imagination* I attempt to expound an account of the presence of God which is neither based upon the ‘inference to best explanation’ model nor positivistic like Reformed Epistemology in accepting belief in God as properly basic. I share Dalferth’s concern for a hermeneutical philosophical theology that explores the imaginative-cultural forms that constitute genuine human *Verstehen* rather than apologetics modeled upon the rationality of the natural science.

But I wish to defend the analogical imagination against Dalferth’s robustly dialectical/eschatological/Christological vision. He writes in one of his latest works:

> «I become aware of God’s presence by becoming aware of how God becomes present to my presence. I cannot do so without realising how the divine Other breaks into my life and fundamentally changes its direction and orientation by opening it up for possibilities which I didn’t see or expect before . . . The Christian sense of the presence of God is a sense of the change of direction of a life in and through the presence of God.»

I argue that the capacity of humans to transcend their immediate environment through the imagination resists reductive accounts of the human mind. The amphibious nature of the human mind, its being-in-the-world *and* its capacity through forming images, negations, hypotheses and suppositions to transcend that immediate environment through the imagination resists reductive accounts of the human mind. The amphibious nature of the human mind, its being-in-the-world *and* its capacity through forming images, negations, hypotheses and suppositions to transcend that immediate environment through the imagination resists reductive accounts of the human mind. The amphibious nature of the human mind, its being-in-the-world *and* its capacity through forming images, negations, hypotheses and suppositions to transcend that immediate environment through the imagination resists reductive accounts of the human mind. The amphibious nature of the human mind, its being-in-the-world *and* its capacity through forming images, negations, hypotheses and suppositions to transcend that immediate environment through the imagination resists reductive accounts of the human mind. The amphibious nature of the human mind, its being-in-the-world *and* its capacity through forming images, negations, hypotheses and suppositions to transcend that immediate environment through the imagination resists reductive accounts of the human mind. I share Dalferth’s concern for a hermeneutical philosophical theology that explores the imaginative-cultural forms that constitute genuine human *Verstehen* rather than apologetics modeled upon the rationality of the natural science.

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environment constitutes the anthropological basis for theological reasoning.\(^1\) I wish to plead for a degree of continuity between man and God whereas the strategy of Dalferth is separation. Christ is, I think, a unique instantiation of a fact about anthropology. Man, like Christ, is a denizen of two worlds. But Christ provides a vision of the invisible and testimony to the ultimate and eschatological destiny of the created realm. I do not wish to underestimate the stark and grim gap between human capacity for good and wilful infliction of suffering, sorrow and injustice: Christ holds together both suffering and joy in his own ministry, he is a summarising of all things; as Westcott observes most memorably:

"Viewed in themselves, the phenomena which would suggest a design of love in the order of the world issue in deeper sorrow [...] But the record of the life of Christ, the thought of the presence of Christ changes all. Christ, as He lived and lives, justifies our highest hope. He opens the depth of vision just below the surface of things. He transforms suffering: He shews (sic) us the highest aspirations of our being satisfied through a way of sorrow. He redresses the superficial inequalities of life by revealing its eternal glory. He enables us to understand how, being what we are, every grief and every strain of sensibility can be made in Him contributory to the working out of our destiny.\(^4\)"

Another crucial theme in Dalferth’s work, and one where he draws critically upon Austin Farrer (1904-1968), is God’s relation to the world. This relation is not accidental but essential, and must be interpreted as action: ‘semper ubique actuosus.’

"Christians have conceived of God as trinity – as one who not only relates to himself by relating to others [...] but who is one God precisely by relating to utter otherness in the very relating to himself. God’s self-love is the love of utter otherness which God is.\(^5\)"

I agree with the Trinitarian emphasis but this raises the problem of the metaphysics of unity: the internal differentiation of the Godhead as part of what Farrer calls the ‘Prior Actuality of God.’

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\(^1\) D Hedley, Living Forms of the Imagination, London 2008.
\(^5\) Dalferth, Becoming Present, s. Anm. 2, 148.
In my muddled English manner, I am inclined to mingle what Dalferth holds together in dialectical tension. Rather than move beyond mythos and logos, I prefer to remythologise in the light of the Christ proclaimed as Logos in the prologue of John’s Gospel. While I do not wish to plead for a crude merging of the Divine and the world, I wish to draw attention to the different levels in operation. The poet may welcome the reflections of a critic on his or her work and agree that the critic recognises elements in the poem of which the poet was only barely aware or even unconscious.

Hence I am more sympathetic to apologetics than Dalferth. Not because I want to defend a sterile and arid intellectualism but because of the need to recover faith for the contemporary imagination. How can we honestly and rigorously contemplate Divine presence and action where the methods of the natural sciences are paradigmatic and often viewed as the exclusive means to obtaining truth? The positivistic either/or of faith or scientific verification presupposes a false alternative. Rejecting this procrustean alternative provides the intellectual challenge. But it is also a challenge for the Christian imagination. How can we articulate the Christian idea of Divine presence in a culture so aware of competing religious claims and imaginatively so hostile to the claims of faith?

Let us consider in this context Dalferth’s seminal 1993 work Jenseits von Mythos und Logos: Die christologische Transformation der Theologie. The title is revealing: "Beyond Mythos and Logos: the Christological Transformation of Theology." While Dalferth’s philosophical interests have shifted from broadly analytic to more phenomenological concerns, his basic theological vision has remained constant: Christology is the proprium of Christian theology; the declaration of Nicaea in 325 that Christ was consubstantial with the Father. What appears to many either as a frankly pagan deification of the life of an inspiring first century Rabbi or the muddled metaphysics of theologians shaped by the arcane mystical speculations of late antique Alexandria is for Dalferth the key to Christian theology. Luther was fascinated by the Nicaean-Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ as both true God and true man. As Luther famously said: one cannot draw Christ deep enough into the flesh: Christ must be seen as a real (albeit sinless) man while being genuinely God. At the same time, the divine nature of Christ cannot be neglected. Humanity and divinity are distinguished in the divine and human natures of the same person. Thus Christian theology can be saved from the idolatry that contemplates God as one of the powers within the world alongside others. So many characteristically and distinctively Lutheran doctrines spring
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from Chalcedonian christology: real presence or communicatio idiomatum and the ubiquity of Christ’s body. Dalferth is concerned to show that the Chalcedonian Christology at the heart of Lutheran theology and this reality of the Christian *kerygma* transcends both pagan mythology and philosophical speculation.

Dalferth develops the cardinal contrast between the mythic, i.e. symbolic mediation of nature and culture and the Christological, i.e. eschatological relation of creator to the created realm. Rather than Sallustius’ famous definition that myth says ‹what never occurred and always is›, Christian theology is concerned with the life and history of Jesus of Nazareth as divine action. He points to the significance of the christological alpha privativum in *asyncheto*; *atepteto*; *adhaireteto*; *achoristeto*: unmixed, unchangeable, undivided and indivisible in contrast to the mythical anthropologising of the Divine.

In the wake of the ancient metaphors of the *liber naturae* and the *liber scripturae*, Dalferth employs the model of grammar. Indeed, it is notable that he draws creatively upon J.H. Newman’s seminal analysis of the nature of religious belief in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* of 1870. *Grammar* refers to the Christian life of faith according to rules capable of explication as a practical and experienced orientation in a text world which is understood by the believer as a specific and meaningful connection of signs.⁶

The model of ‹grammar› is instructive. Our effective knowledge of grammar effectively outstrips our capacity to articulate it. Most native speakers know the grammar of their tongue without being able to explain its rules. Indeed, consider an expert philologist who can explain the rules; he may conversely slip into errors while employing the language. Newman wants to argue for the grammar of assent in this sense: the deep knowledge that cannot be identified with the capacity to articulate.

Newman is producing a personalist and anti-intellectualist argument. Newman contrasts ‹reasoning› which is concerned with mere abstractions and those judgments that are worthy of ‹assent› and which control and form behaviour, grounded in the aboriginal source of the soul where thought, volition and feeling are one. Newman is justifiably contrasting the fundamental or ‹real› assent of the unified person with the merely notional assent that issues from logical control of concepts and forming of generalized beliefs. Dalferth’s interest in real as opposed to notional assent is linked to his opposition to sterile abstraction. I know that Britain is an is-

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land – even though I have never travelled from Land’s End to John o’Groats and back down the East Coast. In philosophical terminology, one might consider the difference of knowledge by acquaintance rather than description. There is much that one ‘knows’ by direct acquaintance that cannot be clearly described. Yet such knowledge by acquaintance, e.g. ‘this tastes like coffee’ is more, not less, certain than much knowledge by description, e.g. ‘Hannibal crossed the Alps.’

Yet this reasonable ‘personalism’ cannot be allowed to warrant rank irrationalism. And Newman was a complex genius, and was considered with great suspicion by many Catholics after his conversion. This is hardly surprising, since his theory of real as opposed to notional assent constitutes a devastating critique of traditional inferential arguments for Divine existence! These must surely be ‘notional’ for Newman. Yet, on the other hand, he notoriously became convinced by the liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius in Naples or the Holy House at Loreto. I agree with Dalferth that Newman’s ‘real assent’ is an insight of genius; notwithstanding its potential for abuse.

Dalferth moves on from Newman’s personalist account of faith to Wittgenstein’s gnomic explication of religious faith as a form of life shaped through certain images. Wittgenstein’s remarks have generated an industry of diverse and hotly contested commentary, and Dalferth’s great predecessor at Claremont, D.Z. Phillips, was perhaps the foremost exponent of an approach to philosophy of religion through Wittgenstein. Dalferth is sympathetic but not uncritical. Like William Alston, Dalferth belongs to those readers of Wittgenstein who use his work in a robustly realist manner. The liberation from an unduly narrow view of religious language cannot provide the license for an intolerable liberty. Dalferth in this context considers Hegel’s momentous distinction between Vorstellung and Begriff as a corrective. But whereas Wittgenstein can merely highlight the specificity of religious language, Hegel is notorious for subsuming it within his speculative metaphysics.

One could translate the German word Vorstellung into English as Imagination. Here Dalferth’s recourse to Austin Farrer is intriguing. I suspect Dalferth is quite unique, among Germans, in his admiration for this seminal English philosopher theologian. Revelation for Farrer is a process of images, drawn from the aboriginal cultic experience of the Divine in Israel’s prophetic, priestly and royal history, and transformed. Christianity constitutes a veritable rebirth of these inherited images through their appropriation by Christ and
the Apostles. These images are not mere poetic fancies but constitute the representation of momentous truth in the history of Israel and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet clearly, for Farrer the imagination is vital for the decoding and appreciation of the very stuff of revelation. Dalførth is one of the most insightful critics of Farrer’s work. Yet ultimately he sees Farrer’s project as subject to the same limitations as those of Wittgenstein.

As Dalførth knows, Farrer was also an eminent and engaged natural theologian. Indeed, Dalførth greets the metaphysical emphasis in Farrer upon divine agency. Behind Farrer’s appeal to images as the stuff of revelation is a theory of divine providence. There is a continuity, in Farrer’s mind, between the heathenish archetypes and the living images of revelation, between forms of human divine interaction that culminate in Christ. Farrer, as much philosopher as he was theologian, was a central figure among the Oxford group called the ‹Metaphysicals› a group opposed to the dominant strand of Ordinary Language Philosophy of Ryle and Austin. The latter believed that metaphysical problems could be dissolved by through careful analysis of ordinary language, whereas the Metaphysicals (including B. Mitchell and J.R., Lucas) argued that these problems could only be banished but not dissolved.

Dalførth’s solution to the residual problems in Farrer is to be found in his appeal to Luther’s dialectical grounding of theology. Here we encounter a christocentric reading of Scripture within a pneumatological context. Hence a thoroughly Trinitarian grammar of the Christian faith in the Word of God provides the basis for the transformative potential of the Divine presence. Whereas Farrer starts with the naked paradigm of agency: esse est operari and then attempts to proceed to the specific content of revelation, Luther starts from the self explicating and self revealing nature of the Divine in Christ. Dalførth presents Luther as providing the key to Farrer’s imaginative aporia: the Christian imagination is not groping towards but structured in faith through the Trinitarian structure of Father, Son and

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*Ibid., 246.*
Spirit. The two stages of analogy and revelation are replaced by the eschatological dialectic of Law and Gospel. Rather than agency per se, Dalferth presents the divine agency in Christ as the basis of theology.

Dalferth rightly attacks those theologians who assault the historical foundations of Christianity and who turn Incarnation and Atonement into sub-historical cults of the dying and rising God. One might think of the endeavours of figures like Drewermann or assorted feminist theologians, whose hermeneutical concerns effectively preempt any transformative potential of revelation. However, a virgin-giving-birth or the God-man-sacrificed-rising-from-the-dead appear like clear instances of the mythic imagination. I agree with Dalferth that we cannot remove the historical claims from Christian theology. But perhaps there is more common ground between the pagan imagination and the Gospel than Dalferth admits.

God makes creatures make themselves. That self-fashioning is through images and myths. These images provide the stuff of revelation, the very materials of providence. But our age is characterised, as Vico puts it, by the barbarism of reflection, because scientific tools cannot explain human nature. We have a natural need to recover our identity through the engagement of imagination. But this does not necessarily mean either irrationalism or crass reduction to the merely figurative. I do not see the re-valuation of myth as necessarily implying the rejection of Christian eschatology. Consider, for instance, the momentous Hellenic apocalypse of Plato’s myths. Westcott remarks on Plato’s celebrated vision of the journey of the soul chariot in Plato’s Phaedrus:

“There is no grander passage in Greek literature than that in which Plato describes how the contemplation of absolute justice, temperance and knowledge is the sustenance of the divine nature. There are times of high festival, he says, in the world above, when the gods in solemn procession mount to the topmost vault of heaven, and, taking their place upon its dome, gaze over the infinite depths of perfect Truth. This spectacle supports the fulness of their being. Nor are they, he continues, alone in the enjoyment of the magnificent vision: all the souls that can and will follow in their train. Such of these as are able to gain the fair prospect and keep it before their eyes, while the spheres revolve, remain in the possession of supreme joy. The rest baffled, wearied, maimed, sink down to earth and are embodied as men. Henceforth, he adds, their condition in this lower life depends upon their past

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8 Ibid., 104.
apprehension of the truth. Their human existence is a striving upwards toward the glory which they have once seen. They live still, so far as they really live, by the recollection of that which has filled them with a noble passion.

The life of man is thus according to the highest thought of Greek philosophy remembered Truth. Such an intuition of noble souls found its confirmation and fulfilment in the word of the Lord: This is, He says, the life eternal... Yes the life of man is the knowledge of GOD, the contemplation of Him Who is the Truth. That is the message of Christ.»

For Westcott Christ is the full truth intimated by the pagans in philosophy as he was prophesied by the Prophets. In St John the God of the Greeks, the God who creates the world as an image of himself because he is without envy, and this is the language of Mimesis and generosity of Plato’s *Timaeus*, becomes the God who offers one perfect and sufficient sacrifice. The genius of St John, like that of St Paul, is not to reject the pagan mind but to deepen its insight through their own forceful minds and what we Christians can only think of as inspiration more divine than poetical, providential rather than philosophical. Christianity has a much higher estimate of sympathy than its Stoic or Platonic rivals. It accepts the fact of suffering rather than pleading for detachment. In so doing, it conveys through its Christology and Trinitarian theology an image of the Divine nature that, however enigmatically, integrates sorrow, sympathy and love in the Godhead. I have been referring to a Cambridge divine, B.F. Westcott who was convinced that «the Word for which Plato longed, as a sure support, has been given to us in Him Whom St John has made known».

Perhaps it is more appropriate for me to appeal to Hölderlin:

*… denn,  
Es liebte der Gewittertragende die Einfalt  
Des Jüngers und es sahe der achtsame Mann  
Das Angesicht des Gottes genau,  
Da, beim Geheimnis des Weinstocks, sie  
Zusammensaßen, zu der Stunde des Gastmahls,  
Und in der großen Seele, ruhagend den Tod  
Aussprach der Herr und die letzte Liebe, denn nie genug

9 Westcott, Christus Consummator, s. Anm. 1, 83–84.  
10 Westcott, Essays in the History of Religious Thought, s. Anm. 4, vi.  
Hatt er von Güte zu sagen
Der Worte, damals, und zu erheitern, da
Er’s sahe, das Zürnen der Welt.
Denn alles ist Gut. Darauf starb er.»
«... for
The thunderbearing God loved his simplicity
And the caring young man saw directly the divine countenance
When, with the mystery of the vine,
They sat together, at the hour of the symposium or supper,
And the great soul anticipated his death and his love tested to
the full
For no words were sufficient for him to speak of Goodness
Or to still the rancour of the world.
For all is good. Thereupon he died.»

Hölderlin is meditating upon the Last Supper and Christ on the eve of the sacrifice of his life. Hölderlin was a product, like Hegel and Schelling (and with whom he shared a dormitory in the Tübinger Stift) of the Lutheran humanism going back to Melanchthon and Reuchlin, and the South West German mystical pietism. The Supper of our Lord is spoken of as a Gastmahl, the word used in German to translate the Symposium, Plato’s great dialogue about the mystical vision of beauty, truth and goodness. But the wine of the Symposium is linked to another figure, Dionysus:

«Doch furchbar ist, wie da und dort
Unendlich hin zerstreut das Lebende Gott»

«How fearsome it is that the living God
should be scattered far and wide»

Hölderlin identifies Christ with Dionysus or Bacchus the wine God who is dismembered and who was often seen with the Christian tradition as a typological prefiguring of Christ.

Yet I do not think that Hölderlin is indulging in learned allusion or fanciful analogies. His point is that the great sacrifice at the heart of the Christian faith generates the energy of renewal. The poem tells us that divine work – «göttliches werk» – is like the sower’s seed or the glowing iron in the furnace or the lava in Mount Etna. – The effect of the divine life is abundance and expansion and that the task of the Christian is participation in this expansion of the divine work

12 Ibid., 91.
and specifically the imitation of the life of Christ out of the riches and energy of the Spirit:

«So hätt ich Reichtum
Ein Bild zu bilden, und ähnlich
Zu schaun, wie er gewesen, den Christ.»

«Thus I would have riches
To make an image of his image
In contemplating the Being of Christ.»

Hölderlin lost his sanity and tragically spent much of his adult life in the so called Turm or tower of Tübingen. How poignant that he should write so movingly of the imprisoned visionary in Patmos. But his message is one of liberation and transformation. The vision of Christ crucified and risen is the transforming vision of the Divine nature, the Christ seen by the beloved disciple in Patmos and the very God of whom St Paul was preaching to the reflective Athenians, the living image, not merely of the unknown deity of the philosophers, but the God in whom we live and move and have our being.

— Dr. Douglas Hedley ist Senior Lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion sowie Fellow und Tutor am Clare College an der Universität Cambridge.

13 Ibid., 93.