

epistemological extremes of subjectivism and objectivism which, although bequeathed by classical philosophy, had been especially polarized since the Enlightenment.\* For Polanyi faith and knowledge are not to be set in opposition, even in the physical sciences, but are properly combined in a concept of *personal* knowledge. This new epistemology\* is established by reference to a wide range of examples and arguments, and helps to unify a spectrum of knowledge from science to the arts. Although he did not extend his arguments substantially into the domain of theology, he recognized the validity of this enterprise, in which theologians, most notably T. F. Torrance,\* have been engaged.

After *Personal Knowledge*, besides refining his epistemological ideas in *The Tacit Dimension* (London, 1967), he began to explore corresponding questions of ontology: in what ways does the actual structure of reality affect our search for an understanding of it? His last writings, summarized in *Meaning* (Chicago, 1975), present a stratified world which human beings, with their mental activity, indwell, personally and objectively. Polanyi's analysis of the multi-levelled structure of reality may throw interesting light upon various aspects of the relationship between divine and human activity in the world.

#### Bibliography

For a general introduction to Polanyi's thought, see R. Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery* (Oxford, 1977). For its application to theology, see T. F. Torrance (ed.), *Belief in Science and in Christian Life* (Edinburgh, 1980); articles by R. L. Hall *et al.* in *Zygon*, 17 (1982), pp. 3-87; J. V. Apczynski, *Doers of the Word: Toward a Foundational Theology Based on the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (Chico, CA, 1982).

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**POLITICAL THEOLOGY** is a term which has had a wide range of meanings in the history of religions, reflecting different attempts to relate a religion to the political character of the society in which it exists. Its present prominence dates from the mid-1960s when the West German Roman Catholic theologian, Johann Baptist Metz,\* revived the term and later referred to 'the new political theology'. Many have followed his lead, some

using the term in a broader sense for a group of related theological emphases.

#### Older forms of political theology

Augustine\* drew on Stoic\* use in order to criticize the 'civil theology' of earlier, official Roman civic religious cults which legitimated and sanctified the political system (see his *City of God* 6:5-12). However, the same tendency had already entered the Christian church, notably in the 'court theology' of Eusebius\* with its adulation of Constantine and then in the 'Christian Empire' of Theodosius. There are traces of it even in the earlier part of the *City of God*, but Augustine was moving to the apolitical reaction of its later books which gave rise to the Augustinian tradition of a spiritual, inner kingdom separate from politics. This was continued in Luther's\* doctrine of the two kingdoms. But the political theology of civil religion\* was equally persistent and approved of by Machiavelli and Hobbes. It reached full formal expression in the 'political theology' of Carl Schmitt with its eulogy of German nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s which encouraged the 'German Christians' in their legitimizing of Hitler. At the time this was condemned as 'political monotheism' by Eric Peterson - an abuse of theology to justify political injustice (see the development of this critique by Jürgen Moltmann,\* in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God* (London, 1981), pp. 192-200).

#### The new political theology of J. B. Metz

According to Metz not only 'political monotheism' but also most recent theology stands in need of correction. In the case of civil theology a false equation of the kingdom with a political system left the church open to the Enlightenment\* tradition, especially through Hegel\* and Marx,\* which criticized it for being merely the ideological superstructure of particular social patterns and power structures. Much modern theology, on the other hand, has an extreme privatizing tendency, stressing the individual, the transcendental and the existential, dismissing the social aspects of life as secondary, viewing charity as a private virtue, and centring religion on the 'I-Thou' relationship (see Buber\*) with faith reduced to 'the timeless decision of the person'. This, of course, does have definite political implications, leaving the status quo unquestioned or tacitly approved. Thus, for

Metz, 'the deprivatizing of theology is the primary critical task of political theology' (*Theology of the World*, London, 1969, p. 110). This is not to deny the NT message to the individual. In fact, Metz believes that the first 'critical liberating function' of the church is to protect the individual 'from being considered exclusively as matter and means for the building of a completely rationalized technological future' (p. 118). However, political theology emphasizes that all the NT promises of the kingdom,\* e.g. freedom, peace, justice, reconciliation, 'cannot be made radically private affairs . . . cannot be entirely interiorized and spiritualized as corresponding to the individual's longing for freedom and peace. They make the individual free with regard to the political society around him, in the sense of committing him to it in a free critique of it' (art. on 'Political Theology' in *SM*, New York, 1970, vol. 5, p. 36). In several of his writings Metz makes the important general statement: 'the so-called hermeneutical problem of theology was not really a problem of the relationship between systematic and historical theology or between dogma and history, but rather a problem of the relationship between theory and praxis\* or between the understanding of faith and social praxis' (1969, p. 112; 1970, pp. 35-36; and *Faith in History and Society*, London, 1980, p. 52). It should be agreed that Scripture requires this concern, with its witness to Jesus in moral conflict with the religious and political leaders of his society, his cross set up in public, and his church called, as bearer of his eschatological message, to similar encounters with the political world. The church is an institution within society with a series of critical, liberating tasks: first, concern for the individual, especially the person who is a victim of impersonal technology devoted to bettering the future of the rich; secondly, a message that the future depends on God; thirdly, love expressed in social terms by bringing justice and peace to all, even in extreme situations to the extent of calling for revolutionary change for the sake of the victims of present systems; and fourthly, a changed view of itself which accepts internal criticism of its leadership (a problem for the Roman Catholic Church especially), welcomes truth from outside and is prepared to oppose the political powers that be.

### Political theologies

Metz forms part of a widespread trend in contemporary theology with several features in common: a. a rejection of the earlier concentration on denominational orthodoxy in confessional theology; b. an opposition to the preoccupation with personal decision in existential theology; c. a concern with how beliefs actually affect and are affected by what is, or is not, done to change society, i.e. with praxis, a term deriving from Marx's concept or critique which asserts the interdependence of theory and practice as they relate to the changing of society, advocating 'orthopraxis', a word popularized by Metz, to emphasize that all good theology has to be action-oriented; d. a stress on the essentially *public* nature of the gospel, so that Christianity is not a private matter but involves a new community which challenges all societal structures; e. a critical opposition to most present societies and to institutionalization of the church, in the sense used by the social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, i.e. one which does not pretend to be neutral or value-free but which is open to future change and committed to encouraging more just social relationships; f. a shared conviction that *politics* has a mediating role in good theology, in that a connecting link which affects the expression of Christian faith is made by involvement in politics.

A wide range of theologians include themselves in the above grouping, not only all black,\* liberation,\* theology of revolution,\* most African,\* and Asian,\* many Indian\* and feminist\* writers, but also people working on fundamental theology,\* the theology of secularization,\* spirituality,\* poverty\* and Marxism and Christianity.\* (See the useful discussions in *The Militant Gospel* by Alfredo Fierro, London, 1977, and Alistair Kee's *Reader in Political Theology*, London, 1974, and *Scope of Political Theology*, London, 1978.) Significant recent books include *Agenda for Prophets: Towards a Political Theology for Britain*, ed. Rex Ambler and David Haslam (London, 1980), Sri Lankan theologian Tissa Balasuryia's *Planetary Theology* (London, 1984), *The True Church of the Poor* by Jon Sobrino from El Salvador (London, 1985), and *Black and Reformed*, by the South African Christian leader Alan Boesak (New York, 1985), related to which

is *The Kairos Document* (London, 1985), an important theological comment by Christians involved in active resistance to apartheid. They distinguish a valid 'prophetic theology' from 'state theology', their term for civic theology (see above), and from 'church theology', which resembles the 'bourgeois' theology criticized by Metz (see *The Emergent Church*, London, 1981, and above).

### Responses

The reaction from 'bourgeois' theology has ranged from cautious agreement, e.g. Peter Hinchliff in *Holiness and Politics* (London, 1982), through outright condemnation of any 'politicization', e.g. Edward Norman in *Christianity and the World Order* (Oxford, 1979), to a revived 'political monotheism' in South African apologias for apartheid, e.g. *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* (Cape Town, 1976), or the theology of the 'new religious right', e.g. Rousas Rushdoony's *Politics of Guilt and Pity* (Nutley, NJ, 1970), or *The Kindness that Kills*, ed. Digby Anderson (London, 1984). There is a corresponding range of views among those evangelicals who are beginning to contribute to the growing discussion of political theology. Richard Mouw is generally sympathetic in *Politics and the Biblical Drama* and *When the Kings Come Marching In* (Grand Rapids MI, 1976 and 1983). Haddon Willmer's response to Norman, in *Christian Faith and Political Hopes*, by C. Elliott et al. (London, 1979), is positive while stressing the need to do justice to the nature of forgiveness. More substantial development of an evangelical political theology can be found in Orlando Costas, *Christ Outside the Gate* (New York, 1982), and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids MI, 1983).

### Conclusion

The world-wide nature of the church and of the theological enterprise at a time of a widening gap between rich and poor, with the majority of Christians and of the unevangelized being among the poor, should oblige any forward-looking theology to be political in the sense intended by Metz, yet not at the expense of leaving out the challenge to personal commitment and obedience to Jesus Christ.

See also: CIVIL RELIGION.

C.W.

**POLYTHEISM.** The belief in and worship of many gods. Earlier in the 20th century it was believed to be a stage in the evolution of religion\* from animism\* to monotheism.\* This view is now generally rejected, and polytheism is seen as the fruit of pre-scientific response to the natural world, since most of the gods are linked to some aspect of nature. Thus the sky, sun, moon, planets, earth, fire, water, animals and even plants have been considered divine, as well as identified with various characteristics of individual and social life. With the personification of natural phenomena as superhuman beings polytheism is born. The world's mythologies are the accounts of the deeds of the gods which often sink to the level of the grossest immorality. Each god has a cult, the centre of which is the god's image. This can be a human being, an animal, a statue, a tree, a fire, a phallus etc. Within polytheism one god or goddess is sometimes singled out by a particular group, and elevated to the position of supreme deity, though the existence of other gods is not denied. This is called henotheism or monolatry and some have argued that OT patriarchal religion was this type of polytheism. Generally, however, the OT condemns the image-worship of polytheism as false attempts to represent God. The NT confirms this condemnation, and Paul even identifies the Corinthian gods with demons (Rom. 1:22f.; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 10:19f.).

### Bibliography

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**POSITIVISM.** A philosophy and humanist 'religion' originating with Auguste Comte (1798-1857). Individuals, he held, and mankind in general, begin by being 'theological', ascribing events to supernatural powers; develop to a 'metaphysical' stage where they ascribe them to abstractions like