

Preface

To be invited to give the thirty-fourth series of Didsbury Lectures at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester in October 2012 was for me a great privilege and delight. The institution of the lecture series in 1979 was at the suggestion of my colleague, Dr Kent Brower, with the advice of his mentor, Prof. F. F. Bruce, who gave the first series. It was then my duty as dean of the college to invite and host the first ten lecturers, including my own former professor, T. F. Torrance. Later teachers of mine included in the series were Prof. J. B. Torrance and Prof. David F. Wright.

Our original intention was to call the series the Frame Lectures, to commemorate the founder of the college, Dr George Frame, but he refused to have any memorials. Had we waited a short time, he would not have been able to stop us! Instead however, since the Church of the Nazarene stands in the Wesleyan tradition, and is now a member of the World Methodist Council, we decided to call the series the “Didsbury Lectures” to commemorate the former Methodist Didsbury College, famous in its day for the Greek scholar, J. H. Moulton, and the theologian, William Burt Pope. Five of the first ten Didsbury lecturers were Methodists.

In keeping with that heritage, I have addressed in these lectures the concern of the Wesleys and their heirs with Christian holiness, and particularly that difficult doctrine of Christian “perfection” which Wesley inherited from the church Fathers. I was in fact asked to address this topic, partly to expand and update the Collins Lectures, which I first gave in 1988 at the then Canadian Nazarene College in Winnipeg (now part of the Ambrose University College in Calgary). I was urged to publish these at that time by the president, Dr Neil Hightower, and the request has come from time to time from various quarters. The same material later formed the substance of the Rothwell Lectures at Southern Nazarene University in Oklahoma in 1995. The late Dr William Greathouse, General Superintendent Emeritus of the Church of the Nazarene, was most enthusiastic and insistent that I should publish them, and even went so far as

to reference them in their unpublished privately-circulated version in his recent commentary on Romans, completed not long before he died. I was very conscious, however, that considerable work needed to be done before publication was possible.

In the privately-circulated version, these lectures were used as class texts for students at master's level at the college and also where I now teach, at Nazarene Theological Seminary, Kansas City. They have also served as a reasonably comprehensive introduction to Christian Theology for those whose undergraduate studies were in other disciplines. I have therefore retained chapter 1 on theological method, but this covers matters that are only preliminary. Too much so-called theology gets bogged down in these epistemological issues (like Christian in the Slough of Despond!) and never gets to real theology. The original Collins Lectures form the substance of chapter 1 and chapters 6 to 8, although much has been re-written. Chapters 2 to 5—summarizing the biblical and historical background, Wesley's own doctrine, and a contemporary reformulation of that—have been added. Chapter 9 is new.

My debts are great. My grounding in the Wesleyan tradition came primarily through the preaching of Dr Sydney Martin over twenty-five years during my childhood and youth. Following studies specializing in History and Education at the University of Glasgow and some years of teaching, I undertook theological studies at New College, Edinburgh, specializing in Christian Dogmatics under Professor T. F. Torrance. I well remember his encouragement when as a new student I explained to him my interest in investigating the question of Christian "perfection." Whereas some in the Reformed tradition would have discouraged such an interest, Professor Torrance, with his deep knowledge of the Fathers, was very positive. I would love to be able to discuss this book with him now. He also strengthened the conviction, already formed from my contacts with the Reformed tradition, that theology should be about *God* and not primarily about us. He also instilled in me the vision that whatever we evangelicals say about justification and sanctification (our heritage from the Reformation and the Evangelical revival), must be grounded in the patristic "dogma" and therefore be christocentric, and thus trinitarian. It was under his influence that I pursued my own doctoral studies in the Fathers. He also illuminated the obvious truth (obvious once you have seen it!) that Christian theologians ought not to be engaged in the task of perpetuating division within the church of Christ. Certainly, no tradition should simply abandon its insights, but the task of theology, in order "that they all may be

one,” is (as he would say) to “cut behind” our disagreements to the central core of Christian belief that “Jesus Christ is Lord” to see whether we could not resolve our differences. That is the spirit in which I approached these lectures: not to perpetuate a Wesleyan “distinctive” or to glory in our being “different” from others, but to persuade all Christians that this is the heritage of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

My more immediate thanks are due to Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, for the invitation to give the lectures; to my students over more than three decades in both Manchester and Kansas City for their thought-provoking questions; to my colleague, Dr David Rainey, for reading these chapters and for constructive and always convivial conversation; and to Chris Foster for his work in putting the book into the publisher’s required house-style. As always, my thanks are due to my wife, Elaine, without whose support and encouragement (not to mention her proof-reading) this project would never have been completed.

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