John Caird—
Theologian and Philosopher[1]

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John Henry Muirhead once said that British Idealism was from the first in essence a philosophy of religion[2]. He saw it as an appeal to the ideas of the German Post-Kantians for the purpose of defending religious belief against the many new challenges mounted to it during the second half of the nineteenth century, challenges which had rendered untenable the less critical faith of preceding generations. Muirhead's interpretation could be disputed, for it is not clear that it accurately describes the principal motivation of *all* members of the British Idealist school, but if there is truth in it, and I think that there is, nowhere is this more so than in the case of the Scottish theologian and philosopher, John Caird, for Caird's entire *oeuvre* revolved around the project of reconciling Christianity and Idealism[3].

A celebrated preacher, then innovative professor of theology and finally much respected Principal of Glasgow University, John Caird was in his time a well-known and highly regarded figure. Today however his work is almost entirely forgotten, along with that of many others in the idealist movement; such ways of thinking having passed from favour as completely as they once held dominance of the intellectual scene. Yet we run the risk of misunderstanding our history, and thus our own present, if we insist on simply turning our faces from certain eras of thought or movements of ideas and deeming them fallow or uninteresting. For that way we simply construct a history which reflects our current prejudices but never can challenge them. In this paper I shall outline the work of John Caird in an attempt to show why it deserves to be remembered, but first let me provide just a few biographical details.

John Caird was born in 1820 in Greenock, on the Firth of Clyde, the son of an engineer[4]. He was educated at Glasgow university and entered the ministry of the Church of Scotland, taking up his first appointment in 1845. He achieved early fame as a preacher, and in his second post two years later at Lady Yester's church in Edinburgh, began to draw enormous crowds. His church was full every Sunday; indeed we are told that a large proportion of the great congregation used to remain in the church between the morning and afternoon services to be sure of their places for the second sermon[5]. Suffering from the considerable stress of such fame, he moved in 1849 to a quiet post at Errol, on the Firth of Tay. It was during

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this period that he was commanded to preach before Queen Victoria. The sermon he delivered on that occasion, entitled *Religion in Common Life,* was subsequently published and very widely read[6]. But perhaps more importantly it was at Errol that he found the time for thought, and began to question the ideas of the Scottish Common Sense school in which he had been educated and to take on board the new thinking of the German Idealists. In 1857 he moved to a new church in Glasgow, but shortly after that he was persuaded by friends to apply for the post of Professor of Theology at his old University, to which he was appointed in 1863. Eleven years later he was made Principal of the University, a post which he held until his death in 1898.

He has been described as "one of the most powerful influences in that transformation of Scottish theology.., which took place during the second half of the nineteenth century".[7] A large part of that influence stems from his most important book, his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* which was published in 1880. Based on a series of lectures delivered in 1878–9, this was one of the earliest pieces of explicitly Hegelian work done in Britain, and for this reason he deserves a place alongside the other pioneers of the Idealist movement[8]. His Gifford lectures, *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity,* and three volumes of addresses and sermons were all published posthumously.

The vindication of reason

The era in which Caird wrote was one of a crisis of faith brought about by the recent advances in biblical criticism and natural science (especially the theory of evolution). For Caird the bulwark against this storm was our own capacity for reason[9]. We should neither capitulate into materialistic atheism, nor turn our backs to the onslaught in dogmatic reliance on faith and revelation, but rather use our best reasoning faculties to demonstrate how modern thought not only does not undermine, but can even be shown to support, what may be isolated as the essential underlying truths of Christianity. Our crucial aid and guarantor of success in this project was, thought Caird, Hegel's Idealism, for in so far as that philosophy assures us that what is real is rational and what is rational, real, we can be certain of success[10]. He said of his own *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion,* "I shall be satisfied, if it leads some few who are in doubt on the highest matters, to see that Christianity and Christian ideas are not contrary to reason, but rather in deepest accordance with both the intellectual and moral needs of man".[11] Yet it is to Caird's credit that he does not simply assume this fortunate harmony, but begins rather by defending himself against a number of potential criticisms of it.

In the first place it might be challenged that religion is a subject that lies altogether beyond the bounds of our limited cognitive capacities, and is hence something about which we ought to remain agnostic. God can

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only be for us the great unknown, or the 'unconditioned', to use Herbert Spencer's term, the philosopher that Caird singles out here for special criticism. Caird responds that such an attitude is simply absurd; we can not simultaneously hold that God exists and yet that we know nothing about him. If our knowledge is truly limited to the finite world, then the correct conclusion to draw concerning the infinite is that no such thing exists, or that the assertion of its existence is meaningless. The claim that we cannot conceive of anything beyond thought itself, though addressed here to Spencer, is of course a standard German Idealist criticism of Kant; something which should prepare us for what is to come.

It might next be argued that religious knowledge is more properly a matter for intuition rather than reason. Against this psychologism Caird objects that "the fact that I feel in a certain way, or find in my mind a notion or impression of which I cannot get rid, is simply an empirical fact, a thing which happens, and nothing more. It cannot be assumed without further reason that my moral and spiritual intuitions are, even for me, a revelation of infallible truth" (I 53). Moreover, he points out, it may well be that others have no such intuitions or intuitions wholly contrary to mine. In both of these points he seems quite correct.

Lastly it might be urged that the proper source of religious knowledge is not our own reason, but rather some divinely granted revelation of the truth. Caird admits the need for revelation, "a God who does not reveal Himself ceases to be God" he says, but he strongly insists that we can never under any circumstances be forced to accept what is *opposed* to reason, or that it makes any real sense to follow Leibniz and speak instead of what is *above* reason[12]. Certainly he is opposed to any naive view of faith in, for example, the Bible. "The Bible is not a book of scientific theology" he notes, arguing that much of its language "cannot be construed literally or taken as an immediate repertory of theological doctrine" (F ii 173–4) . Caird's deeper position on this whole issue is that in the end the distinction between natural and revealed religion is an untenable one—"There is no such thing as a natural religion or religion of reason distinct from revealed religion" (F i 23)—for we must not regard human nature as "a thing divided against itself" (I 64), and the true idea of revelation, that which is most ennobling both to God and to man, is of a revelation addressed to the *whole* of our spiritual nature, which includes our reason (I 61). The key note, as always in Caird's thought, is unity; man is unified and thus it is with a unified voice that God speaks to him.

The falsity of materialism

The heart of Caird's *Introduction* to *Philosophy of religion* is, what in effect amounts to, a two-step proof of the existence of God. First he attempts to prove the falsity of materialism, second to demonstrate the necessity of a religious point of view. I shall consider the first step in this

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section, the second step in the next section.

Materialism is false, argues Caird, because its starting point—the bare object or fact wholly independent of mind—is a false abstraction. For there exists nothing which does not have mind or thought as an inseparable factor of it. What we encounter in experience or observation is always relative to mind. All our organs of sense can yield is "simply isolated and transient sensations", "an endless series of fugitive impressions" (I 91).

But, of course, that is not what we actually *experience*. We experience a stable and organised world. The extra unity and organisation which gets added in to make this world is, argues Caird, the work of the mind; the self which is presupposed in all experience adds in the categories which structure and mould that experience. So far we are, of course, simply following Kant. But, Caird goes on, to speak of how things are in and of themselves apart from experience is nonsensical, (a claim we have already seen in his attack on the Spencerian Unknowable), and so we must think of mind as providing not merely the form but also the very content of our experience. "Man... creates nature", Caird concludes (S 315), and with this we leave behind the vestigial realism of the Kantian system and enter Idealism proper[13].

Caird also offers a second argument against materialism based on the inapplicability of mechanical causation to organic, and especially to mental, phenomena (I 94–110). The argument is based on his belief in the increasing degree on holism that manifests itself as one ascends the scale of being from the mechanical to the Spiritual, an increase which makes it harder as one gets higher up, to separate out the distinct causes and effects required for mechanical causation. This argument fails to convince, mainly because, although the position is one attractive to any one with such holistic sympathies, the reasoning offered here is in itself quite insufficient to bear the metaphysical weight put upon it.

The necessity of religion

The false starting point of materialism dismissed, Caird claims that "when we begin at the real beginning... [thought] is forced onwards, from step to step, by an irresistible inward necessity, and cannot stop short till it has found its goal in the sphere of universal and absolute truth, or in that Infinite Mind which is at once the beginning and the end, the source and the final explanation of all thought and being" [I 87]. This general idea of thought working out its own natural progression from one limited perspective to a higher more inclusive point of view is, of course, an Hegelian one. The details of the path followed, however, may be attributed to Caird himself. Caird uses a variety of arguments in this stage of his case, which he does not always distinguish. We can, I think, separate out three distinct patterns of reasoning.

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In his main argument, Caird urges that it belongs to the very essence of mind to find itself in that which lies beyond it, to break down the barriers between it and its objects. It cannot be shut up in its own individuality. What Caird means by this is that we are essentially knowing beings. The mind is plastic, able to take on the character of what it knows and able to know anything (I 114). But, if it is to know them, the things it knows, the natural and the social world (i.e.nature and other minds), cannot be wholly external or foreign to it (I 115). In essence this point seems to be a reiteration of the Kantian idea that the structure of the world is imposed by us, that looking at nature is, to a certain extent, like looking in a mirror (I 115). Sometimes rather than speaking of the self finding itself in its object Caird speaks in a slightly different way; he says that subject and object presuppose a unity behind them that includes them both (I 122). But the point is the same: we learn that the distinction between subject and object is neither absolute nor insurmountable, and that "to be ourselves, we must be more than ourselves" (I 116). The argument has one last step. Although the self may find itself in the objects of its knowledge, being itself finite, it cannot of course break down in this way the barrier between the finite and the infinite. But, thinks Caird, the mere fact that the growth of knowledge is an endless process is itself a revelation of the Infinite and our essential relation to it (I 117). Boundless possibility of advancement, both intellectual and moral, belongs to our very essence; the infinite world to which we aspire is to our nature no more alien than the finite world we inhabit.

In a separate argument Caird says that the very recognition of ourselves as finite points to the idea of the infinite. We must have within us the idea of absolute perfection because it is only against such a standard that we could know ourselves to be imperfect (I 118). There are, of course, strong echoes of both Plato and Descartes here. Related to this, but worth distinguishing, is an argument from the nature of knowledge. Caird argues that "Even in maintaining that the human mind is incapable of absolute knowledge the sceptic presupposes in his own mind an ideal of absolute knowledge in comparison with which human knowledge is pronounced defective. The very denial of an absolute intelligence in us could have no meaning but for a tacit appeal to its presence. An imperfect knowledge of God, in this sense, is proved by the very attempt to deny it" (I 121). Royce uses an argument very like this in his *Conception of God.* Arguably the problem with both versions of this argument as Caird presents them is that they fail to distinguish between our possession of the idea of perfection and its actual instantiation. It is to the credit of both Royce and Descartes that they see the necessity of arguing for the latter as well as the former.

In a third argument Caird goes from what he takes to be the established idealist conclusion that everything depends on *thought,* via the

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very plausible recognition that it clearly does not depend on *my* thought, to the postulation of a higher thought on which it must depend. For not only is it very clearly not my thought that makes or unmakes the world for me (I 148), but it is possible for me to think of myself as well as and alongside the world, and "In thinking myself, my own individual consciousness and an outward world of objects, I at the same time tacitly presuppose a higher, wider, more comprehensive thought or consciousness which embraces and is the unity of both" (I 149). In one form or another almost all Absolute Idealists have appealed to this line of reasoning.

Caird moves on from his own argument for the necessity of a religious point of view to consider the traditional proofs of God's existence. He argues that they are flawed, and the diagnoses which he offers of the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments are standard enough. But he goes on to claim that they retain a certain value if viewed as "expressions of that impossibility of resting in the finite" (I 125). His attempts to show this are implausible, the supposed core which he uncovers in each case being hard to relate to the detailed arguments themselves.[14] One is tempted to think here that it would have been better simply to say they were invalid, but in a way to suggest this is to misunderstand something very central in his thinking. Like his brother Edward, he demonstrates a great humility and generosity of thought, finding some truth in almost every position and rarely condemning any, and this attitude characterises and motivates his entire philosophical effort. It is, for example, the same spirit displayed here with regard to the arguments for religion that manifests itself later in his claim to have isolated the essential or fundamental ideas of religion itself.

The proper form of religious knowledge

Emphasising as he does the role of reason, it becomes necessary for Caird to address the question of the relation between philosophy and religion, and it is here perhaps that his Hegelian debt comes out most clearly. He argues that we must make a distinction between the content and the form of religious knowledge—there is only one truth, but it may be expressed in many and various forms. Religion and philosophy, he then goes on, say the same thing, they simply say it in a different way—they "agree in substance and content, but differ in form" (I 178). Religion expresses its message in a concrete and pictorial fashion, philosophy in an abstract and conceptual manner. The figurative or symbolic character of ordinary religious thought, in which spiritual ideas are represented by either material objects in space or events in time, makes it easy to grasp and gives it a power to speak directly to the emotions, rendering it suitable for the ordinary everyday consciousness. Thus Caird is able to say, for example, "The bible is not philosophy. Its glorious truths are to be

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apprehended not by the critical intellect but by the humble and loving heart" (ESR 243). However, the popular immediacy of such thought is bought at a price and it suffers from a number of problems. Literally construed, of course, it is untrue (I 178), it encourages us to substitute metaphors for real thoughts (I 181), and it can even keep us from seeing the truth. The problems of this way of thinking are especially apparent with the atonement, argues Caird (F ii 172–3, 175), and he spends time criticising some of the many misleading commercial and substitutional models that there exist of this. At a deeper level pictorial thinking is also incapable of uncovering the truth behind the contradictory appearances of the world, or of capturing the organic unity of things. Philosophical representation is free from these defects. Because more abstract, it is able to separate out the message from the medium, and to deal with notions—such as self-consciousness or unity-in-difference—that defy all sensuous representation. It is thus a truer and higher medium. In consequence, ordinary thought, in so far as it is truth-seeking, must rise beyond the merely pictorial to be recast in a higher speculative system (I 205). Indeed it is to precisely this task of rational reconstruction that Caird's entire philosophy of religion is devoted.

Like the Hegelian original which it follows, this view of the relation between philosophy and religion might be criticised as intellectualist and lacking in feeling, as an attempt to replace religion with philosophy. But Caird is, I think, less guilty of this than Hegel. He insists that philosophy does not seek to replace religion, and is in no sense a rival to it (I 42). In what sense then is philosophical theology superior to religion? Only intellectually, and while religion has an intellectual component, that is not its main, its most important, or even an essential component. Although "right views of himself and of divine and eternal things, is the most precious gift which God can bestow on the human spirit" (S 231), the real essence of religion lies in "love and loyalty to Christ" (S 24) or "the communion of the soul with God" (S 27). The philosophical theologian is thus like one who takes up a practice (say, football) and becomes extremely adept at one part of it (say, free kicks), which although present and perhaps very valuable, is not the main content or the main point of the game (you can still win matches with only a rudimentary skill at free kicks). As Caird himself puts it you don't need a theory of music to appreciate it, nor a theory of love to feel it (S 17). The superiority is in one sphere only[15]. In that sphere it is, to be sure, jealously guarded, and against those who would say that theology needs to make room for feeling, Caird objects that feeling in itself yields no knowledge at all (I 161). But overall Caird has a wider and less dismissive conception of religion than that which we find in Hegel.

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Specific religious positions

Caird thought of himself not only as a theist but as a Christian, and I now move on to consider his position with respect to a few more specific religious positions. Before I do so it is worth pointing out that Caird's general stance towards Christianity is demythologising in spirit. The miraculous and supernatural are notably absent.[16] The taking up of such an attitude seems to him just an obvious intellectual advance. "Ignorance and superstition revel in the religion of magic and mystery, and find nothing to revolt them in the ascription to their divinities of the waywardness and capriciousness of arbitrary power. But, with the advancing spiritual life of the world, men are led more and more to seek their proofs of God and of divine action, not in sudden and unaccountable marvel or capricious displays of supernatural power, but in the manifestations of wisdom and beneficence in intelligible relations and sequences" (S 72–3). But there are, of course, degrees of demythologising and perhaps it should be added that, although he subscribed to the basic Hegelian position, Caird's treatment of specific doctrines is generally more orthodox than that might first make us think[17].

The Christian View of God

In his Gifford Lectures Caird opposes both pantheism and deism, advocating instead what he calls the Christian view of God as "infinite, self-revealing Spirit or mind" (F 143). Individuality, freedom and value are all lost in pantheism, submerged in the whole[18]. Deism on the other hand traces too much to the arbitrary will of God, which in itself explains nothing. As Caird sees it, we, along with all things, participate in God as God participates in us—"the true idea of [God's] relation to the world is that of a spirit which is ever revealing and realizing itself in all things and beings, in the life of individuals, in the order of society, in the events of history and the progress of the race" (F ii 141). That this is, of course, Hegel's view is clear from the language of self- manifestation. As such it seems more pantheistic than deistic,[19] the appearance of having taken a reasonable middle path owing in large part to the extreme nature of the two alternatives presented. Certainly God is not in any sense a separate entity, but rather "Him, of whom all other life is only the partial and imperfect manifestation" (F ii 65). "God is all" we are told (F i 140)

But God is not equally manifested in everything and Caird firmly believes that some things, such as the organic and the spiritual, more truly reveal God than others, such as material (indeed it was one of his objections to pantheism that that system cannot allow for such a progressive revelation). It is a consequence of this that God is most fully to be found in our own spiritual lives, indeed he is, thinks Caird, the very ground of that life. Finite consciousness is only possible in so far as it is thought of as a fragment of wider infinite consciousness. "All spiritual

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life is of God; all spiritual knowledge and activity are due to the operation of an infinite omnipotent agent on the human spirit" (S 77); again, "all spiritual life rests upon the indwelling of the divine spirit in the human" (F ii 158). Does not this destroy our freedom or individuality? Caird argues that it does not. Indeed he urges to the contrary, that it is in the state of union with God that we most fully realise our true self (S 84). For example, says Caird, the individual creative freedom of the poet is greatest, when taken out of his dull ordinary self, he is captured and uplifted by Beauty itself (S 84). And though we speak blithely of 'ourselves' does any of us really know or understand the source from which our own actions spring?

The Trinity

Caird may well have described this as the Christian conception of God, but surely this is a notion more appropriate to the Trinity. Caird, however, is unwilling to hinge so much on something so opaque to reason. He argues that "it is scarcely conceivable that the new or distinctively Christian element should be, not light, but darkness" (F i 58).

But what was his view of the Trinity? In all his many writings, the Trinity, like other awkward supernatural elements is but little spoken of. He does not deny it, but the very act of side-lining it constitutes a statement of its own. He helps himself to the notions of God as the Father of all Spirits, as indwelling spirit, and as Christ, but the relation of these three he touches little on.

It seems that he never really found a satisfactory account of the Trinity. The general drift of his thinking was Hegelian to regard it as a figurative expression of identity-in-difference. He says in the Gifford Lectures after discussing the relation between Father and Son, "perhaps in these images of things divine, we may discern the expression, under human analogies, of that principle of unity in difference, of that oneness of elements, distinguishable but indivisible, which we have seen to be the very essence of all intelligence" (F i 79).

But the details of such an account seem to have eluded him. And the note struck at the end of one lecture was one of honest confusion and failure. He said to his pupils, "I thought. . . that I should find in the formulae of the Hegelian philosophy a solution of the high mystery of the Trinity. I feel, I am bound to confess, that I have failed to satisfy my own mind".[20]

Jesus Christ

In general Caird sees Christ far more as a present reality than as an historical figure. He conceives of him as a living spirit indwelling in individual Christians, in the Church, and in humanity at large; a spirit manifested in our achievements and progress, even in the natural world

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itself, and in our own communion with and response to these things. He says "the essence of the life of Christ is no more a thing of the past than the being and life of God is a thing of the past, or of any particular time or place. It is rather that eternal life which is for ever realizing itself in the spirit and life of humanity" (F ii 96, see also 94, 98, 247–8, ESR 99). Emphasising this conception of Christ, far more 'visible' and immediate than any historical figure, if it does not dismiss the historical question, certainly blunts its sense of urgency. But Caird does consider that question. His overall attitude is to down-play the supernatural elements of Christ's life. Christ's fundamental significance, for Caird, is as an example, both ethical and metaphysical. His great role is to provide, as one commentator has put it, "an empirical anchor to what is otherwise a mere abstract or law".[22]

In the first place Christ embodies the moral law for which God stands. In this respect Caird argues that "the events of the life of Christ are for the Christian consciousness the outward representation of a spiritual content" (I 170) . He is for us a perfect concrete example of our moral ideal, and as such his life provides us with an empirical handle on to what would otherwise be a wholly abstract rule or standard. Transformed from a cold impersonal principle into a living human individual, whom we may love and follow, God's power to bring about our moral and spiritual growth is vastly increased (F ii 84–5).

In addition to his life, Christ's being itself may also be thought of as an example. In this case the principle illustrated is a metaphysical one. Caird insists that the doctrine of the incarnation must not be thought of as something inscrutable to reason (F ii 100). He argues (as we have seen above) that union with God belongs to the very essence of humanity, it is the spring of our conscious being. Such union may be realised, by being recognised, to a greater or lesser extent, its ultimate consummation taking the form of "a spiritual life in which the very mind and will of God become identified with our own, in which it is God's thoughts our minds think, God's will that worketh in us, the very life of God in which we participate" (F ii 167). A complete full and perfect union like this between God and man is, even for the most holy of people, a very distant ideal, and only once in history, viz in life of Jesus Christ, has it ever occurred, thinks Caird[23]. Jesus thus expresses, under the form of time, the fundamental principle of the union of human and divine (F ii 102). He is an example of the higher metaphysical life that lies latent within us all, revealing to us our essential affinity with the divine. Caird does not intend to deny the uniqueness of the incarnation in Christ, and what is realized in full in Christ is realized only very imperfectly in our lives. But it is crucial that this is a difference of degree not kind, for however unique the union between God and man in the special case of Christ, Caird insists that "it must yet be a union of which by its very structure and essence humanity is

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capable" (F ii 159).

Behind the mistaken metaphorical pictures of the atonement, there lies, thinks Caird, an important truth. The elements of the atonement tell us that somehow God suffers because of our sins and that somehow we benefit from this. This invites two questions. Firstly, how could a perfect person suffer for sin that is not even his? Caird suggests that we can make sense of this if we think of it as analogous to the case of an upright and loving father suffering the disgrace into which his own family has fallen. "Would he not be stung by an anguish, a borrowed humiliation, as bitter as if the sin had been his own?" (F ii 221). Secondly, we must ask, how could we benefit from *his* suffering, for guilt and merit are not transferable? The answer, argues Caird, is that in so far as we are brought into union with God, the distinction between who pays and who benefits is collapsed. "It is not that the merit of the perfect righteousness and atoning sacrifice and death of Christ is, in some incomprehensible way, ascribed to us; but there is a profound sense in which they become actually our own—His sorrow our sorrow, His sacrifice our sacrifice, His perfect life, in all its ideal beauty and elevation, the very life we live" (F ii 226). It is worth noting in this whole discussion of the atonement that Caird disregards all supernatural elements. He says nothing of the cross and the resurrection events, which are for most Christians the essential vehicles of that atonement[24].

Other religions

Caird's views on the relationship between Christianity and other religions are worthy of note, in that they were in several respects much ahead of their time. We have already seen that dogma is not, for Caird, the defining essence of religion, and he was in no doubt that heaven includes places for heathens "beyond the pale of Christian civilisation" as well as those in Christian lands "who have struggled for light but failed to find it" (S 233). We have also seen how his Hegelian contrast between the form and content of religion allows for the possibility of differing representations of the same truth. In the final chapter of his *Introduction to Philosophy of Religion* he argues that all of the world's religions can be seen as differing attempts to express the same truth, "as the unconscious effort of the human spirit in various forms to express that elevation above ourselves and the world, that aspiration after and rest in an infinite unity of thought and being, in which the essence of religion has been shown to lie" (I 312). His religious pluralism does not, however, regard all religions as on a par. We have already seen how, according to Caird, our own thought moves under the force of its own internal dynamic towards a full recognition of the spiritual principle behind it, and he believed that it was possible to trace a similar path of development through the history of religion itself[25]. There was, he claimed, "a rational order" in the "apparent arbitrary

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succession" (I 313) of their histories, a continuous growth of understanding and spiritual awareness that culminates in Christianity. Christianity thus grows out of other religions, but we must not think of this as mechanical process, or of Christianity as but a "plagiarism" from other sources, a "natural outgrowth of heathen and Jewish thought" (I 340). Rather, argues Caird, this growth should be thought of as involving a new spiritual element that develops the ground which has been prepared[26].

Immortality

Caird offers three arguments for immortality. The first is simple enough and in effect no more than a corollary of his general position. He argues that the divine mind must be considered not only as infinite but also as something eternal, in the sense of being outside of time rather than simply possessing endless duration (F ii 258–9). But we have already seen that human minds, though finite, partake essentially of the nature of the divine mind. He infers that in so far as this occurs they too must be regarded as eternal.

Caird's second argument for immortality is based on the disproportion between what he describes as the 'greatness' of man's spiritual nature and the contrastingly brief duration and limited needs of his present life. What Caird means is that we have in us the capacity to develop knowledge and goodness without limit (F ii 260–1, ESR 33), but that this would be a waste if we were not immortal. As he expresses it, this is a weak argument, for he proves neither that it is 'more expensive' to produce a creature with unlimited capacity than one with limited capacity, nor that such a 'waste' could not occur. But it would seem from what Caird says later on that the argument in fact hinges more on the notion of an undeceiving that an economising God. For how do we know there is no such waste? Only, Caird admits, with the eyes of a prior faith in God. Otherwise "the hopes and aspirations it encourages us to cherish [would be] but an elaborate and cruel deception" (F ii 296).

Both of the previous arguments are in a way quite orthodox, but it is also possible to find in Caird a third argument for a rather more demythologised immortality that is neither personal nor timeless. Both in the Gifford Lectures and in one of his University Sermons, he considers the idea of Corporate Immortality. This is the idea that each generation leaves its legacy to the next and that in so far as we do we may be thought to live on in the progress of the race itself. He argues that Christianity encourages us to expect as the destiny of our race a time when the whole of humanity shall be permeated through and through with the spirit of Christ, as each individual fully participates in the moral and spiritual elevation of God. But what greater ambition could we have than to contribute towards this ultimate goal. Caird had a very strong sense of

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progress—"the history of human knowledge is a history, on the whole, of a continuous and ever accelerating-progress" (UA 32)—and of our intellectual and moral indebtedness to the past—"that any of us attains to a high measure of intellectual and moral advancement and not merely to a stunted and arrested inward growth, is due to this, that we were born amidst the better influences of the present rather than under the feeble light and in the depressing moral atmosphere of an earlier time" (S 381). If it be objected that the continuation of one's higher values in the life of future generations is not really personal immortality, Caird admits it. But, he goes on, the Christian lives and works not for himself but for others, his dearest wish being for the redemption of the world from evil and the creation of heaven on earth. And that is precisely what this is (S 192, cf. 389f). If it be objected that this state need not in any sense be thought of as timeless, Caird admits that too. Purify and ennoble the hearts of men, he says, and heaven could take place here and now. He claims that "The eternal world is not a world beyond time and the grave. It embraces time, it is ready to realize itself under all forms of temporal things" (S 193).

Caird's influence in his day was very great indeed. At a time when the legitimacy of scientific theology itself as a discipline was challenged, he took the Hegelian philosophy of religion and presented it to a generation of theologians creating the conceptual space for them, using its tools and basic principles, to work out their own positions. We thus find many of the basic patterns he first laid out at work in subsequent idealist philosophies of religion, such as those of J.R.Illingworth, C.C.J.Webb, W.R.Sorley, A.E.Taylor and Henry Jones. This direct influence came to an end with the First World War. Arguably, however, Caird's greatest contribution was not his detailed theology—that was an exploratory evolving creation, and no one followed it in detail any more than he had followed Hegel in detail—but rather the spirit of his thought, and that influence was longer-lived. He stood for a faith in the power of the human intellect and a freedom of thought from the shackles of orthodoxy, that together emboldened him to think his way out of theological difficulty. He kept open the possibilities of theological thought and in this way helped theology as an intellectual discipline to survive the crisis of doubt which beset it. This was his lasting legacy, and this I think is the reason why we should read him today. He stands for a wider conception of the philosophy of religion and a more generous conception of what is essential in religion than dominate even today, but if we can read him in his own terms—and there seems little worth simply in pointing out that he is not a wholly orthodox thinker—the horizons of our thinking can only be expanded.

1 I use the following abbreviations to works by Caird in this paper: I = *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion;* F = *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (two vols.); UA = *University Addresses;* US =*University Sermons;* ESR = *Essays for Sunday Reading.*

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2 Muirhead, p.197

3 "Christianity and Idealism were the two poles of my brother's thinking, and the latter seemed to him the necessary means for interpreting the former" wrote his brother Edward (E.Caird, 'Memoir', p.cxli).

4 Details of Caird's life may be found in E.Caird (1899), Jones (1898) and Warr (1926).

5 Warr, p.101.

6 *Religion in common life,* Edinburgh: William Blackwood & sons, 1855. Some more of Caird's early sermons were published in his *Sermons,* Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1858.

7 Cheyne, 1993, p.46.

8 Muirhead said that Caird's book "marked an epoch in religious thought" (p.197 note), a phrase reminiscent of that which he used to describe the significance of Bradley's *Ethical Studies* (p.228)

9 He had the same faith in reason as the salvation of philosophy also. Rejecting the response of the Common Sense school to the problem of scepticism, he argued, "If you begin with reason and criticism you must go on with them.., the wounds of reason can only be healed by reason" (UA 189).

10 Caird's is, it should be noted, quite a generous sense of reason. It is opposed primarily to intuition, faith, feeling and common sense, and although it is also opposed to mere sensationalism, it would include the workings of natural science.

11 E.Caird, p.cxxxi.

12 To the former he says "To try to convince me that I ought to distrust my natural reason and believe things that revolt it, involves the same practical paralogism as the attempt to prove to an insane man that he is insane" (I 64). While to the second he says "Nothing that is absolutely inscrutable to reason can be made known to faith. It is only because the content of a revelation is implicitly rational that it can possess any self-evidencing power, or exert any moral influence over the human spirit" (I 73).

13 This result refutes as circular the materialist's attempt to explain mind in terms of matter, since his basic terms already presuppose mind. In this point Caird is following closely Green's criticism of Hume, as he also does in regarding Hume's scepticism as "the *reductio ad absurdum* of the sensationalist philosophy" (UA 181–2).

14 For instance, the true meaning of the ontological argument is said to be that "as spiritual beings our whole conscious life is based on a universal self-consciousness, an Absolute Spiritual Life, which is not a mere subjective notion or conception, but which carries with it the proof of its necessary existence or reality" (I 150).

15 For this reason it seems a little unfair to say, with Sell (1987, p.80), that there is "a strongly gnostic suggestion" in the idea that "what is revealed to philosophers is superior to what is revealed to babes". The superiority is limited to *a given sphere only,* and this surely all theologians must hold—for unless one considers theology to be in at least some respect superior to common sense, why study it at all?

16 Just by way of an example of this, he speaks, without apology or comment, of the revelation of St Paul as "that hour when the consciousness of a vocation to Christ's service came upon him with a vividness which lent to it the character of a immediate call from heaven" (S 363–4).

17 Sell p.65. However, there seems no justification to infer from this fact, as Sell

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does, that "at certain crucial points his metaphysics is at war with his theology".

18 Caird repeats this attack on Spinoza's pantheism in his *Spinoza* (Edinburgh: William Blackwoods & sons, 1888).

19 Although as both Sell (1987 p.82) and Long (1989 p.374) note, panentheism is probably a better designation here.

20 Warr.p. 184. However, not everyone has shared my negative assessment of the value of Caird's discussion in his Gifford Lectures. J.S. Mackenzie described it as "Probably the best interpretation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in recent times" (*Elements of Constructive Philosophy*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1917).

21 Certainly it would have been Caird's response to the charge (Sell 1987 p.88) that "his gospel was inadequately rooted in the life and work of Christ". Indeed, it is interesting to note that Cheyne cites concentration on the person of Jesus Christ as one of the defining features of Caird's thought (1993, p.48) . Caird himself argues that it was necessary that Christ's corporeal presence be removed to make way for "a nearer, deeper, more blessed divine presence" (ESR p.50).

22 Long, 1989, p.374.

23 It is precisely this supreme nature of Christ's incarnation which allows us to challenge the claim (Sell p.86) that Caird's "notion of revelation as not once-for-all given, but developing, cannot but threaten the idea of the finality of Christ". The development that occurs is all the development of this ultimate revelation.

24 Sell (1987 p.85) argues that Caird's doctrine of the unity between God and man, as the 'natural' state of things, makes the Cross-Resurrection event appear somewhat redundant. There is some justice in this, but it is not quite right to say as he does that for Caird "our union with God is there irrespective of it [the atonement]", for as Caird sees it the atonement cannot be understood except by reference *to* that unity.

25 Caird offers some details of this in his chapter. It should also be noted that he contributed an article "The Religions of India: The Vedic Period — Brahmanism" to *Faiths of the World* (Edinburgh: undated) pp.1–36. But by far the greatest work in this field was done by his brother Edward in his two volumes of Gifford Lectures, *The Evolution of Religion* (Glasgow: James McLehose, 1893) and *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers* (Glasgow: James McLehose, 1904).

26 In this he seems slightly at odds with his brother Edward, who very often stresses that the evolution brings in no new elements but merely develops what is latent within. This may however be but a difference of emphasis.

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Justice, Peace and Dominicans 1216–1999: V – The New World: Bartolomé de las Casas and "the option for the poor"

Austin Smith CP[1]

Introducing the world of Las Casas

If you look in a popular atlas for the world of Las Casas—in other words, Central and South America and the West Indies—you will find it tucked away at the end. An afterthought, you might say. Our atlases very much help to shape our mental geography.

In fact the world of Las Casas covers one-sixth of the earth's total land surface and now contains over 500 million people, the vast majority of them Catholics (they account for almost half the world's Catholic population). However, still nearly half of the people in that world are illiterate, and nearly half of them are landless peasants; there is, in other words, still a huge gap between the rich and the poor. Las Casas would be broken-hearted to know that today at least some of the ugly consequences of the colonisation which began five centuries ago are still there for every discerning foreign tourist to see. But who was Las Casas?

Men like Dominic and Francis in varying ways powerfully articulated timeless questions in the lights of their times, and we call them men of vision. We must not claim too much for them, for they were in and out of their times. At the same time, we must keep them alive in our collective memory in a living historical conversation rooted in discernment and interpretation. They took hold of the past, immersed themselves in a living

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