

## ANDREW SHANKS' HEGELIAN CHRISTOLOGY

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### *Introduction*

In 1952, Karl Barth asked ‘Why did Hegel not become for the Protestant world something like what Thomas Aquinas was for Roman Catholicism?’<sup>1</sup> Barth speculated that such a day may still come. It has not arrived yet but there is at the moment a Hegelian revival within philosophy and theology.<sup>2</sup> Three of the most important Anglican theologians alive today are Hegelians: Rowan Williams, John Milbank and Andrew Shanks. Within political theology, Milbank tends to receive most of the attention as far as believing and/or institutional Christianity goes, but I think Shanks and Williams offer good but under explored alternatives, with Shanks the least well known of the three. This is unfortunate as Shanks, Canon of Manchester Cathedral in the UK, has published a thought-provoking body of work that is at once intellectually rigorous and practically focused.<sup>3</sup> To redress the balance, this paper seeks to open up discussion of Shanks’ work as he takes forward some Hegelian insights. As such it neglects a fair portion of Hegel’s Christology in order to focus on only those elements used by Shanks.<sup>4</sup> Before the main discussion of Shanks, a very brief sketch of why these three theologians value Hegel should give some indication of Hegel’s importance. For all three of them Hegel offers a way of connecting the infinite and the finite, a way of conceiving and talking about the infinite that is open to finite minds; an obvious desideratum for theologians. The significance of this can only be seen against the background of Hegel’s (1770-1830) immediate philosophical predecessor and the greatest philosopher of modernity and the Enlightenment – Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant sought to generate certainty in knowledge by limiting knowledge to the finite realm, thus rendering whatever is beyond the empirical intrinsically unknowable. Hegel’s critique of Kant begins to show the way beyond this. John Milbank lists four ways in which he wants to continue Hegel’s project: a theological critique of Enlightenment; the historical narration of the connection between politics and religion; a self-critique of Christian historical practice; and a fusion of philosophy and Christianity so that reason itself is beyond secular reason.<sup>5</sup> Shanks and Williams would endorse the first three of those, though the last is more contentious. For Shanks, Hegel also makes more explicit than anyone else the ambiguity of religious language and prioritizes action over theory. In short, Hegel is important for contemporary theology for both theological and philosophical reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *From Rousseau to Ritschl* (trans. Brian Cozens; London: SCM Press, 1959), 268.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. John Milbank and Slavoj Žižek, *The Monstrosity of Christ* (London: MIT Press, 2009); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006); all of Slavoj Žižek’s work, but a good introduction is *The puppet and the dwarf* (London: MIT, 2003). See also Gillian Rose’s work.

<sup>3</sup> See now the overview article, Andrew Brower Latz, ‘Andrew Shanks’s Civil Theology’, *Political Theology* 13.1 (2012), 14-36.

<sup>4</sup> See G. W. F. Hegel, *Early Theological Writings* (trans. Richard Kroner and T. M. Knox; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1971); also the work of Peter Hodgson and Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel’s Theological Thought as a Prolegomenon to a Future Christology* (trans. J. R. Stephenson; New York: Crossroads, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 147.

*Hegel and Anselm: Why did God become human?*

As a way in to Shanks' Hegelian Christology consider the question, 'why did God become human?' In Shanks' view, Hegel was the first theologian since Anselm to give an original answer to this question. A comparison of Anselm and Hegel on this point will make apparent Hegel's contribution to the Christian tradition and philosophy in general. Shanks considers Anselm's answer to his own question, *Cur Deus Homo?*, to be mythical in character in the sense that it is abstracted from human history, including Jesus' own history.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of *Cur Deus Homo?* Anselm describes his task as proving that an atonement for human sin necessarily involves God's incarnation and death so that humanity could have deduced that God would become human (since it is rationally necessary) even if it had never happened. Anselm's Christ saves (roughly speaking) by virtue of his sufferings being of infinite worth, which thereby satisfies the infinite dishonour done to God through human sin. Anselm's theory certainly highlights the depth of both sin and God's love but it works on the same level as the myth of Adam's fall, i.e. it is non-historical. And since the details of the life of Jesus and the church are 'extraneous to the argument',<sup>7</sup> Anselm's atonement 'adds nothing concrete to our understanding of what actually constitutes sin, or what divine love implies in practice'.<sup>8</sup> Anselm is keen to emphasise Jesus' uniqueness: he alone is capable of carrying out the task of redemption and as such is significantly different from the rest of humanity. His role is as a sacrificial rather than exemplary representative. Christ 'represents humanity *en masse*'.<sup>9</sup>

Shanks does not pursue the comparison between Anselm and Hegel much further than this but it is interesting to pause and expand on it. Anselm, in *Cur Deus Homo?* but also perhaps elsewhere (c.f. *Proslogion*), attempts to strike a strange balance between believing in order to understand and proving the rational necessity of various parts of Christian doctrine: the incarnation and atonement in *Cur*, the existence of God in *Proslogion*. On the one hand then, Anselm deliberately excludes the history of Jesus in his atonement theory so that he can offer a rational proof of the necessity of the atonement; this could then convince non-believers.<sup>10</sup> Hence in the Preface to *Cur* he says

The first book contains the objections of unbelievers who reject the Christian faith because they think it militates against reason, and the answers given by the faithful. And eventually it proves, by unavoidable logical steps, that, supposing Christ were left out of the case, as if there had never existed anything to do with him, it is impossible that, without him, any member of the human race could be saved. In the second book, similarly, the supposition is made that nothing were known about Christ, and it is demonstrated with no less clear logic and truth: that human nature was instituted with the specific aim that at some stage the whole human being should enjoy blessed immortality...but that this could only happen through the agency of a Man-God; and this it is from necessity that all the things which we believe about Christ have come to pass.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Andrew Shanks, *Hegel's Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 17-8. HPT hereafter.

<sup>7</sup> HPT, 18.

<sup>8</sup> HPT, 18. Andrew Shanks, *The Other Calling* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 174-9. TOC hereafter.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Shanks, *God and Modernity* (London: Routledge, 2000), 80. GAM hereafter.

<sup>10</sup> C.f. Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Anselm on faith and reason' in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 48-9.

<sup>11</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Why God became Man*, in *Anselm of Canterbury. The Major Works* (ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 261-2.

On the other hand, however, our skeptical feeling that anyone would have thought to ‘prove’ this had it not occurred historically seems to be justified and (implicitly?) anticipated by Anselm when he says in the *Commendation* of the same work ‘Unless you have believed, you will not understand’<sup>12</sup> (citing Isa. 7.9). Anselm goes on to say, ‘I consider that the understanding which we gain in this life stands midway between faith and revelation’, where faith is, roughly speaking, assent to what we do not fully understand, in contrast to revelation, which is fully understanding the reason and logical necessity of our beliefs (which we could then perhaps call knowledge). Anselm’s assumptions here include humanity as rational, as having a *telos* towards God and reason, yet also marred by the fall, and so in need of God’s help to use our reason correctly.<sup>13</sup> Thus, whilst Anselm perhaps thinks non-believers can reason part of their way to God, ultimately faith is necessary in order to know the truth and reason to it.<sup>14</sup> So the idea that he has shown the rational necessity of the atonement can be doubted, and certainly it seems more dubious in our more emphatically pluralist age. ‘One ought to say that *only* because one first experiences the ‘shape’ of incarnation, of atonement, is one led to formulate the abstract notions of their occurrence; and only then does one construe reality in terms of the need for the perfect offering of love.’<sup>15</sup> Anselm’s thought experiment, to prove some historical events as rationally necessary, whilst brilliant, is questionable, but this makes Shanks’ juxtaposition of it with Hegel all the more illuminating.

Hegel aimed, like Anselm, to show the rational possibility and necessity of the atonement and Hegel also accepts that in order to see Christ as divine it is necessary to have faith.<sup>16</sup> History, for Hegel, does not prove that Christ is God but it does corroborate the view of faith. Thus Hegel too could be read as offering arguments both for believers and non-believers but Hegel is more explicit in admitting that these arguments require faith in order to be fully persuasive. The most important difference between Anselm and Hegel here, however, is rightly located by Shanks in the role of history. At issue are two different interpretations of philosophy: Anselm’s neo-Platonism and Hegel’s historicism. Whereas for Anselm metaphysical truth is located in the intellectual realm of the divine ideas, for Hegel ‘history is how we do our metaphysics, how we reflect on what we non-negotiably are and what are the conditions of our concept formation.’<sup>17</sup> When Hegel looks to understand Jesus and the meaning and rationality of the atonement he therefore looks to learn from history rather than innate ideas.

It is with this difference that Shanks thinks Hegel makes a decisive step forward in several respects. He takes the primary meaning of the atonement from the actual history of Jesus, as part of human history in general. On his account, the importance of Jesus’ death by crucifixion is that this was a death reserved for slaves and political dissidents, and was therefore a denial of personhood or individuality as such as well as of political and religious dissidence. Jesus relativised all authority not simply by subjecting it to divine judgment but by his own practice of prophetic dissent and questioning.<sup>18</sup> The resurrection is then the reversal of these judgments and the vindication of Jesus’ activity. Yet Jesus is here an exemplary representative, so that the vindication of Jesus is the divine affirmation of the

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<sup>12</sup> Anselm, *Cur*, 260.

<sup>13</sup> Adams, ‘Anselm’, 33-8.

<sup>14</sup> Adams, ‘Anselm’, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 218.

<sup>16</sup> Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 155f.

<sup>17</sup> Rowan D. Williams, ‘Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the wake of Gillian Rose’, *Modern Theology*, 11:1 (January 1995), 15.

<sup>18</sup> HPT, 5-8, 11.

value of individuality *per se* and of political dissent. In fact, God here identifies Godself with the political dissident. In other words, Jesus' free-thinking and questioning is a vocation for all to take up; Jesus thus represents each individual rather than the mass of humanity, as symbolic of God's indwelling of every person and their infinite worth. The discovery of the individual as both inherently valuable and as a locus of truth is, Hegel believes, a Christian discovery, although it took a long time to emerge clearly. The cultural recognition of the individual (who, it should be noted, it constituted only intersubjectively) in post-Reformation societies therefore makes it easier in some ways to live out Jesus' message of the value of the individual.

The brief version of Hegel's answer to Anselm's question is twofold: God became human so that we can 'experience human individual and social history as a kind of participation in the divine life'<sup>19</sup> and to save us from the Unhappy Consciousness. The Unhappy Consciousness is Hegel's term for mental slavery, for the internalization of the master-slave relationship.<sup>20</sup> It involves self-censoring thought, the refusal to face up to some aspects of reality, the taking of some thing or things as unquestionable. This is one aspect of sin in the concrete and this is what Jesus saves us from.<sup>21</sup> Salvation is, at least partly, the confidence and willingness to think and question. God does not want slaves but free people. So far then, Hegel's atonement and christology seem superior to Anselm's by taking account of Jesus' history and human practice, but Hegel does not stop there.

The truth of Christology is salvation from the Unhappy Consciousness, free-thinking for and as liberation. Yet this truth cuts across belief and unbelief.<sup>22</sup> On this basis, which is based on Hegel's understanding of the relationship between philosophy and theology,<sup>23</sup> Shanks makes a fundamental distinction between truth-as-correctness and truth-as-openness. Truth-as-correctness is truth considered as correct opinion, as the correspondence between an idea and a thing.<sup>24</sup> It is truth viewed as a property of statements abstracted from conversation or contexts of power. Truth-as-openness, by contrast, is truth understood as a quality of statements gained from within a conversation of maximum openness and equality. As a quality of character, truth-as-openness is openness to the point of view of others, especially those most different from ourselves, a suspicion of prejudice, a readiness to change one's opinion.<sup>25</sup> Whilst truth-as-correctness works to some extent as a way of understanding science or historical facts, it fails to appreciate the truth of poetry or religion.<sup>26</sup>

From this epistemological distinction, Shanks makes the existential and soteriological move of cutting salvation free from truth-as-correctness and tying it to truth-as-openness.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Martin J. De Nys, *Hegel and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 28.

<sup>20</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (trans. A. V. Miller; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), ch. 4B, 119-138. C.f. Andrew Shanks, *Civil Society, Civil Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 111-2. CSCR hereafter.

<sup>21</sup> CSCR, 112: 'For unhappy consciousness is sin. But it is not sin as traditionally defined, anywhere, within a tradition largely lacking in the actual experience of isonomy. On the contrary, it is that very dimension of sin which – despite the gospel itself – the tradition fails to recognize, because of its lack of such experience.'

<sup>22</sup> HPT, 25.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Shanks, *Faith in Honesty. The essential nature of theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 8-10. FIH hereafter.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Shanks 'What is Truth?' *Towards a theological poetics* (London: Routledge, 2001), 16. WIT hereafter.

<sup>25</sup> TOC, 4-10, 14.

<sup>26</sup> WIT, 5.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew Shanks, *Anglicanism Reimagined. An honest Church?* (London: SPCK, 2010), 31. AR hereafter.

Salvation consists in being freed from the Unhappy Consciousness in order to be thoughtful, not in holding certain doctrinal or metaphysical views.<sup>28</sup> In what could be seen as simply an extension of negative theology, Shanks agrees with Heidegger that what is existentially most fundamental is being open to and assimilating the experience of ‘shakiness’, since any formulation of that experience (or of the transcendent) will necessarily fall short of it.<sup>29</sup> Shakiness is an experience of cultural or metaphysical trauma, that renders beliefs uncertain and puts them in question. Consider the possibility of a person holding all the correct doctrinal views of Christian orthodoxy, who is knowledgeable in theology and church history, yet also bigoted, homophobic, racist and sexist. Now consider an individual who is open to hearing what others have to say and ready to try to take on board the truth in what they say, who is, in short, thoughtful or Honest,<sup>30</sup> and is a Muslim or atheist or pagan. Surely it is the latter rather than the former who enacts salvation in concrete terms. Indeed, is not this one meaning of Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and Publican? Shanks calls this ‘post-metaphysical faith’.<sup>31</sup>

Shanks further develops the theme of salvation as Honesty in a trinitarian pattern corresponding to three fundamental forms of dishonesty.<sup>32</sup> These are: 1) ‘dishonesty-as-banalities’, going along with the flow without question. The term banalities here comes from Hannah Arendt’s volume *Eichmann in Jerusalem. The banality of evil*. Arendt concluded Eichmann was capable of organizing genocide not because he was a monster but because he would not or could not stop and think. Such dishonesty can therefore be extremely dangerous. 2) ‘dishonesty-as-manipulation’, which involves flaws in both the manipulators and manipulatees; the whole economy of threats, flattery and seduction. Party politics at its most debased offers a good example, as would church propaganda and ideology. 3) ‘dishonesty-as-disowning’, chiefly a disowning of the past, an attempt to achieve historical innocence, a refusal of history’s effects on either individuals or groups and a refusal to take responsibility for this.

Faith in the form of sincerely held doctrinal beliefs is clearly no guarantee of avoiding such forms of dishonesty. It is possible to go along with the flow of church culture without ever questioning it, or by refusing to question certain aspects of it. It is possible to be utterly sincere and yet simultaneously act manipulatively, as for instance Athanasius did in the Arian controversy. Dishonesty-as-disowning is often manifested by sincere believers who regard terrible events in church history – the crusades, for example, or collusion with Nazism or apartheid – as not part of “true” Christianity, as if thereby absolving the church of fault. By contrast with this latter position, part of what drives Shanks’ project is precisely the question of how churches could have failed to resist totalitarianism in the twentieth century and what needs to change within theology and church life to try to ensure this never happens again. Sincerity is not enough.

As part of a different arm of his theological project – namely, the development of a civil theology<sup>33</sup> – Shanks develops three pre-theological virtues for building the solidarity of the

<sup>28</sup> For Shanks’ definitions and deployments of ‘metaphysical’ see WIT, 34-5, 139; 34-64.

<sup>29</sup> GAM, 35-41, 45; WIT, 16.

<sup>30</sup> ‘Honesty’ is Shanks’ formula for this. FIH, 2.

<sup>31</sup> GAM, 42-64.

<sup>32</sup> For the following see FIH, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Shanks’ version of civil theology is not that of the usual caricature. See CSCR and Brower Latz, ‘Shanks’ Civil Theology’.

shaken.<sup>34</sup> Pre-theological means they are universal, not restricted to religious believers. These are free-spiritedness, flair for tradition, and transcendent generosity. Before discussing these, it is important to note that Shanks views religion as a way in which groups, cultures, political entities, can heal their divisive memories and cultural traumas by a public handling of them in liturgy that has the quality of prayer and meditation rather than conflict or party political point scoring. Thus, whilst he thinks the church should repent corporately for those of its institutional sins that are still live issues (in the UK context, this includes at least slavery, sexism, homophobia, colonialism, anti-Semitism), the refusal of historical innocence does not foreclose the possibility of corporate forgiveness, healing, and moving on (that would be pathological). Attaining such closure is precisely one of religion's functions, but it can only be achieved by dealing with the issues publicly. In the language of practical theology, 'interruption' is the term for the process in which a person is forced to question their faith and deal with doubts due to some event in their lives. Shanks' shakenness is a corporate homology of this. He pictures shakenness as occurring not simply because an individual loses a loved one, say, but for the church as a whole to question its beliefs in the face of genocide, ecological disaster, its own historical failures and so on. It is a response to history and culture not simply to individual circumstances.

Free-spiritedness is Shanks' term for Heidegger's *Entschlossenheit* (resolve, resoluteness) as expounded in *Being and Time*. As Shanks takes it, the heart of the matter here is 'to stay with one's shakenness.' Shanks juxtaposes this with the Hegelian theme of overcoming the Unhappy Consciousness, and the Nietzschean theme of overcoming slave morality, especially *ressentiment*. For Shanks, what all three thinkers have in common at this point is the attempt to enable people to change their minds in openness to reality, to think for themselves. Failure to do so could take the form of participating in the herd (mindless adherence to culture or leader), the mob (violent groups without direction), or the gang (loyalty to an organization at the expense of truth).<sup>35</sup>

Whereas free-spiritedness involves taking responsibility for oneself, flair for tradition is taking responsibility for one's own community and its direction. It is a principal of rooted creativity (Gadamer) or traditioned reasoning (MacIntyre). It involves the attempt to develop authority that is open to reason and contributes to the ability of people to open themselves to reason. It is in tension with free-spiritedness then, in that it necessitates the attempt to build tradition, although on the basis of shakenness and so as to embody the insights of shakenness. There are two principle failures corresponding to this virtue. The first is to fail to allow sufficiently for the conflict of opinion, so that the 'ideal consensus' of the heavenly city becomes an ideology of priestly control.<sup>36</sup> Shanks has in mind here Augustine and Milbank. This is a failure of scientific modesty, of claiming too much for theology (though any discipline can be guilty of the same problem in principle, and this is part of Milbank's critique of sociology). The second is hermeneutic impatience, a failure to stay with a tradition in order to reform it towards expressing and embodying the insights of shakenness, withdrawing instead into a self-justifying clique.<sup>37</sup> These failures are, if you like, having too much or too little tradition.

<sup>34</sup> For the following see CSCR, 140-99.

<sup>35</sup> The herd and mob are Nietzschean terms, the gang is Shanksian, though Arendt uses it too.

<sup>36</sup> CSCR, 163.

<sup>37</sup> Shanks develops a critique of 'gnosticism' as the conceit of the intellectual elite in disdain of everyone else and in desire for innocence in TOC, especially 72-91. C.f. FIH, 126.

Transcendent generosity is Shanks' term for the main thrust of Levinas' call to respond to the infinite ethical demand represented by the Other. Levinas is concerned with the 'aspiration to an impossible perfection of non-violence: an ethics altogether beyond the art of the possible which is politics',<sup>38</sup> but this call to the conscience is precisely what is needed when political structures and ideologies fail to restrict hostility and social antagonism. The failure here, then, is to refuse the challenge, call and demand of the Other, to refuse to take on board what they are and represent at anything but the most superficial level. Stretching it a bit, we could say failure here entails a breakdown of the ability to dialogue.

A vice could be extrapolated from each of these virtues, as their opposites, so that exploring this triad makes an informative contrast with the three forms of dishonesty. The inverse of free-spiritedness maps fairly closely onto dishonesty-as-banality. Perhaps in some ways refusing the other contributes towards dishonesty-as-manipulation, but it is surely not the same. Failing to allow for conflict of opinion, or seeking ideological uniformity, and hermeneutic impatience are quite different from dishonesty-as-disowning. Yet in all of these Shanks parses what he sees as some of the fundamental problems of the human condition. Whilst the holding of metaphysical opinions does not guarantee resistance to any of these, true thoughtfulness does begin to break their hold, and that is why faith-as-Honesty is the only saving form of faith.

#### *The Shanksian development*

Shanks is aware that his proposal of post-metaphysical faith is in some ways a departure for the tradition.<sup>39</sup> In his view, 'the rigidification of grammatical rules into the form of hypotheses, which are supposedly 'true' *in themselves*, merely reflects the power-play, down the centuries, of the religious thought-police – with their sundry ideologies of salvation-by-membership.'<sup>40</sup> Yet he claims as precedent what 'Kierkegaard meant by the proposition that, in spiritual matters, 'truth is subjectivity'; not just correctness, not just a property of certain statements; but a quality of character.'<sup>41</sup> Or 'what Bonhoeffer meant by his critique of religion-as-metaphysics.'<sup>42</sup> Both had an apologetic purpose in claiming that Christianity uniquely highlighted this truth, whereas Shanks wants to drop the apologetics. For Shanks, what a person believes matters less than how open they are to their beliefs being challenged and how well they act in solidarity with others, especially those from other confessions (including non-religious people). Given the minority position of this theological stream it is worth trying to head off misunderstandings and some more obvious objections.

First, it is surely apparent that liberation from the Unhappy Consciousness is not guaranteed by any metaphysical or doctrinal creed, but equally that liberation is available in a number of them (though not all). Thus, insofar as salvation has concrete meaning and can be regarded as liberation from the Unhappy Consciousness, it does follow that salvation is not a property of doctrine but of the way individuals hold to doctrine. Again, sincerity is insufficient.

Second, Shanks is not, I think, denying the need for or inevitability of metaphysics or doctrinal correctness, he simply wishes to make it subservient to the needs of shakiness, to

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<sup>38</sup> CSCR, 197.

<sup>39</sup> AR, 16-7. Of course, post-metaphysical philosophy only really becomes an option after Hegel.

<sup>40</sup> CSCR, 138.

<sup>41</sup> CSCR, 138.

<sup>42</sup> CSCR, 138.

truth-as-openness and faith-as-Honesty.<sup>43</sup> What Shanks advocates, though this is my language not his, is a corrigible metaphysics rather than an abolition of metaphysics. If so, this makes the label ‘post-metaphysical’ potentially open to misunderstanding. Indeed, to jump too quickly into asking what Shanks thinks about this or that doctrine is to risk missing the whole thrust and challenge of his thought, which is precisely the existential value of shakiness. Both levels, the metaphysical and pre-metaphysical, can be seen at work in Shanks’ post-metaphysical doctrine of salvation. Such faith is focused on the immanent and the present: for salvation to be a meaningful term it must make a difference to how people live. What salvation does not mean is that adherence to a specific formula grants post-mortem guarantees. Thus the corruption of eschatology into a form of threats and rewards generating persuasive power to evangelism should pass away. Nevertheless Shanks affirms, for instance, the traditional Christian metaphysical doctrine of the resurrection of the dead.<sup>44</sup>

Third, Shanks is not driven primarily by epistemological concerns. On the contrary, what concerns him above all is the need to build solidarity across confessions, as a response to totalitarianism and the totalitarian element present in all mass democracies.<sup>45</sup> His primary concern is therefore with political and social justice and with how this may come about. This partly explains his refusal to abandon Christian institutions and traditions, opting instead to attempt to reform them rather than join an intellectual clique desirous of historic innocence.<sup>46</sup> ‘I’m a Christian priest, basically, because I believe in the solidarity of the shaken, and because I can see no real alternative to popular religion when it comes to promoting that ideal, in all its true difference from solidarity among philosophers.’<sup>47</sup>

Fourth, for Shanks as for Hegel, the truth of the gospel takes time to emerge.<sup>48</sup> Hegel sees all of history as the unfolding of the Idea, and, in Shanks’ interpretation, wants to see all of history as a revelation of God.<sup>49</sup> Hegel realized that ‘the modern world, in its absolute novelty and distinctiveness, also requires a correspondingly *new* form of religious consciousness, for its disorder to be healed.’<sup>50</sup> It is this new form of religious consciousness that Hegel sought to provide. Thus Hegel could not be nostalgic about ancient Greece, as much as he admired it, nor seek timeless truths in a Platonic manner. He was led to assess the progression of religion and its relation to socio-economic forms. It is this sense of modernity as a break, constituted not simply by ideas (including the death of God) but by material and economic forces (population growth, the emergence of capitalism, urbanization, etc), that necessitates a radical re-thinking of tradition, or, perhaps better, of the truth of the gospel. It is only after the Reformation, Enlightenment and French Revolution that Hegel’s reading of the gospel becomes possible, and so he sees the emergence of that history as part of the unfolding of the truth of the gospel, precisely because the gospel contributed to these very events. Specifically, Hegel’s reading of Jesus’ life and death as divine valorisation of the individual as such is possible only after the emergence of the concept (and existence) of the individual after Descartes and Hobbes. It is this historicism that forms the basis of Shanks’ claim that

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<sup>43</sup> WIT, 139, 142.

<sup>44</sup> FIH, 131-2.

<sup>45</sup> See the comments on Bonhoeffer, CSCR 84-7; also CSCR, 3-6; HPT, 1-4, 186-8.

<sup>46</sup> See the critique of Nietzsche in this regard in FIH, 26-7, and the whole argument of TOC.

<sup>47</sup> AR, 30-1.

<sup>48</sup> C.f. AR, 51.

<sup>49</sup> HPT, 88; c.f. CSCR 21-67.

<sup>50</sup> HPT, 107.



the gospel will ‘not yet be true’ until the church sets aside serious liturgical time for corporate repentance for its anti-Semitism.<sup>51</sup>

Fifth, as should be clear by now, the emphasis on free-thinking notwithstanding, Shanks’ project is by no means intellectually elitist. This is simply because being free-thinking is being open to shakiness, which is a question of will not of ability.<sup>52</sup> The *articulation* of shakiness is a question of ability to some extent, but that is secondary in importance to being open to the challenge of shakiness. Hence Shanks’ repeated calls for a catholic community of intellectuals with non-intellectuals in equality and genuine reciprocity. It could, however, be questioned whether this is a version of faith only for intellectuals or at least best suited to them. Can those with little education really be expected to cultivate the fruits of shakiness? Can those new to the faith be immediately shaken? These are important questions. One suspects that Shanks’ pastoral experience would make him aware of the difficulties here. One could apply Hegel’s stress on the unfolding of the implications of ideas over time in culture and history to the individual level. Perhaps initially people need more straightforward teaching, and only later can these ideas then begin to be questioned. This would be in line with the ancient idea of spiritual progress as well as the more recent idea of stages of faith (Fowler). Yet it should not be overlooked that even if a person feels confident about their beliefs, it is still important to be able to hear the voice of others, respond to their perspective, and work in solidarity with them. This is a moral quality that is not restricted to intellectuals.

Two other concerns are perhaps worth addressing. Firstly, how does Shanks’ insistence on the various metaphysical options compatible with faith fit with the notion of orthodoxy? It is of course true that Christianity exists in multiple forms, in multiple cultures, in multiple philosophical frameworks. It is in that sense syncretistic and that is a great strength. In this situation, continual arguments are what keeps Christianity alive and progressing. The difficulty of orthodoxy is thus not unique to Shanks. The composition of the creeds can be seen as already recognising that mere repetition of verbal formulae is not sufficient to establish orthodoxy. This seems oxymoronic, if not contradictory, but the realisation that non-biblical terms (such as *homoousios*) were needed to explicate what had hitherto been taken for granted should give pause for thought. Nevertheless, Shanks’ major emphasis on dialogue, debate, the possibility of various beliefs, leaves one wondering where lines may be drawn, if at all. An example of where this becomes important is when the church feels it needs to speak for or against an issue. Does a debate with the church undermine its voice? Shanks would see the role of the church as contributing to public debate and the quality of public debate, in terms of substance and atmosphere, the way in which debate is carried out. And in fact, debate does occur within churches, so the attempt to suppress it or get around it is not just doomed but mistaken.

### *Concluding Remarks*

In this last section, Shanks’ critique of Anselm can point to some broader issues for theology. Shanks regards Anselm’s atonement theory in *Cur Deus Homo?* as ‘mythical’. This means it disregards, or insufficiently attends to, history. Now Anselm does in fact deliberately rule out history in his exploration of the atonement because he wants to show that even if the

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<sup>51</sup> TOC, 203.

<sup>52</sup> TOC, 16.

incarnation had not happened we could deduce that it would have to happen because it is logically necessary. Anselm probably does not say this in order to discard or denigrate the historical revelation in Christ but to strengthen its plausibility. In order to focus on the role of history in philosophy and theology in Hegel and Anselm let us leave to one side the various interpretations of Anselm's argument.

Note that Anselm is working within a neo-Platonic framework in which divine ideas take the place of the forms. In this way of thinking true insight involves seeing beyond the empirical world to what eternally and unchangingly is the case, as created by God. The way of attaining such insight is through prayer and meditation on nature and the scriptures. Skip forward six hundred years and Kant says something a little similar: true and *certain* knowledge is available if we limit our claims to knowledge to sensory experience that is categorized by our minds. With Hegel we reach a fundamentally different view of what philosophy and knowledge – and, by extension, theology – are. Hegel shows that Kant's allegedly immutable and timeless categories are in fact the product of a particular history and that this applies not just to Kant's philosophy but to *all* knowledge. The best way of understanding an idea, then, and the best way of deciding whether it is true, is to construct a history of the idea's coming to be and what sort of work it has done in different situations. Hegel calls this a 'phenomenology'.

To conclude, I think this is important for a few reasons. First, for the bulk of Christian history, let's say about three quarters of it, theology was done within this neo-Platonic world. After modernity, however, it is extremely difficult to think in this way, though perhaps not impossible. John Milbank, for example, has tried to revive the Platonic heritage of Christianity in a way that takes into account the philosophical challenges and changes of modernity and postmodernity. Now one could argue that neo-Platonism is best suited to help us understand and express the nature of the world (roughly speaking, neo-Platonism is true), in which case the fact that most contemporary people find it difficult to believe and to think in its categories is unfortunate. And in which case, modern Christianity is in rather a pickle and we need a more robust return to the tradition. Or one could argue that there are other ways to think about the world that are just as adequate, that come more naturally to us now, and that, since Christianity can be expressed in more than one philosophical system (or culture, if you prefer), we should expend our efforts in transposing traditional theology into a new philosophical key. In which case we should be paying more attention to Shanks than Milbank. There are clearly problems either way, but what exists in common is the difference, one could even say gap, between various pre-modern and medieval ways of thinking on the one hand and the modern (in which I include postmodern) ways on the other. This gap exists not only as a result of the history of ideas but because of social, political and economic changes. The emergence of the scientific method and worldview in place of the 'chain of being' idea; the primacy given to will over intellect; the rise of the individuality as a social experience and value; capitalism; urbanization; pluralism; globalization; the nation-state; secularization; information technology; and so on. These changes are unlikely to be undone; they are now our realities. Yet what if, as many argue, it is not just that our ideas change as society changes but that they *ought* to change. In that case we have a duty to re-cast traditional ideas in new forms. Practitioners instinctively know this, I suspect, and, as Hegel

pointed out, the task of philosophy (and, we could add, theology) is to catch up with practice.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> I would like to thank participants in the Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, postgraduate seminar on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2012 for their helpful questions and comments on an earlier draft of this paper.