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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an **intellectual biography** of John Caird (1820 – 1898). Caird was a minister in the Church of Scotland in the aftermath of the Disruption and at a time when religion and Christianity in particular came under increasing pressure from atheists both within the sciences and arts. Caird served as minister in four parishes before taking the Chair of Theology at Glasgow University. He went on to serve as principal of the university for twenty-five years. As a theologian, he was a disciple of both Spinoza and Hegel, though he was never concerned with the detail of their philosophical systems. Perhaps, above all, Caird was a significant figure of his day because of his oratorical skills as a preacher. He was a chaplain to the Queen, who described Caird as the *greatest* preacher she had heard. Caird remains a notable figure in the history of the Church of Scotland.

**John Caird:
an intellectual biography**

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Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

The University of Edinburgh

2012

Contents

Introduction	2
1. Biography (1820 - 1862)	4
2. Biography (1862 - 1898)	26
3. The Croall Lecture	51
4. Spinoza	84
5. The Gifford Lectures (1)	105
Natural and Revealed Religion	105
Faith and Reason	112
The Trinity	114
Pantheism and Deism	118
6. The Gifford Lectures (2)	127
Relation of God to the world	128
Origin and Nature of Evil	135
Incarnation	143
The Idea of Atonement	147
7. The Gifford Lectures (3)	151
Mind and Matter	153
The Future Life	158
The Compensation Argument	163
Conclusion	166
Bibliography	167

Introduction

This thesis is an intellectual biography of John Caird (1820 – 1898). Caird was a minister in the Church of Scotland in the aftermath of the Disruption and at a time when religion and Christianity in particular came under increasing pressure from atheists both within the sciences and arts. Caird served as minister in four parishes before taking the Chair of Theology at Glasgow University. He went on to serve as principal of the university for twenty-five years. As a theologian, he was a disciple of both Spinoza and Hegel, though he was never concerned with the detail of their philosophical systems. He sought to emphasise ‘the permanent elements in religion, and [ignored] technicalities.’¹ Perhaps, above all, Caird was a significant figure of his day because of his oratorical skills as a preacher. He was a chaplain to the Queen, who described Caird as the *greatest* preacher she had heard.

In chapters one and two, I shall offer a brief biography of Caird’s life: his early years in Greenock, his parochial service and his time at Glasgow University. In the remaining chapters, I shall present and comment upon Caird’s three published works (one posthumously): his Croall Lectures (1878 – 1879) which appeared in book form as *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1880); Spinoza (1888); and, his Gifford Lectures (1890 – 1891, 1896) which appeared in book form as *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (1899). Caird sought to subject (popular) religion to philosophical inquiry and the scrutiny of reason: nothing in religion is to be considered outside of or above reason. Every doctrine as well as the interpretation of Scripture was analysed rationally and every metaphor and piece of figurative language explored and, if found wanting, discarded.

Following in the footsteps of Cartesian philosophy, Caird’s theology is one of unity, the unity of all things. In all its forms, dualism is erroneous and our union with God is not a union of two essentially different natures but the realisation of the soul in and through the Spirit. In chapter three, I shall discuss the central importance of thought

¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1911 Vol IV 905

which Caird argued preceded all things, all matter. There could be no matter which is not thought matter. I shall go on to consider the objections which were raised against Caird's (and Hegel's) philosophy. In chapter four, I shall discuss Caird's book on Spinoza and his general sympathy towards Spinozism. Finally, I shall discuss Caird's Gifford Lectures which are an explicit application of Hegelian Idealist thought to the doctrines of Christianity.

At the outset, it may reasonably be stated that Caird was not an original thinker and neither was his philosophical theology deeply rigorous. He worked with dominant ideas rather than concerning himself with the details of a system. Throughout my research, I have struggled due to the scarcity of material. In my brief biography of Caird's life, I have relied heavily upon the biography of Charles Warr. Warr was ordained and inducted to St Paul's, Greenock in 1918, the Caird family church. His biography does not cite sources and is hyperbolic in style making discernment extremely difficult. The University of Glasgow holds a small number of items and the National Library of Scotland, including from the Blackwood archive, yielded little. Balliol Library, Oxford, where Caird's brother, Edward, was Master, similarly holds no material of any significance on Caird.

My thesis is a presentation principally of Caird's published philosophy of religion and, where it has been helpful, from his sermons.

Chapter One: Biography (1820 – 1862)

From Birth to Ordination

John Caird was born in Greenock on 15 December, 1820. His father, also John (1787 – 1838), was a partner and manager of the engineering business, Anderson, Caird & Co.,² Cartsideyke. The firm supplied steam engines for ships built on the River Clyde. John was the eldest of seven brothers, though one died in infancy. His mother, Janet (1799 – 1889), the daughter of Roderick and Isabella Young of Paisley,³ raised her large family with the help of her extended family following her husband's early death. The firm opened in 1809 as a foundry and was extended for the purpose of manufacturing machinery in 1826, employing around 200 men. From 1791 to 1829, the population of Greenock doubled from 15,000 to almost 30,000, so the Greenock of Caird's early years was a community which rapidly expanding and, for some at least, a very prosperous one.

Caird's grandfather, also John, came to Greenock from Logie in Stirlingshire and 'possessed no more than the clothes on his back and the fear of God in his heart,' according to one report.⁴ He worked as a blacksmith and, as shipping increased and trade with America opened up, there was a great deal of work to be had. In time, he went on to purchase the feu where his smithy stood and, as trade increased, so too did his profits. Caird's father, like his grandfather, was a 'deeply religious man.'⁵ He was, Warr emphasised, 'something of a reader, but....could not be persuaded to interest himself in other than religious and theological literature....Books of that order he devoured omnivorously.'⁶

² The Glasgow Herald, *Obituary*, refers to the firm as Anderson, Caird & Co. 1/8/98 In his *History of the town of Greenock*, Weir refers to the firm as Caird & Co.

³ Edward Caird in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, online edn, 2008)

Edward Caird refers to Paisley, while Warr refers to Port Glasgow. Quoting an unknown source, Warr describes Janet as 'the most even-natured, placid and contented spirit possible.'

⁴ Charles Warr, *Principal Caird*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1926), 13

⁵ Edward Caird in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*

⁶ Warr 22f.

Devoted to his family, Caird's father 'walked through life dominated by an austere Calvinism, and directing his every act and purpose with a stern acknowledgement of the august sovereignty of the living God.'⁷ There is no indication that Caird was anything other than accepting of his family's religion.

Despite the relative privilege Caird enjoyed and the wealth brought to the town by engineering and other firms, Greenock was marred by a lack of culture and poverty. In his submission to the Chadwick Report (1842) on public health and sanitary conditions in Greenock, a local doctor wrote in graphic terms of the unpleasantness in which the poor of Greenock lived. Disease, such as typhoid, was common. Dr Lawrie wrote, 'The people seem so familiarised with this unseemly state of things, and so lost to all sense of propriety, that it is a matter of no small difficulty, in some of the back streets, to make your way through them without being polluted by filth.'⁸

Caird was educated at the Grammar School of Greenock, an institution established around the middle of the eighteenth century. He came under the inspirational influence of James Lockhart Brown, Master of the school. Brown was recognised by the University of Glasgow with a Doctorate of Laws. He 'taught them well...grounded them in the classics, knocked into them the elements of mathematics...[and] led or herded them into the fields of English literature.'⁹ At the age of 15 and at his father's request, Caird was withdrawn from school in order to start work in his father's office. For 18 months, Caird gained experience in several departments of the firm. In 1837, Caird wrote to his father requesting that he be sent to the University of Glasgow to study mathematics and other subjects for one year. This, Caird suggested, would enable him to be a better manager in the firm. His father agreed. In Session 1837/38, Caird attended the Mathematical and Logic classes and took prizes in both subjects. With pride and not a little parental bias, Caird's father remarked of his son, 'John was worth any two of his assistants.'¹⁰

⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸ Lawrie, W L in *Scotland: The Autobiography* (ed Goring, R) (London: Penguin Group 2008) 226

⁹ Warr, 35

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xi

Caird's father died suddenly in September, 1838. This led to the closure of the firm and Caird's parting with the engineering business. For a few months, he worked with his uncle, James Caird, in the family chain-making company but, tragically, James also died and the business was sold. Caird was offered a management post in a mill in Greenock, but he decided to return to university. Edward wrote:

Early religious impressions, which were deepened by the deaths of his Father and uncle, led him to look to the Church as the profession which he would prefer to all others....He had already shown some indications of that power of public speaking which was his most prominent gift.¹¹

Caird was shy, potentially very shy, and yet he possessed a magnificent gift of public oratory. Caird's father died when John was 18 years old.

Once he was sure that he had the financial means to do so, Caird decided to pursue his studies at the University of Glasgow. From 1840 to 1845, the years immediately surrounding the Disruption, Caird 'threw his whole energy into study.'¹² He gained prizes for poetical composition and an essay on 'Secondary Punishments' (having visited a number of prisons to verify his facts.) 'He stood first in the classes of Moral and Natural Philosophy, and in all the Divinity and Ecclesiastical History classes.'¹³ Caird also distinguished himself in Latin and Hebrew.

The deaths of father and uncle cast a shadow over Caird for a number of years and their full impact would not be realised for a decade. Caird's upbringing together with the piety of his family sowed the seeds of a calling.¹⁴ Though he made good friends during his years at university, intimate and lasting friendships,¹⁵ Caird suffered greatly from loneliness and, as often as he could, returned home to

¹¹ *ibid.*, xii

¹² Edward Caird, Memoir in *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* by John Caird (Glasgow: James MacLehose & Sons, 1899) xiii

¹³ *ibid.*, xiii

¹⁴ Warr wrote of the 'faint whisper of eternal things, mysterious as an echo in the twilight,' awakening in the soul of the young man. 'Irresistible voices were calling him.' 40

¹⁵ Edward Caird, Memoir, xiii Caird's friends included Duncan Weir, afterwards Professor of Hebrew at Glasgow; Archibald Watson, afterwards minister of East Parish Church of Dundee; Robert Graham, afterwards minister at Kilbarchan; and John Paisley, afterwards minister of the Parish of Garelochhead.

Greenock. 'He seems to have been in a somewhat depressed state of mind'¹⁶ throughout his student years. Writing to a friend, James Williamson of Greenock, Caird repeatedly spoke of 'the heart – and home-sickness, the inevitable depression and anxiety which have been ever the attendants of my student life.' 'Believe me, my dear friend, if I do meet with success in after life, it is dearly purchased by the racking and feverish anxieties of a student's life, by its often sad forebodings of the future, and by its many hours of loneliness and labour.'¹⁷ This sadness may be the personal sadness of bereavement, a sadness rooted in isolation and a very deep loneliness or, perhaps, a sadness at the religious turmoil in Scotland and the dismal prospects for the future and the recovery of the Church.

These were dark days for Caird and for the entire Church. The Disruption, in essence, the centuries old strife of the regnum and the sacerdotium, tore apart the Church of Scotland. Caird remained within the Established Church, though his family lost one aunt to the Free Church.¹⁸ Many of the most talented ministers of the Church 'went out' to the Free Church. Caird's Professor of Divinity was Alexander Hill, the son of the leader of the Moderates, Principal George Hill of St Andrews. Alexander had been elected to the Chair in 1840, despite the candidature of Thomas Chalmers. Warr wrote:

Alexander Hill appears to have kept his head in a time when too many were losing theirs, and piloted his students through those disastrous days with commendable calmness and dignified restraint. He spared no effort to fortify his classroom from the passions that seethed outside the College walls; but the fact that the effect of the Disruption on his roll was a 50 per cent reduction in its numbers could not but cloud the Divinity Hall with the gloom and tragedy of the great separatist movement.¹⁹

In 1845, the year that Caird graduated and was ordained to his first charge in Ayrshire, the Revd. Norman MacLeod, a young minister leaving his Ayrshire charge for Dalkeith, wrote in his journal:

It is notorious to every honest man that we have received a terrible shock

¹⁶ *ibid.*, xiv

¹⁷ *ibid.*, xiv

¹⁸ Sell, 66

¹⁹ Warr, 57

by the Secession....the best ministers, and the best portion of our people have gone....The 'moderate' congregations will soon make 'moderate' ministers. The tone will be insensibly lowered. We have many raw recruits but they are thinking more of the drawing room papers and the fiars prices than the Church. We have no heads to direct us; not one commanding mind, not one trumpet voice to speak to men's inner being and compel them to hear. There are, I doubt not, many who would do right if they knew what to do. Like some regiments during the war we have gone into battle with our full complement of men, and the slaughter has been so great that ensigns have come out as majors and field officers, with rank and uniform, but without talent or experience.²⁰

MacLeod may have over-stated the crisis but his mood reflects the mood of the clergy and, in particular, the younger clergy of which he was one, the pervading mood in the year of Caird's ordination. Caird's sadness, even depression, may well have been personal sadness aggravated by sadness at the state of the Church he loved.

Four Parishes

During the summer of 1844, Caird served as a student missionary at Ardentiny. The extension chapel (erected in 1838) was built to accommodate the parishes of Kilmun, Dunoon and Lochgoilhead, and 'to meet the spiritual needs of the summer population which the expanding steamboat service was scattering annually in increasing numbers over the Clyde coast.'²¹ Caird went to Ardentiny because the minister had been one of those who 'went out.' In 1845, Caird graduated MA and was ordained and inducted into the parish of Newton-on-Ayr on 18 September, a church which over the years became associated with distinguished preachers.²² Caird's predecessor had seceded and taken with him almost all of the congregation and all but one member of the Kirk Session. Caird quickly established a reputation as a man with remarkable pulpit gifts. Warr claims that admirers of Caird likened

²⁰ J H S Burleigh *A Church History of Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960) 377f

²¹ Warr, 73

²² Besides Caird, these preachers included John Stuart of St Andrews Church, Edinburgh; A K H Boyd; Burns of Glasgow Cathedral; Robert Wallace; and John MacLeod of Govan.

him to ‘a resurrected Chrysostom’²³ and ‘to many it seemed as if they were gazing on something supernatural, witnessing with their own eyes a phoenix rising from ashes that were cold and dead.’²⁴ However gifted he may have been in these early days, there was no noticeable drift back to the parish church by those who had previously been members of the congregation. Caird was poorly paid: he received £60 a year to be paid half-yearly and, in addition, received a grant from the Exchequer of £90 a year. On receiving his first cheque from the congregation, he took it home to his mother, who was living with him at the time, threw it on his desk and said, ‘There you are – thirty pounds! That’s what I am considered to be worth!’²⁵ Caird remained in his first charge for 18 months. He was happy to leave.

On 6th May, 1847, Caird was inducted to the parish of Lady Yester’s in Edinburgh. Caird had been unanimously elected to the post by the town council. The church building was situated on the south side of Edinburgh and was relatively hidden in a side street. It was built at the turn of the nineteenth century to replace the original structure. The church ‘was a typical specimen of that bleak and hideous architecture with which parsimonious heritors had disfigured the face of Scotland. Its dim, dowdy interior was nothing but a dreary timber-yard of pews and deep, dark galleries, glowered over by a monstrous pulpit at the end.’²⁶ During this period, public worship was shaped, even disfigured, by Puritan influence. Warr said that services of worship were devoid of taste:

The prayers – the first of which not infrequently lasted for forty minutes – were almost invariably an interminable meander over the whole field of orthodoxy from the Fall of Man to the Last Judgement, and the sermons, of at least an hour’s duration, were more often than not a repetition of the subject of the prayers on a more flamboyant and incomprehensible scale. There were few good preachers. Even judged by contemporary standards, of the sermons of that day it might be said.....that some were good, some were middling, most were bad. It was not until 1856 that the General Assembly ordered the clergy to read the Holy Scriptures during divine

²³ Warr, 77

²⁴ Ibid., 78

²⁵ Ibid., 81

²⁶ Warr, 93 Warr goes on, ‘Andrew Fairservice knew what he was talking about when he declared the dog-kennel at Osbaldistone Hall to be better than many a House of God in Scotland.....Church services had sunk to what Dr Story scathingly described as probably the baldest and rudest in Christendom.’

service, a practice which up till then was almost universally neglected.²⁷

Public worship at Lady Yester's was no different from the rest of Scotland. The charge had fallen vacant following the death of the minister, the Revd Dr Archibald Bennie, who was Dean of the Chapel Royal. Caird's appointment is undoubtedly a comment on his oratorical skills, but his ministry in this parish led to a personal crisis from which it took him years to recover. It is during this ministry that Caird's name begins to become known not just in Edinburgh but throughout Scotland. He drew crowds wherever he preached. 'His style was less chastened, and his thoughts less weighty' than they would become in later years but 'he spoke with an earnestness and vehemence, with a flow of utterance, and a vividness of illustration, which carried his hearers by storm.'²⁸ When he had the time, Caird would commit his sermon to memory and preach without notes, but the demands of parish work meant that was not always possible.

While, on occasion, Caird would become so animated by his preaching that his voice would rise too high, it seems that part of the draw and allure of Caird both as a young man and also later in life was the sound of his voice.²⁹ For Warr, however, there was something more than the voice to catch one's attention: 'It is not only his marvellous voice, his throbbing sympathy, his gestures, his thought, that enthralled his hearers; his extraordinary face, bordering frankly on the ugly, was curiously mesmeric.'³⁰ The Revd Dr Fisher of St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh said, 'Caird's was a face so striking and conspicuous that, even if you had not known who he was, you would have turned round in the street to look at him.'³¹ Caird possessed a commanding presence, a severity in his facial expression and posture, dignity, eloquence and an attractive intellect together with a voice which was flexible and had 'great compass.'³² These are laudable qualities in a leader, including a minister, and Caird was a preacher at a time in Scottish Church history when the Established

²⁷ Ibid., 97

²⁸ Edward Caird, *Memoir* xvi

²⁹ Warr states, '[Caird's giving out of the psalm is something to be remembered. That voice! Scotland had heard nothing like it.]' 99

³⁰ Ibid., 105.

³¹ Donald MacMillan *The Life of Robert Flint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), 274.

³² Ibid., xvii

Church had not long lost most of its very best preachers. It is no surprise that Caird was a success, at least initially.

It was an exciting time to be a member of Lady Yester's. Edward quotes at some length a letter which he received from the Revd Dr Macmillan of Greenock after Caird's death. Macmillan wrote:

The three years of Dr Caird's ministry in Edinburgh were among the most fruitful of his whole life. He himself, I have reason to believe, loved to look back upon that period as a time of highly quickened intellectual and spiritual life.

The letter is fulsome in its praise of Caird, perhaps too much so, and this may be due to the fact that Macmillan was serving in Greenock not long after Caird's death.

The claims made for Caird in the account reach almost messianic proportions.

Macmillan wrote:

A good steady-going congregation attended regularly the ordinary services of the church up to the time of the vacancy. But when the new preacher came, the place seemed all at once to have been changed by magic. The very external appearance of the church seemed to brighten with a sunshine of its own.

Despite this hyperbole, it is fair to say that a new, young and capable minister would inject energy and renewed interest in a worshipping community that it did not previously display. Wearing his usual black gown and bands, Caird climbed the stairs of the pulpit with 'dignified step.' He called the people to worship by reading some verses from a psalm 'in quiet and measured tones' while 'his eager, youthful face seemed shaded with thought; and his long black hair, brushed back from his forehead, lent a striking prophetic look to it.'³³ Macmillan, who had been a student at university during Caird's time at Lady Yester's, wrote of Caird's 'appropriate gestures' while preaching, 'brushing his long hair from his forehead' and pouring forth a 'succession of impassioned sentences which fairly carried you away.'³⁴ He remembered also Caird's sincerity in what he preached. 'Sensational utterances or the wiles of the actor or mob orator were quite foreign to Caird's fastidious

³³ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xxi

refinement.’³⁵ His sermons were ‘distinguished for their philosophic breadth, and their intense sympathy with all the struggles and sorrows and sins of humanity.’³⁶

The Revd Robert Herbert Story, Caird’s successor as Principal, wrote to Edward, again after Caird’s death, in equally warm terms. Like Macmillan, he was compromised by his position but, perhaps most importantly, what we hear is the regard and affection in which Caird was held. Of Caird’s three short years at Lady Yester’s, Story wrote:

I remember well my first sight of him, in Lady Yester’s: A slim, young man, pallid in complexion, with a mane of long jet-black hair, which he had a way of throwing back from his forehead in the fervour of his preaching.....a voice of singular flexibility, rich in tone, wide in compass. He began the service with an air of reverence and solemnity that arrested attention; and his prayers were marked with an order in arrangement and beauty of diction, specially noticeable in those days.³⁷

Story wrote of Caird’s sermons as ‘a work of art and exhibition of rhetorical power.’³⁸ He was easily able to hold the attention of the many students present.

Story compares Caird to Chalmers:

Chalmers, to judge by the popular accounts of him, must have been more overwhelming, more absolute in rugged power; but his rough voice had none of the musical inflexions and polished force of Caird’s, and his style had none of his literary grace and felicity. When Caird got into the full flow of his declamation, one was carried off in the tempestuous torrent, whether one would or not. The fire of the eye, the rapidity of the gestures, the resonance of the voice, the sacred passion of the orator, were not to be withstood. However dull and unemotional you might be, you felt the magnetic contagion, and were ‘taken captive of him at his will.’³⁹

The accounts offered by Macmillan and Story are too consistent not to be taken seriously. At Lady Yester’s, Caird established himself as a preacher. His call to the ministry and choice of vocation will have been confirmed in him, but he did not have to seek his troubles.

³⁵ Warr, 100.

³⁶ *ibid.*, xxii

³⁷ *ibid.*, xlviii

³⁸ Edward Caird, *Memoir* xlviii

³⁹ *Ibid.*, xlviii

In Edinburgh, Caird was preaching at a time when Calvinism continued to flourish in Scotland and in the immediate aftermath of the Disruption. His sermons were typically ethical rather than being concerned with dogma: he preached the Christian faith in its most practical aspect. Dogmas which did not seem to him to have a direct bearing on everyday life did not feature in his sermons. His 'failure' to stress or even mention Christ's atoning death or use the familiar language in the 'Scheme of Salvation' meant that he was regarded by many with suspicion. He was suspected of a doctrinal 'want.' Unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not expound 'with a revolving dreariness'⁴⁰ the clauses of the Westminster Confession. Thought to be heretical and without creed, Caird was accused of 'not preaching Christ'. Edward argues that the reverse was true: 'it might rather be said that he never preached anything else, and that the idea of the sympathetic realisation of Christ's life and death, and of Christ's union with man, was the one theme upon which all his preaching turned.'⁴¹ During his time at Lady Yester's, Caird wrote to a friend about the consolation of his faith. He wrote of his sense of intimacy with Christ. Caird said:

I am never weary of recurring to the thought of the personal nearness, the mysterious yet most familiar sympathy, the profound and unerring wisdom, the mingled majesty and tenderness of that divine yet gentlest of Consolers. If Christianity had no more than this, this one so beautiful, so real and wonderfully suitable provision for the deepest yearnings of the heart would be to me proof sufficient of its divine origin. I have all the certainty of moral evidence that this is the specific for all the unrest and manifold distractions of man's inner life....'the peace of God that passeth understanding, keeping our heart and mind through Christ Jesus.'⁴²

Caird may have had the most secure personal faith and preached with eloquence taking his hearers by storm, but some did not like the sound of what they heard. This, together with the pastoral demands of the parish, made life increasingly burdensome to Caird, who had not yet reached thirty years of age.

⁴⁰ Warr, 108.

⁴¹ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xviii

⁴² *Ibid.*, xviii

Significantly, Edward said that his brother had been ‘working at the utmost tension from the time of his father’s death.’ His father died just over ten years previously but it is here at Lady Yester’s that the burden of his bereavement finally takes its toll. Caird’s public persona was that of a highly successful preacher, while, in private, he had been scarred by sadness and depression at university and he lived with the pain of bereavement throughout the decade which followed. He left Edinburgh in 1849 to take up a post as a parish minister at Errol in rural Perthshire. (This move meant his stipend was reduced by half.) Edward said that John had worked ‘to the point of collapse’ and, at Errol, led ‘a very retired life.’ Warr is gracious in his record of this time in Caird’s life. Caird, he wrote, was a man of ‘anxious and sensitive mind....[who] was thoroughly exhausted, mentally and physically tired out, a victim of a rattled nervous system strained almost to its breaking point.’ He could cope with Edinburgh no longer and accepted a call to Errol where, for the most part, he led a life in the ‘comparative leisure of rural living.’⁴³

Caird felt himself to be deficient in literature and philosophy. Over the eight years he remained at Errol, Caird sought to correct that. This became a very significant time in his life. He came back from personal breakdown stronger than ever. With the countryside and its therapeutic beauty together with a manse which charmed him, Caird’s time at Errol was necessary. In 1855, a friend encouraged him to leave Errol for a more prominent position. Caird replied, ‘My good fellow, such notions are not to be entertained for man along day to come. The object of my coming here would not be attained by a speedy return.’⁴⁴ Locally, the church is called ‘The Cathedral of the Carse.’ There has been a Christian presence in the Carse of Gowrie since the 13th century. The building in which Caird served was built in 1833 and is of English Norman design with a richly carved oak pulpit. Besides his regular parish work, the three most important events in Caird’s career during this period of ministry were his role in the establishment of a school for girls (1854), his sermon preached before the Queen at Crathie (1855) and the preparation of his first book of sermons (which was published later when he was at Park Church, Glasgow).

⁴³ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxiv

⁴⁴ Warr, 117.

While at Errol, Caird became involved in the establishment of a Girls' School of Industry. The girls, he wrote in a letter to a member of Lady Yester, were:

utterly ignorant of the commonest sorts of household work, are unfit to manage their own houses when they marry. They have no habits of personal neatness, no taste for order, cleanliness, domestic comfort; they never aspire to anything beyond the mere eking out of their coarse, scanty, comfortless life, and their only pleasures are sensual indulgence and scandal. What a life! I seldom return from a day's visiting in our village without feeling my moral tone lowered by breathing in such an atmosphere. What must it be, without education, or elevating influences of any sort, to have to breathe in it continually. I am determined to do something to help them.⁴⁵

There was a growing belief in the Church that evangelism would have a greater chance of success if the Church tackled the social evils of the day as well as preach the gospel. Many in the Church believed that the misery and immorality of the people were, at least in part, a consequence of their poor physical circumstances and lack of opportunity. Caird's choice of language in describing the poor was not always the most sensitive or, even for his day, politically correct. Warr even describes it as 'violent.'⁴⁶ There was resentment. Caird toured the country preaching and lecturing in order to raise funds for this project. He spoke movingly of the conditions in the Carse of Gowrie and offered descriptions of the capabilities of the young women. He said that they could not cook, wash or sew and that their homes were filthy. When word reached Errol of all that Caird had been saying there was a good deal of anger. 'Once, when he was on one of these expeditions to Edinburgh, a maid-servant in the house where he was due to stay went on strike the moment she heard he was coming. She was a girl from the Carse of Gowrie, and she flatly refused to wait upon him.'⁴⁷ However, by 1856, he had established a school offering very practical education which boasted a teacher, an assistant, six boarders and one hundred day pupils. Unfortunately, the success of the school had been largely dependent upon Caird himself and so when he left to take up his post in

⁴⁵ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxv

⁴⁶ Warr, 125.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

Park Church, Glasgow the school shrank and became an independent primary school which, in 1914, was taken over by the government.

In 1855, Caird was invited to preach at Crathie Church in the presence of Her Majesty the Queen and Prince Albert. His text was Romans 12:11 and the sermon was entitled *Religion in Common Life*. In her 'Private Journal' dated 14 October of that year, the Queen wrote:

The Rev. John Caird, one of the most celebrated preachers in Scotland, performed the service, electrified all present by a most admirable and beautiful sermon which lasted nearly an hour, but which kept one's attention riveted....He explained in the most beautiful and simple manner what religion is; how it ought to pervade every action of our lives; not a thing only for Sunday or for our closet; not a thing to drive us from the world; not a perpetual moping over good books, but being and doing good, letting everything be done in a Christian spirit.

The Queen commanded that the sermon be published, though without the Queen's insistence it would never have happened because Caird was too aware of the gaps in his education. It was translated into several languages and happily sat alongside *Thomas à Kempis* and *Selections from Browning*.⁴⁸ The sermon was described 'rather excessively'⁴⁹ by A P Stanley, Dean of Westminster, as 'the best single sermon in the language.' This was Caird's first publication. It sold tens of thousands of copies throughout Britain, Europe and North America. In 1898, the year of Caird's death, Cosmo Gordon Lang said to Queen Victoria that Caird's famous Crathie sermon had lasted for forty-five minutes, while other preachers were instructed not to exceed twenty minutes. Lang records, '[The Queen] took this with great good humour and said drily, "When English dignitaries and clergy can preach as well.....I will let them go on as long as they like."' ⁵⁰ While Norman MacLeod was the Queen's favourite preacher - she thought him 'most delightful', she freely acknowledged Caird to be 'the greatest.' Though the sermon had an enormous impact, it was not written for the service at Crathie. Caird had been selected to

⁴⁸ Warr, 141.

⁴⁹ A Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 167.

⁵⁰ J G Lockhart, *Cosmo Gordon Lang* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1949), 133.

preach before the Lord High Commissioner during the General Assembly the previous year in St Giles' Cathedral. Writing in *Fraser's Magazine* of that sermon, a critic said, 'Given there with all the skill of the most accomplished actor, yet with a simple earnestness which prevented the least suspicion of anything like acting, the impression it produced is described as something marvellous. Hard-headed Scottish lawyers, the last men in the world to be carried into superlatives, declared that never till then did they understand what effect could be produced by human speech.'⁵¹ On 7 December, 1857, Caird was appointed by the Queen as one of her Chaplains-in-Ordinary. From today's perspective, Caird's sermons are excessively long with illustrations which are analysed in every detail.

In a letter to Edward that year, Caird is shocked at the disparity between what he reads of real life humanity in newspapers and the 'theoretical man and woman in the sermon.'⁵² This disunity which appears and arises out of different perspectives, disciplines and world views is the problem which Caird seeks to overcome. If life is one there should be a unity and common currency between all disciplines: there cannot be one measure of the world in one discipline and a quite unconnected measure of the world in another. In that same letter, Caird compared the formal words of public prayer with the 'world of realities, the world of headaches and heartaches, of coarse, uncongenial contacts and intercourses.' He believed it was the task of the preacher to bring the 'high religious motive and feeling to bear on the common incidents of life.'⁵³ Of Caird's sermon before the Queen, Edward wrote:

Its theme was the necessity of carrying the religious spirit into all the ordinary practice of life, and the hollowness and worthlessness of any religion that wastes itself in feeling, in zeal for orthodoxy, or in the formalities of worship and fails to consecrate the whole secular existence of man. In some sense, this sermon strikes the keynote of much of his later preaching and writing.⁵⁴

At both Lady Yester's and Errol, Caird was very interested in the growing efforts being made by a number of ministers across the Established Church who were

⁵¹ Warr, 143.

⁵² Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxx

⁵³ *Ibid.*, xxxi

⁵⁴ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxix

seeking after beauty in public worship. Edward said that from the beginning of his ministry his brother had ‘felt a strong desire to modify the somewhat bald and prosaic form to which Puritanism had reduced the service of religion in Scotland.’⁵⁵ Caird was supportive of other changes which were beginning to take place: there was a move to improve the architecture of churches, provide choirs with musical training and generally to raise the aesthetic character of public worship. Like others, Caird disliked the ‘coarseness and rudeness’⁵⁶ of Puritan-style worship which infested much of the liturgical practice of the Church of Scotland. In 1865, enthusiastically, he lent his ‘prestigious support to the work of the Church Service Society’⁵⁷ becoming its Vice-President, the year it was founded. At Lady Yester’s, he used prayers from ancient liturgies and at Errol he had the Communion Table dressed with a pall of crimson velvet. Caird appreciated beauty in worship but he did not ever place form over substance. He understood that liturgical practice can be taken too far and that it can lead to ‘formalism and self-deception’ but he did participate in the Renaissance of Worship. He believed that the Church needed to proceed with caution on liturgical reform because unspiritual and immature minds stop short at the symbol and prefer illustrations to intellectual argument. Caird said, ‘It is easy to admire the sheen of the sapphire throne, while we leave its glorious Occupant unreverenced and unrecognised.’⁵⁸

Throughout his ministry, Caird had very little time for the courts of the Church. While at Errol, Caird was elected Moderator of the Presbytery but was present at only two of the six meetings held during his term of office. He never spoke at the General Assembly and he strongly resisted attempts to elect him as its Moderator. However, Kirk Session meetings were unavoidable. He was minister at a time in history when the sins of parishioners were rebuked in public. The list of cases before his Kirk Session is long. The minutes of the Kirk Session note that on two successive Sundays individuals, who had fallen short of the moral law, were forced to appear in front of the minister, Kirk Session and congregation and be rebuked for

⁵⁵ Ibid., xxxiii

⁵⁶ Caird, J *Aspects of Life* (London: H R Allenson) p227

⁵⁷ Cheyne, A C *Studies in Scottish Church History* p176

⁵⁸ Warr, 149f.

their sins. Caird found this practice abhorrent, ‘pitiless and barbarous’,⁵⁹ and persuaded his Kirk Session to hear such cases in the relative privacy of the Session House with minister and elders only being present.

Preaching was Caird’s *raison d’être*. Everything he read he read with the eye of a preacher. He came alive in the pulpit and when not there he had a reputation for extraordinary shyness. He loathed public engagements; writing to Edward, he said, ‘I don’t like going into general society, indeed, to be honest, I shrink from it, with a distaste a monk might envy.’⁶⁰ Part of his success as Principal of the University was his extreme reserve and aloofness yet, from the time of his first parish to the very last sermon he preached, Caird came alive in the pulpit and expressed himself with immense eloquence. Caird was more able to be personal in the pulpit than he was capable of in a social gathering or even private company. Warr said that in the drawing room or at a social gathering, Caird was never really a success: he was regarded as dull and his conversation was far from brilliant.⁶¹ (A minister without small talk is likely to find pastoral visiting a strain. However, there is one story told of a woman in Glasgow who recalled Caird’s visit to her with great warmth. She said, ‘His visits when I was ill were like those of a messenger of God.’ Whatever else she may mean, it seems as though he brought her the peace of God.)⁶² Caird understood the human condition and felt the struggles of the inner life, but it will suffice to say that Caird read literature and philosophy while at Errol and did so not for its own end, but as a tool to equip him in the pulpit.

Edward said that Carlyle had a very deep influence upon his brother and he read extensively in English theology and was greatly interested in the work of Newman and Pusey and in the movement of which they were leaders. The Oxford Movement caused Caird to reflect on the relationship of authority and reason. At Errol, Caird began to study the German language and to explore the theological and philosophical thought of Germany. ‘He had for some time been sedulously reading the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 126.

⁶⁰ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxxf

⁶¹ Warr, 170.

⁶² Ibid., 171.

translations of the German orthodox theologians which were beginning to be issued, and he was gradually drawn on from them to an interest in the writings of Schleiermacher, and, at a somewhat later period, of other German philosophers and theologians.⁶³ The motto of his book, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, which largely comprised his Croall Lecture (1878/79) is borrowed from St Anselm: *Negligentia mihi videtur, si postquam confirmati sumus in fide, non studemus quod credimus intelligere.*⁶⁴ This motto could easily be used to express Caird's permanent attitude towards his faith and his search began in earnest at Errol. Over time, he increasingly felt that 'an uncritical, unreasoned and unexplained faith was insufficient.'⁶⁵ Unlike St Anselm who did not think that reflection could change doctrine, Caird came to reject or modify many elements of it. He understood revelation as being on a continuum; that Christian doctrine evolves with each new generation.

At Errol, Caird devoted hours to reading and systematic study. The population of Errol was less than 800 and so the pastoral demands, which he carried out as required but did not enjoy in the least, were not onerous. During his time at Errol, his brother, Edward, came to stay with him for an extended period. Edward had been studying at Glasgow and then at St Mary's College, probably a move to hear the new appointment, John Tulloch. However, Edward did not keep good health and went to live with John. Separated by fifteen years in age, this period together marked the start of a personal closeness, 'a fellowship of the heart'⁶⁶, which would last a lifetime. It was during this period that Edward drifted from his intention to enter the ministry. Commenting on this change of heart, Henry Jones⁶⁷ suggested that the younger brother, having heard his older brother preach at first hand and regularly, knew that he could not match that extraordinary oratory and decided on a different path. Edward was not always the most gifted speaker, at times having difficulty expressing himself, and so it is not improbable that Jones is right.

⁶³ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxxiv

⁶⁴ It seems to me a failure in reasonable conduct that one who is confirmed in faith should not seek to understand what he believes.

⁶⁵ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxxvi

⁶⁶ Warr, 157.

⁶⁷ Warr, 157f.

Caird's time at Errol was extremely well spent. Henry Jones said:

I should be prepared to find that Caird owed in after life much of the rarer qualities of his thought and character to the eight years of his peaceful residence in this parish. There is unmistakeable evidence of meditative communion with Nature, and of reflective sensitiveness to her larger moods, in many a passage of rare descriptive beauty in his sermons; and, above all, a certain sacredness and quietness of thought, an aloofness rising from the elevation of his soul above the circle of the petty cares of man, which indicate that his spirit had felt the eternities all around him and walked very closely with God – as if, at one time in his career, he had found, in the wilderness of human trouble, some sweet oasis where the waters ran and the grass grew green.⁶⁸

At the end of 1856, Caird was encouraged to accept the charge of West Park Chapel, (later Park Church, Glasgow) which was in the process of being built. Situated at the west end of the city, this was a prosperous and rapidly expanding area. At the same time, he received an offer from St George's Church, Edinburgh. Edward records that Caird had several reasons for deciding in favour of Park Church rather than St George's. First among these was Caird's view and hope that a new congregation would be 'unformed'⁶⁹ and open to his leadership and teaching. In addition, the new church would not, as yet, be connected with the Presbytery whereas in Edinburgh he would be required to attend the regular meetings. He wrote to Edward saying, 'I hate Presbyteries; but in St George's I should be forced to attend them.'⁷⁰ The charge of St George's would bring with it a demanding Edinburgh parish, while his work at Park Church would involve preaching and congregational visiting only. Unlike St George's, Park Church would provide an assistant and he would be able to delay his start with them for ten months. This would allow him to complete the volume of sermons which he was working on and prepare them for publication. To his surprise, he found leaving the people and parish of Errol more difficult than he would have thought. He had enjoyed very good and close friendships with his people, friendships which had grown over the years. These friendships and the church and countryside of Errol had been the place where Caird had regained his strength and, in fact, had reached a new spiritual and

⁶⁸ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁹ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xxxix

⁷⁰ Ibid., xxxix

theological maturity. MacMillan claims that Caird's three years of ministry at Lady Yester's were 'among the most fruitful of his whole life'. This may well be true to the extent that experiences which cause us the most pain are often the ones which are most formative for us. However, it was during his ministry at Errol that Caird rose to the stature of a man capable of being a figure on the national stage. He preached his first sermon in Park Church, Glasgow on the last Sunday of 1857.

'The ecclesiastical life of Glasgow, so far as the Established Church was concerned, was dominated by the City Churches, which, in some cases at least, were manned by outstanding men.'⁷¹ Many preachers, however, were fairly conservative and Caird's appearance in Glasgow brought a return of the suspicion in which he was held in Edinburgh. Though Norman MacLeod and John Tulloch were openly questioning aspects of doctrine, Caird was surrounded by a 'grim cohort of severe Calvinists'.⁷² The contrast with many other preachers could not be greater:

His preaching was fresh, vivid, arresting, while that of his contemporaries was dourly orthodox and reactionary. Caird analysed ideas, handled themes, envisaged truths, gripped issues which these men never approached. Compared to him, with his massive mind, profoundly religious and philosophic, with his incomparable voice, his majestic oratory, his message proclaimed with the fervour and conviction of a prophet of antiquity, they were dull, obsolete, ineffective.⁷³

One worshipper at Park who had never heard Caird before wrote of being used to consuming 'dreary doctrinal discussions' which never appeared to have any relevance to life, yet Caird preached 'a sermon which pierced my heart like a sword, and brought me face to face with a Saviour robed with love and not with dread.'⁷⁴ In 1858, writing in *Fraser's Magazine*, the 'gossipy but perceptive'⁷⁵ A K H Boyd wrote of Caird:

You feel that the preacher has in him the elements of a tragic actor who could rival Kean....it is rather as though you were listening to the impulsive Italian speaking from head to foot, than to the cool and unexcitable Scot....

⁷¹ Warr, 162

⁷² Ibid., 162

⁷³ Ibid., 163

⁷⁴ Ibid., 163f

⁷⁵ A Cheyne, *Studies in Scottish Church History*, 168.

[and at the close] you think the sermon has been a short one: you consult your watch – it has lasted three quarters of an hour.⁷⁶

But few preachers appeal to all worshippers at all times. Caird could fail to make a positive impression. Even in the best of preachers, a sermon which is best suited to one congregation or person may not be so suited to the needs of others. One worshipper said, ‘There are times when one thinks Dr Caird the very apostle for the age, and other times when one cannot make out what he is preaching.’⁷⁷ Warr cites another example from Caird’s time at Errol: “Was he no’ graun’ the day?” asked one elderly worshipper of another as they left the church. “Ay,” came the reply, “but did ye un’erstaun’ him?” “Un’erstaun him?” repeated the first speaker, “I wadna presoom!” Equally, A K H Boyd recalls being in a church in the 1860s which was packed full and with standing room only; they had come to hear Caird. Boyd said that he watched a man whom he knew and whom he knew would not understand the sermon but who, nevertheless, was hypnotised by Caird. Warr observes:

Caird’s influence over the crowds he drew was in some measure the subtle, magnetic sway which majestic oratory can exercise over uncomprehending minds. Overwhelming speech, moving rhythmically like the sound of a sonorous musical instrument, can undoubtedly weave a mesmeric spell, an incommunicable psychological power.....It is a strange power this.⁷⁸

The suspicion of his fellow clergy infected the minds of many worshippers in Glasgow and his natural reserve did little to disabuse them of all that they had heard about him. Caird lacked ‘that superficial bonhomie which means so much and at the same time means so little.’⁷⁹ It is very likely that Caird was aware of the suspicion in which he was held by many and also of the idle talk which attached itself to his name. He will have been hurt by these rumours but, a stronger man than before, he was able to live with them this time without too much cost to his health. Caird detested the bigotry within the Church.⁸⁰ It annoyed him that one either had to preach narrow orthodoxy and make use of the language, phrases and tone associated with it or be subject to suspicion.

⁷⁶ A K H Boyd, ‘Concerning a Great Scotch Preacher’ in *Fraser’s Magazine* (August 1858)

⁷⁷ Deas Cromarty, *Scottish Ministerial Minatures* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1892) 9

⁷⁸ Warr, 135

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 164

⁸⁰ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xliii

At Park Church, Caird spent much or most of his time ‘thinking and writing for the pulpit.’⁸¹ Towards the end of his time at Errol and through his time at Park Church, his sermons became richer in thought and more substantial in expression. Preaching was his vocation; he was not primarily a philosopher and only came to that later in life. Edward describes preaching as Caird’s ‘essential vocation’ and that for Caird preaching is ‘the noblest sort of work on earth.’ Writing to a friend, Caird said, ‘I am sure you can easily conceive how intensely interesting, how almost necessary to one’s existence it becomes.’⁸² He was a deeply spiritual man – former students remember ‘the spirit of devoutness and reverence which by word and example he ever inculcated’⁸³ – and he brought that deep spirituality into the pulpit. In a letter to Edward, he said:

I have sometimes in my day-dreams let my mind picture to me a preacher’s Paradise: a quiet, not very numerous but thoughtful and earnest-minded people, bringing each successive week thought to meet thought, and ready to reciprocate every real feeling, and to carry away and embody in its practical discipline of a holy life every hint, suggestion, principle, that had aught of truth and reality in it.⁸⁴

At Errol, Caird prepared a volume of sermons, which he published while at Park Church. They give us an indication of the sort of sermons he was preaching in his latter days at Errol and in the earlier days at Park Church. In these sermons, Caird makes a thorough effort to ‘break down all artificial boundaries between religion and ordinary experience...to re-translate the terms of dogmatic theology into the language of common life, and to bring out its essential ethical meaning.’ In addition, there is in Caird’s sermons ‘the ever recurring thought of the greatness of the possibilities of human nature...of the intellectual and moral experience of which man is capable’ together with the ‘infinite sadness of his common sorrows and the infinite sweetness of his common joys.’⁸⁵ Caird’s imagination was fired by the knowledge that humans are beings with consciousness. Ultimately, we are capable of union with God. Edward wrote:

⁸¹ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xlii

⁸² *Ibid.*, xlii

⁸³ *ibid.*, lxxiii

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, xliv

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, xlv

Many of the sermons read like variations on the great theme of Pascal: 'Man is but a reed, and the weakest in nature; but he is a reed that thinks. It does not need the universe to crush him; a breath of air, a drop of water will kill him. But even if the universe overwhelms him, a man would be more than that which destroys him, because he knows that he dies, while the universe knows nothing of the advantage it obtains over him.'⁸⁶

Having heard Caird both at Lady Yester's and then at Park Church, Story said that a change had occurred over that period. The power was there but the oratorical force was restrained, the sermons were always read and the eloquence was less exuberant. Story felt that the thoughtful hearer would now be the better for these changes. Caird laboured over the content and delivery of each sermon. On one occasion, on a Saturday before he was due to preach in the church at Ardentenny, Caird was seen out on the hills practising his sermon. After just over four years at Park Church, with much hesitation and doubt, Caird was persuaded by friends to become a candidate for the post of the Chair of Theology in the University of Glasgow. Caird's teacher, Alexander Hill, had died. Caird was unanimously elected to the office by the University Court. At the age of forty two, Caird left the parish ministry to enter the world of academia at Old College in the High Street.

One postscript to his years at Park Church: his marriage. It is curious that in Edward's *Memoir* of Caird, which runs to 133 pages, Caird's wife, Isabella, is mentioned in a single sentence only. In June 1858, at the age of 37, Caird married Isabella Glover, the daughter of the Revd Dr Glover of Greenside Church, Edinburgh. Edward does say that it was a union which 'greatly added to the happiness of his [brother's] life,' but that is it. Warr describes Isabella as a young woman of 'vivacious charm and unusual beauty' and again she gets no more than a sentence. John and Isabella had no children.

⁸⁶ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xlvii

Chapter Two: Biography (1862 – 1898)

Caird and his brother, Edward, had an intimate association which began during Caird's ministry at Errol, through the period when both Cairds were at Glasgow University and, to a lesser extent, when Edward moved to Oxford. Edward was fifteen years Caird's junior and he looked up to him, with affection, as the eldest sibling. Caird was a formative influence on Edward while the younger brother was a student at Glasgow and he would spend most of his vacation of six months with him. While at Glasgow, when Caird was Professor of Theology and Edward Professor of Moral Philosophy, the brothers were in almost daily contact with each other. Edward remembers the many discussions on philosophy, theology and University affairs and the many long walks in the country, Caird's smoking-room, and in the summer evenings 'while strolling up and down in front of the University and looking down upon the lights of Glasgow.'⁸⁷ Their common interests in many subjects, their partial differences of opinion and their shared outlook⁸⁸ together with their familial tie made their relationship 'one of the most sustaining and inspiring things in life,' and each benefited from the 'freest criticism, without a risk of misunderstanding; and the thought of each other's appreciation was to us both one of the strongest encouragements to effort.'⁸⁹ As to personality, the brothers were said to share one thing in common with Calvinism: 'they had depth without warmth, intellect without emotion.'⁹⁰ It has been speculated that, even when Edward had left Glasgow, Caird learned from his younger brother 'what it meant to sit under Jowett and T H Green.'⁹¹

Professor

After a good deal of hesitation and conflict of mind, Caird became a candidate for the Chair of Theology at the University of Glasgow. Writing to Edward, Caird said,

⁸⁷ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxx

⁸⁸ A L Drummond & J Bulloch, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1978), 237 'The two brothers had so much in common that it is not always easy to distinguish the mind of the one from the other.'

⁸⁹ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxx

⁹⁰ Drummond, 238.

⁹¹ Drummond, 237.

‘I know I should feel the position of theological teacher of the future teachers of our church to be a very noble one, well worthy of the devotion of a man’s whole life and energy. God help me.’⁹² Caird understood that the intellectual demands of the theologian would be far greater than that of a preacher. ‘It is quite possible for a man to feel and declare in apt and impressive words,’ wrote Caird, ‘the truth of the Gospel, who is destitute of the power scientifically to analyse and defend them.’⁹³ The theologian must possess the power of investigation to understand the laws of thought, develop dialectical principles and the rules of reasoning. He approached his new task with a ‘depressing sense of inadequacy.’⁹⁴ Edward warned Caird to be cautious in his teaching because there would be no shortage of critics and, in reply, Caird said that he did not wish notoriety but rather to work out of sight: he knew, he said, that ‘to think or speak one word out of the routine jargon that stands for thought and faith’ could provoke unwelcome attention.⁹⁵ Caird spent the Christmas of 1862 preparing for his first lectures. His Inaugural Lecture set the direction of his theology for the ten years he would hold the Chair and beyond. In his lecture, Caird unreservedly placed religion within the realm of reason. Everything which followed in Caird’s theology was within the limits of reason. Caird would have nothing to do with what Edward called the ‘sceptical defences of religion’, in which theologians sought to evade the ‘open field of thought’ by falling back on ‘some moral, or aesthetic, or religious faith, which is not to be explained or criticised by reason.’⁹⁶ There had been a time when Caird accepted ‘the evasion of Leibniz, that a thing might be above reason, without being contrary to it’⁹⁷, but Caird soon found that to be mistaken.⁹⁸ Caird came to the view that revelation must, if we are aware of it at all, contain rational thought, however implicit and undeveloped, and therefore it is thought which human intelligence can ‘ultimately free from its sensuous veil.’⁹⁹

In his Inaugural Lecture Caird said:

⁹² Edward Caird, *Memoir*, I

⁹³ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lviii

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, lix

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, li

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, lxxiv

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, liii

⁹⁸ John Caird, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 71f.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72

The signs of the highest personality are not to be sought in the manifestation of mere will, but in the manifestation of will under the guidance of intelligence – that is, of will acting rationally and regularly, of will acting by law.¹⁰⁰

God acts, said Caird, with an ‘infallible uniformity of conduct’¹⁰¹ but God is not to be conceived of as an ‘indeterminate being.’ In his lecture, Caird was, in part, repudiating the philosophy of Sir William Hamilton (1788 – 1856) and the work of Henry Longueville Mansel (1820 - 1871). In 1829, in his essay, *The Philosophy of the Unconditioned*, Hamilton argued that there can be no knowledge of the infinite which can be known to the finite mind. As the absolute Being, Hamilton held that God could not be known. A professor of metaphysical philosophy, and later Dean of St Paul’s Cathedral, in his Bampton Lectures (1858, *The Limit of Religious Thought*), Mansel followed Hamilton (and Kant) and was an opponent of Hegelianism. Mansel argued that ‘to think is to relate and to condition, and therefore, thought, by its essential nature, cannot grasp the Absolute and the Unconditioned.’¹⁰² Caird’s rebuttal of this philosophy was to challenge the concept of God which was offered. Caird employed the ontological argument and said that the intellectual impotence of this school of thought was no real impotence at all. In their thinking, human beings are reduced to finite beings and nothing more. They could only know God when they ceased to be finite and no account was taken of humanity’s ‘birthright.’¹⁰³ Caird said:

God, the highest of all beings, should be one, of whom not the fewest, but the greatest number, of qualitative limitations can be predicated. He is the Being in whom are all conceivable powers, excellencies, good and great qualities in their highest perfection.....The awful conclusion is, that the Father of the Universe is shut out from communication with His children, and they from Him.¹⁰⁴

In bringing his lecture to a close, Caird argues that science or human knowledge in general cannot know everything, human knowledge is almost never perfect, but that

¹⁰⁰ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, liii

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, liv

¹⁰² Edward, lv

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, lvi

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, lvi

does not preclude us from knowing something. We may never be able to know God in all God's fullness, but we can know something. Caird said:

It does not follow that because we cannot know all, our partial knowledge is not therefore to be trusted; that because human intelligence cannot comprehend God, it can have no real knowledge of Him; because it cannot 'find out the Almighty to perfection,' it can never know Him at all. Hopeless and universal indeed would be our ignorance, if that can never claim to be knowledge which is not perfect knowledge. In that case, we are not only incapable of knowing God, but also our fellowman and ourselves.¹⁰⁵

For Kant, Hamilton and Mansel, God dwells outside of the material universe: God cannot be known with either perfect *or* partial knowledge. It is not possible, argued Mansel, to have a direct intuition of things outside of space and time.¹⁰⁶

Caird was often thought to be a heretic, mostly because his defence of religion did not rest on the usual ground, that is, supernatural or revealed religion which could not be critiqued by reason. Caird was accused of Rationalism and Socinianism, if not 'darker heresies.'¹⁰⁷ (In 1874, Caird faced an accusation of heresy from the Revd Dr Smith in the Presbytery of Glasgow. The charge was based on a criticism of a sermon he preached, *The Guilt and Guiltlessness of Unbelief*, but it was withdrawn without Caird having to retract a word of what he had said.)¹⁰⁸ Edward argued that Caird was more orthodox than many of his brother's critics, claiming that Caird 'sought to find an intelligible meaning in doctrines, which [for his critics] had become a dead tradition, or an incomprehensible mystery.'¹⁰⁹ Edward's defence of his brother's theology is, perhaps, disingenuous because there is little doubt that, in Caird's hands, Christian theology had moved on to new ground and some of the doctrines of the past had been quietly left behind. Caird's reliance on reason to

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, lvi

¹⁰⁶ Henry L Mansel, *The Philosophy of the Conditioned* (London: Alexander Strahan, 1866), 77.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lx Rationalism, that is, where the intellect or dialectic of reason is primary over against the sensory or empirical science, may be a credible charge against Caird. In the nineteenth century, Socinianism was a charge used against anyone whose beliefs were at odds with the accepted norm. In a narrower sense, it may refer to those who do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, among other things. It is not difficult to see how Caird fell foul of these charges, at least in the popular mind.

¹⁰⁸ In his letter to *The Scotsman*, dated 26 March, 1874, Caird wrote: 'Will you allow me to state that the sermon preached in Dundee, on the newspaper report of which the charge of heresy was based, and the sermon preached in Edinburgh, on the report of which it would seem the charge is to be withdrawn, were word for word the same.'

¹⁰⁹ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxi

critique both received doctrine and to scrutinise Scripture was an approach not universally well received by his contemporaries. No subject or thought can remain beyond rational inquiry and so Scripture, doctrines and the thought of past theologians were not to be protected by a misplaced ‘mechanical belief in authority.’¹¹⁰ Caird believed that, while his generation benefited from the wisdom of the past, the present generation was philosophically in advance of all who had gone before. He said:

The complexion of a theological system depends greatly on the philosophical and logical method and categories of thought which we bring to its construction; and surely we may hold, without presumption, that the logic and philosophy of our day are in advance of that contentless scholastic logic and barren nominalism, which cumbered the earth when most of our traditional creeds and systems were being built up.¹¹¹

Caird impressed upon his students that the writings of the New Testament were a ‘casual outcome of the Church’s experience under the guidance of the Holy Spirit’¹¹² and that the writers never thought that their work was for any other purpose than to meet the immediate needs of the early Church communities. Caird sought to ‘free the minds of his students from the tyranny of the letter of Scripture’ and to ‘accept the guidance of the Spirit in every age as fresh knowledge.’¹¹³ Caird places the faith of the Church on the living Spirit of God and not on the written word of previous generations, however instructive they might be.

In 1871, Caird preached a sermon, entitled *Christian Manliness*, which aroused considerable hostility. Preaching before the University of Glasgow, Caird intended to demonstrate to students that the Christian faith did not belong to their childhood but was ‘a rational creed for an educated man.’¹¹⁴ It was necessary for students to supplant their implicit faith with knowledge. Of the Bible, Caird said:

It implies no irreverence, but rather the profoundest homage for the inspired record of God’s will, to say that it does not address us simply as an

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, lxxix

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Lxxxi

¹¹² Warr, 185

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 186

¹¹⁴ Drummond, 239.

authoritative message from heaven which we are to believe at our peril.
The Bible....elicits, educates, appeals to that which is highest in our nature.¹¹⁵

In response, James Service, a Glasgow lawyer, issued a leaflet in which he challenged Caird on several points of doctrine. He began, however, by criticising Caird for his apparent condescending attitude towards those less cultured than he. Caird said, 'The uncultured man has few pleasures. Life is to him in many respects a poor and shallow thing....What wonder that he should often seek escape from vacuity in the coarse pleasures which are the only ones he knows.'¹¹⁶ Service resented the seeming arrogance of Caird's assumption of intellectual superiority. In bad verse, Service wrote:

For on a hill apart on Gilmore top,
With wisdom filled, his envied, happy lot
'The Million' sees, his wisdom he retains:
Not fit for City clods or vulgar brains.¹¹⁷

Caird expressed no more than his usual theme: a salvation that rests on mere authority to a set of doctrines which lie outside the critique of reason is a 'degrading notion.'¹¹⁸ Service also took issue with Caird's language criticising him for the ambiguity of his rhetoric. Service described Caird's sermon as a 'deleterious mixture,' in which there was the ingredient of undefined words, capable of any construction the author may choose to give them. Caird had said, 'Nature quickened, glorified, transfigured by thought,' to which Service replied, 'What meaneth this?' In truth, Caird did not use the language or theological concepts with which Service was most comfortable. Vital elements of doctrine were missing: in preaching to the students of a mature Christianity, Caird made no mention of the strength of evil, the weakness of humanity or of the urgent need for salvation.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, 239.

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*, 239.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, 239.

¹¹⁸ Drummond, 240

¹¹⁹ Incredibly, Drummond goes on to say, '[Service] was correct in regarding Caird's sermon as a commendation of religion with no distinctively Christian content.' 240

Caird is accused, not only of subordinating supernatural or revealed religion to reason, but also of reducing Christianity to an evolving historical idea rather than a revealed religion encapsulated in historic doctrine. For Caird, ecclesiastical controversies and the development of Christian doctrine were evidence of the evolution of truth in the growing life of thought within the Church.¹²⁰ The Church's truth emerges through the evolution of theological ideas and controversies which occur down the generations. Caird believed that, in resisting the 'mechanical repetition of formulas', he was freeing the movement of thought towards 'the natural and ever-changing expression of a growing spiritual life.'¹²¹ The truth of the Church, argued Caird, is to be found in the evolving life of thought of the Christian community and this includes the composition of Scripture. 'Reverence,' said Caird, 'even for the most sacred books does not require that we refrain from examining into its credentials, and into the evidence and rational significance of its contents.'¹²²

Caird left behind some doctrines of the Church; he did not espouse the 'Scheme of Salvation.' The scheme or plan of salvation was based on the Westminster Confession. 'Its mysteries of election, predestination, justification, adoption, and the like were,' says Warr, 'interminably droned out and examined and reviewed and emphasised by the clergy in their pulpits.'¹²³ Worse still, the plan was taken to the bedside where the dying were asked, 'Do you know the plan?'¹²⁴ Caird's treatment of atonement, justification, sin, sanctification, the transcendence of God and the evolution of ideas are all questioned and re-worked.

In 1874, in his Inaugural Address as Principal of New College, Dr Rainy of the Free Church, accepted the theory of the evolution of species and 'with the care of a bomb disposal unit' handled the explosive subject of the inspiration and authority of the Bible and the nature of revelation. As the reign of Calvinism weakened, Rainy said that he 'saw in the Old Testament a progressive unfolding of God's purpose, not in documents, but in the history of Israel,' and 'even the writings of the New Testament

¹²⁰ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxxix

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, lxii

¹²² John Caird *A Plea for A Scientific Theology* (see Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxxx)

¹²³ Warr, 180

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 180

were personal statements.’ ‘However the inner harmony between them may be,’ said Rainy, ‘it is very far removed from mere outward harmonizing....We apprehend it gradually.’¹²⁵ Rainy never said much on the intellectual issues raised by the Cairds, Ritschl or Harnack, but his acceptance of revelation through a people and through the intellectual thought of humanity, through a process of intellectual evolution, is, at least in part, a restatement of Caird’s theology, which he began to deliver over a decade earlier.

Caird used idealistic philosophy to defend Christianity against the theology of supernatural revelation, which he believed to be unsustainable in the nineteenth century. According to Edward, Caird was initially interested in the Kantian principle of the relativity of knowledge of the objective world to the conscious self. Kant maintained that the intellect as well as the sense imposes their own form on to the things that are presented to them. However, says Edward, Caird was drawn to Hegel because of the thoroughness with which Hegel applied the idealist principle and because of the strong ethical and religious experience in Hegel’s work. In his Croall Lectures, published as the *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, Caird blended together the language of religion and philosophy, the very words of Scripture, with the dialectic of the evolution of thought. It is the Hegelian dialectic which secured religion for Caird. Caird was ‘entirely with Hegel in his trust in the powers of the human intelligence’ and, says Edward, would have said with Hegel, ‘the hidden being of the Universe has no power in itself that could offer resistance to the courageous effort of science.’¹²⁶ Caird felt that religion had nothing to fear from scientific and philosophic enquiry; on the contrary, such enquiry would lead to a deeper basis of truth. Edward wrote:

He followed Hegel...in refusing to seek safety for religion in any of the cities of refuge that have been opened for it since the days of Kant: in feeling, in the moral consciousness, or in some special form of aesthetic or religious intuition, which is to be regarded as above reason and exempt from criticism.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Drummond, 7

¹²⁶ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxxvii

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, lxxvi

During his time as professor and also beyond, Caird was increasingly interested in the history of doctrine and the history of religion in general. He was committed to the idealistic philosophy of evolution.

One criticism made of Caird's theology is that, on the face of it, Caird has no protection against the direction which the philosophical evolution of Christianity may take, even to the extent that it could diverge quite substantially from its origins, even to the extent of losing its essential character. Perhaps the substantial weakness of this criticism is to question the apparent static nature of the origin of Christianity. In claiming that Christianity is the product of philosophical evolution and continually evolving he suggests that it has never been a static concept and, further, imposing a static nature on to Christianity would be to deny the spiritual life of faith which, in Caird's mind, is the essence of faith. Moreover, standing as he did in the Reformed tradition, a tradition in which both Church and theology are understood to be permanently reforming, *theologia reformata et semper reformanda*, Caird embodies the spirit of his tradition in contrast to his critics who wish to hold on to the dead letter of a past era. Christianity's originality is more than 'the reproduction, in a collective form, of ideas contained in the religious and in the philosophical and ethical systems of the ancient world.'¹²⁸ Evolution by its very nature involves an 'organic development' in which the new, 'a wholly original element' not present in the old, is introduced and the continuity is secured by the 'rational spiritual life' which is the very nature of Christianity.¹²⁹

Caird lived at a time in history, in the 'Christian Century' in the 'Christian World', in which the great powers of the world, Great Britain, the USA, France, Prussian-Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia, were Christian. Christianisation of the rest of the world was expected within a generation: it is no surprise that Caird's theology possesses a self-confidence, a self-belief, that revelation is to be found in and through the intellectual culture of his day, most supremely expressed in Idealism. While that confidence was shattered with the advent of the First World War, in which the

¹²⁸ John Caird, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (see *Memoir*, Lxxxiii)

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxiv

Christian powers fought and their philosophy seemed to fail, the essential point of Caird's argument, that revelation is subject to reason and reveals itself through the evolving thought of humanity still holds. The mistake made by Caird and others was to associate the catholicity of the Church with ecclesiastical monopolism within the state; if the Disruption taught the Scottish Church anything, it was that the Church catholic and the state is not likely to be a successful partnership. However, there is no other place for revelation to be found than in the evolving or emerging rational thought of humanity.

During his tenure as Professor of Theology, Caird did not involve himself in the general business of the University, the exception being his proposal in 1868 that John McLeod Campbell be awarded the degree of D.D. Campbell was deposed by the Church of Scotland in 1831 for heresy: he taught the doctrine of Universal Pardon in opposition to limited atonement. In his book, *The Nature of Atonement*, Campbell argued that the mercy of God was not limited to the elect. 'It may fairly be said,' wrote Edward, 'that the heretic has in the long run converted the Church.'¹³⁰ The University duly awarded the degree and Dr Ewing, Bishop of Argyll and the Isles, congratulated Caird and the University for their actions. In reply to Dr Ewing, Caird acknowledged the theological progress which had been made but was also cautious to protect the independent reputation of the University:

It is a most hopeful thing that in Scotland, where views of the Atonement based on shallow forensic metaphors have been so long prevalent, the power of a book which starts from the fundamental idea of the Fatherhood of God should have been so widely felt, and the substantial truthfulness of its teaching so widely recognised.¹³¹

The University, said Caird, was not endorsing McLeod Campbell's theology but it did feel that in honouring him it was honouring itself. The doctrine of election, limited atonement and justification had played its part in history in the elevation of people over against authoritarian government, but the Calvinist view that God would elect or save only some people while the others were sent to Hell was no longer

¹³⁰ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxxxviii

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, xcf

defensible. Here is an example of revelation found in the evolution of rational thought and one which the Church, on the whole, came to accept.

There are a number of testimonies by former students recording their appreciation of Caird as their teacher. He is particularly remembered for the prayers he said at the start of each class. Devout and sincere, his prayers were described by one student as ‘a spiritual sunbath.’¹³² Almost certainly, many of the students were grateful to Caird because he was the professor who first opened their minds to new worlds of thought. After Caird’s death, writing in *The Scotsman*, a former student said he spoke for many ministers who first gained a real and abiding interest in theology because of Caird, a teacher, not merely ‘in touch with modern thought, but who was himself making it...’, in whose hands ‘old doctrines became full of human interest.’¹³³ Dr Muir¹³⁴ said, as a student, he was warned that Caird, the new professor of theology, might unsettle him but instead he found ‘stability and confirmation.’¹³⁵ Caird was remembered for his equanimity in stating clearly not only his view but the theology of opponents. Muir said:

He did not.....enter into the details of the Sunday Question or of Subscription to the Westminster Confession, which, in consequence of the utterances of Dr Norman Macleod and Principal Tulloch, were evoking very keen feeling, but he incidentally laid down principles which sufficiently indicated his own position and guided us to take up our own.¹³⁶

Like others, Muir wrote of the prayers which Caird led in class: ‘no novelty of thought, no stateliness of diction, touched us so much as the man himself,’ an ‘impression of devoutness.’¹³⁷ Dr Strong of Hillhead Parish Church, a former student and minister of the church where Caird served as an Elder, wrote of the ‘rational apprehension of divine truth’ which Caird gifted to his class. Strong wrote:

[Caird’s] aim from first to last has been the same – to place theology on a rational basis – to bring our thinking on the greatest of all subjects into line

¹³² Warr, 181

¹³³ *The Scotsman* (see in Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxvii)

¹³⁴ Dr McAdam Muir, a former student, minister of the cathedral, Glasgow and he gave the address at Caird’s funeral.

¹³⁵ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, lxix

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, lxx

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, lxxi

with our thinking on other subjects of serious import – thus to give theology a philosophic or scientific basis, and to harmonise, if not to identify, natural and revealed theology.¹³⁸

Caird was especially popular with United Presbyterian students and many Church of Scotland students attended his classes for a fourth session, even when no longer required to do so by the General Assembly. Caird supported the degree of B.D. being conferred on students in extra-mural halls from Arts without them having to sit additional papers and this proved an enormous success. He also proposed that the degree of D.D. be awarded on academic merit only by the submission of a thesis or on examination. This policy, however, was not successful and by the time Caird was principal the degree returned to being awarded for the discharge of professional duties.

Though he had little involvement in the work of the Senate, Caird did offer ‘signal service’ to the issue of the new buildings at Gilmorehill. There was pressure, as early as 1824, to consider new teaching accommodation. The problem was twofold: firstly, as the number of students and staff increased it became more difficult to accommodate the needs of the expanding University; and, secondly, by the 1850s, the neighbourhood was marred by air pollution and the spread of disease, such as typhus and cholera, and it was no longer considered suitable for either students or the ‘Faculty’ professors who lived there, in Professors’ Court, with their families.¹³⁹ The design of the new buildings is attributed to John Ruskin,¹⁴⁰ of whom Caird was an admirer; the architectural commission was given to Sir George Gilbert Scott. With passion, MacKenzie describes Ruskin’s work as ‘perishable, and at times pernicious,’ arguing that his ‘artificial and antiquarian Gothic’ taste resulted in the destruction of the old University building, one of the finest Scottish Renaissance works, and replaced by the ‘mock-Gothic horror which disfigures such a splendid site’ on Gilmorehill.¹⁴¹ The new complex was completed in 1870. It was gigantic

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, lxxiii

¹³⁹ Michael Moss, J Forbes Munro and Richard H Trainor, *University, City and State: The University of Glasgow since 1870* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 29.

¹⁴⁰ John Ruskin (1819 – 1900), art critic, social thinker, poet and artist

¹⁴¹ Anne Mure MacKenzie, *Scotland in Modern Times (1720 – 1939)* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers, 1941)

by the standards of the day which, at 540ft long, was the largest public structure built in Britain since the completion of the Houses of Parliament ten years earlier.¹⁴² The major problem with the new building project was money. The original estimated cost of the new building was £266,000, which dwarfed the £12,000 annual income of the University.¹⁴³ Caird was very willing to be recruited to approach individuals who might be able to contribute to the costs of the new building.¹⁴⁴ The foundation stone was laid by the Prince and Princess of Wales in October, 1868. On 29 April, 1870, the University closed its High Street campus and Caird delivered the opening lecture at the new building.

Once on the new site, Caird instituted University services and encouraged ministers from all denominations of the Christian Church in Scotland to assist and preach. Leading ministers from the Church of Scotland, Free Church, United Presbyterian Church and others were invited and to the Episcopal clergy he gave the option of using the liturgy of their own tradition. Caird seemed indifferent to the causes of disagreement between the main denominations of the Church. Edward said of his brother:

I remember that once when addressing a United Presbyterian congregation, he gave them almost more liberality than they desired, by declaring that he would not take the trouble to cross the street in order to convert a man from their denomination of Christian to his own.¹⁴⁵

In 1871, Caird invited Bishop Ewing to preach but he was prevented from doing so because William Wilson, Bishop of Glasgow, objected. In response, Dean Stanley of Westminster Abbey wrote to Caird to thank him for his liberality. Stanley and Jowett, as Anglicans, were not subject to the jurisdiction of Wilson and both came

¹⁴² Moss, 44.

¹⁴³ Moss, 36: In the end, the cost rose to £428, 000, though this now included the Western Infirmary on the adjacent site as part of the Medical Faculty. The Glasgow Union Railway Company purchased the old site for £100,000, the government paid £141,400, while the fund-raising efforts of the University raised £159,000 by 1876.

¹⁴⁴ For example, *The Scotsman* (19/04/1870) reports a meeting which took place in the Council Hall, Greenock, 'to hear a deputation from the new University Building Committee, and to make arrangements for subscriptions in aid of the funds for completing the edifice. Provost Morton presided, and addresses were delivered by the Very Revd Principal Barclay, Dr John Caird, and others.'

¹⁴⁵ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, xcvi

and preached. Both as professor and as principal, he oversaw the arrangements of the chapel. Once he left the Chair, Caird is said to have maintained a particular interest in the progress of students in Divinity, their names and the distinctions attained.

On Sunday 23 February, 1873, Dr Barclay, Principal of the University, died at his residence in Gilmorehill; he was 81. The funeral service on 28 February was held in the University Chapel and led by Caird; the service was attended by members of the University Court, the Senate, students and representatives of the city. Barclay had been a parish minister, as well as a son of the manse, and had had a secular career, working as a reporter with *The Times*, before entering the ministry. Like Caird, Barclay took almost no part in ecclesiastical politics. Barclay ‘prized liberty of thought and expression and so proved very tolerant of differences of opinion within the University.’¹⁴⁶ This is the model which Caird would be set to follow. In prayer, Caird spoke of Barclay’s ‘long, useful and honoured life,’ a man ‘with a clear head, vigorous will, firm integrity, strength of purpose, and [an] unshaken loyalty to truth and right.’¹⁴⁷

Caird made no mention of Barclay’s ‘lion-like growls’ which instilled fear in those around him. Caird was a pall-bearer and conducted the service of committal at the cemetery, Sighthill. The appointment of principal lay in the hands of the Crown. In this instance, however, the Senate petitioned that the office be filled by Caird and this was supported by a recommendation from the Home Secretary. On 7 March, 1873, the Queen appointed Caird to the post of principal.

Principal

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Glasgow University attracted 1500 students, which made it large in Scottish and British terms, though smaller than Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh and, in 1870, it had an academic staff of around 100 made

¹⁴⁶ Moss, 29

¹⁴⁷ *The Scotsman* 1 March, 1873

up of thirteen professors (twelve Faculty professors and the Principal, all of whom were housed in Professor's Square.) Its proximity to Ulster meant that it was the preferred choice of Irish Presbyterians and while that had an influence on the University, so too did the city, which more than doubled in size between the middle of the century and 1901,¹⁴⁸ due to the expansion of the textile industry and shipbuilding.¹⁴⁹ The translation of the University from the High Street to Gilmorehill caused some difficulty because Gilmorehill 'was a leafy suburb distant from the city centre, too far away for the professors to be seen daily in the clubs and bars frequented by the leading citizens.'¹⁵⁰ By the mid-nineteenth-century and throughout Caird's term of office, teaching at the University was done over a twenty-week session which began in November and lasted to the end of March. By the 1860s, one quarter of the students was from a working-class background, while the remainder came from 'comfortable urban middle-class homes.'¹⁵¹

Caird's time as principal was to be marked by his generosity of spirit as was his time as professor. The traditionally strong Church of Scotland position within the University was being challenged, partly by evangelicals within the Church and partly by those who sought academic autonomy freed from clerical control combined with Toryism.¹⁵² Like Barclay, Caird protected the name of the University from entanglement in church politics by distancing himself from denominational disputes. Caird managed to steer a middle way between the religious turmoil of Scotland and the increasing scepticism of many intellectuals about the involvement of the Church in 'secular' matters. What is more, it became essential during the fund-raising for the new building that the University become less involved with the Church of Scotland and, indeed, the Church in general; Barclay and Caird honoured that.

¹⁴⁸ Moss, 15

¹⁴⁹ In his Rectorial address, Macaulay said, 'In the whole kingdom we shall find no district in which the progress of trade, of manufactures, of wealth, and of the arts of life, has been more rapid than in Clydeside. Your university has partaken largely of the prosperity of this city and of the surrounding region....We now speak the language of humility when we say that the University of Glasgow need not fear a comparison with the University of Bologna.' (The Papal Bull of 1451 which established the University had modelled it on Bologna.)

¹⁵⁰ Moss, 1

¹⁵¹ Moss 20

¹⁵² MacFarlan saw no distinction between Church and University and, in 1843, managed to serve as Moderator of the General Assembly, Minister at the Cathedral, Glasgow and Principal of the University.

Caird wrote to Edward to say that that he accepted the post of principal largely because the Senate had unanimously requested that he present himself for it. He felt he was better suited to the Chair of Theology and part of that enjoyment was his daily interaction with the students, an experience he feared he would now lose. He looked forward to preaching in the University Chapel on Sundays and delivering public addresses as and when he was called upon to do so. Writing to Edward, he said, ‘Many a thorny and intricate problem has been made easier to me by seeing the manner in which it was grappled with by young, acute and enthusiastic minds.’¹⁵³ On leaving his Chair, the Non-Conformist students wrote to him to express their gratitude for all that he done for them. In reply, he said that it had been a particular pleasure for him that students of different denominations had studied together side by side and he hoped that, in the future when doctrinal and other denominational differences would undoubtedly surface between them, they would remember their shared experience in the Divinity Hall at Glasgow and so approach their differences in a kinder and more sympathetic spirit. He also said as in other disciplines, such as science or philosophy, theology was concerned primarily with the discovery of truth and that the only appeal in learning should be to reason; he found it objectionable that, too often, theological students were separated according to different theological systems where, he said, the outcome is assumed before the inquiry begins.

Caird did not regard himself as particularly suited to the post of principal: he felt he had no capacity for dealing with financial matters or administration, yet, from this time forward, he had to thoroughly acquaint himself with all such matters. As principal, Caird was required to chair the Senate and, in practice, the University Court as well and in both to act as impartially as he could. University politics, particularly before the University Bill, was fraught with conflict, factions and ill-feeling: ‘he did not pass through these years without many hours of severe mental anxiety, and often he suffered greatly from loss of sleep when matters of importance were weighing on his mind.’¹⁵⁴ Caird regarded the appointment of new professors

¹⁵³ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, cii

¹⁵⁴ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, cvii

as singularly important because he felt that they more than anything would shape the character and set the direction of the University. He believed that the role of a University was ‘to teach Science, or the universal element in human knowledge.’¹⁵⁵ He said:

Much of the mere information which the student acquires here may fade away from his mind, but what is not lost is the training to keenness and accuracy of his power of observation, the practiced ability to see what the facts of observation really are, to grasp that meaning, appreciate their value, discern them in their light of their relation to other facts and phenomena, weigh the force of evidence for conflicting interpretations of them. Now, here we have a result which only the guidance of a living instructor can supply, and which is of inestimable value as a preparation for the future work and conduct of life.¹⁵⁶

Caird spoke to students and staff of the duties to society which are common to everyone and lie beyond professional work.

Throughout his time as professor and principal, Caird was a proponent of the admission of women into the University. In 1877, the Association for the Higher Education of Women was established and, significantly, Caird was its president and Janet Galloway (later of Queen Margaret College) was the secretary (a post which she held until 1909.) In 1883, QMC was incorporated and it opened the following year. The College received a considerable boost when it was visited by the Queen in 1888 and received an endowment worth £12,000 (North Park House and grounds.) Caird was intimately involved in the negotiations with Queen Margaret College, the college for women, which, in 1892, led to their eventual merger with the University. Outside of the University, Caird appealed for the improvement in the working conditions of women. In acknowledging and congratulating trades’ unions for improving the quality of working life for men, he said that women had to endure ‘more of the worst kind of sweating, paid cruelty and oppression, and all kinds of injustice than ever were attempted with men.’¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ University Address, Moss, 49.

¹⁵⁶ University Address, Moss, 49.

¹⁵⁷ Smith ‘Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest’ in *Scottish Pulpit* (4 Nov 1891) p308

In his role as principal, Caird saw the importance of a good and warm relationship between the city and the University and he maintained personal friendships with ‘many of the leading men of business and civic officials.’¹⁵⁸ His readiness, says Edward, ‘to respond to calls upon his time, and to speak for civic objects, or on great civic occasions, must have done much to make the City take pride in its University, and interest itself in its credit and success.’¹⁵⁹

As he had hoped, Caird spoke regularly to the students through preaching at the weekly services in the University Chapel and, when not preaching, he led them through the conduct of worship. Caird gave the address to the students at the opening of each Session and often reflected on an aspect of study, such as in history or art, or on the thought of some leading thinker, such as Spinoza, Bacon, Hume, Butler and Galileo. Caird also addressed the University at the close of the session; he would comment on the changes that had affected the University throughout the past year, including the deaths and retirements of professors and the election of their successors. During Caird’s time at Glasgow, there were two University Commissions (1876 and 1887), the recasting of the whole system of Degrees in Arts, the adjustment of complicated Ordinances, over which almost every clause was fought in Council, Senate and Court, the gradual shift of power away from the Senate to the Court, the debates over tests and degrees in the Faculty of Theology, the creation of the Faculty of Science, the relations of clinical to systematic teaching and of the University with the Western Infirmary, the provision of new Chairs and Lectureships, the institution of the Students’ Representative Council, the erection of Students’ Union building (1888 and an extension in 1893; besides the Queen and others, Caird and his wife were patrons of the fund-raising for the extension) and the founding of many university societies, including the football club (1873), the athletic club (1881) and the Dialectic Society (1888), which debated, among other things, the abolition of the monarchy and the erection of a new engineering building (1894). Caird, it was said, was not a passive observer but an influential figure in shaping and controlling ‘the movement of the great machine entrusted to his care.’¹⁶⁰ Edward

¹⁵⁸ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, cx

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, cx

¹⁶⁰ The Revd Professor Dickson in Edward Caird, *Memoir*, cxvii

said that Caird as principal, *primus inter pares*, gained and maintained the respect and confidence of his colleagues throughout his term of office.

After Caird's death, Professor Dickson, wrote to Edward of the dignity with which Caird had conducted himself:

[The] public functions, wherein he was known to all, were far from being the whole, or even the most onerous and important of his services to the University, although there were probably some who measured his work mainly by these occasions, and deemed his position one of dignified leisure, occupied only with those congenial studies of which the world gladly at intervals received the ripened fruits. In the more important fields of the Senate and Court, his presence was more essential and indispensable....He remained at his post, as a rule, from the outset to the end of sittings which often lasted for several hours.¹⁶¹

Caird, said Dickson, often had to deal with digression and 'desultory talk'¹⁶² among colleagues within the Senate but he did so with grace and restraint. The Senate often heard about instances of poor discipline among the students. On one occasion, in 1875, when discipline in the Physiology class completely broke down, it fell to Caird to deal with this: a reprimand to the class was delivered by the principal in person.¹⁶³ Caird was also called upon to deal with staffing problems: Caird's 'courage and determination were evident when he encouraged the tempestuous Andrew Buchanan (Institutes of Medicine, 1839 – 1876) to retire once he lost touch with the advances in his subject, and lost control of his class.'¹⁶⁴ By virtue of office, Caird was entitled to attend the meetings of all standing committees and, by request, those of special interest. He took an active part in the work of all the committees, not least the Library Committee; he seldom missed a meeting in twenty-five years.

In 1875, using his privileged position as principal, Caird published an article in the *Christian Treasury* in which he drew attention to "*preventable* causes of destitution and vice, summoned Christian philanthropists to 'investigate the physical causes and

¹⁶¹ Edward, cxv

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, cxvi

¹⁶³ Moss, 53f.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

conditions of living among the poorer classes, their employment, food, house accommodation' and the ways these can be improved."¹⁶⁵ Caird wrote of the rights and duties of owning property as well as raising the question of the redistribution of wealth and the relationship between capital and labour. He was scathing in his public comments when the City Council refused to open the East End Palace to working people on Sundays. He said: 'Could they not offer them this brief refuge from the wretchedness of their narrow and crowded and noisy and too often fireless hearths? Oh! the prejudice and bigotry of men!'¹⁶⁶ Caird's passion for social justice was neither superficial nor passing. How much firsthand contact he had with the living and working conditions of the poorest in society and women in particular is difficult to say but he used his position willingly on their behalf.

During the last fifteen years of the century, professors became more involved in the life of the city; one preferred means was Liberal Unionism. 'The Party attracted Glasgow academics as diverse as John Caird, Richard Jebb, and – most influentially – Kelvin, who became president of its West of Scotland Association.'¹⁶⁷

Death

In June 1896, the University celebrated the 50th anniversary of Kelvin taking up his Chair of Natural Philosophy. Representatives of the scientific community from across the world attended along with representatives of the city and University: 2500 guests in all were welcomed by the Senate. Caird had suffered a paralytic seizure, which disabled his left side and made walking very difficult; he was not present at the celebration. He recovered sufficiently to return to work but, writing to a friend, he knew that this illness was 'the first distant note for me of the ringing-in bell.'¹⁶⁸ In the summer of 1897, he considered resigning but was able to carry on and for much of the next session he attended the meetings of the Senate and Court and

¹⁶⁵ Cheyne, A C *Studies in Scottish Church History* p178f

¹⁶⁶ Jones, H *Principal Caird: An Address, Delivered to the Students of the Moral Philosophy Class on the opening day of the Session 1898-99* (1898) 12.

¹⁶⁷ Moss, 81.

¹⁶⁸ Edward Caird, *Memoir*, cxxxiii

delivered his closing address to the University. However, his health had been deteriorating and he submitted his resignation in February 1898 to take effect from 31 July that year. He had had two attacks of ‘an inflammatory kind’ and, though he nearly died twice, he recovered. His closing address to the University was the last words he spoke in public. In July, he left his University residence for the last time and went to stay with his brother, Colin, at his home, *Dungourney*, in Greenock. Caird died on the morning of Saturday 30 July, 1898, one day before his resignation was due to take effect. The University had purchased a house¹⁶⁹ for Caird in Greenock but he was never able to move in to it. Before he died, in reply to a friend’s letter, he sent a letter of encouragement and support, in which he quoted the last paragraph of his own Gifford Lectures. Caird wrote:

If, underneath all the phenomena of the world in which we live, we can discern no principle of reason and order, no absolute intelligence and love, then, indeed, our hope of immortality may be but an illusion and a dream, then, indeed, the world’s course may be the thing of meaningless waste and reckless incongruity which such a disposition involves. But if there be a God, an infinite loving wisdom which has endowed us with the capacity of knowing, loving, and communing with itself, and which has made the order of the world a system of moral education, preparing and disciplining us for a career of never-ending goodness and blessedness hereafter, can it be that all this vast moral system, with all the hopes and aspirations it encourages us to cherish, is but an elaborate and cruel deception? It is impossible to believe it, *if* there be a God; and *if* that God be manifested in that which is best and greatest in man, above all, in the man Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁰

Caird’s funeral was held in St Paul’s Church, Greenock, on Wednesday 3 August.

The tributes are generous but, for all the dynamism of the last twenty years or so, there had been a growing concern in the last decade of Caird’s tenure that the relative standing of the University was suffering not only because of his ‘decreasing vitality’ but also because ‘his approach to higher education – rooted in the low-cost, lecture-centred, arts dominated university of the early Gilmorehill era – had become slightly old-fashioned.’¹⁷¹ Caird’s appearances beyond Gilmorehill were becoming increasingly rare and, writing to a friend in 1897, Edward said of his brother:

¹⁶⁹ *The Times* 1 August, 1898 The University purchased Drumslea House in Greenock for Caird and his wife; it was fully furnished and ready for occupation.

¹⁷⁰ John Caird, *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity II* 296

¹⁷¹ Moss, 87.

It is impossible but that there should be no controversies and collisions between so many teachers, each set on his own subject, and moderating between them is apt to take a good deal out of any one whose nerves are not at their best.¹⁷²

As Caird's time at Glasgow was drawing to a close, the University feared that it was being left behind, not only in comparison with some English Universities but particularly in Germany and America.

On the day of Caird's funeral, St Paul's Church was filled with a congregation consisting for the most part members of the Senate and the Court of the University;...deputations from the Town Councils of Glasgow and Greenock, and of former students...'¹⁷³ Caird's body was taken from his brother's home to the church in the early afternoon and laid on a bier in front of the Communion Table. The coffin was polished oak with brass mountings; the inscription read: John Caird, D.D., LL.D., aged 77 years. The Queen sent a large wreath of white lilies, acacias, roses and asters set in a spray of fern; on the card it said simply, 'From the Queen'; she was represented by the Very Revd Principal Story. The pall-bearers were his brothers, James, Colin, Edward and Stewart together with the Right Hon. the Earl of Stair, Chancellor of the University; Principal Story; Lord Provost Richmond, Provost Erskine, Greenock; and Mr A S Middleton, representing the students of the University. From silence, the service began with the organist playing Chopin's funeral march; the service was conducted by Principal Story, Dr McAdam Muir (Glasgow Cathedral) and the Revd Robert Barclay, West Parish Church, Greenock. After the service, with mounted police, the cortege formed and the procession extended to about three quarters of a mile. Though many of the residents will only have heard his name rather than known him, the shops on the one and a half mile route to the cemetery were closed as a mark of respect and the entire route was lined with people. Only the family entered the cemetery for the Committal.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁷³ *The Glasgow Herald* 4/8/98

Tributes were made by leaders within the city and churches. Meeting on the same day as the funeral, the Presbytery of Glasgow sent its Moderator as its representative.¹⁷⁴ At the meeting, the Presbytery recorded its appreciation of the many years of dedicated service which Caird had given to the Church and the city. The Revd Thomas Somerville said that he had ‘heard distinguished preachers in other lands, but for the rare combination of intellectual power, beautiful diction, and impressive utterance I have never heard his equal.’ Caird, said Somerville, was distinguished by a ‘catholicity that is the characteristic of a deep spirituality.’ While he regretted that Caird had not spent more time at the Presbytery, he concluded his address saying, ‘In him the university has lost a conspicuous ornament, Glasgow a loyal citizen, Scottish life a striking personality, and those who knew him a dear and true friend.’ At the meeting of the Glasgow U P Presbytery¹⁷⁵ the Moderator, the Revd Dr MacEwan, spoke of the remarkable change that had come over relations between the University and city and that this was in no small measure due to the public spirit of Caird, ‘his affability and discretion, and to his obvious freedom from the pride of intellect and learning.’ At the meeting of the Glasgow Corporation five days after Caird’s death, Lord Provost Richmond said:

Of our distinguished statesmen, orators, scientific investigators and inventors, teachers, theologians, and others in various departments of public service, Glasgow claims her due proportion. In Principal Caird, however, our city possessed one who was not only the chief ornament of our ancient seat of learning, but who by his transcendent mental endowments, his wide scholarship and varied culture, his deeply religious nature, his high standing as a theologian, and his eloquence and power as a preacher, has called forth the admiration and regard of all classes of people.¹⁷⁶

Sir William Gairdner¹⁷⁷ spoke of Caird as a man of ‘great simplicity...homeliness, absolutely without affectation or parade.’ ‘I have seen and heard,’ said Gairdner, ‘his hand and voice tremble in the announcement of a common piece of University discipline; the most splendid orator of his day, afraid to use words lest they should be found not exactly fitted for their purpose.’ While on a visit to Gregport in the

¹⁷⁴ The quotations from the Presbytery of Glasgow are taken from *The Glasgow Herald*, 3/8/1898.

¹⁷⁵ *The Glasgow Herald* 10 August, 1898

¹⁷⁶ *The Glasgow Herald* 5 August, 1898

¹⁷⁷ Gairdner’s words are taken from a letter written to Edward after Caird’s death (Edward, cxxxiv/f)

Highlands, Gairdner was asked to speak about Caird (and the late Dr MacLeod) at a specially convened public meeting.¹⁷⁸ Gairdner spoke of Caird's 'faculty of eloquent speech' and said 'no man ever crossed my path in life who impressed me more as a character of great simplicity.' In the pulpit, Caird was a man whose 'life was hid with Christ in God;' he was unselfish, modest and unobtrusive.

In pulpits across denominations, references were made to Caird. Dr Hunter of Trinity Congregational Church¹⁷⁹ spoke of his personal indebtedness to Caird describing the late Principal as 'pre-eminently the disciple and apostle of spiritual Christianity as distinct from the priestly and dogmatic conception of our religion.....His catholic spirit levelled all sectarian fences.' Caird, said Hunter, stood with the giants of the faith comparing him favourable to Chrysostom, Savonarola, Stanley, Liddon, Guthrie, Candlish and Chalmers. Knowing, perhaps, that Caird appreciated the work of Carlyle, Hunter wrote:

All human work is transitory and small in itself, only the worker thereof, and the spirit that dwelleth in him, is significant.

Caird, said Hunter, was revered because of his unaffected, dignified character as much as his learning and eloquence. The Revd John Edgar of Hillhead Parish Church, Caird's minister, spoke of his last visit to him a few days before he died: 'When I looked on the pallid face and thin white hands I felt that the labourer's task was done, and that the day of rest was not far off. And when I left him it was with the kindly voice ringing in my ears, and the kindly words mingling with the tears in my heart, as he wished me all God's blessings in the years to come.'¹⁸⁰ In Wellington Church, the U P 'preaching station' situated opposite the gates of the University, Dr Black spoke of Caird as an 'ideal preacher.' 'Few', he said, 'have been able by power of thought and expression and depth of emotion and eloquence of speech to move, enrapture, and melt an audience as he could, and he was always willing on special occasions to give other Churches the benefit of his services.'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ *The Glasgow Herald* 10 August, 1898

¹⁷⁹ *The Glasgow Herald* 1 August 1898

¹⁸⁰ *The Glasgow Herald* 1 August, 1898

¹⁸¹ *The Glasgow Herald* 1 August, 1898

The Revd Dr Marshall Lang of the Barony Church said Caird possessed an ‘element of mysticism...without which there cannot be vision far and deep.’ Dr Tulloch, preaching in Maxwell Church, Glasgow, spoke of the great loss to the country, city and university while, at the Commission of the Free Church meeting in Edinburgh, Principal Rainy spoke of Caird’s death as the loss of a father of the Church.

Five days before Caird died, a number of friends from the University and city decided that the retiring Principal should receive a gift as a mark of the admiration and affection in which he was held to be ‘applied to such educational purpose or purposes in the University’ as he may direct. On the day of the meeting, some £4000 was raised; Caird, however, died before being made aware of the proposal and it fell to an executive committee to decide how best the funds should be spent. In the newspapers, there was some correspondence as to what might be done as a memorial of Caird; these suggestions included the erection of a new University Chapel in preference to the Bute Hall, the purchase of a new pulpit or, indeed, the establishment of a new Chair to be named ‘The John Caird Chair of Philosophy of Religion.’

Edward said of his brother that ‘he was essentially a pure-minded man, to whom no one could speak of anything doubtful or equivocal.’¹⁸² Caird, said Edward, did not attach any great importance to his gift of speech; he seemed to take his eloquence in the pulpit or the public arena for granted.

¹⁸² This seems to be too generous, not least because Caird worked in the centre of University life and politics.

Chapter Three: The Croall Lecture

Objections to the Scientific Treatment of Religion

In this chapter, I shall discuss Caird's Croall Lectures. The lectures were delivered in Edinburgh in 1878 – 1879, which were later published in book form: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* in 1880.¹⁸³ There are ten chapters: objections to the Scientific Treatment of Religion (in the first three chapters); the necessity of religion; the proofs for the existence of God; the religious consciousness; the inadequacy of the religious knowledge in the unscientific form; the transition to the speculative idea of religion; the relation of morality and religion; and, finally, the relation of the philosophy to the history of religion. I shall explore Caird's philosophy of religion in each of these chapters and then the criticisms made by his objectors.

Besides John and Edward Caird, there were a number of Scottish philosophers steeped in German idealism. These include A Campbell Fraser, William Wallace, D G Ritchie, James Seth, John Watson, W P Ker, W R Sorley, John H Muirhead, John Stuart Mackenzie and R B Haldane.¹⁸⁴ John H Muirhead said, 'British Idealism from the first has been in essence a philosophy of religion.'¹⁸⁵ British Idealism owed much to the 'crisis of faith' in the late Victorian period. The roots of this crisis were the advance of natural science, positivism and the so-called higher criticism from the Tübingen School of biblical criticism. In natural science, there were the discoveries of the age of the earth and Darwin's theory of evolutionary biology. The Positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte with its three stage theory of progress offered to make sense of human history. Comte's first stage was theological, in which superstition reigned; the second stage was the metaphysical in which humanity turns to speculative explanations; and, the third stage, the positivist,

¹⁸³ John Caird, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1904), James MacLehose & Sons, Glasgow

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Broadie *A History of Scottish Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 302.

¹⁸⁵ J H Muirhead *The Platonic Tradition, Anglo-Saxon Philosophy* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1931), 197.

in which everything is understood in terms of its underlying causes and science comes to 'prominence as a kind of secular religion of humanity.'¹⁸⁶

Idealism sought to answer these developments by offering a rational interpretation of faith to 'satisfy both people's spiritual needs and the intellectual rigours of the new scientific way of thinking.'¹⁸⁷ Alongside Idealism, others responded to these developments in different ways. G J Holyoake and Charles Bradlaugh adopted dogmatic atheism, while the Oxford Movement turned backwards seeking refuge in traditional faith. There was 'confused soul-searching'¹⁸⁸ from E B Pusey, F D Maurice and others in the controversial *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and a simple lament by Matthew Arnold in 'Dover Beach' (1867). Mander states that the four 'founding fathers' of British Idealism were T H Green, John and Edward Caird and F H Bradley.¹⁸⁹ Caird's *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* was Caird's most important piece of philosophical work.¹⁹⁰ Caird states, 'If you begin with reason and criticism you must go on with them....the wounds of reason can only be healed by reason.'¹⁹¹ Caird's *Introduction*, states Mander, is 'in effect a re-presentation in English of Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion.'¹⁹²

Philosophy, for Caird, offers thought an escape from the narrow limits of feeling or practical experience and from all individuality into what is universally and objectively true. 'A philosophy of religion starts with the pre-supposition that religion and religious ideas can be taken out of the domain of feeling or practical experience and made objects of scientific reflection...[and out of] devotion and spiritual enjoyment...[into] the form of pure or speculative thought.'¹⁹³ Philosophy is able to cleanse religion of its imperfections, contradictions and inchoate knowledge and place it more firmly on its proper ground, namely, absolute truth. If religion deals with what is real, then it is properly subject to rational scrutiny. For

¹⁸⁶ W J Mander *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 138.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹⁹¹ John Caird *University Addresses* (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1899), 189.

¹⁹² Mander, 148.

¹⁹³ John Caird, *University Addresses*, 1.

Caird, and this is particularly important, religion cannot hide from reason or claim that it is above reason or that it lies outside reason: if religion is to do with this world and if we are to understand anything that God might communicate to us then, in this rational universe as rational beings, religion is subject to reason and philosophy is, as Hegel argued, the service of God.

Hegel lectured on the philosophy of religion for the first time in 1821; ‘there was no topic in which he had a deeper and more abiding concern.’¹⁹⁴ At the very beginning of his lectures, Hegel said:

God is the beginning of all things and the end of all things; [everything] starts from God and returns to God. God is the one and only object of philosophy. [Its concern is to occupy itself with God, to apprehend everything in God, to lead everything back to God, as well as to derive everything particular from God and to justify everything only insofar as it stems from God, is sustained through its relationship with God, lives by God’s radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God. Thus philosophy *is* theology, and [one’s] occupation with philosophy – or rather *in* philosophy – is of itself the service of God.¹⁹⁵

This passage is alluded to in Caird’s *Preface*, in which he said that the aim of philosophy was to discover ‘not what seems, but what is, and why it is; to bind together objects and events in the links of necessary thought, and to find their last ground and reason in that which comprehends and transcends all – the nature of God.’¹⁹⁶ Like his brother Edward, Caird sought to construct a bridge between the Christian faith and the Idealist philosophical movement which was dominant in British universities in the late nineteenth century¹⁹⁷ and he believed that Idealism offered the Church a credible response to those who were drifting from dogmatic systems of belief and unsettled by the emerging biblical scholarship.

In chapters one to three, Caird discusses three objections to the scientific treatment of religion: the first of these is the relativity of human knowledge. In essence, it is claimed by those who object to religion in any way being thought of as a science that

¹⁹⁴ Peter C Hodgson in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel and Nineteenth Century Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 230.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁹⁶ Caird, *Op. cit* 3

¹⁹⁷ Drummond, *The Church in Late Victorian Scotland* (1874 – 1900) 254

the Infinite cannot be known within the limitations of the finite mind: religion belonged in the realm of the supernatural transcending the finite and phenomenal world, while science observed and categorised nature. In this first lecture, Caird responds directly to the work of Herbert Spencer who holds that ‘the provinces of Science and Religion are distinguished from each other as the known from the unknown and unknowable.’¹⁹⁸ ‘Human intelligence can be proved to be incapable of any absolute knowledge’ because of the relativity of human knowledge.¹⁹⁹ A thing can only be thought by being distinguished from that which it is not, in other words, human thoughts are conditioned thoughts: they are limited sense perception. We cannot think, it is held, outside of the finite universe into a realm in which we would have no means of defining or understanding anything. This argument comes from Kant and is applied to theology by Hamilton and Mansel:

Inasmuch as to think is to ‘condition’, to think or know the ‘unconditioned’ or the infinite and absolute, would be simply to think the unthinkable.²⁰⁰

Quoting Spencer again, Caird said:

A consciousness of the Infinite necessarily involves a self-contradiction; for it implies the recognition by limitation and difference of that which can only be given as unlimited and indifferent.²⁰¹

Thought needs a thinking subject and that which is thought is thought only in relation to the thinking subject; finite beings are necessarily limited to the finite world and human knowledge is necessarily relative. We can never know things in themselves, that is, on their own terms and not conditioned by finite thought, or the Absolute or God in Himself: we cannot know what cannot be brought within finite, conditioned limits. For Spencer, however, this did not amount to the destruction of religion. On the contrary, he argued that despite the fact that we are incapable of thought outwith finite limits, there remained ‘a consciousness that is positive’ and not ‘rendered negative by the negation of limits.’

¹⁹⁸ Caird., Op. cit 10f

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 12f.

Caird responded to the objection of the relativity of human knowledge in four ways. First, he argued that Spencer's theory was inconsistent: one cannot hold that knowledge of God is beyond the capacity of the finite mind because of its need of limitation, then go on to argue that it can *nevertheless* know of the existence of the Absolute through a consciousness that is positive: either it is possible to know or it is not. What is more, argues Caird, in order to be able to speak of the finite as finite we must acknowledge the infinite: the finite conception of what is finite is conditioned by knowledge of what is infinite: 'If we knew no other than finite and phenomenal existences, then we should never know or be able to characterise them as finite and phenomenal.'²⁰² For Caird, it is not possible to bring together, as Spencer does, a basis for knowledge and reality which is limited to the finite, to that which can only ever be conditioned, while, at the same time, speak of a knowledge which can transcend the finite. To speak of the Absolute at all, as Spencer does, is to acknowledge its existence and one cannot then retreat into limited finitude, however reserved one maybe about making claims of the Absolute. Spencer argues that while it is impossible to give 'qualitative or quantitative expression' to the Infinite still there 'remains with us a positive indestructible element of thought.'²⁰³ For Caird, this is to 'play fast and loose with the object of thought. [The Infinite] must either be thinkable or unthinkable...'²⁰⁴ Spencer is not trying to undermine religion: he encouraged a silent reverence for the unknown and unknowable. For Caird, the real is rational and the worship of the unknown and unknowable was not credible or sustainable for rational beings.

Caird's second objection to Spencer and the relativity of human knowledge was to argue that, if human knowledge was limited to what is finite, then such a finite consciousness could never apprehend the Infinite: no supernatural aid could make any difference because whatever is grasped of supernatural revelation would be only relative and subjective, and not absolute. Once again, Spencer cannot have it both ways: either we are conditioned and limited in thought to what is finite or we are not. Even a supernatural revelation could only be conceived of within those very

²⁰² *ibid.*, 15.

²⁰³ *ibid.*, 31.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 32.

narrow limits and, conceived as such, it would have become a relative thought. Spencer is precluded from knowing the Absolute on its own terms.

Caird's third objection concerns Spencer's reverence for the unknown and unknowable but, for Caird, things in themselves, things beyond thought or which have no relation to thought are a mere 'chimera';²⁰⁵ Spencer was not describing 'an unknowable something but utter non-entity.'²⁰⁶ In contrast to this indefensible approach, Caird maintains that science proceeds and can proceed on the basis of reason and rationality because there was in nature, in all of creation, reason and rational relations. Science observed a coherent and self-consistent system in the material world; in other words, this reason and rationality which scientific discovery reveals is objective, outside of the individual, and, as such, is revelatory of the nature of the Infinite. Caird argues that it would be self-contradictory to find that the final explanation of all rational revelations was irrational and that the basis of all things and beings comprehensible by intelligence was a blank non-entity.²⁰⁷

Caird's fourth objection is again directed at Spencer's reverence for the unknown and unknowable. It is not possible, argues Caird, to worship that which is truly unknown. He accepts that there will always be an element of mystery in religion but a religion which is all mystery is absurd. His substantial criticism is that for an object to be contemplated as something more than nothing, more than the negation of thought, it must be something, that is, it must be more than unknown. It is one thing to say that something is unknown but quite another to say that it is unknowable. Transcendence, which Spencer will not forgo, is contemplated and, therefore, it is known. As known, it is subject to reason and thought. For Caird, Spencer's defence of religion, taking it into the realm of the supernatural and the unknown, was no defence at all.

Intuitive or immediate knowledge is that knowledge in which religion finds its truth or reality in the human consciousness. Knowledge which is immediate or intuitive

²⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 20.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 21.

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 22f.

is bound up with ‘the mind’s certainty of itself.’²⁰⁸ For Caird, immediate or intuitive knowledge is no defence of religion. His argument is twofold: first, immediate or intuitive knowledge may not be what it seems, that is, absolute truth; and, second, immediate or intuitive knowledge is empirical, subjective and individual knowledge and as such cannot be its own guarantee or proof. In the first case, immediate knowledge may be no more than ‘unwarrantable popular assumptions’ which, by ‘a process of arbitrary association’, may form on the basis of ‘any intense feeling or inveterate belief.’²⁰⁹ In the second case, intuitive or immediate knowledge which is merely empirical is, therefore, at the same time, individual and subjective: it may be nothing more than that and others may hold quite different intuitions. For these reasons, intuitive or immediate knowledge is no defence of religion. The credible defence of religion, for Caird, lies in reason:

It is the objective authority of reason itself, which, in its *universality*, its absoluteness, in its self-consistency, alone has the right to dominate all individual thought and the power to give irrefragable assurance of its own deliverances.²¹⁰

As in the case of Spencer, it is not credible to revere or worship an idea of God which is devoid of all intellectual content: intuitive or immediate knowledge, which has not been scientifically or philosophically analysed, may lead the worshipper either to the spiritual theism of Christianity or the rudest fetishism.²¹¹ Intuitive or immediate knowledge cannot be its own judge, but rather is to be measured by the ‘principles of thought, education, moral and spiritual culture [of] the more advanced nations.’ Caird believed that the more advanced nations – he almost certainly had in mind Britain and Germany – were, by virtue of their religious progress, far more evolved in their religious and moral thought than more primitive cultures. Reason, for Caird, is the sole means of substantiating any thought or idea and that, if an idea or thought is to have credibility, it must find its place in the ‘organic unity of thought.’²¹² There cannot be two kinds of knowledge, a scientific knowledge and a religious knowledge, a natural and a supernatural knowledge or a rational knowledge

²⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 49.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 52.

²¹⁰ *ibid.*, 55.

²¹¹ *ibid.*, 55.

²¹² *ibid.*, 57.

and a knowledge which lies outside of reason. For Caird, 'each idea has a place or function involved in its own nature and in its necessary relations to all other ideas and to the whole.'²¹³

Caird criticises religious knowledge which finds its defence in positive revelation. For Caird, there cannot be two types of knowledge, ideas of revelation and science which are mutually exclusive as if human knowledge and human beings were subdivided into separate realities. 'Revelation,' argues Caird, must be conceived of as being 'in harmony with the free play and development of thought'²¹⁴ and that the highest ideal of revelation is revelation which honours God and, at the same time, ennobles humanity, that is, not one which rests on absolute dualism in which humanity is passive, mechanically receiving the truth. Caird cites and criticises the work of Bayle and Gibbon, who argue that doctrines are true, however contradictory and irrational because, they say, 'the organ of religious belief is not reason but faith'; reason is, for them, our 'carnal understanding' and it is nothing short of impious for reason to question revelation, which is a higher authority.²¹⁵ Within Caird's schema, all knowledge is subject to rational scrutiny and all thought which expresses reason finds its place within the organic whole, within the unity of thought, and there can be no dualism or discontinuity between one branch of inquiry and another. 'The human spirit,' argues Caird, 'is not a thing divided against itself.'²¹⁶

After criticising Bayle and Gibbon, Caird criticises the apologia of Leibniz whose defence of religion is to say that revelation is not so much opposed to reason but is rather above reason: doctrines are not irrational, says Leibniz, but 'above the grasp of finite reason.'²¹⁷ Caird argues for the unity of thought and inquires of the relationship conceived of between lower and higher reason. How are we to know if there is any correlation between lower and higher reason? If higher reason, as Leibniz maintained, was beyond the capacity of human thought, then it is possible that a doctrine which is contrary to lower reason may also be contrary to higher:

²¹³ *ibid.*, 57.

²¹⁴ *ibid.*, 61.

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, 63.

²¹⁶ *ibid.*, 64.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*, 66.

how would we know? If a revelation is to have any meaning for us at all then it must, to some extent, be able to be construed by the mind and capable of coherent proposition. If higher reason is outside of human thought, then we can say nothing of it. Using the example of the Trinity, Caird illustrates that it is possible to ‘predicate the intelligible ideas....of unity and trinity, or of a trinity which is consistent with unity’ without being able to comprehend the realities represented by such terms as Person or Substance.²¹⁸ For Caird, there must be a real relationship between the nature and reality of the finite and that of the Infinite: in a universe which reveals rational consistency and in which the highest creature is a rational creature, it reasonably follows that the rational thought of which the finite mind is capable will, in objective reason, be consistent with the Infinite Mind. Equally, revelation only has relevance and power for humanity because it is rational and capable of being apprehended by humanity; by contrast, a revelation which contained no rational content would have no moral or spiritual influence.

Mind and Matter

In chapter four, Caird explores the relationship between mind and matter. He gives an account of materialism and argues that, contrary to the popular view and the view of many scientists, thought does not proceed from matter but, rather, matter is dependent upon thought. Caird argues for *the necessity of religion*, that is, the elevation of the finite spirit into communion with the Infinite and Absolute Spirit is in the very nature of humanity. Thought, argues Caird, is presupposed in matter. Materialism is a theory which attempts to give ‘unity, coherence and completeness to our conception of the universe by regarding all its phenomena as ultimately resolvable into the dynamical actions of atoms or particles of matter;’²¹⁹ and ‘thought itself is but a function of matter’ precisely because each thought and emotion is connected to ‘some physical change or modification in the brain matter.’²²⁰ In criticising the theory, Caird argues that it is a mistake to assume that

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, 71.

²¹⁹ *ibid.*, 82.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, 84.

consciousness and thought may be regarded in the same way as inorganic nature, as though under the force of mechanical causality, molecular changes in the brain *create* consciousness and thought. It is not possible to know anything, any atom, molecule or force, without the medium of thought; ‘you cannot start in your investigations with bare, self-identical, objective fact, stripped of every ideal element or contribution from thought.’²²¹ How can we know anything without thought going before the object? In addition, the theory of materialism presupposes thought because it goes beyond mere sensation experience: force, law and matter, which define the relationships of observable objects but which are themselves not observable, are abstractions which are the activity of thought. It is ‘the spiritual self’, ‘the self-conscious Ego’, which brings together all sensation into the unity of thought;²²² physical causality is itself ‘a creation or category of mind.’²²³ Consciousness and thought *create* existence because we can have no knowledge of existence which thought does not precede. Thought, for Caird, is within nature; it makes the observation and measurement of nature through science possible; and, through science, in a process of self-revelation, thought revealing itself in thought, a new and deeper expression of thought emerges. This is Hegel’s dialectic.

Throughout his philosophy of religion, Caird argues for the unity of thought, indeed, the unity of all things:

If we are ever to get at the true explanation of the world, it will doubtless be one according to which there will be no irrational gap or breach of systematic continuity between one order of existences or one class of forces and another, but the transition from the inorganic to the organic, from the lower to higher forms of life, and, last of all, from all inferior orders of being to the self-conscious mind that thinks them, will be seen to be that of intelligible sequence and evolution – in other words, of a succession of elements so rigidly concentrated that the very lowest and least shall be in determinate relation to, and contain in it the prophecy and foreshadowing of, the last and the highest, and the highest shall involve in it the lowest as its necessary presupposition.²²⁴

²²¹ *ibid.*, 88.

²²² *ibid.*, 92.

²²³ *ibid.*, 93.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, 108f.

By way of illustration, Caird maintains that the first prelude note contains within it the promise and the potency of the whole symphony, the symphony which is held in the mind of the composer at the outset, or, again, the first faint touch impressed on the canvas contains within it the promise and the potency of the magnificent and finished work of art, which is held in the mind of the painter before the first touch is laid on the canvas: thought precedes creation.

For Caird to prove the necessity of religion, he must show that ‘the elevation of the human spirit above the finite.....is contained in the very nature of mind, is necessary to mind as mind.’²²⁵ Further, he will be required to demonstrate that the ‘inward dialectic’ of the finite mind finds its ‘goal in a thought which is universal and absolute.’²²⁶ Caird argues that a spiritual, self-conscious being is one which contains within it a virtual or potential infinitude: in nature, objects are only externally related to one another while, by contrast, a spiritual self-conscious being has the potential to transcend its individuality and so share in the life of the world, the life of nature and in that of other spiritual beings. More than that, Caird argues that it is precisely in losing our individuality in the life of nature and others that we discover our larger self, our true nature: it is only as we embrace family, nation and race that we more and more progress to ‘a life which is unlimited and universal.’²²⁷ He affirms that within us we possess an ideal inheritance, a revelation of the Infinite but yet paradoxically acknowledges that we never take full possession of it: though we are ‘capable of a perpetual progress in knowledge and goodness,’ yet we are ‘conscious of our moral defects.’²²⁸ Caird argues that it is within the ‘rational and spiritual nature and life’ of humanity that we become involved in the ‘consciousness of God and our essential relation to Him.’²²⁹ Our individual thoughts may be subject to error but, the very fact that we are aware that there may be error means, implicitly at least, that there is an absolute truth, which it is impossible to doubt. It is because we are rational and spiritual beings that we are concerned with truth and, though individuals may be wrong, our belief in absolute truth *is* unshaken: ‘it is our

²²⁵ *ibid.*, 111.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, 112.

²²⁷ *ibid.*, 117.

²²⁸ *ibid.*, 117f

²²⁹ *ibid.*, 118.

prerogative as spiritual beings, that we can rise above the feeling of the moment, above all that is isolated and individual.’²³⁰ Thought is inescapable: even if we were to annul all existence, argues Caird, it would be ‘a thinkable nothing, a nothing for thought.’²³¹ In conclusion, for Caird, the universe has the rational within it and, in our thought, thought reveals itself to us through the universe; thought precedes matter and materialism is a false theory, a phantom theory because it wholly depends on thought; and, our pursuit of truth, though we may err, is a pursuit after absolute truth which, as rational and spiritual beings, we know to be within the consciousness of God.

Proofs of the Existence of God

Caird explores the merits of three proofs for the existence of God, namely, the cosmological, teleological and ontological arguments. His argument is cumulative in that he takes what he can from the first leaving behind its weaknesses, adds to that the strengths of the second, repeats the exercise for the third argument and, finally, arrives at what is his over-riding philosophy, namely, that consciousness and thought precede matter and all things that can be conceived and that the conception of the nature of God and the nature of humanity which makes religion necessary is that which is the highest realisation of both. In the first of these, the cosmological argument, which maintains that because the world is contingent there must be an Absolute necessary Being, that is, a Being which is not contingent, not caused but rather unconditional and necessary, a First Cause. It is the mind’s sense, argues Caird, that the world is contingent and unsubstantial, illusory and permeated with a feeling of instability that places in the mind a ‘germ of the idea of God.’²³² While Caird accepts that one cannot, by a process of deduction, move from a lower to a higher principle, from the contingent to an absolute, he does accept this traditional argument as ‘a stepping stone towards a higher idea.’²³³ The fundamental problem for Caird with the cosmological argument is that it negates the finite: as an Hegelian,

²³⁰ *ibid.*, 123.

²³¹ *ibid.*, 123.

²³² *ibid.*, 128.

²³³ *ibid.*, 130.

Caird is in search of a theology of unity in which the finite and the Infinite find their fulfilment in the other.

In the teleological or design argument, which, for Caird, is the weakest of the three arguments, we move from the world which is contingent and, therefore, negated by the necessary First Cause, to the finite which is complete in itself and self-determined. God is the Creator or Designer, self-conscious and self-determined before the determination of anything else, 'who freely, or of His own free will and pleasure, creates and works out certain purposes or ends in the world.'²³⁴ God is external to the world and His relationship with the world is 'a purely arbitrary one.'²³⁵ God is essentially outside of the finite, that is to say, the finite is self-formative, self-developing, and any later arbitrary 'corrections' or 'adaptations' indicate that the design was flawed or imperfect in the first place; such a finite world, imperfect as it is, could not of itself self-correct. In this design argument, we do not so much see a manifestation of infinite wisdom as 'mere arbitrary will and power.'²³⁶ For Caird, it is not enough that the finite world is more than a contingent reality or that our conception of God is more than a First Cause but, rather, God is the Infinite Mind, necessarily revealing Himself, the Logos, for whom the existence of the finite world is an essential reality, an integral part of the nature of God, of the Self-Realisation of God.

It is in the ontological argument that Caird finds the best proof for the existence of God; 'it is in this argument that our whole religious consciousness may be said to rest.'²³⁷ Caird's philosophy of religion is governed by reason, by thought, and thought itself precedes all things; there is nothing outside of thought. It is self-contradictory to claim that one can think of a thing-in-itself outside of thought because, by thinking it, one has already pre-supposed thought: 'thought cannot be removed from thought of an object.'²³⁸ In a very clear re-statement of Hegel's dialectic, Caird argues:

²³⁴ *ibid.*, 133.

²³⁵ *ibid.*, 135.

²³⁶ *ibid.*, 141.

²³⁷ *ibid.*, 146.

²³⁸ *ibid.*, 148.

In thinking myself, my own individual consciousness and an outward world of objects, I at the same time tacitly think or pre-suppose a higher, wider, more comprehensive thought or consciousness which embraces and is the unity of both.²³⁹

The higher, wider, more comprehensive thought or consciousness, the thought or consciousness on which individual reason rests, is ‘the universal life of all intelligences, or the life of universal Absolute intelligence.’²⁴⁰ Finite minds are able to transcend their finitude and in so doing unite with the thought or consciousness of the Absolute. Individual self-consciousness is based on the Universal or Absolute Self-Consciousness; ‘all existences are relative to thought.’²⁴¹ Thought precedes the existence of all finite things; nothing exists outside of thought: we may say that we are ‘in thought’ prior to our existence. The existence of an Absolute Spiritual Life is necessary for the existence of anything: ‘in the very idea of God the proof of His existence.’²⁴²

The Religious Consciousness

The religious consciousness rests not in feeling but in thought. Caird argues that there is nothing, including all experience, which exists outside of thought; feeling has no meaning for us apart from thought. Feeling is located in our individuality; it is what makes an experience personal, but ‘we are rational or spiritual beings only in virtue of our power to transcend our individuality.’²⁴³ Caird explores the argument that religion must be equally accessible to all people and, therefore, it must reside in that which is common to all people: religion, it is argued, must be independent of intellectual ability and culture. Religion is ‘feelings of self-abnegation, of conscious dependence, of awe, reverence, aspiration – in that disposition or attitude of the heart towards God’;²⁴⁴ it is feeling, so the argument goes, which elevates ‘the human spirit into union with God’, which resists ‘all division and intermediation.’²⁴⁵ However,

²³⁹ *ibid.*, 149.

²⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 149f

²⁴¹ *ibid.*, 149.

²⁴² *ibid.*, 144.

²⁴³ *ibid.*, 151.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 158.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 159f

Caird argues that it is *not* that feeling is not the essence of religion but that it is a mistake to place religion *exclusively* in feeling, restricting the essence of religion solely to the sphere of feeling. Mere feeling without thought would make it impossible to discriminate in any way the object which gave rise to the feeling and almost everything would be dependent upon the vivacity of the feeling experienced which, by necessity, would be an individual experience. Others may feel differently in response to the same object: the purest faith, Caird argues, would have no advantage over the most primitive or base cult. Feeling is 'individual, variable and accidental' while the Divine is 'universal, immutable and necessary.'²⁴⁶

Feeling is present in the most primitive worship and the objects of nature, such as the sun, moon or sky, can be indicative of a faith which is aware of the spiritual reality lying behind them and upon which every object is dependent. Individual life as well as human history may also constitute a kind of knowledge transcending the faith and events in themselves: the outward phenomena of human history can be read as possessing 'universality and self-consistency...absoluteness and necessity, which are the characteristics of truth.'²⁴⁷ For Caird, 'the life of Christ has been the symbol and suggestion of the richest treasure of moral ideas.'²⁴⁸ In his interpretation of the Bible, Caird penetrates the text beneath the literal level to the deeper, spiritual meaning of the text:

When we read of a Divine Being who has eyes to behold the righteous, ear to listen to their prayer, to whom the smell of incense or the savour of sacrifice is sweet; when He is represented as seated on a throne, according to a place of honour at His right hand, having a local dwelling called heaven, coming down or despatching emissaries from heaven to earth; as working, being fatigued and taking rest; or again, when we are told of His wrath as being roused or abated, of His avenging personal insults and offences, of His repenting of former acts or intentions, of His being induced by persuasion, intreaty, or interposition, to give up His former purposes, of His making and revising schemes, contracts, covenants, with mutual stipulations and penalties for breach of bargain; - in all these cases, even in its most immature stage of spiritual culture, the religious mind passes beyond the anthropomorphic figures to seize, in an indefinite but not unreal way, the hidden spiritual

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 165.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 169.

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 171.

meaning.²⁴⁹

Penetrating beneath anthropomorphism, Caird points us to the spiritual meaning of Scripture but still we need to discriminate the feeling to which that spiritual meaning gives rise: feeling without intelligent or moral content is not defensible. 'Feeling,' for Caird, 'is necessary in religion, but it is by the content or intelligent basis of religion, and not by intensity of feeling, that its character and worth are to be determined.'²⁵⁰

Religion in the Unscientific Form

The representative form of knowledge, that knowledge which is found in ordinary thinking, is inadequate because, in differing ways, it distorts speculative thought. Caird's first example is metaphor: metaphor is that knowledge which is 'the highest attainable by ordinary thought,' but the central problem is that thought is never free of the figurative or analogical relationship upon which it is based; it attempts to relate two things which are essentially different and often it insinuates a materialistic theory in the nature of thought. In considering, for example, the nature of God's presence and action, we impose upon or limit our understanding of God's presence and action if we say that God is 'above' us: the word 'above' determines the direction or route of our ordinary thought and one is almost excluded from then thinking that God's presence and action are to be found in the 'normal processes of thought, in the 'natural' influences of truth over the mind and heart.'²⁵¹ God is either above us, outside of us, or He is not: this knowledge in unscientific form has failed.

Caird maintains that ordinary thought is too dependent upon the properties of material things and relations of objects in space and time: objects which exist in space and time lack the essential unity which is necessary for our understanding of the nature of ultimate reality; Caird argues for an essential unity, 'a unity of

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 174.

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 176.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, 184.

differences, in which all trace of that self-externality which pertains to nature and the world of sense has disappeared.²⁵² Thought precedes matter and there can be no division between thought and matter, though they can be distinguished from one another: love, sympathy and self-surrender are not comprehensible as isolated things, a human spirit is not a human spirit when considered in isolation from other spirits and it is only in our essential relation to one another and to God that the human spirit reaches its 'intensest specification.'²⁵³ Caird argues that spiritual beings cannot be conceived of as being in relation to each other in the manner of stones in a building or as a building to its inhabitants:

Spatial measures are not applicable to moral and spiritual relations: distance or nearness has no more to do with the relations of two spiritual beings than with the relations of two irreconcilable or incongruous ideas.²⁵⁴

Even the metaphorical use of the assimilation of food, 'the bread of life' and 'the living water', as indicative of spiritual reality is, for Caird, only 'half-spiritual.'²⁵⁵

Caird's philosophy of religion is one of spiritual unity as integral, essential to, difference both within the spiritual and material: there is no dualism or pantheism; the fulfilment of the finite *and* the Infinite is found in relationship with the other. Metaphor, or unscientific knowledge of religion, is 'incapable of solving the contradictions or reconciling the seemingly contradictory elements of the spiritual world.'²⁵⁶ Idealism does not abandon or make contingent the finite world but rather maintains the essential nature of the finite and acknowledges the contradictory elements but rises above them to 'lay hold of a higher principle.'²⁵⁷ Caird dismisses as 'a foolish travesty'²⁵⁸ any interpretation of idealism which does not take full account of the reality of the external world:

What, for any sober thinker, idealism does mean is, that both mind and matter, self and not self, intelligence and its objects are, taken in isolation,

²⁵² *ibid.*, 187.

²⁵³ *ibid.*, 189.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 191.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 192.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 192.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 194.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 194.

nothing more than abstractions, that they have no conceivable existence save in opposition and therefore in relation to each other, and that a self which does not refer itself to that which is not-self, a not-self, which is not for a self, is as much an impossible notion as an inside without an outside, an upper without an under, a positive without a negative. Thought or self-consciousness is that which at once posits and in its own higher unity solves the contradiction.²⁵⁹

The finite and the Infinite are correlative terms and not only does the finite spirit find its truer self in its self-surrender to the Infinite but, most significantly, the finite is implied in the very nature of God: the Infinite is a truer Infinite, more Infinite than an Infinite without limit, by virtue of its essential relation through love, sympathy and self-revelation in and through the finite; the Infinite finds Itself in the being and life of the finite: they are inseparably bound up together.

The Speculative Idea of Religion

Religious knowledge is best expressed in speculative thought; this is the point to which Caird has been working: 'the highest ideal of knowledge' is knowledge 'in which the form is no longer foreign, but adequate to the content, and the ideal element is grasped in its purity, and in its internal coherence and harmony.'²⁶⁰ Unity is not a determination which can be added or super-imposed on difference; self-consciousness is not a simple notion which can be thought of in isolation to all other things: 'a self which is conscious and a self which is the object of consciousness, a self which thinks and a self which is thought of...[are an] inseparable correlation.'²⁶¹ Thought and that which is thought about are inseparable, thought and matter are inseparable: this is the unity which Caird maintains and for which no undifferentiated feeling, intuition, metaphor or ordinary knowledge is adequate; mind's 'very nature and essence is to exist in and through its relations to other subjects.'²⁶² Speculative thought takes account of the 'unity which is immanent' in difference: through the inner dialectic, speculative thought transcends objects

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 195.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 205.

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, 212.

²⁶² *ibid.*, 214.

themselves to arrive at the ‘ideal or organic universality.’²⁶³ The process of negation and affirmation is, by nature, an evolutionary process: a perfect organism, for example, is ‘the result of a process of perpetual affirmation and negation, which, whilst it has annulled all the prior stages of its history, at the same time has absorbed and re-affirmed each and all of them in its own perfect unity.’²⁶⁴

Caird explores the relation of the finite spirit to the Infinite Spirit, arguing that the former pre-supposes the latter and, secondly, that contained within the idea of the very nature of the Infinite Spirit, there is an organic relation to the finite. First, then, as rational and spiritual beings the soul’s true life is to be found in union with God; the realisation of both are found in the other, in which finite is not the negation of the Infinite but, rather, is necessary to it. There is no sense in which the finite is a new act which, in some way, adds to the infinitude of God. What distinguishes humanity from animals is our self-consciousness and ability to escape or transcend our individuality:

It is the prerogative of man’s spiritual nature that he can rise above himself as this particular being, that he can cease to think his own thoughts, or be swayed by his own impulses, and can yield himself up to a thought and will that are other and infinitely larger than his own.²⁶⁵

It is as self-conscious beings that we may be said to ‘live in the atmosphere of the Universal Life.’²⁶⁶ As thinking creatures, it is possible for us to become ‘the pure medium or intelligence that is Universal’; in letting our consciousness be ‘possessed and suffused by the Infinite and Eternal Spirit [we] realise the highest possibilities of [our] nature.’²⁶⁷

Caird argues that Infinite Spirit contains, in the very idea of its nature, organic relation to the finite, in which the finite is neither contradictory to nor a negation of the Infinite. It follows that if it is only in union with the Infinite that the finite spiritual nature finds its fulfilment, then there must be something *necessarily* in the

²⁶³ *ibid.*, 218.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 220.

²⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 236.

²⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 236.

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 237.

nature of the Infinite upon which finite spiritual nature is based: ‘a necessary relation cannot be one in which there is necessity only on the one side and mere arbitrary will on the other.’²⁶⁸ In a return to the ontological argument, Caird maintains that the manifestation of love is greater than the possibility of love and that a God who did not reveal Himself in and through the other, who did not, in reality, love, would be a less perfect God than One who did. If God’s capacity for love was ‘unrealised and unrevealed’ then God would be ‘less than He is now, and.....the God of creation, providence, and redemption, is greater than the solitary, self-sufficient God, the abstract Infinitude of the eternal past.’²⁶⁹ God is known and knows Himself in the ‘surrender of the hearts that love Him, it is no paradox to affirm that He knows and loves Himself’ in and through the finite.²⁷⁰ Most crucially, Caird argues that the object, which in the finite minds remains external to the subject, becomes in infinite Thought or Self-Consciousness a ‘moment of its own being, the knowing, thinking spirit becomes object to itself.’²⁷¹

The Religious Life: Relation of Morality & Religion

Human beings are one reality with two natures, namely, an animal nature governed by instinct, which we cannot annihilate, and reason, which enables us to transcend our individuality. Our spiritual consciousness is our truer, deeper nature better than all the sensuous desires and impulses, than all the experiences of phenomenal life. It is our spiritual consciousness which enables us to live beyond our individual experiences and, in doing so, we come to know that sensuous experiences are particular, isolated and limited. It is thought which contextualises the appetites and impulses of nature and, once seen in their true limited light, they begin to lose their potency and we can anticipate and plan for their repetition. Unusually, Caird cites Hegel directly, quoting from *Philosophy of Religion I*:

It is I who am the self that condemns sensuality and passion; and it is I who am, at the same time, the self that is condemned. It is I who abandon myself

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 238.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 241.

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 245.

²⁷¹ *ibid.*, 242f

to the satisfactions of the animal; and it is I who, conscious of an infinite ideal, regard these satisfactions with shame and self-disgust. Nay, inasmuch as consciousness in its unity embraces all that passes within it, it may be said that I am at once the combatants and the conflict and the field that is torn with the strife – the self who struggles to be free, the tyrant that enslaves him, and the scene of the internecine conflict between them.²⁷²

How is this division or strife to be healed? The answer, argues Caird, is to be found in love and self-sacrifice, in the individual losing one's self in the other, living for the other, in and through another, within family, state and even the entire race. The moral life is the 'renunciation of the private or exclusive self and the identification of our life with an ever-widening sphere of spiritual life beyond ourselves.'²⁷³ We find ourselves in and through others when we move beyond moral duty, beyond external law, to the point at which the moral life is no longer foreign to us, that, as a second nature, we act in love and self-sacrifice. Though Caird is doubtful that many individuals manage it, the highest realisation of the moral life is the identification of the individual with the moral life of the human race, where the oppression or degradation of a nation appears to us as personal injury: Christ, says Caird, is the supreme example of this.

The conflict within our self-consciousness needs to be resolved through acknowledging and not suppressing or extirpating either of the two natures. The moral life is attainable in and through our natural passions and not by denying them: the ascetic, argues Caird, mistakenly seeks to eliminate the natural appetites and desires in order to free the inner life, while the mystic, through dreams, seeks to silence the thoughts and feelings which bind us to this world. Yet, 'if morality be conceived of as the identification of the individual with the universal life, the surrender of the private to the social life, it implies the existence, as the raw material out of which it is to be wrought, of the individual self and the various social relations, and therefore of all the natural tendencies out of which these relations rise.'²⁷⁴ It is the perspective which reason brings that we have the conflict in the first place and the means to overcome the natural appetites. The ultimate moral life

²⁷² *ibid.*, 262

²⁷³ *ibid.*, 263.

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 274f

is when ‘the heart thrills only in response to the advancement, the welfare, the happiness of mankind.’²⁷⁵

One of the criticisms made of Caird’s philosophy is that he is dealing with ideal humanity and not the reality. However, Caird acknowledges that morality is not enough: it is only a partial solution to the contradiction and conflict within humanity because, even at the peak of our moral life, we are never truly free of our individuality; any infinitude we experience is but a ‘relative infinitude.’²⁷⁶ In going beyond morality, religion makes us ‘the actual partaker of a Divine or Infinite life;’ it becomes for us a present reality. Caird reminds us that the very first pulse of the spiritual life, in which there is no division between spirit and object, the finite ‘has reached its goal and become suffused with the presence and life of the Infinite.’²⁷⁷ Infinitude is not to be conceived of as ‘quantitative infinitude,’ as if we are somehow able to accumulate the infinite but, instead, we are at the outset possessors of the whole:

Oneness of mind and will with the Divine mind and will is not the future hope and aim of religion, but its very beginning and birth in the soul.²⁷⁸

The moral life is progressive while the ideal of religion is our possession in the here and now: the Infinite does not come to us in portions.

Beyond morality and within religion, it is within prayer that we rise above ourselves, entering the sphere in which all discord and evil disappear: ‘the world in which we outwardly live is only the unreal and the evanescent making believe to be real; the true, the real, the world of unchangeable and eternal reality, is that in which we pray.’²⁷⁹ Prayer is the climax of Christian worship and Caird argued that it was worthwhile to pray for spiritual improvement, for growth in faith, purity and

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 277.

²⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 279.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 280.

²⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 283.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 288.

knowledge because prayer rests on the conviction that ‘we are already perfect, even as our Father in heaven is perfect.’²⁸⁰

The Relation of the Philosophy to the History of Religion

In his final Croall lecture, Caird explores the relationship between the philosophy *and* history of religion. His central thesis is that as spiritual beings we cannot be understood in isolation and, in fact, the only way to understand what it means to be a human being is to understand what we have been. Likewise, in religion and the philosophy of religion, it is important to understand the ‘principle of development’;²⁸¹ it is not possible to understand the present without reference to the past. The human spirit is ‘no self-originated thing. It is the living result of all the stages through which the thought and culture of the world has passed to become what it is.’²⁸²

Caird argues that the revelation of God in the consciousness of humanity comes through the evolution or progress of religious ideas over time. The function of scientific inquiry is to interpret facts to give rational coherence and order; the science of religion must consider ‘all the observable facts of every religion and religious practice or observance in order that the truth of the various positive religions can be measured...’²⁸³ Caird cites the work of Muller²⁸⁴ who is concerned with the tension that exists between polytheistic and monotheistic religions and the progress through time of the former to the latter. On the back of this, Caird notes the unity in diversity in the doctrine of God both within Christianity and Judaism.²⁸⁵ At a more basic level, Caird notes the progress from fetish practice, in which material objects are believed to possess power to a growing awareness of a power behind the

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 289.

²⁸¹ *ibid.*, 293.

²⁸² *ibid.*, 295.

²⁸³ *ibid.*, 308.

²⁸⁴ Max Muller *Hibbert Lectures 1878: Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by the religions of India* (London: Green & Co, 1878).

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 312 Of the Trinity, Caird notes the unity and diversity in the conception of the Godhead and of Judaism, he cites a number of the attributes or names of the One Spiritual Being, attributes or names which reveal diversity. Of the Veda hymns, Muller said, “One poet, for instance, says, ‘They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni; that which is and is one of the wise name in diverse manners.’”

material; this is no different in relationship than primitive face painting to the greatest works of art or counting to mathematical science. Following Muller, Caird explores the movement from the material to the spiritual in the Brahmanic conception of God. The cause of the development from Brahmanism to Buddhism, argues Caird, was a philosophical evolution discontent with the pantheism of the former, a pantheism which meant that the Infinite's relationship with every finite object and action was the same: moral distinction disappeared and inequalities of the cruellest form were instituted and perpetuated, most notably in the Caste system. Buddhism, by contrast, was the elevation of the Infinite above the finite because the finite did not yield satisfaction.

The theory of the development or evolution of religion had many critics, not least because many of those who used the theory did so to discredit religion in general and Christianity in particular. Religious critics argued that Christianity was of a different origin from the other religions and that, in contrast to the superstitions of the heathen, Christianity was of divine or supernatural origin. Caird responded by arguing that religion ought to be judged by its end and not its beginning in much the same way as Astronomy grew out of Astrology or Chemistry out of Alchemy; humanity should be judged not by its origin in the anthropoid ape but as a rational being. The 'real ground for humiliation' in religion was 'in the elements of fetishism and unreason that often still clings to it, in the admixture of vulgar magic which still deforms its worship and in the remains of meaningless and irrational dogma which still corrupts its faith.'²⁸⁶ For Caird, there is no contradiction between the claim of divine or supernatural origin and that of the theory of the development of religion for two reasons: first, to have claimed a disjunction between Christianity and all that had gone before was to 'denigrate the Author of revelation' since every religious insight prior to Christianity would need to be considered false and erroneous; and, second, if, 'by inward transfusion of its idea and principles [Christianity had entered into] the springs of human thought and action,' as Caird believed it had, then it was impossible that it was out of relation to the spiritual

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 330.

consciousness of the world.²⁸⁷ In other words, Christianity could only have the appeal that it has because it speaks to the spiritual consciousness of the age and through the ages. Crucially, Caird argues that most Christian apologists acknowledge the prophecy and anticipation of Christianity in Judaism and so, in what amounts to an emphatic declaration of the Christian faith, Caird argues that far from damaging apologetics, Christianity would be strengthened:

If it can be shown that the highest thought and life, not simply of one isolated and outwardly insignificant nation, but of all the races and nations of the ancient world, constituted a preparation for [Christianity], that the whole order of human history in the pre-Christian ages pointed to Christ, and that He was, in this sense, 'the desire of all nations.'²⁸⁸

In any process of development there must be something new which enables evolution from what already was: for Caird, that something is left undefined; his concern is to note that Christianity does not obliterate but transcends all that has gone before. It takes into itself the highest thought of the pre-Christian evolution of religion. For Caird, there is no way to avoid the theory of evolution in religion without some 'monstrous supposition'²⁸⁹ that everything and everyone prior to the dawning of Christianity be annihilated. In Caird's philosophy of religion, Christianity is able to transmute, harmonise and transcend pantheism, dualism, anthropomorphism and the limitations of monotheism.

Context & Criticism of Caird's Philosophy

I shall now explore the context within which Caird offered his Croall Lectures. It is important to note that from across the Church, various attempts were being made to demonstrate the credibility of faith. Caird's philosophy of religion and re-working of Hegel's thought was only one. In 1875, P G Tait & Balfour Stewart²⁹⁰ published anonymously their book *The Unseen Universe*. Their central thesis was to

²⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 333.

²⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 335.

²⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 341.

²⁹⁰ P G Tait was Professor of Mathematics at Belfast (from 1854 – 1860) and of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh (from 1860 – 1901); Balfour Stewart, a Scot, was Professor of Physics at Manchester (from 1870 – 1881).

demonstrate that there was no incompatibility between science and religion; they sought to do this without direct reference to Scripture. The emerging scientific milieu was an uncomplicated materialism and determinism: ‘Alexander Bain had taken the first steps in a psychology which reduced mind to the level of a by-product of physical states and stimuli.’²⁹¹ This was a ‘Calvinism minus God, a rationalism which regarded thought as an epiphenomenon, a dogmatism masquerading as scepticism.’²⁹² The predestination of religion was an increasingly irrelevant concept as humanity was believed to determine its own future. For Tait and Stewart, their line of argument was one of continuity: religion was consistent with natural law and where ‘strange, abrupt or unforeseen events occurred in the history of the universe’ it was because we did not yet fully understand natural law.²⁹³ While Tait & Stewart maintained that miracles were not to be considered absolute breaks of continuity, they conceded that the doctrine of divine providence offered some difficulty because ‘the general laws appeared to have no reference whatever to individuals.’²⁹⁴ In 1883, Henry Drummond, more popular writer than theologian, published his book, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*: the essays interpreted the Christian life in the language of science arguing that both natural and spiritual law were equally subject to the law of God. In 1890, Drummond published what was to become his most famous work, *The Greatest Thing in the World*: in it, he argued against the old theory of God as One who made the world like an inventor and stood outside it but rather, as One who is ‘immanent in it.’²⁹⁵ The popular success of this book is attributed to the fact he not only unhesitatingly celebrated the age of science which was welcome by an educated laity but that he did so in contemporary language and non-theological terms.

At the same time as scientific thought caught the imagination of the population, the churches were also having to deal with challenges to traditional interpretations of Scripture and their relationship to the historic creeds. In the United Presbyterian

²⁹¹ Drummond, 18.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁹³ Drummond writes, ‘This, after all, was no different from the classic definition of Augustine that a miracle is not contrary to nature but to nature as far as we know it.’ 25

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁹⁵ Henry Drummond in Drummond & Bulloch, 29.

Church, much of the content of the Westminster Confession of Faith was being openly questioned – and doubted. In 1877, David MacRae, a minister in the U.P. Church, tried to persuade the presbytery to overture the Synod for a revision of the Confession: the Synod condemned MacRae for such disparaging behaviour but, nevertheless, appointed a committee to revise the Confession! MacRae argued:

I hold that the doctrine of everlasting and unspeakable torment is not only unscriptural but unreasonable.....that it outrages man's sense of justice, and conflicts with all the purest and noblest sentiments that God has planted in the human breast.....

That God will cast His children into hellfire (as the Standards teach that He will), and keep them alive there in unspeakable torment of soul and body forever, I do not believe, but resent as an outrage on God's eternal justice, as well as His Fatherly pity and love.²⁹⁶

MacRae argued that the Church's adherence to notions of hellfire led to ridicule rather than inspiring terror.

Caird is 'accused' of presenting Hegel's philosophy, both in lecture, sermon and university address without ever critically engaging with it, yet this is not unusual for the period.²⁹⁷ In critiquing Hegel's philosophy, Wallace argues that it does not take sufficient account of the problem of evil. If all reality is rational and righteous, then how do we account for the 'notorious facts of unreason and wrong everywhere'?²⁹⁸ McTaggart suggests that the best solution to the problem is to accept both propositions, namely, 'that the universe is eternally rational, and that imperfection does exist,' and hope that there is yet an undiscovered higher synthesis.²⁹⁹

In *Divine Immanence* (1898), J R Illingworth argued that the material world is a revelation of spirit and that belief in a personal God is firstly instinctive and then, only secondly, is it rational. In stark contrast to Caird, Illingworth argued that belief

²⁹⁶ Drummond., 33f.

²⁹⁷ William Wallace in 'Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic' in *Lectures & Essays on Natural Theology & Ethics* (ed. Edward Caird) Oxford at the Clarendon Press (1898) comments that J M E McTaggart's *Studies in the Hegelian Dialectic* (1896) is 'a distinct advance.' 542

²⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 546.

²⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 546

is immune from rational critique. ‘Reason alone will never secure faith.’³⁰⁰ In response to Kant’s criticism of the inadequacy of the traditional theistic arguments, Illingworth said, ‘The persistence of a belief, whose negative supports have been removed, is an additional evidence of its inherent strength.’³⁰¹ Faith rests in our ‘intense and sincere’ desire to know God: ‘the ethical and religious stirring for God take precedence over and determine the intellectual.’³⁰² For Caird, this was a regressive step and one that fatally undermined faith.

James Orr (in 1891) criticised the Cairds for their adherence to the thought of Hegel, which he regarded as little more than a philosophical diversion which had little to do with history and the *real* Jesus:

The fault of the Hegelian theory is its predominantly intellectual and abstract character.....God is lost in logical relations. It is a system of categories, practically, which is presented to us instead of the Divine. It is the logical relations, the eternal truth, which absorbs all the interest. All else is appearance, manifestation, temporary form....At the shrine of the idea the historical is ruthlessly sacrificed. It is not thus that Christianity conceives of the relation to the Father-God in Christ.³⁰³

Somewhat later, H R Mackintosh makes a similar point:

To believe in the Logos presents no insurmountable difficulty, but to believe in One who died for our sins and to whom we owe everything for our relation to God – this is a burden too heavy to be borne.³⁰⁴

Orr and Mackintosh do not engage directly with Caird’s philosophy of religion or, if they do, it is only to say that it does not fit in the traditional ‘Scheme of Salvation’: that Caird (and his brother) were not trying to maintain that Scheme but, rather, evolve beyond it, can hardly be deemed a failure on their part when they did not restate it as their position. What is more, neither Orr nor Mackintosh takes sufficient account of the fact that their theologies are based on *interpretations* of Scripture and

³⁰⁰ Mander, 403

³⁰¹ J R Illingworth *Divine Immanence: An Essay on the Spiritual Significance of Matter* (Macmillan, 1898) 50

³⁰² Mander, 403

³⁰³ James Orr in Drummond, 255.

³⁰⁴ H R Mackintosh in Drummond, 255f

theological tradition and not on an inherited body of knowledge the interpretation of which is fixed and beyond question. Drummond, likewise, criticises the Cairds for their foreclosure on the relations between humanity and God, which does not take full account of the Atonement and their philosophy did not take sufficient account of sin which, Drummond argues, is ‘the greatest reality of the spiritual world’: again, Drummond, like Orr and Mackintosh, wants to hear only one theological position, framed in familiar language and dependent upon ‘accepted’ interpretations of Scripture, Creeds and Confessions.³⁰⁵ Drummond said:

Among those who judge Calvinism by its negative and repressive aspects there is a general assumption that its decline was a matter of thankfulness alone, but it only requires a brief reading of the Cairds from any traditional Christian standpoint to see how much had been lost.³⁰⁶

H R Mackintosh argued that Hegel (and, in turn, followers such as Caird) emptied Christianity of its essential content and, more than critiqued religion by reason, made religion submissive to reason. For Mackintosh, Hegel was guilty of pantheistic Monism or logical evolutionism: the most ‘sinister’ feature of Hegel’s (and Caird’s) philosophy was to make the Infinite dependent upon the finite; the Absolute or Infinite only rises to consciousness of Self in and through the finite. Moreover, the dialectic which is applied to being as well as thought, of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, is erroneously applied to God:

Not even the Absolute, on his showing, is a finished or irreducible fact complete from the beginning: He, or It, likewise is the outcome of the unending forward movement which has been mediated by the tension of contradictories....³⁰⁷

Like Hegel, Caird adheres to the argument that the God of Incarnation and Redemption is a more Infinite and truer Infinite than an abstract or self-contained God; in order to avoid creation being arbitrary in the will of God, Caird argues that

³⁰⁵ Drummond, 257.

³⁰⁶ Drummond., 257.

³⁰⁷ H R Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1952 (first published 1937)) 104

creation is necessary to God. Was God less than God's Self without creation? Caird answers affirmatively, while Mackintosh and others do not adequately address the contradiction between the self-surrender and self-revealing nature of love which is necessary to make love what it is and the self-contained Absolute. Is it possible to maintain the paradox that God is wholly Himself without creation while at the same time claim that His self-realisation is found in and through His relationship with the finite? Caird argues precisely this when he distinguishes between the qualitative and quantitative nature of the Infinite: God, then, is fully God or, fully in possession of Himself, while, at the same time, there is evolution within God's Self in and through His relationship with the finite. Mackintosh describes the Trinity of Hegel's philosophy as a 'dialectical triad, not Father, Son and Spirit in any sense in which Christian faith has ever pronounced the threefold Name.'³⁰⁸

Citing Feuerbach, Mackintosh argues that religion loses its essential character in the dialectic of Hegel; it becomes the slave of speculative thought and reason.

Mackintosh dismisses Hegel's (and Caird's) philosophy without substantially engaging with the argument: Mackintosh leaves untouched the central thesis of Hegel and Caird that nothing in the created universe, material or abstract, can exist outside of reason. What is more, the dialectic, by its very nature, is self-correcting and never loses touch with phenomenal experience. Too readily, Mackintosh argues for a return to traditional theology and the familiar language of the 'Scheme of Salvation'.

Mackintosh dismisses the philosophy of Hegel (and Caird) as pantheistic: 'the story of man is the history of God's becoming, the self-evolution of the Absolute Reason.'³⁰⁹ Mackintosh criticises the apparent reduction of historical Christianity into the evolution of ideas, myths and parabolic statements: no one event, not even that of Christ, has unique significance. Yet, Caird is at pains to differentiate his philosophy of religion, his understanding of the Christian faith, from pantheism and,

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 105.

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 108.

it seems, no account is taken of this: for Caird, creation matters, it is necessary, and the Infinite is not the finite, for the finite does not satisfy the longings of humanity as spiritual beings. Mackintosh's Christianity has to account for the 'scandal of particularity' and for the *favouritism* of God in His election of Israel, then, in Christ; in his system, Mackintosh must account for the disjunction between the faith of the Church and all other world religions. The evolution of ideas is in sympathy with how human beings evolve as social and intellectual creatures. In a sense, Caird's argument that God reveals God's Self through the normal thought processes of reason is more truly *incarnational* than the dualism of Mackintosh.

Mackintosh argues that the Idealism of Hegel 'silently treats Jesus as....irrelevant,' that 'Christianity breaks the 'bond with history' and that the God-Man is solely to be thought of as a 'logical construction, not as a Living Person.'³¹⁰ It is 'fatally clear,' argues Mackintosh, that Hegel favoured the religion of the Greeks in preference to Old Testament religion: God, for Hegel, was 'Pure Being' rather than the 'free and creative personality' of the Bible.³¹¹ But, we may ask, what is a 'free and creative personality'? To what extent can we maintain that God is free: if creation is entirely an arbitrary act on the part of God, let's hope that He does not change His mind! Caird's argument, by contrast, is that the finite is necessary for the Self-Realisation of God but also, if God is to have integrity by respecting the integrity of creation, then God is not as free as He might otherwise be. Moreover, what does Mackintosh mean by his use of the word 'personality' as applied to God? While Caird acknowledges the dangers of anthropomorphism, does Mackintosh?

In his defence, Mackintosh does acknowledge the contribution which Hegel and Hegelianism make in exposing the fallacy of materialism and for exploring the nature of the human and the Divine: while they are very different, Mackintosh accepts that the potential for union with God is necessarily part of finite nature.

³¹⁰ *ibid.*, 110.

³¹¹ *ibid.*, 110.

Mackintosh argues that Hegel can know nothing of love, as understood in Christian terms, because the self, he argues, cannot know the other, the neighbour, for all are merged into God: this would not be Caird's theology for our highest realisation is in and through the other, through family, state and race; a theology in which love is brought to its climax through relationship with the other. Mackintosh also distinguishes, as he sees it, between the nature of thought in God and that in humanity, the former being creative while the latter only reflective. Yet, if humanity is to have any real independence, any necessary existence, if it is to be more than a passive partner in relationship with God, it may be argued as Hegel (and Caird) does that, in thought, humanity co-creates with God: in so far as it can be, this is a real union. Caird has a higher view of humanity than is typical within the 'Scheme of Salvation.' This may be seen also in Caird's (through Hegel) approach to sin: for Mackintosh sin must be 'disposed of';³¹² but what does that mean? Again, is humanity to be reduced to a passive partner in a mechanical and disempowering Scheme of Salvation? Or, is it, as Caird would argue, that redemption means very little if it is *done to us* and in which we are not active participants: how can we achieve spiritual and moral progress if we are not active in our redemption and, moreover, can we not see the 'wrath' of God as a *symbol* which needs to be interpreted rather than taken literally as a demand which must be satisfied?

Mackintosh argues that, if humanity is to have any relationship with God at all, then God must 'stretch forth His hand and draw us near. If we are to know Him, with the knowledge which is life eternal, He must speak His free and gracious Word.'³¹³ Here, as elsewhere, Mackintosh sinks beneath speculative thought into the undefined language and thought of ordinary religion: what does it mean for God to 'stretch forth His hand' or 'speak His free and gracious Word'? These metaphors take us nowhere and are no defence against the philosophical argument of Caird: the only thoughts we can have, even revelatory thought, is within thought, within and subject to reason; God is not as free as Mackintosh would have us believe and to speak His

³¹² *ibid.*, 116.

³¹³ *ibid.*, 117.

‘gracious Word’, as Mackintosh would argue, is through the written Word of God, which he does not acknowledge is itself a record of the evolution of religious ideas.

Chapter Four: Spinoza

Introduction

In this chapter I shall discuss Caird's book on Spinoza.³¹⁴ From the outset, Caird is sympathetic to Spinoza's direction of travel: he is concerned with the 'dominant idea or general tendency'³¹⁵ of Spinoza's thought and any inconsistencies or other difficulties Caird regards as 'foreign' to the 'essential character' of Spinoza's work.³¹⁶ There are sixteen chapters. Caird begins by outlining the ethical motive of Spinoza's work which is the improvement of understanding. Before considering Spinoza's thought directly, Caird prepares the ground with four chapters on the influence on Spinoza of preceding writers: the Kabbala; medieval Jewish philosophies, in particular, Maimonides; Giordano Bruno; and Descartes. He then turns to Spinoza's *Ethics* and criticises its method. In brief, Caird argues that the geometric method adopted by Spinoza is a structural weakness which leads to problems later on. In the next four chapters Caird discusses Spinoza's terms: substance, attributes, modes and infinite modes. The longest chapter at the heart of Caird's book is *The Nature and Origin of Mind*. Caird goes on to consider *The Moral Nature of Man*, *The Doctrine of Emotions: the self-maintaining impulse*, *Intelligence and Will*, *The Bondage and Freedom of Man*, and *Immortality and the Blessed Life*.

Caird is one of a number of 19th century British interpreters of Spinoza; others include R H M Elwes, William Hale White, Frederick Pollock and James Martineau. These interpreters, including Caird, read Spinoza sympathetically and take 'such candor about Spinoza's shortcomings to be a mark of their earnest and respectful

³¹⁴ John Caird *Spinoza* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1888)

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

engagement with his thought.³¹⁷ Within current Spinoza scholarship, Newlands argues that the prominent Spinoza scholar, Michael Della Rocca, echoes the idealist conclusions of the 19th century.³¹⁸

Caird is often described as an Hegelian. His brother, Edward, challenges this description saying that John almost never quoted Hegel directly. Instead, Edward says that his brother's inclination was towards Spinoza³¹⁹ and in recent times Caird has been described as a disciple of Spinoza.³²⁰ That said, Caird's interpretation of Spinoza, like the others, was shaped by 'the weighty shadows of Kant and Hegel.'³²¹ In his study of Spinoza, Caird 'showed the latent Hegelianism of the great Jewish philosopher.'³²²

Improvement of the Understanding

Caird was an Idealist, not an empiricist. For him, the nature of reality, his ontology or metaphysics, was that reality could only be deduced from rational thought and that reality as received from empirical study is only ever partial, fragmentary, illusory and superficial. In chapter 1, Caird considers the ethical motive of Spinoza's work, which is for the improvement of the understanding. Above all, Spinoza sought 'spiritual rest'. Like Caird, Spinoza found dissatisfaction with the 'ordinary desires and passions', that the 'senses and imagination bred only perturbation and unrest' and that eternal joy is to be found 'beneath the shows of things' in the 'hidden essence'.³²³ Spinoza sought the 'attainment of moral and spiritual perfection' which meant to see things in their reality, all things in their relation to all other things and to

³¹⁷ Samuel Newlands From an article in *Philosophy Compass* 6/2 (2011) 'More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza' (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2011), 111.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

³¹⁹ Edward's *Memoir*

³²⁰ Roger Scruton *Spinoza* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986 (2nd ed. 2002), 120

³²¹ Newlands, 110.

³²² Encyclopaedia Britannica 1911 Vol IV 950.

³²³ John Caird *Spinoza*, 8.

see each thing as part of the absolute whole. Consistently throughout his work, following Hegel, Caird challenges dualism and argues that all things exist in God and everything has to be brought back to God. Caird writes:

True knowledge is that which breaks down the false isolation and independence which popular imagination gives to individual objects; it regards the universe as a whole, in which no object exists for itself, or can be understood save in its relations to other objects and to the whole.³²⁴

For Spinoza (and Caird), the highest idea is the most perfect Being which is the source and origin of all things. Ideas are not the objects themselves. Spinoza assumes that a true idea is something different from its object but that the idea is an adequate representation of its object. Ideas are their own evidence and they rely entirely on reason. Imagination or consciousness attributes a false independence to objects and, says Caird, 'knowledge must remain imperfect until we can contemplate all things from the point of view of their absolute unity.'³²⁵ Caird quotes from the work of Pollock who argues that the idea of the most perfect Being includes, 'if it is not equivalent to, the belief that the whole of nature is one and uniform' which belief is 'the very first principle of science.'³²⁶ Pollock argues that Spinoza being steeped in the tradition of the 'Hebrew sentiment of a one and only Supreme Power clothed the purely scientific idea of the unity and uniformity of nature in the theological guise of the most perfect Being.'³²⁷

Pollock argues that Spinoza 'does not ignore theology, but provides a euthanasia for it.'³²⁸ Reason, says Pollock, once it is free, purges theological speculation of all anthropomorphism and brings it round to the scientific view. While Caird similarly does not endorse anthropomorphism, he rejects the notion of God as an outside creator because it is dualistic. Caird states:

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

To find in God the explanation of the world implies that the existence of the world and all that is in it is traceable to something in the nature of God, and not to His mere arbitrary will or power.³²⁹

There can be no existence outside of God and God is the first principle of all being and knowledge. God cannot *not* create and the finite world is organically integral to the nature of God.

Spinoza sought 'spiritual satisfaction and rest' which he could not find in 'the things that are changeable and perishable.'³³⁰ It was his dissatisfaction with the finite that led him to the 'rational idea of a most perfect Being.'³³¹ Or 'It is not the reality, but the unreality, of the finite world that gives rise to the consciousness of God.'³³² Our dissatisfaction with the finite is itself a presumptive proof for the existence of the Infinite and that our joy and fulfilment lies beyond the finite.³³³ Caird writes:

The sense of the illusoriness of life deepens into weariness and disgust or into a sense of shame and remorse, in the man who reflects on himself and feels himself the sport of it, who has detected the vanity of his desires and hopes, yet is powerless to emancipate himself from their dominion.³³⁴

For Spinoza (and Caird), God or the idea of the most perfect Being is not arrived at by 'a dogmatic dream' or 'extracted from the facts of nature.'³³⁵ Consciousness of the infinite is only possible because thought transcends the finite.

The Influence of Preceding Writers

Caird considers the influences on Spinoza; in particular, Caird briefly discusses the mysticism of the Kabbala, the philosophy of Maimonides, the philosophical writing

³²⁹ *ibid.*, 19.

³³⁰ *ibid.*, 20.

³³¹ *ibid.*, 21.

³³² *ibid.*, 22f.

³³³ *ibid.*, 24.

³³⁴ *ibid.*, 22.

³³⁵ *ibid.*, 24.

of the Italian Dominican friar, Giordano Bruno and Descartes. The problem for all philosophical theology is to account for the relationship between God and the world, the Infinite and the finite. Spinoza is accused of pantheism which Caird suggests finds its impulse in the speculative mysticism of the Kabbala. He quotes Moses Corduero:

The knowledge of the Creator differs from that of the creature in this respect that, in the case of the latter, thought, the thinker, and the object thought of are different. But the Creator is Himself knowledge, the Knower, and the object known. His knowledge does not arise from His directing His thought to things outside of Him, since in comprehending and knowing Himself, He comprehends and knows everything that exists. Nothing exists which is not one with Him and which He does not find in His own substance.³³⁶

The problem for Caird and for neo-Platonic theory is how to account for the finite from the perfect Infinite and differentiation in the indeterminate. Caird is dismissive of ‘poetical or imaginative pantheism’³³⁷ in which individual character is lost in the Divine. The problem for Spinoza, says Caird, is that he starts with a neo-Platonic idea of God and although he wishes to go beyond it, to account for the finite and the integrity of individuality, he is constrained. To rehabilitate the finite from God as a self-identical unity, says Caird, would be ‘to destroy God in order to derive the finite from Him.’³³⁸ Spinoza, says Caird, chooses ‘some illogical expedient’ rather than modify his concept of the Infinite. In summary, Caird writes:

Out of the rigid unity of absolute substance difference is to be deduced; from an infinite which is in incommunicable isolation the finite world is to be desired. This problem Spinoza thinks to solve by conceiving of all individual finite existences as ‘modes’ – that is, finite determinations of the infinite substance – and then escaping the contradiction implied in determinations of the indeterminate by means of the conception of what he terms ‘infinite modes.’³³⁹

Finite modes have no independence from infinite substance, though they are determined by other finite modes in an infinite series. ‘The whole spiritual world,’

³³⁶ *ibid.*, 40.

³³⁷ *ibid.*, 46

³³⁸ *ibid.*, 54.

³³⁹ *ibid.*, 54f.

says Caird, 'may be represented as a universal intelligence which, embracing all finite ideas or intelligences, is itself unlimited or infinite.'³⁴⁰ True knowledge is to escape from 'vague experience' to 'reason or the rational contemplation of the world.'³⁴¹ Reason destroys the unreal basis of the finite and in reaching the highest stage of knowledge, seeing the hidden essence, the knowledge of the finite mind is the knowledge that God has of Himself.

Maimonides follows Plato and Aristotle in his conception of God. For Maimonides, 'In God, the absolute energy, the ever-active intelligence, thought, the thinker, and the object of thought, are one.'³⁴² No predicates or attributes can be attached to God and so Maimonides is forced to account for the creation of the world as *ex nihilo*, as a supernatural act. He is trying to reconcile the force of philosophy with the creed of the synagogue. Consequently, 'a transcendent God, a self-identical unity excluding all distinctions, can find in itself no logical explanation of the existence of the finite world.'³⁴³ Spinoza argues that the finite world follows from the necessity of the divine nature and so cannot accept a supernatural act. Following Plotinus, Spinoza opts for emanation. Plotinus wrote:

Everything that is in any degree perfect, tends to overflow itself, to stream forth, and produce that which is other than itself yet an image of itself. Fire produces heat, snow cold, fragrant substances odours, medicine healing. The most perfect cannot remain powerless, shut up in itself.³⁴⁴

Spinoza does not conceive of an external creator and all matter is dependent for its existence on the infinite. For Spinoza, 'there is but one infinite substance, outside of which nothing exists or can be conceived; and all finite beings, corporeal and spiritual, are only modes of that one substance.'³⁴⁵

³⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 55.

³⁴¹ *ibid.*, 56.

³⁴² *ibid.*, 63.

³⁴³ *ibid.*, 66.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 43.

³⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 73.

Caird describes the philosophical writing of Bruno as a ‘kind of anticipation of Spinozism.’³⁴⁶ Bruno distanced himself from the medieval notion of God as transcendent God as well as the ecclesiastical conception of God as a Being above the world who revealed Himself authoritatively through mysterious dogmas. ‘The false exaltation thus given to the idea of God,’ says Caird, ‘led by obvious sequence to the degradation of nature, and the individual and social life of man.’³⁴⁷ Bruno wrote:

The true philosopher differs from the theologian in this, that the former seeks the infinite Being, not outside of the world, but within it. We must begin.... by recognising the universal agent in creation.....³⁴⁸

For Bruno, ‘the universe is to be conceived of as an infinite living organism, not created by any outward cause, but having the principle of all its existences and activities within itself.’³⁴⁹ Here we meet the concept of the infinite as a living organism and it is because of this philosophical image that Caird challenges Spinoza over his geometric method in *Ethics*. For Bruno, ‘the ideal principle or formative power goes with the matter, and constitutes its essence.’³⁵⁰ The problem for Bruno, says Caird, is that he arrives at a unity which excludes all determinations: all actuality is one and the distinction from God of all things is that they are finite. Bruno wrote of God, ‘Thou art not nearer to the infinite by being man rather than insect...’³⁵¹ Caird’s criticism of Spinoza is that he cannot, like Bruno, maintain the self-identical unity of God, a ‘self-identical undetermined substance’,³⁵² and also account for the existence of finite determinations.

³⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 76.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 77.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 78.

³⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 79.

³⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 81.

³⁵¹ *ibid.*, 86.

³⁵² *ibid.*, 89.

Descartes' starting point is self-consciousness. 'Self-consciousness....is presupposed in all knowledge and to which all realities are relative.'³⁵³ Caird points out:

We can ideally distinguish in it that which thinks and that which is the object of thought; but they do not lie outside of each other, they are indivisible elements in the unity of self-consciousness.³⁵⁴

For Descartes, the veracity of God, the truthfulness of God, who is the source of 'clear and distinct ideas of matter or of external realities', is the guarantor that the ideas of the mind are true.³⁵⁵ Consciousness is for Descartes a proof, a witness, to an infinite Being for he could find no other explanation for the source of consciousness. Caird writes:

The secret nerve of the argument, and that which constituted its motive and significance, was, that there is an infinite element in thought, or that the consciousness of the individual, when closely examined, is seen to be implicated with or dominated by a universal consciousness, or a consciousness of the infinite.³⁵⁶

Descartes employs the ontological argument. From the idea of God, of a Being supremely wise, powerful and perfect, he argues that such a Being does not exist contingently but exists necessarily. Caird writes, 'It is the presence in the mind of the idea of infinite and necessary being that enables us to pronounce any other existences to be finite and contingent.'³⁵⁷ Descartes states, 'The idea of the infinite is prior in me to that of the finite.'³⁵⁸

Spinoza – his method

Spinoza aims at a 'system of knowledge in which everything should follow by strict necessity of thought from the first principle with which it starts.'³⁵⁹ For Spinoza (and Caird), the function of reason is to rise above the senses, 'to strip away from the

³⁵³ *ibid.*, 98.

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 99.

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 100f.

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 102.

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*, 105.

³⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 105.

³⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 113.

objects it contemplates the guise of contingency and independence with which ordinary observation clothes them, and see all things related to each other under the form of absolute necessity.’³⁶⁰ Caird’s main objection to Spinoza’s geometric or scientific method is that it applies concepts of space and quantity to objects which lie outside of each other whereas not only does philosophy admit no unexamined presuppositions but, following Bruno, ‘a living being is not composed of parts which exist simply outside of each other, and have only external or spatial relations to each other....There is a sense in which in an organism the whole is in every part, and the parts exist only in the whole.’ Or, again, ‘in a living unity, when you have summed up all the parts, you have left out something which escapes spatial measurement, and yet which constitutes the very essence of the thing.’³⁶¹ Crucially, ‘in the sphere of thought or self-consciousness we have absolutely transcended that of spatial outwardness.’³⁶² But, even here in his consideration of method, at this point of serious criticism, Caird sympathetically defends his subject claiming that Spinoza is greater than his method.

In the remaining part of this chapter Caird makes two different points. Firstly, Spinoza understands the finite as negation, want of being or non-being. The finite has no individual or independent reality: any independence or individuality is purely appearance and fictitious. ‘Thought,’ says Caird, ‘penetrates to the reality of things....and perceives the only reality to be that, not of the part but of the whole, not of the finite but of the infinite.’³⁶³ Secondly, because Spinoza defines the most perfect being as absolutely indeterminate he fails to see that the indeterminate or affirmative *needs* the determinate or the negative as its correlate. Caird states, ‘The infinite, in the highest sense of the word, must be conceived not as a simple negation of the finite, but that which at once denies and affirms it.’³⁶⁴ Spinoza starts from an indeterminate being as first principle he excludes any possibility of an end or final cause of things. Spinoza rejects a teleological conception of God’s relation to the

³⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 113.

³⁶¹ *ibid.*, 119.

³⁶² *ibid.*, 119.

³⁶³ *ibid.*, 123.

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 124.

world. For Spinoza, to view the world teleologically would 'imply imperfection in God by conceiving of Him as aiming at an end outside of Himself.'³⁶⁵ Spinoza writes, 'If God works for the sake of an end, He necessarily seeks something of which He stands in need.'³⁶⁶ However, Caird rejects Spinoza's argument. For Caird, 'the idea of final cause is that unity which realises itself in differences, which, by its own inner impulse, gives rise to differences, yet ever maintains itself in them, and through these differences returns upon itself.'³⁶⁷ Applying the concept of organic unity, Caird states:

[The idea of final cause] implies an organic process, in which neither the unity is lost in the differences nor the differences in the unity, but in which, the further the differentiation is carried, so much the richer does the original unity become.³⁶⁸

Spinoza is precluded this conclusion because his concept of God is of a self-identical unity in which all differences would, at the end, be annulled.

Substance, Attributes, Modes and Infinite Modes

Philosophy, according to Spinoza, begins with the universal, not the particular, and the particular is known through the universal. Spinoza's starting point is the idea of substance which he defines as 'that which is in itself and is conceived through itself.'³⁶⁹ He identifies substance with God. Substance is:

Infinite, indivisible, unique, free, eternal, as the cause of itself and of all things, and as consisting of an infinite number of attributes, two only of which, thought and extension, are cognisable by human intelligence.

God is a Being absolutely infinite consisting of infinite attributes which express the eternal and infinite essence. All our ideas are developed from substance, from the absolutely infinite being, which is the totality of being outside of which there is no existence. For Spinoza, the separate, independent existence which is commonly attributed to individual things is not real. For Spinoza (and Caird), it is in the

³⁶⁵ *ibid.*, 127.

³⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 128.

³⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 128.

³⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 128.

³⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 130.

organic unity of substance that we find the ultimate unity of self-consciousness and all knowledge. Caird writes:

What [the organic unity] expresses is, that thought and being, though distinguishable, are correlated elements in that ultimate unity of self-consciousness which all knowledge presupposes as its beginning and seeks as its goal.³⁷⁰

For the idealist and, as such, for Caird, the ‘transition....to the finite world must lie in the very nature of substance.’³⁷¹ Spinoza believed that his system achieved this. Spinoza moves from substance to infinite attributes, then into infinite modes and finally into an infinite number of finite modes. The initial problem for Caird is that, in his view, Spinoza simply asserts infinite attributes from infinite substance without supporting argument. Caird accuses Spinoza of moving from a ‘colourless blank’, a unity without differences, to a unity which contains all differences. However, as a sympathetic commentator of Spinoza, Caird argues that the ‘unconscious logic’ of Spinoza leads him to attributes of substance. The differentiation or diversity in unity Spinoza secures through the *perception* of finite intelligence as it contemplates substance. ‘It is,’ says Caird, ‘not the essence itself of substance, but the essence relatively to our intelligence.’³⁷² The absolute nature of God always remains beyond finite intelligence. Spinoza finds a justification for his thought in the Hebrew Scriptures: Jehovah represents the absolute essence of God while El Shaddai and other names are the attributes of God, that is, how God is manifested to created things. Attributes are the reflection of God’s nature, not the essence itself. The infinite being has an infinite number of attributes, though humanity can only know God under the attributes of thought and extension. The absolute infinite substance is not the sum total of all attributes because each attribute expresses the same infinite reality. Here, as Caird would wish, Spinoza is speaking of an organic unity. For Spinoza, each infinite attribute is a ‘parallel, independent, equivalent manifestation of the same infinite object.’³⁷³ Caird notes:

Thought does not contain more or less of God than extension, but the

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 140.

³⁷¹ *ibid.*, 141.

³⁷² *ibid.*, 146.

³⁷³ *ibid.*, 150.

content of both and of an infinite number of other attributes is absolutely the same.³⁷⁴

Caird offers several criticisms of Spinoza's understanding of attributes. Firstly, he notes that thought or intelligence, which is the product of an attribute, is 'surreptitiously introduced to create [all] attributes.' In other words, 'finite intelligence...is supposed to create that by which it is itself created.'³⁷⁵ Secondly, Caird argues that infinite attributes should arise out of the essential nature of substance. 'Substance must be conceived of as a unity which has in it an impulse to go forth out of itself, to realise itself in the infinite determinations expressed by the attributes and their modifications, and yet in so going forth as remaining in unbroken identity with itself.'³⁷⁶ Spinoza cannot achieve this from his starting point and neither does he adequately account for infinite attributes through his explanation of finite intelligence. Thirdly, Caird says that Spinoza falls foul of his own warning. When he speaks of the diversity of attributes as infinite he means quantity when, elsewhere, he asserts that infinite denotes its very nature which is beyond limitation. Fourthly, Caird discusses the exchange which Spinoza had with his correspondent, Tschirnhausen. In particular, Tschirnhausen asks Spinoza if, in fact, the attribute of thought has a wider extent than other attributes. Caird points out that when attributes are parallel, as Spinoza would have them, there is no reason why one attribute would know another. Caird states, 'The relation of parallelism does not carry with it what is involved in the deeper relation of consciousness to its object.'³⁷⁷ The inconsistency within Spinoza's system is, for Caird, a happy one. Caird writes:

Thought has....a purely exceptional place in the scheme; it is the correlate of all other attributes. It is not simply one of the two attributes which human intelligence knows, but it is a universal factor in that knowledge of God which is possible for all finite intelligences.³⁷⁸

Modes, for Spinoza, are the explanation for the existence of the finite world. Modes are identified with individual things and are the 'affections' of the attributes of God. According to Caird, Spinoza wishes to maintain that only the infinite can follow

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 150.

³⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 151.

³⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 152.

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 155.

³⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 156.

from the infinite, that the finite world has only the appearance of reality and, at the same time, modes are affections of infinite attributes. Quoting Spinoza, Caird draws attention to this apparent contradiction:

That which is finite cannot be produced by the absolute nature of God or any of His attributes;.....it must therefore follow from God, or some attribute of God, in so far as He is modified by a modification which is finite and has a determined existence, and this mode or cause must in turn be modified by another.....³⁷⁹

Caird argues that, in the end, Spinoza is saying that individual finite things are derived from God. Spinoza says that finite things follow from God in so far as He is modified by finite things but not individual finite things but the interminable series of finite things, which is not finite but relatively infinite. While Caird makes the point that no matter how infinite in length the series of finite things the finite is not logically derived from the infinite, he along with other British interpreters worked hard to defend Spinoza against Hegel's conclusion that Spinoza was an acosmicist, denying the existence of finite things altogether.

Caird also finds fault with Spinoza's use of causality. Spinoza writes, 'The modes of any given attribute have God for their cause.' However, for Caird, causality is a category of the finite because it implies succession. He writes, 'The infinite cannot be conceived of as external to, and acting on, the finite, as one finite body is outside of, and acts on, another; in such a relation it would cease to be infinite.'³⁸⁰ Equally, Caird argues that we cannot speak of the infinite passing wholly into the finite or in some sense becoming lost in it because this amounts to the extinction of the infinite. God, for Spinoza, is the immanent cause of the world. Spinoza places the cause of finite things within and not outside of the finite, 'wholly within the things which are said to be its effects.'³⁸¹ For Caird, there is inconsistency within Spinoza's system or, at least, Spinoza relies on assertions. In *Ethics*, Spinoza qualifies his concept of mode claiming that 'the finite is *in part* negation.' There is, then, a positive element in finite things. Caird writes:

³⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 165.

³⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 168.

³⁸¹ *ibid.*, 169.

In accordance with the principle which generally governs his reasoning, the very essence of finite things is identified with negation or non-being; they not merely have no real existence apart from God, but existence in God is for them equivalent to extinction of existence. Yet...to these same finite things Spinoza ascribes a positive self-affirmative nature, an individuality which is inherent and essential, and which is not extinguished when the limits that divide the finite from the infinite are removed.³⁸²

For Caird, Spinoza's system holds in tension the case, on the one hand, in which the world is nothing and God is all and, on the other hand, the world is an expression of the nature of God and God's nature manifests itself without losing itself in finite things. Caird says that there is in Spinoza an 'unconscious endeavour' to move from the former to the latter.³⁸³

From modes, Spinoza moves to infinite modes. Infinite modes are a more explicit attempt to bring coherence between the infinite and the finite. As his model, Spinoza has in mind the doctrine of the *logos* or Son of God, who is begotten (and therefore finite) and, at the same time, consubstantial (and therefore eternal) with God. The concept of infinite mode introduces a degree of self-determination which is lacking in Spinoza's definition of substance or attribute. Caird writes:

The barren infinitude is thus rendered fertile, and then finite things are so ennobled as to make it possible to claim for them an infinite origin.³⁸⁴

The concept of infinite mode serves to introduce finitude into his system because Spinoza's definition of substance would never account for the finite. The infinite mode may be defined as 'self-determined extension or extension with the elements of activity or self-determination in it.'³⁸⁵ Caird argues that it would have been better for Spinoza to hold that God as self-conscious Spirit or Mind rather than self-identical substance but as he cannot do this Spinoza achieves self-determination through the guise of infinite mode. The infinite mode of motion is the attribute of extension which is the totality of finite bodies conceived as self-determining and the

³⁸² *ibid.*, 175.

³⁸³ *ibid.*, 175.

³⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 180.

³⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 183.

infinite mode of intellect is the attribute of thought which is the totality of ideas.

Caird writes:

If the phrase '*facies totius universi*' be regarded as embracing both the world of thought and the world of things, then we have a point of view from which we can contemplate it as an infinite and external expression of the absolute nature of God.³⁸⁶

Caird's preferred system is that of organic unity. A living organism, he says, is not the sum of its parts and the infinite organic whole lives in and through 'every infinitesimal portion' and all constituent parts form part of the 'corporate unity' as a 'living expression of its infinite author.'³⁸⁷ Caird remains sympathetic throughout to Spinoza's direction of travel without becoming disillusioned with his method. I shall now turn to Caird's consideration of Spinoza's understanding of the nature and origin of the mind.

The Nature and Origin of the Mind

Spinoza sought 'the discovery of the way to spiritual perfection and blessedness' and he believed that 'all moral advancement rested on disabusing our minds of error and illusion.'³⁸⁸ Spinoza's aim implies in his whole treatment of the subject that the mind was capable of emancipating itself from the particular to the knowledge of things from a universal point of view. The mind must first free itself from domination by the senses and imagination, from transient phenomena, in order to reach permanent laws. The second stage of knowledge is when the mind connects 'things under necessary principles and laws, rest on and involves the higher principle of all, the very necessity of the nature of God.'³⁸⁹ This second stage is intuitive knowledge which 'proceeds from an adequate idea of the absolute essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.'³⁹⁰ For Spinoza, the mind's 'first consciousness of things is from a purely individual, but it

³⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 186.

³⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 187.

³⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 188.

³⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 191.

³⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 191.

is capable of rising to a universal standpoint.³⁹¹ For every mode of thought there is a mode of extension: the modes are in parallel. ‘The body and the idea of the body are one and the same thing.’³⁹² However, as indicated above, the idea of the mind precedes the mind itself. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza writes, ‘the idea is the first thing constituting the being of the human mind.’³⁹³ The mind for Spinoza is the correlate in thought as the body is in extension.

A further characterisation of the mind is the idea of itself. Caird writes, ‘This further step maybe expressed by saying that the first determination is that of mind as consciousness of object, the second that of mind as self-consciousness.’³⁹⁴ For Spinoza, the human mind is part of the infinite intellect of God in so far as God constitutes the essence of the human mind. Spinoza writes, ‘There must necessarily exist in God an idea both of Himself and of all His affections, and therefore an idea of the human mind.’³⁹⁵ It is also true that the mind possesses self-activity; it has a power of self-reflection, a power which matter does not have. The mind has its own inherent activity; the mind has, says Caird, ‘a power over itself’ and a power over the affections of the body, in other words, beyond the sphere of thought itself.³⁹⁶ In summary, Caird says that for Spinoza:

The mind is capable of attaining that supreme elevation in which all finite things and all laws and principles of finite things are referred to the ultimate unity which is their immanent principle and origin. In light of this highest universality, it contemplates all things as they really are, and not as they seem to be, from the point of view of the whole, and not in partial, fragmentary aspects, in their essential relations, and not in accidental combinations, ‘under the form of eternity’, and not under the conditions of time.³⁹⁷

The final consideration of Caird on Spinoza’s treatment of mind is to distinguish between reason and intuitive knowledge. Reason releases us from the perception of the senses and imagination. However, it is intuitive knowledge which takes us to the first or highest principle, knowledge which is ‘determined by the idea of the whole,

³⁹¹ *ibid.*, 191.

³⁹² *ibid.*, 193.

³⁹³ *ibid.*, 194.

³⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 200.

³⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 201.

³⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 204.

³⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 210f.

and proceeds from the whole to the parts, from unity to difference.³⁹⁸ Intuitive knowledge, writes Caird, is ‘that which interprets us to ourselves, and enables us to transform our consciousness of the finite by bringing it into relation with the infinite.’³⁹⁹ In order to understand, we need intuitive knowledge, that is, the metaphysics of the finite dependent upon the infinite.

The Moral Nature of Man and the Self-Maintaining Impulse

In this section I shall consider Caird’s discussion of the moral nature of Man. In a genuinely pantheistic system there would be no qualitative difference between all finite things. However, moral advancement is a stated aim for Spinoza. Spinoza’s explanation for all moral activity he finds in what he calls the self-maintaining or self-realising impulse. It is the human experience to release ourselves from imagination and the passions and to rise to rational freedom. It is by thinking a passion that we have control over it. The mind, guided by reason, rises above the passions. The mind’s joy is in the consciousness of its own perfect activity combined with the idea of God as its cause. The mind’s elevation, its self-consciousness, is the consciousness of God and, as such, has reached human perfection. Caird says that the mind’s love of God is part of the infinite love with which God loves Himself. The mind is not determined by time and, ‘taken up into the infinite, it...knows itself in and through the infinite.’⁴⁰⁰

For Spinoza, reason itself is the single most useful thing in nature which leads humanity to a virtuous or moral life. Caird says that Spinoza’s dialectic ‘furnishes no answer’ to how he reconciles God as the immanent source of all things and an individual finite nature with its own self-realising impulse, which is the negation of the finite with a real self-affirmation essence.⁴⁰¹ For Spinoza, the self of selfishness is destroyed by the self-affirmation of reason. Self-seeking is lost when ‘the self we

³⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 215.

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁰¹ *ibid.*, 236.

seek is that whose essence is reason and the knowledge and love of God.⁴⁰² Caird states, 'The essence of man...is the power to think.' Reason is not subject to individual temperament but determined by objective standard and in intuitive knowledge self-seeking evaporates entirely such that the human love of God does not seek that God should love in return. Caird says that there is no 'purer philosophy' than finding one's satisfaction and fulfilment in the welfare of others. Self-affirmation or self-realisation is increased, not diminished, by the selflessness of an act. There is in Spinoza, says Caird, nothing of the self-abnegation of the mystic or the self-annihilation of the pantheist. Rather, our affirmation and realisation are found in our selflessness.

Intelligence and Will and the Bondage and Freedom of Man

Self-affirmation is an activity and as such it is no step at all for Spinoza to argue that ideas are not passive but involve an element of activity, that is, ideas are self-affirmation. The voluntary activity in the mind involves what we popularly understand by will. For Spinoza, the self-maintaining impulse is self-affirmation by the mind under its own power of thinking. The moral life advances as we make intellectual progress and as inadequate ideas are overcome. 'The effort to understand,' writes Spinoza, 'is the fruit and sole basis of virtue' and evil is defined as that which hinders our understanding.⁴⁰³ Spinoza writes:

In life it is of supreme importance to us to perfect the understanding or reason, and in this one thing consists man's highest happiness or blessedness.⁴⁰⁴

The culmination of the moral life is when, by reason, all finite things are seen in their unity and in their relation to the highest idea, which is God. 'Blessedness,' writes Spinoza, 'is the contentment of spirit which arises from the intuitive knowledge of God.'⁴⁰⁵ Humanity's failure to master the emotions Spinoza called servitude and when thought is in conflict with the will Spinoza argues that such thought is not

⁴⁰² *ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁰³ *ibid.*, 245.

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 246.

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 246.

adequate thought, not thought at all, but inadequate thought. Will, properly understood, presupposes thought and is 'the endeavour of the mind to realise itself.'⁴⁰⁶ Will becomes will and is distinguished from animal impulse by the presence of self-consciousness and self-determination. Caird writes:

Thought or self-consciousness...is the common element of all voluntary acts, and that which gives them their special character and complexion as the acts of a moral agent.⁴⁰⁷

Spinoza speaks not of independence but of the self-maintaining impulse to which he ascribes the function of a self-conscious, self-determining individuality. It is consciousness which 'silently discerns the presence' of unity and universality within all particularity and diversity. Spinoza understands the moral life as a journey from bondage to freedom and, through the power of reason, to rise above all influences in self-determination, self-realisation. However, it is not through the annihilation of the passions that reason triumphs but rather by their transmutation. Spinoza acknowledges that it is impossible for humanity ever to be free of the passions – pleasure and pain – and yet as self-conscious beings the conscious life belongs to a different order from that of nature. Spinoza says, 'a rational life is the proper destiny' of humanity.⁴⁰⁸ It is by actual knowledge of the emotions, says Spinoza, that the mind has power over them and is able to destroy them. Caird says that it is when we gain true knowledge that 'passion loses its hold over us.'⁴⁰⁹ For example,

The wise or freeman is no longer impeded by hunger and lust, but by the rational endeavour after that to which these appetites point – the preservation and continuance of the life of the individual and the race.⁴¹⁰

It is the knowledge of passion which transmutes passion. By contrast, 'Subjection to absolute truth is the freedom of intelligence.'⁴¹¹ The spiritual life is, in part, a journey of transmutation of the passions through reason.

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 251.

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 252.

⁴⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 270.

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 277.

⁴¹⁰ *ibid.*, 279.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*, 283.

Immortality and the Blessed Life

For Spinoza (and Caird), humanity realises itself most fully with the self-affirmation of God in us. Individual perfection, that is, freedom, activity, self-consciousness and self-determination, is summed up by what Spinoza calls ‘intellectual love’, which he defines as ‘joy or delight accompanied by the idea of one’s self, and therefore by the idea of God as its cause.’⁴¹² This is our deepest nature and, says Caird, there is nothing in our true nature which can be affected by the destruction of the body. ‘There is,’ says Spinoza, ‘necessarily in God...an idea which expresses the essence of the human body.’⁴¹³ It would seem that not only the mind but the body also survives death. It is not a purely spiritual body: matter is as divine as mind; thought and extension are both infinite attributes. That said, there is in Spinoza a ‘tacit ascription’ that mind is in some sense superior to the body, thought over extension.⁴¹⁴ Immortality is qualitative, not quantitative, and therefore it may be attained here and now. ‘The moral acceptance of death,’ says Caird, ‘is the supreme act of liberation.’⁴¹⁵

Humanity’s immortality, which stems from the very nature of our being, finds its origin in the nature of God. It is at the point that the limit between the finite and the infinite vanishes, when the finite is conceived only through the infinite, though not suppressed or absorbed, that ‘the finite mind is represented as attaining the most complete individuality and activity.’⁴¹⁶ ‘The perfection of human nature,’ says Caird, ‘is a state of blessedness in which the consciousness of self is not lost in God, but actually based on the consciousness of God.’⁴¹⁷

Conclusion

Caird is a sympathetic commentator of Spinoza. One may go so far as to say that Spinoza is a philosophical soul mate for Caird. Caird is not without his criticisms

⁴¹² *ibid.*, 298.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*, 289.

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.*, 292.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid.*, 291.

⁴¹⁶ *ibid.*, 296.

⁴¹⁷ *ibid.*, 298.

but he works carefully always to give Spinoza the benefit of the doubt. Caird acknowledges that the God with whom Spinoza started his philosophy is not the God with which he ends: the indeterminate infinite, which is the negation of the finite, becomes the infinite which necessarily expresses itself through the finite. Equally, the human mind which is a mere mode of infinite substance whose independent existence is an illusion becomes endowed with an essence which is indestructible and in and through God attains its conscious perfection and blessedness. Self-negation or self-renunciation is the route to the self-realisation of humanity, the perfection of the moral and spiritual life. 'It is in the very act of living for others we die to self.'⁴¹⁸

Spinoza, says Caird, was 'feeling after' a conception of God as an absolute Spirit. Caird writes:

All the manifold distinctions of things and thoughts must be so conceived of as to be capable of being comprehended in one organic whole – capable, that is, in the utmost diversity that can be ascribed to them, of being brought back to unity.⁴¹⁹

It is through the world of objects that consciousness realises itself or becomes self-consciousness. For Caird, the proof of our infinitude is that 'every conceivable advance in knowledge is only a realisation of ourselves, and that the very consciousness of our limits implies that there is that in us which transcends them.'⁴²⁰ Perhaps Caird's attraction to Spinoza was Spinoza's attraction to Christ. In a manner not dissimilar to Bruno, Spinoza admitted that he could not understand how spirits express God more than other creatures but that it was necessary always to 'know the eternal Son of God, that is, God's eternal wisdom, which is manifested in all things, but chiefly in the mind of man, and most of all in Christ Jesus.'⁴²¹

⁴¹⁸ *ibid.*, 307.

⁴¹⁹ *ibid.*, 309.

⁴²⁰ *ibid.*, 313.

⁴²¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1911, Vol 5, Cartesianism, 426.

Chapter Five: The Gifford Lectures (1)

In this section, I shall present and comment upon the philosophical theology of Caird in four areas of thought: the relationship between natural and revealed religion, faith and reason, the Christian idea of God (the Trinity) and the relation of God to the world (pantheism and deism). This essay is a review of the theology of Principal Caird as he defined it in the first five of his Gifford Lectures.

Caird was invited to be the Gifford Lecturer for Session 1890-91. He delivered the first twelve of his lectures then, for various reasons, he could not deliver the others. In 1896, he delivered a further eight lectures in the series but because of a stroke it was impossible for him to go on. Under the terms of the Gifford Bequest, Caird was called upon to present his theology ‘without reference to any authority but reason.’⁴²² His brother, Edward, records that this was no ‘unwelcome limitation.’⁴²³ That sentiment is borne out by the lectures themselves. Caird presents his theology with all the force, passion and rhetoric of a skilled preacher while carefully unfolding his philosophical (Hegelian) thought with precision, eloquence and clarity. Let me begin with Caird’s consideration of the relationship between natural and revealed religion.

Natural and Revealed Religion

Caird argues that, in essence, there is no practical difference between natural and revealed theology. Caird begins by stating that the ‘inherent nature and value of ideas’⁴²⁴ which we possess as human beings are to be judged on their merit and not on their perceived source. It does not matter whether the ideas have come from ‘a voice from heaven, from the lips of an inspired prophet, by sacred tradition...*or* by the observation of nature, by the study of history, by the teaching and influence of other minds, by the moral and spiritual results of our own experience and

⁴²² Edward Caird in *Principal Caird* Memoir pccxix.

⁴²³ *ibid.* pccxix.

⁴²⁴ *ibid.* 5.

reflection.⁴²⁵ While many would regard revealed religion to be of a different and higher order than anything humanity can discern through our own thought and observation of the natural world, Caird states:

Much of the teaching of revelation consists of the unveiling to us of the meaning of nature and human life. One function at least of the inspired record is to help us to read the open secret of the universe; to enable us, by the quickening of our spiritual discernment, to understand the significance of the manifold expression of God in the world and man, the phenomena of nature, the changeful incidents of the individual life, the conflict of man with himself and the world, the mystery of good and evil, of freedom and necessity, of life and death.⁴²⁶

Caird claims that it is the 'office of revelation' to instruct humanity on the nature of life in this life and not instruct us on 'some transcendental order of things' or teach us 'something that pertains to the superhuman, supernatural sphere.'⁴²⁷ The purpose of revealed religion is to enable us to 'penetrate to the moral and spiritual meaning of the world in which we are.'⁴²⁸ The thoughts of biblical prophets, psalmists and apostles concern life in this world, in time and space. Caird states:

The historic books of the Old Testament are part of revealed religion; but they are so because and in so far as they are the record of that revelation of the mind and will of God, of that moral order which is unfolded to us in the life of nations and the course of history.⁴²⁹

Natural theology is traditionally understood as knowledge about God and the divine order which we acquire through reason rather than with the aid of external revelation. While Augustine held that there was no such thing as 'unaided' knowledge of God, Aquinas 'formulated the distinction between natural and revealed theology clearly and authoritatively.'⁴³⁰ Aquinas held that reason, through observation of the natural world, could lead us to affirm that God exists and enable us to deduce, through rational reflection, certain truths about God. However, he also held that only special and revealed theology could lead us to doctrinal truths, such as the Trinity,

⁴²⁵ *ibid*, 6.

⁴²⁶ *ibid*, 6.

⁴²⁷ *ibid*, 7.

⁴²⁸ *ibid*, 7.

⁴²⁹ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1899), 9

⁴³⁰ *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology* 'Natural Theology' by Alan Richardson & John MacQuarrie (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1983), 393

Incarnation and Atonement. While natural reason is common to the good and the bad, knowledge of God belongs only to the good. Aquinas argued that revealed theology was of a higher order: a more perfect knowledge of God is known by grace rather than natural reason. In the eighteenth century, natural theology came under philosophical fire from thinkers, such as Hume. In more recent times, one of natural theology's severest critics is Karl Barth. Barth held that natural theology was an 'illegitimate attempt on the part of man to grasp the knowledge of God.'⁴³¹ Natural theology, he argued, subjected God to human reason and therefore made Him into an object and idol. Barth's criticism was founded on the sinfulness of humanity. Given human sinfulness, there could be no point of contact between God as wholly Other and sinful, alienated humanity. Barth uncompromisingly declared, 'Christ alone; scripture alone.' Caird for his part accepts the place of natural theology and respects the gift of human reason. He argues that, because creation is of supreme value to God, creation, in some measure at least, reflects the nature and character of God. That nature and character can be observed and reflected upon by humanity, by human reason, and also, that humanity, despite the Fall and its sinfulness, is capable of righteous moral action.

Morality or the moral outworking of religion lies at the heart of Caird's philosophical thought and personal faith. This in itself may indicate to us the seriousness with which he honoured God in his life. Caird understood that his daily living was wholly bound up with God. Caird states that the 'highest revelation of God is the life of God in the soul of man' and that the 'realisation of our highest freedom, in every movement of our thought, in every pulsation of our will [is] to be the organ, and expression of the mind and will of God.'⁴³² This is an echo of Hegel. Hegel wrote:

In thinking, I lift myself up into the Absolute....I am infinite consciousness while I remain at the same time finite consciousness...It is in myself and for myself that this conflict and this conciliation take place.⁴³³

⁴³¹ *Ibid*, 393.

⁴³² *Ibid*, 54.

⁴³³ G W F Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (1832) ed. Peter C Hodgson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), Vol 1, 63f.

The principles of divine government are to be found not only in words but in the 'living language' of nations crowning 'national purity and integrity' and bringing 'disaster and ruin' on national corruption.⁴³⁴ The principles of divine government, God's morality, is the very substance of all philosophical thought: sacred texts as well as the insights of natural theology teach us about God, ourselves and our relationship to Him and one another. The insights of religion are to be brought to bear upon every decision and action of every person and nation. For Caird, there can be no separation of politics and religion: 'The everlasting laws of righteousness is reflected in the destinies of modern Europe as really as in those of ancient Asia, in the history of England, France or Germany, as in the history of Israel, Egypt or Assyria.'⁴³⁵ The preacher who, in 1855, preached before the Queen a sermon on religion pervading every action of our lives is found almost forty years later as an academic teaching that the highest revelation of God is to be found in the life lived by humanity in this world. The outworking of God's morality in human living and decision-making is, at its moment of realisation, the manifestation of God's will for the world. Moral decision-making and actions manifest God's love and involvement in the created universe.

Nothing is exempt from the scrutiny of reason in either natural theology or revealed theology. Eternal laws and principles relate to the earthly and human and even these, even our most sacred texts, cannot be ear-marked as being outside the sphere of reason. Caird states:

These doctrines (the Trinity, the Divinity of Jesus and redemption) form no exception to the principle that the distinction between natural and revealed religion is an arbitrary and misleading distinction, and it is the highest function of revelation to enable us with quickened spiritual discernment to understand the true significance of nature and man and human life.⁴³⁶

Revealed religion does not teach us about supernatural spheres or a spiritual other world but reveals this world and life to us. Reason is informed by human experience and this connects reason directly to the subject matter of revelation. Of the doctrine

⁴³⁴ Caird, *Op. Cit.*, 11.

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*, 11.

⁴³⁶ *ibid.*, 13.

of the divinity of Christ, Caird states what he believes to be ‘most profoundly true and real’, namely that the doctrine is concerned with ‘the ideas and principles that interpenetrate the very being and essence of humanity; [our] hopes, aspirations, ideals, which are the very web and woof of the drama of human history.’ Christ is the manifestation of the divine expressed in a human life. The key point here is that the expression is in a human life and this brings the doctrine of the divinity of Christ squarely into the realm of human reason and philosophic inquiry. The divine nature of Christ ‘suffused, blended, identified itself with the thoughts, feelings, volitions of a human individuality.’⁴³⁷

If the first reason for subjecting revealed religion to human reason is that it is concerned with life in this life and world, then the second reason which Caird gives for that subjection is that revealed religion expresses itself in the consciousness of the believer. In other words, revealed religion reveals itself in and through the natural world. The ‘outward revelation’ needs to be ‘inwardly appropriated by the spiritual intelligence.’⁴³⁸ Therefore, revealed religion is once again properly subject to philosophic enquiry and the subject of revealed religion is the nature of life in this world. Caird states:

The teaching...of a great and original mind may be a communication of new ideas to us, but it is so, because it interprets us to ourselves.⁴³⁹

Caird presents the gospel as sensible, rational, reasonable, intelligent, moral and the very answer which humanity seeks in its self-understanding. Christianity captures the nature of the relationship between the human and divine, between the material world and the Spirit of God, by respecting the integrity and value of both. Of Christ, Caird states:

The perfect moral ideal which broke upon the world in the person and life of Christ contains in it elements of moral truth and beauty not less but more

⁴³⁷ *ibid.*, 14f.

⁴³⁸ *ibid.*, 17.

⁴³⁹ *ibid.*, 18.

accordant with our capacity of knowing and appreciating what is good and fair, than the ethical ideas which moralists have struck out apart from it and by what is called the light of nature. The 'eternal life' which Christianity reveals – a life of union and communion with God, in which the finite spirit rises above the power of change and decay into participation in the very life of the Eternal – this is a doctrine more true to man's being and its infinite capabilities, not less but immeasurably more accordant with thought and reason than that notion of mere survival after death, or of an 'immortality of the soul,' based on vague speculation and imperfect analogies, which the light of nature is supposed to yield.⁴⁴⁰

The fact that Christ is rooted in history, that Jesus of Nazareth was an historical character, means that Christianity and the gospel has something to say to the human predicament. Christian theology rests on firmer ground than arguing from general rational principles. For Caird, Christianity's greatest strength lies not in abstract philosophy but is a human life lived in history, a life which struggled with morality and the questions of God, suffering, justice and death.

Caird takes the historicity of Jesus, the God-Man, as a higher form of moral instruction and spiritual insight than natural religion. That is to say, while revealed religion falls within the orbit of reason because it is concerned with life in this world and while the place and importance of reason in religion is, for Caird, unassailable, Christianity is of a higher and different order from other faiths. Caird refutes the claim that there is a set of truths of which all religions speak. It is not the case that we can simply add Christ or Christian theology to Deism, Judaism or Islam. He states:

The God of natural religion is not the same with the God of Christianity. Christianity knows no such being as a 'First cause' or an 'Almighty Creator and Governor of the world' – a being framed at best after the image of man, an anthropomorphic potentate seated on a celestial throne, publishing laws and dispensing rewards after the manner of an earthly sovereign or magistrate.⁴⁴¹

Caird has been meticulously working towards the point when he can declare that there is no distinction between natural and revealed religion in the sense that both are subject to human reason: how else can humanity make sense of God? But Caird

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

goes further. Natural religion on its own is not enough. Christianity has introduced into the thought of the world a new element which ‘works a fundamental change in all the previous materials of religious knowledge.’⁴⁴² Caird states:

By its cardinal doctrine of the unity of God and Man, Christianity has dissolved the dualism which such notions involved, bridged the gulf between the finite and the infinite which, apart from Christianity, was never spanned, and by its conception of the self-realisation of God in humanity, solved the problem which, baffled the greatest minds of ancient times.⁴⁴³

The unity of God and humanity, the unity of God with His creation, is the single thread which connects the entire philosophical theology of Caird. Moreover, morality matters supremely because creation itself matters. Creation is of supreme value to God because of the nature of God. Caird states:

Virtue has been transformed into holiness, obedience to an outward law or even to the imperative of conscience, into participation in a divine spirit and the realisation in all social relations of a divine organic life; and on the other hand, vice has become sin, disobedience to law has deepened into selfish alienation from God and the arresting or abandonment of an infinite destiny.⁴⁴⁴

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, from Paley onwards, natural religion was part of mainstream Christian thought. For Caird, through the eyes of faith, natural religion was ‘elevated and transmuted into revealed.’⁴⁴⁵ It is not only that revealed religion is subject to reason but also that natural religion, being a product of God’s supremely valuable creation, was bestowed with new worth.

The true character of religion comes not from what religions may have in common but from all that differentiates them. Religions are to be measured not by their origins but by their ‘essential principle or end.’⁴⁴⁶ In the case of Christianity, that measure is the life of Jesus Christ, an historical figure whose life and morality can be viewed through rational, philosophical reflection, which ultimately leads us to God in

⁴⁴² *ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴³ *ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 22f.

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 28.

this life and to the world beyond. The dualism between natural and revealed religion is dissolved.

Faith and Reason

In *A Faith That Enquires*, Hegel states, ‘Let man seek God by the way of pure reason, and he will find him.’⁴⁴⁷ Caird acknowledges that faith precedes understanding. Faith is an intuition, an ‘immediate, intuitive recognition, arising in the devout mind on the presentation to it of spiritual truth.’⁴⁴⁸ ‘Religion,’ wrote Caird, ‘is the immediate communion of the soul with God, and the Spirit of God is to the devout and believing mind its own witness.’⁴⁴⁹ Faith does not stand on the intellectual irresistibility of religious doctrine, no matter how appealing or elaborate, but rather on a ‘simple unhesitating assurance’ that belief in the Scripture is ‘beyond the reach of doubt.’⁴⁵⁰

He argues that any religion which claims to be a ‘world-redeeming, regenerating power’ cannot turn either:

on the accurate knowledge of historic facts, the evidence for which it requires much research and critical acuteness to appreciate, or on the apprehension of ideas which only minds endowed with no little dialectic skill or speculative insight can grasp.⁴⁵¹

Reason’s relation to religion is an attempt to bring clarity of understanding to what is felt implicitly given in Christian experience. Reason is a distinguishing feature of what it is to be human, to be a self-conscious intelligence. He states:

In religion as in other spheres of human activity – in morality, in art, in social and political life – there is present the underlying element of reason which is the distinctive characteristic of all the activities of a self-conscious intelligence; and the endeavour, by reflection, to elicit and give objective clearness to that element – to know what our religious ideas mean, what conceptions of the object of worship and of our own spiritual nature are

⁴⁴⁷ G W F Hegel *A Faith That Enquires*, vii.

⁴⁴⁸ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 32.

⁴⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 33.

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*, 35f.

involved in them, on what grounds they rest and to what results they point, to trace their relations to each other and to other branches of knowledge; to infuse, in short, into the spontaneous and unsifted conceptions of religious experience, the objective clearness, necessity, and organic unity of thought....⁴⁵²

Augustine argued that without reason how were we to distinguish between divine authority and pagan soothsaying? It is reason - rational, philosophical reflection - which discriminates between competing claims to authority. Caird states that it would be strange indeed if, 'in the highest of all provinces of human experience, intelligence should be compelled to renounce its birthright.'⁴⁵³ Applying reason to religion, to our intuitive religious belief, is, for Caird, to apply conscious reason to what is implicit reason, where implicit reason is 'reason working intuitively and unconsciously, and therefore, without reflection or criticism of its own operations.'⁴⁵⁴

Biblical interpretation is not beyond the orbit of reason. Scripture concerns life in this world and God's relationship to humanity and, therefore, falls within the sphere of reason. It is by rational reflection and 'discounting the merely symbolic or analogical element'⁴⁵⁵ of the written Word that we arrive at the truth. God having eyes to behold, ears that are open, performing days of work and having days of rest or being enthroned in some celestial locality are all to be distilled through reason.

As he draws his lecture on Faith and Reason to a close, Caird considers morality. Caird bemoans the fact that too many years of Christian history have been marked by controversies, divisions and heresies, by the attempt of the Church to make specific statements or expressions of doctrine the defining rocks upon which faith stands. Caird states that it is 'the religious life' which is the 'practical solution' to the problem of contradictory dogma.⁴⁵⁶ Paradox is an instrument of reason and Caird celebrates the importance of paradox in religious thinking and expression. He states:

⁴⁵² Ibid., 42f.

⁴⁵³ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 45.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 52.

Philosophy seeks to lead us to a higher point of view, from which the seeming contradictions vanish, from which reason, following in the wake of faith, grasps the great conception that the religious life is a life at once human and divine – the conception that God is a self-revealing God, that the Infinite does not annul, but realises Himself in the finite, and that the highest revelation of God is the life of God in the soul of man; and, on the other hand, that the finite rests on, and realises itself in, the Infinite; and that it is not the annihilation, but the realisation of our highest freedom, in every movement of our thought, in every pulsation of our will, to be the organ and expression of the mind and will of God.⁴⁵⁷

This is the intellectual love of which Spinoza speaks.

Caird's theology seeks to remove religion from superstition, arbitrary interpretations of Scripture and individual, subjective opinion. Caird's rationalist approach makes religion intellectually credible and respectable. Religion can sensibly converse with other human disciplines in the pursuit of truth and human self-understanding.

Trinity

For Caird, the Trinity is '*the* distinctively Christian idea of God.'⁴⁵⁸ Too many Christians are by default deists or Unitarians. Many, he claims, readily accept God as Creator, Sustainer and Moral Governor of the world but are:

baffled by the idea of a Being who includes in Himself a threefold Personality, into whose single self-consciousness is introduced a division or distinction that seems absolutely irreconcilable with individual unity.⁴⁵⁹

Caird acknowledges that all things pertaining to God are mysterious and that human thought can never truly hope to grasp the idea of God. The central point about unity, the unity of God in Trinity, is that unity is enhanced and enriched through difference. Using the example of a stone and mechanism with many parts, Caird states:

In the one case the parts have no essential difference, and therefore no internal relation to each other, and their unity is merely that of a juxtaposition or agglomeration; in the other case they are not merely stuck together, but

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

they exist and act each for the other; no one can fulfil the function of another, each is necessary to the others and to the whole which they constitute.⁴⁶⁰

Using an illustration he applies to Spinoza's method, Caird develops his philosophical understanding by moving to the complexity of organisms. He points out that the parts or members of the organism are not only related but that they feel that relation. 'The common life so suffuses them that each member suffers in the injury or suffering, is happy in the happiness and well-being of the rest.'⁴⁶¹ What is more, there is, he states, a 'self-productive energy'⁴⁶² in an organism. There is within it an idea or design, there is potential and power, to realise itself from its very beginning. That energy and development takes place within the entire organism, each part only able to grow because of the energy and development of the others. Caird applies this analogy to humanity, to the highest form of life, self-conscious intelligence. He dismisses as illusion any sense that an individual human being possesses 'pure abstract self-identity.'⁴⁶³ He states:

In its sensations, feelings, ideas, its whole inner experience, [self-conscious life] is perpetually taking up into itself the play and movement, the infinite diversity of the world....The current of experience is continually changing it.⁴⁶⁴

Everything which affects us in the present moment is carried within us to the future self. Following Descartes, without that necessary interaction with others and the world, our self-conscious life could never realise itself. He goes on:

[Self-consciousness] includes two inseparable elements, a self which thinks, and an object which is thought of – not to speak of a third element, the unity or oneness of these two.⁴⁶⁵

Without interaction we are nothing and would become nothing: 'to think nothing is to be nothing.'⁴⁶⁶ We have an essential unity with others and the world because we could not realise ourselves without them. It is that difference with all to whom and

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

which we are united that enables us to grow and realise our potential as self-conscious life. Without nature, the world of objects in time and space, without other intelligences, society and human history and without an appreciation of the universe itself, we would ‘slumber in unconsciousness.’⁴⁶⁷

The moral life is, for Caird, the ‘renunciation of the immediate, private, exclusive self.’⁴⁶⁸ Caird states:

What love, friendship, paternal, filial, fraternal affection means, is that I have emerged from the void and narrow life of immediate, self-centred individuality, that my latent, sympathetic capacities have been liberated, and that another and larger life has begun to flow into mine.⁴⁶⁹

This self-surrender is our route to self-enrichment and fulfilment. Following Hegel, Caird pays tribute to nobler spirits from human history whose capacity for openness to and affection for others yielded in them a moral height or elevation only possible because self-surrender had ‘passed beyond all finite limits into identification with a life that is infinite and eternal.’⁴⁷⁰ For Caird, less could not be true of God.

The distinctively Christian idea of God, the Trinity, draws on self-surrender. Self-surrender is a human characteristic which finds its origin in the nature of God. Caird states:

If we are to ascribe to God an intellectual and moral nature, if we are to think of knowledge, goodness, holiness as essential elements of His being, if we are not to deny to Him the perfection and blessedness which are expressed by the words love, self-surrender, self-sacrifice – then can this result only be reached by the conception which is expressed in the Christian doctrine of the Logos or Son of God – the conception of a self-revealing principle within the very essence of the Godhead.⁴⁷¹

Self-surrender and self-sacrifice are, in this world, the ultimate expressions of love and love itself is humanity’s supreme moral value. Therefore, Caird argues, it is a reasonable deduction that this characteristic and moral quality is to be found in the

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁷¹ *ibid.*, 70.

Godhead. We find that expression in the Word made flesh, the Second Person of the Trinity. If love is the highest level of spiritual nature, if love is the defining moral essence of God, then God cannot remain isolated and self-contained. God must be in relationship for God's self-realisation and self-fulfilment. God will only realise God's potential in relation to that which in one sense at least God is not. Caird states:

God reveals Himself to Himself in nature and in the finite spirits He has made in His own image. The capacity of love in the heart of God may be said to find a new channel for its outflow in every human soul; and in the responsive love which that love awakens there is something which we can think of as adding a new sweetness and joy to the very blessedness of the Infinite.⁴⁷²

If God can only realise God's potential by being in relationship to what which God is not, then we must be able to conceive of a time when God was a 'solitary' God existing in the 'isolation of a still unmediated self-identity.'⁴⁷³ If God can be conceived of being in unmediated self-identity, then God, the Christian God, in that state could not have been able to realise God's full potential: that was a time when God was less perfect and less blessed. Moreover, 'the nature and life of God must be an ever-growing one, and that, as for the finite, so also for the infinite nature, absolute perfection is a goal that can never be reached.'⁴⁷⁴

Caird describes the essential relationship of the Trinity *in itself* in these terms:

[The form of human relationships] suggest to us the thought of an eternal past as the scene of movement of an ineffable and boundless love, of an absolute reciprocity of thought and feeling in the life of the Eternal, of Infinitude yielding to Infinitude, of God as knowing and being known, loving and being loved by God.⁴⁷⁵

To what extent can we conceive of God as being Trinitarian without creation and without the self-giving and self-sacrifice of the Son in human history? Can it be argued that before our universe existed there was another 'creation' of God with which He was in relationship?

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

In his lecture on the Trinity, Caird makes no attempt to justify the doctrine from Scripture nor does he acknowledge that the origins of the doctrine may have more to do with the controversial needs of the fourth century AD than any other influence. Caird avoids the philosophical constructs and terminology of Greek theology (*homoousios* and *hypostaseis*). Caird does not define or qualify what he means by 'Being' when speaking of God.

The Relation of God to the World

In turn, Caird addresses the inadequacies of pantheism and deism before arriving at the Christian view of God's relation to the world. In these lectures, Caird is working towards a philosophical position which best accounts for the existence of creation, the supreme value of creation, creation's moral freedom and the best fit conception of God which, by definition, is one which is most consistent and maintains integrity with the reality of this life and world. He states the problem in these terms:

Can we think of God as infinite and absolute without swamping the reality of nature and the individuality and independence of man; or of nature and man as possessing any reality and independence without tampering with the absoluteness and infinitude of God?⁴⁷⁶

Caird asks if creation and, in particular, self-conscious intelligent life, has *in fact* the moral life and freedom of which it seems to be conscious? Can anything other than God truly exist and act? If we claim for humanity a spiritual and moral life independent of God, then do we not necessarily impose a limit on the absoluteness and infinitude of God? Caird asks if there is a sphere of moral activity which 'not even Omnipotence can invade'?⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 80.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

Pantheism

Caird defines pantheism in these terms:

The forces of nature, the movements of the human spirit, the incidents of each individual life, the history of nations and the human race, all thinking things, all objects of all thought, are immediate manifestations of the being and life of God. We do not need to rise above the finite world to find God, or to discern in nature and man the proofs of the divine existence; for nature and man are themselves divine. Pantheism....is simply the deification of the finite world.⁴⁷⁸

The world is reduced to an illusion. It has no energy of its own for its self-realisation nor does it have moral freedom. The world does not stand apart from God. Every religion, he argues, has at its core the desire to reach beyond the material world and even the most 'ignorant idolater' kneeling before 'stock or stone' would not be possessed of a feeling of fear, awe, reverence or absolute dependence if he believed that there was nothing beyond the 'piece of matter' which 'the eye cannot see or the hand grasp.'⁴⁷⁹ Religion is a seeking after that which is permanent in place of that which is transitory, a search for the Eternal in a reality which is obviously temporal. In a philosophical reversal, Caird states that pantheism is not so much the deification of the world but rather a philosophical theology which reduces the world to 'nothingness and insubstantiality.'⁴⁸⁰ He states:

It is not what the world is, but what it is not, that first sets the mind on feeling after [the Eternal. It is the] awakening of evanescence, the mutability, the lack of permanent reality, which seems to be the universal characteristic of earthly and finite things [and because of that humanity seeks] a First Cause or an all-wise and powerful Creator.⁴⁸¹

What is more, the cosmological argument, viz. that the existence of the finite world is the proof of the existence of an infinite being as its cause, in relation to pantheism does not follow. The cosmological argument only works because the finite world does not satisfy humanity, because even in the mind of the most ignorant idolater, the finite is not ultimate reality. Pantheism affirms that the world in all its finitude is

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

reality. Caird states, 'The discovery of a limit is the proof that the discoverer has already transcended it.'⁴⁸² In conclusion, he states:

The mind's discernment of the finite as finite is due to the presence of the Infinite within it; the power of the eternal betrays itself in the very capacity to recognise the evanescence of the things seen and temporal; it is the rock on which, though we know it not, our feet are resting, that enables us to perceive the flux of the rushing stream which is bearing all finite things away.⁴⁸³

As an example of pantheism, Caird critiques Brahmanism:

In the contemplation of the endlessly diversified, ever shifting forms of things, in the consciousness of the instability and evanescence of human life and of all its possessions and enjoyments, the Indian said: These are but the surface appearances, the insubstantial accidents; beneath them all there is one and only one reality, one Being that is and never changes, and that is Brahma.⁴⁸⁴

In this pantheism, the world is illusory, it is not reality and it cannot therefore be endowed with *supreme value* either in itself or in relation to God and nor can it have any serious moral integrity. Morality cannot be of any ultimate significance in such a world. In such a philosophy, is there meaning in life, does human reason count for anything and would there be any point to human achievement and progress? This view is at great odds with Christianity: a world that was so phantasmal could not possibly be of genuine concern to God and therefore is unlikely to be the home of God Himself. There is little possibility of Incarnation.

Pantheism obliterates rather than comprehends and accounts for the finite. Caird acknowledges that any philosophic system which is not dualistic will maintain that all things are to be found in God, that nothing can have its existence or individuality apart from God, but a philosophy which obliterates the finite world is as equally defective as one which, like Deism, exaggerates its independence. Given the inconsequential nature of the finite within pantheism, Caird doubts whether God, the Infinite Substance, would create at all.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 89f.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

Caird makes the point that our consciousness of independence is the basis of our morality, our moral decision-making, and to obliterate that independence means that evil is only evil in ‘an imaginary or shadowy world.’⁴⁸⁵ While Caird acknowledges that many followers of Pantheism have achieved asceticism and the suppression of natural desires and passions, others have consecrated the same. Given the insubstantial nature of the finite within Pantheism, the only credible moral choice is detachment. The only moral choice, states Caird, is:

to quell within us every movement of conscious life, to kill every human affection and emotion, nay, even all personal consciousness, and so to approximate more and more to that vacuity in which the divine essence is supposed to dwell.⁴⁸⁶

Moreover, a Being who is understood to relate to all finite things equally would, in effect, mean that conscious life has no more value to the divine than inanimate objects. By contrast, the Christian view of the world understands there to be a ‘richer revelation of the infinite mind’ in human intelligence and consciousness than in animal instinct and brute matter. Pantheism is morally fatalistic: ‘the wildest orgies of sensual excess may be part of the homage rendered to the object of worship, seeing that in yielding ourselves up to nature we are yielding ourselves to God.’⁴⁸⁷ By contrast, from the Christian perspective, it is, according to Caird, our moral decision-making which transforms the natural elements of our being into the divine or spiritual life.

The Deistic View

Deism, says Caird, is entirely inconsistent with a genuine Christian understanding of God’s relation to the world, where Pantheism is a total union of God and the world; the world becomes an illusion. In Deism, God is complete, immutable and infinite. Plotinus said that God is sufficient to God’s Self without reference to any other thing. Caird argues that Deism:

⁴⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 113.

betakes itself to anthropomorphic analogies derived from the relations of man to the outward world – such as that of a human contriver or artist to the work of his hands, or that of a human potentate to his subjects.⁴⁸⁸

The weaknesses with this philosophical system are numerous. Firstly, in applying an anthropomorphic model, God is limited to the materials He has available, that is to say, He is limited to the qualities, materials and characteristics He first chooses to use in constructing His creation. These materials have certain qualities which God could shape, mould, fit and construct in much the same way as a human contriver or artist. Once He had created His universe and set it in motion, He would then have only limited means of ‘interfering’ with His handiwork, given that its characteristics were set and bound from the very beginning. Within Deism, the Infinite is distinct from the finite and the Infinite is not completely free to ‘interfere’ or be in reciprocal relation to the finite.

Dualism separates the Infinite from the finite. This poses the problem of the growth and evolution of organisms. In other words, having set creation in motion, the Deistic God necessarily needs the organisms to have self-causation or inner self-development. That concession undermines dualism and external causation, at least in a very narrow sense of Deism. To concede that God is immanent, that He is a spiritual presence, is to depart from Deism towards a more Christian view of God’s relation to the world. The spiritual nature of human life is free from outside interference. Caird states:

If God is to be conceived of as the Author and Sustainer of the life of the Spirit, it must be in such a way that that life can be thought of as our own as well as His, as at once His and our own. His action must be not simply action on us, but action in us, losing the character of externality and becoming in a sense identified with us – the action not of an external creator or ruler, but of an inward inspirer, whose thought becomes our thought, whose will passes into our will, the light of all our seeing, the inspiration of all our doing.⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 124.

The more substantial criticism which Caird places against Deism is one of integrity. It is entirely reasonable to argue that there is a direct and positive correlation between God and the nature of the universe which He created. Caird states:

To find in the idea of God the explanation of the existence of the finite world implies that that existence must be traceable to something in the nature of God and not simply to His arbitrary will.⁴⁹⁰

For some, it may be appealing to conceive of God as all-powerful, as absolute will and power, to act as He pleases without regard to His creation, to be above and outside of limitation. But, argues Caird, it is reasonable to think of God as self-limiting, that there are principles and laws to which 'even Omnipotence must submit': not even God can make $2 + 2 = 6$ or change a circle into a square.⁴⁹¹ 'Freedom,' states Caird, 'does not exclude necessity.'⁴⁹² God must act in accordance with His own character. If it is true that, in humanity, the principles which determine the conduct are not external and foreign but are in fact integral to humanity's own nature, then we can say that humanity is 'self-conditioned and self-determined.'⁴⁹³ Caird takes this argument one step further by applying it to the nature of God. The divine will, he wrote, enters 'into the very essence of God's own nature.'⁴⁹⁴ While men and woman always fall short of the ideal perfection of their spiritual nature, God acts and creates perfectly according to His will. While at first it may be appealing to think of God as absolute power, as in Deism, Caird states:

In the system of the universe there is an unbridged gap, a dualistic breach of unity, so long as there is nothing to connect the essential nature of God with the world He creates.⁴⁹⁵

The finite has value and meaning in a philosophical system of thought in which God is in direct, positive and active relation with the finite. Earlier, Caird made the point that we are relational creatures and that this is a relational world and universe.

Pantheism and Deism are fundamentally not relational. Caird states:

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 126f.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 127.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

To make the system one and unbroken, what thought demands is a relation between the infinite and the finite, such that in the very idea and essence of the Infinite there is that which requires and implies the existence of the finite, and in the very essence of the finite that which finds its explanation in the nature of the infinite.⁴⁹⁶

Caird argues that the explanation and origin of the finite is to be found not in the mere will and pleasure of God, but ‘in the inner being and life of God.’ The nature of God would not be what it is if the world, the finite, did not exist. There would be something lacking in the completeness of the Divine Being if the finite did not exist and ‘with reverence be it said, God would not be God without it.’⁴⁹⁷ Deism leaves God self-contained within his own infinitude and we are left wondering why He created a world like it is or, indeed, why He created at all. Why would God leave His infinitude, his self-complete, self-sufficient Personality to create and why, having created, did He create a world of order and beauty rather than darkness and disorder, why life with its infinite varieties of form and function with its boundless susceptibilities to pleasure and pain, and crowned, no less, with intelligence, moral aspirations, the possibilities of good and evil and the insatiable desires for perfection and happiness?⁴⁹⁸

Caird argues that if Deism allows conscience or an inner sense of good, holy and fair, then it is revealing that the finite is made in the image of the infinite. In Caird’s understanding, the human pursuit of the moral good is the supreme expression of our spiritual nature. That pursuit, that will and action, are our own nature and it seems to Caird more reasonable to argue that we are the way we are because we are made in the image of our Creator. If good and evil have no absolute reality, then the finite loses integrity and everything that we are is meaningless, everything about our nature to desire the highest and best expression of love and selflessness would be a lie. Our inner spiritual and moral voice would be a deception. God is rooted in the very nature of the finite, in the nature of humanity, human society and history. Either

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

what we are has integrity and unity with God or what is the point of life? Why does humanity seek to make progress through history?

In terms of divine agency, Caird, like a number of his contemporaries, challenges supernatural agency traditionally understood. He states:

We have a more vivid impression of the presence of a divine spirit when we think of Him as not limited by any fixed and invariable conditions, as no longer 'imprisoned in natural laws,' but as bringing about results of which we can only say, 'The finger of God is here.'⁴⁹⁹

Caird understands history as always moving upwards, always self-improving, and the hand of providence, upon individuals and nations, is imperceptibly present shaping and guiding humanity towards its fulfilment and destiny in God. He argued that in 'law, government, social order, in science, art, morality [and] religion' humanity is forever moving from barbarism to civilisation and the inheritance of each successive generation is always richer than before. Would Caird have held this view after two world wars? Caird resists the conventional or traditional interpretation of miracles within Scripture. He states:

It may...be shown that such events are lower and not higher manifestations of divine agency than the order of things we commonly refer to natural causes; and that the disproportionate value attached to them is due in a part measure to the survival, even in Christian minds, of the Deistic idea of God and of His relation to the world.⁵⁰⁰

Humanity clings to an anthropomorphic concept of God, 'a celestial mechanic or potentate, constructing and controlling from without the machinery of the world, that we receive such a comparatively vivid impression from supernatural acts and events.'⁵⁰¹ Even within a Deistic view, crude interventions would be less and not fuller and greater manifestations of God. Caird argues that the ingenuity and power required in a creation which was 'self-rectifying, self-adjusting...capable, that is, of adapting itself to all possible circumstances and exigencies' would be of a higher order than a creation which needed 'touched up' and readjusted on special

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 136.

⁵⁰¹ *ibid.*, 136.

occasions.⁵⁰² Moreover, if those interferences, to the rational mind, to God's self-conscious intelligent creatures, appeared arbitrary and inexplicable, then we may reasonably conclude that God is less creative and wise and not more. The final nail in the Deist's coffin is that any interference is, by definition, a denial of dualism. How can, and why would God, interfere with a world He was not in direct, positive and active relation with? Having cleared the way of Pantheism and Deism, Caird turns to the Christian view of God's relation to the world.

⁵⁰² *ibid.*, 137.

Chapter Six: The Gifford Lecture (2)

In this section, I shall present and comment upon the philosophical theology of John Caird in four areas of thought: the relation of God to the world (the Christian view), the origin and nature of evil (the Augustinian theory, the theory of negation or privation, the predominance of sense over spirit and the theory of free will), the possibility of moral restoration, the Incarnation and the Atonement.

Fergusson states that in Caird ‘we encounter the most significant theological appropriation of idealist philosophy.’⁵⁰³ Taylor states that Hegel’s achievement was to undermine the idea that human consciousness could be understood in the abstract: human consciousness is situated in our life as embodied and social beings.⁵⁰⁴ Following Aristotle, the God of the Enlightenment, *ens realissimum* (the most real being), understood as the most original and perfect being, sought apart from the everyday things of this world, is shown to be inadequate: Hegel gives philosophical expression to the theology of negation, finitude and death and locates them within the life of the Divine.⁵⁰⁵ In his work, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel wrote:

The life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself.⁵⁰⁶

The Enlightenment drew theology and the philosophy of religion towards the unknowability of God, of God as abstract essence (*Wesen*), while Hegel wrote of God as Spirit (*Geist*). For Hegel, God is to be understood as the God who is, first of all, present in the community of faith, in religious belief, and present in the mode of His Being as Spirit, present in the human consciousness. Hegel argued that it is the distinction of our age to ‘know an infinite mass of objects, but only of God to know

⁵⁰³ David Fergusson (ed) *Scottish Philosophical Theology 1700 – 2000* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2007), 17.

⁵⁰⁴ Charles Taylor *Hegel and Modern Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 167.

⁵⁰⁵ Eberhard Jüngel *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt* (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1977), 100.

⁵⁰⁶ G W F Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A V Miller (OUP, 1977), 19.

nothing.⁵⁰⁷ Hegel's thought represents an almost complete departure from that of the Enlightenment. For Hegel, 'God is the beginning and end of all things. God is the sacred centre, which animates and inspires all things.'⁵⁰⁸ He wrote:

God is the one and only object of philosophy. [Its concern is] to occupy itself with God, to apprehend everything in God, to lead everything back to God, as well as to derive everything particular from God and to justify everything insofar as it stems from God, is sustained through its relationship with God, lives by God's radiance and has [within itself] the mind of God. Thus philosophy is theology, and [one's] occupation with philosophy – rather in philosophy – is of itself the service of God.⁵⁰⁹

Hegel argued that God is to be known by reason as distinct from positive revelation⁵¹⁰, though he did argue that there was, properly understood, no distinction between reason and positive revelation because that which is revealed is rational and reason itself is revelatory.⁵¹¹ Of reason, Hegel states that there cannot be two kinds of reason and truth, one for the finite world and one for God. He wrote:

Human reason....is reason generally, is the divine within humanity. Spirit, insofar as it is called divine spirit, is not a spirit beyond the stars or beyond the world; for God is present, is omnipresent, and strictly as spirit is God present in spirit. God is a living God who is effective, active, and present in spirit.⁵¹²

The relation of God to the world

Caird is seeking a philosophy of religion which respects the integrity of creation, its independence and moral freedom, and, at the same time, conceptualises God in a manner consistent with what we know about the created order. He frames his question in these terms:

⁵⁰⁷ Peter C Hodgson (ed) translated by R F Brown, P C Hodgson and J M Stewart *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 3 vols. (1: 86-87).

⁵⁰⁸ Stephen Houlgate (ed.) *The Hegel Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 483.

⁵⁰⁹ Peter C Hodgson (ed) translated by R F Brown, P C Hodgson and J M Stewart *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 3 vols. (1: 84).

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, (1:83)

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, (3:63)

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, (1:130)

Can we form an intelligent conception of God as a Being who is all in all, without sacrificing or suppressing the reality and independence of the finite world; who is not simply the external Creator of the world, but the inward principle and ground of its being; and who, finally, is related to the world, not by the link of arbitrary will, but by the inward necessity of His own nature?⁵¹³

Caird sets out to show that the Infinite or Intelligent Mind is the ground of our being, that it is not incidental but rather in the very nature of Godself to reveal Godself to the world and that, far from negating the finite in any way, the infinitude of God, rightly conceived, is the ‘principle of the individuality and independence of nature and man.’⁵¹⁴ Like Hegel, Caird challenges the Kantian understanding of reality. Kant maintained that our concepts of reality are just that, *our* concepts and that we are never able to reach beyond the constructs of our minds to perceive reality as it is in itself. Caird notes that the cultured observer goes beyond the crude realism of passive spectators to appreciate that what exists exists relative to the sensibility of the observer. Without ‘organs of sense to receive impressions’ and ‘conscious intelligence to apprehend them’, ‘the vibrating ether, the light waves or sound waves’ would never become light or sound.⁵¹⁵ It is sense, human intelligence, which brings alive the world in which we live; it is the mind which takes the raw material of the world and creates a world of objects and relationships. It is, said Caird, ‘the self-conscious spiritual self, the unifying constitutional power of thought’ which unifies ‘the flux of impressions, co-ordinating them into a coherent system of realities.’⁵¹⁶ In his own expression of Kant’s philosophy, Caird states:

All this wonderful system, whatever its value, is only our thought or conception of the world, not the world itself – ideas about things, not things in themselves.⁵¹⁷

Caird states that it is nothing short of extravagance to make ‘this objective, solid world only the phantasmal creation of mind.’⁵¹⁸ The world of raw material is real and no philosophy can shake that. There is integrity between the world in its reality

⁵¹³ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 143.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 148.

and our perception of it. In argument, Caird is making his way towards showing that the created world is of supreme value, that it has independence and moral freedom and that the finite lives its life in the infinite. Caird cannot hold that our understanding of the created order is little more than our own thinking and that we cannot know the world in itself for to concede that would undermine the value of the finite. He states:

Philosophy does not evaporate the common sense conviction that the world and all that is therein, the round ocean and the living air and the blue sky, the whole fair and wondrous order of nature, would be as real and fair though we, and myriads such as we, were not here to perceive and know it.⁵¹⁹

For Caird, there is and must be integrity between our thought and the world in itself. In complete contrast to Kant, Caird, following Hegel, argues that the relation of the world, the object, to consciousness, is a relationship of mirroring and our cognition, our knowing, flows out of that two-way relationship. The object is not mere matter but rather the finite in which the divine life lives and through which it communicates and Self-reveals to the finite spirit. Caird states:

If...mind be the constitutive principle of nature, and if the only existence we can ascribe to nature is an existence relative to thought, then what this does imply is that something analogous to our intelligence, yet not subject to its transiency and imperfection – an infinite and eternal thought, in other words – is that in and through which all nature – the world of our experience, and all worlds in the unfathomable past or in the boundless realms of space, live and move and have their being.⁵²⁰

For Caird, thought is the highest form of life; it is thought which makes sense of life and the existence and nature of thought leads to the implication of the divine, an Intelligent Mind, which gives existence, structure and meaning to the created order, in and through which It mediates or reveals Itself. The uniformity of nature, the invariable relations, laws and sequences of cause and effect make the sciences possible. We are able to go beyond ourselves, to see and understand the world from the perspective of the Intelligent Mind, so that we become the ‘pure media of the

⁵¹⁹ *ibid.*, 150.

⁵²⁰ *ibid.*, 151.

universal and absolute intelligence.’⁵²¹ In contrast to pantheism or any form of dualism, Caird states:

For it is the freedom and the fulfilment of our spiritual being to breathe in the atmosphere of the universal life, to become the organ of the infinite reason. And the goal and perfection of our spiritual life would be reached, if every movement of our mind, every pulsation of our intellectual and moral life were identified with it, so that in isolation from it we had no life we could call our own.⁵²²

Caird goes so far as to say that the very existence of the finite spirit is part of the nature of the infinite: ‘in the Infinite there is that which involves the existence of the finite spirit.’⁵²³ Through creation, God knows Godself, God relates to Godself through the finite spirit, which is other than God. Hegel said that the self-knowledge of the Divine Spirit is through the mediation of finite spirits.

In developing the concept of God in relation to Godself and the essential nature of relationship to the created world, Caird points to the social or relational characteristic of humanity. Without the possibility of knowing, loving and willing *through* our interaction with others we could never reach our potential. If we were deprived of our social environment, we would be ‘mutilated and suppressed.’⁵²⁴ Everything that is good, such as love, sympathy, admiration, self-devotion, patriotism and philanthropy would never be born in us. It is our social relations, our interaction with others, in and through whom we live and learn about ourselves. Our social relations are a ‘revelation of ourselves.’⁵²⁵

From this position of arguing that the infinite and the finite are inseparably related, that the existence of one is necessitated in the other, and from that it is from the very relational nature of finite spirits that they discover their fullest potential, Caird argues that it is only in and through relationship with the finite world that God reaches God’s fullest potential. In direct opposition to Aristotle, Kant and the Enlightenment, Caird, like Hegel, not only argues for the intimate and essential

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵²⁴ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 159.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

involvement of God in and with the world but that to deny God this involvement would make God less than and not greater than humanity. The central point hinges on relationship, both in terms of self-discovery and the nature of love. Caird states:

To conceive of God as an abstract, self-identical, self-sufficing Infinite, would be to make Him not greater but less than man; for it would be not only to deny to Him that which makes intelligence and self-consciousness possible, but to make Him a stranger to that which...is the highest element of the life and blessedness of a spiritual nature, the element of love.⁵²⁶

The Logos, or Son of God, is the self-revealing principle in the Godhead. God's response to Godself in Christ, the divine in and through the finite, is the union and reconciliation which God seeks. The response in love of any finite soul to the Infinite, however feeble a response, adds a 'new sweetness and joy to the very blessedness'⁵²⁷ of God. We are now at quite some distance from pantheism and deism. God is not only involved in the life of the finite but that the creation of the finite is essential to the Being of God. The nature of that relationship is love. Caird writes:

We have not yet surrounded the depths of what we express by the word until we think of a love which no ingratitude can exhaust, no unworthiness can alienate, no meanness of infamy and degradation render hopeless of its object, or place it beyond the range of reconciliation and forgiveness; nay, more than that, till we can think of a love which, undeterred by the unworthiness of its object, will bear any hardship with and for it, and for which there is no measure of pain and sorrow and sacrifice to which it will not submit for the restoration of that object to goodness and happiness.

The finite is made in the image of God. The Infinite is ascribed with the attributes of self-existence, eternity, omnipresence, immutability and omnipotence: how can these attributes be reflected in the finite? The image in humanity lies not in that which is material but rather that which is spirit. It is the intellectual and moral life, the spiritual nature of humanity, which is made in the image of God. There is no dualism: we are not to think of body and soul as 'artificially connected'⁵²⁸ for a time. Caird states:

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

Our moral life takes its special complexion from the inseparable relation between what we term our higher and our lower natures; our impulses, desires, passions, are what they are because the conscious self is present to and in them; and whether it yields itself up to them or rises above them, the result is one which is in some way conditioned by them.⁵²⁹

The image of God in humanity, Caird argues, is not to be sought in the mists of time, in antiquity, in some fictional primeval state in a mythological garden. The image of God in humanity is to be found and measured against the ideal to which we are travelling; we are to be measured against the moral and spiritual life of which we are capable. Of Scripture, Caird notes that while the attaining of the knowledge of good and evil is depicted as a degeneration, as a regression, it is also understood, in one sense, as an advance: ‘Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’ His central challenge to the popular understanding of the perfect humanity dwelling in Eden rests on the nature of what it is to be human. The notion of ‘an original and pristine perfection’ is ‘irrational and untenable.’⁵³⁰ There is so much more to be gained from a consciousness which grows and matures through interaction with the world. A fully developed mind and furnished with knowledge is a contradiction in terms. It bears no relationship to the nature of the finite world as we know it.

For Caird, the image of God within us is to be found in our decision-making process, in the moral beauty which we can create in reaching up to the ideal, to the infinite perfection which we are destined to share. Reason itself is the divine spirit: reason is revelation. Caird states:

In a great work of art there is the sense in which the idea of the perfect whole is the present and operative from the beginning – in the first prelude note of the great symphony, in the first line of the great epic or dramatic poem, in the first touch of the master’s hand impressed on the canvas or the marble...The child is the father of the man; that the power that makes the philosopher, the poet, the hero, lies latent in him from the dawn of his conscious life, ere education and the discipline of life have begun to elicit it....⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 176f.

The image of God in humanity is to be found in and through our decision-making process, creating, as far as we can, moral beauty and reaching up to the infinitude in order to realise our fullest potential. Humanity can know God in and through reason, in and through the natural world and in our ethical life. Reason is the self-disclosure of God to the world. Humanity is subject to time, change, mortality and is subject to the wants, impulses and passions which are common to the animal world. Humanity's spiritual nature, intelligence and conscious life are influenced for good or ill by physical changes in the brain and nervous system, yet he maintains:

There is that in us as spiritual beings which rises above the limits of time and space....which is not subject to the condition of nature....which is, in one sense, uncaused, uncreated, unconditioned, having no temporal beginning or end, and of which we can think....as the reproduction or reflexion of His own eternal consciousness and life.⁵³²

It is our sense of the Infinite which makes us aware of our finitude, our sense of the ideal which reveals the imperfections before us and that if we were nothing more than finite we would be ignorant of our finitude. If we were wholly and exclusively finite, then our finite desires and appetites would be satisfied with the finite and death itself would present no horror. Equally, for Caird, the fact that the self-conscious is aware of time is indicative of an eternal element within us. It is our sense of feeling for the Infinite which transfigures our self-conscious and self-understanding. Caird elevates feeling as a proof of God, though it is feeling which is sifted by reason. In this matter, Caird is following the approach of Hegel. Hegel argued that feeling God, feeling God to be within one's being, feeling that God and oneself were not two but one, is a necessary aspect of religious experience. However, Hegel qualified this position noting that feelings needed to be purified and cultivated by thought; feelings have no capacity for making judgements. 'Thought,' said Hegel, 'is the ejection of the content out of feeling; it is a kind of liberation.'⁵³³ That said, Caird notes, 'The moral life, at the very best and highest, is and ever must

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵³³ Peter C Hodgson (ed) translated by R F Brown, P C Hodgson and J M Stewart *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 3 vols. (1: 391 - 396).

be imperfect, a life in which that which is, is distinguished from and falls short of, that which ought to be.⁵³⁴ For Caird, religion is:

the absolute self-surrender of the soul to God. It means the giving up or annulling of the private, particular self, of every interest or satisfaction that belongs to me as this particular individual, and the blending or identification of my will, and potentially of my whole life and being, with the will of the Infinite.⁵³⁵

Origin and Nature of Evil

Caird begins by exploring the Augustinian theory of evil. He begins by arguing that the question of evil has nothing to do with the perceived power of the flesh over the spirit. If the flesh, the carnal or sensuous side of humanity's nature is to be understood as evil, then the flesh would be no more evil in humanity than in lower animals and, more significantly, that would take the origin of evil all the way back to the Creator. If the flesh is always to be stronger than the spirit, then not only is moral freedom an illusion but the origin of evil lies in the original constitution of humanity and, therefore, it lies with God. If evil's origin and root is in the flesh, then not only is humanity exempt from moral condemnation but only God could be the source of evil because it is God who made the flesh with the nature it possesses.

Caird does not accept that the origin of evil is to be found in God. He states:

That God is good and can never be the author of evil, that we are responsible for our actions and justly punishable for our misdeeds, that no speculative theorizing can explain away the terrible reality of moral evil, that the voice of conscience tells us that we ought to struggle with it and therefore may hope to overcome it, and that there is no moral disability in our nature which exempts us from the conflict – these and the like are convictions which no speculative difficulties can subvert.⁵³⁶

⁵³⁴ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 191.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

Augustine's theory is that humanity, united as it is, as a race, can trace its biological and moral origin back to Adam, the first progenitor. Humanity began life with no innate bias towards evil: humanity was originally endowed with absolute perfect freedom to choose between good and evil. Adam's choice, amounting to a misuse of that freedom, means that the entire race has lived under the curse of an innate bias towards evil: 'The first transgression poisoned human nature at the root.' Within the doctrine of original sin, sin is traced not simply to an historic person but to humanity as represented and embodied in that person.

Caird is critical of 'Federal Theology', of the view that God and Adam entered a covenant together, a covenant which is taken as actual, in which Adam, the head or universal figure of humanity, concluded in his state of innocence a treaty with God. Adam's failure in morality will last for all time. Caird describes this theory as a legal fiction. His concern is founded on the place of personal responsibility. Augustine states that we are linked in our seminal nature to the one from whom we were propagated. Caird argues that this theory makes Adam guilty not only of his own sins but of the sins of every descendent. If sins can be passed down the generations as Augustine believed, then we are guilty not only of our own sins but of the sins of every previous generation, irrespective of our moral character. Caird wrote:

That such a doctrine should have been seriously propounded by Augustine, only serves to show the extravagance into which a great and subtle mind may be led by controversial exigencies.⁵³⁷

The doctrine of original sin, or the inheritance of sin from the first parent, means that the race has an inherited or innate bias towards evil. We are biased towards evil not because of any individual participation in the first sin but by the 'vitiating influence it has wrought on the minds and wills of the first sinner's descendents.'⁵³⁸

Distinguishing between moral and physical evil and by way of challenge to the doctrine, Caird notes that pain, sorrow and death are evils which have been with humanity from before the awakening of self-consciousness, with humanity by virtue

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵³⁸ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 212.

of its nature as part of the created world and, therefore, it is only moral sin that can be attributed to Adam. Moral evil does at times seem to be hereditary: ‘Vicious and criminal propensities, tendencies to intemperance, sensuality, dishonesty, and other vices, seem not seldom to run in the blood.’⁵³⁹ But, says Caird, however much we may have sympathy for such people, individuals must take personal responsibility for their actions and they cannot escape moral censure or punishment. Personal responsibility and a personal relationship with God is very important to Caird and it will re-appear later in his thought on the Atonement.

Moral qualities are as likely to be passed down from parents as physical ones. Yet, says Caird, Adam in the Garden of Eden lived in ‘paradisiacal innocence, if not paradisiacal perfection.’ Given the doctrine of original sin, set as it is in the garden of perfection, why would Adam choose evil? What is more, and this is a more substantial point, moral decision-making is only possible in a moral agent, in a human being with reason and conscience. In the garden of perfection, it is difficult to imagine that Adam would choose evil. And, notes Caird, if we are so bound in our bias towards evil because of the sin of the first progenitor, then our motives and actions can hardly be described as evil given that they are irresistible. This attack on the doctrine of original sin is a departure from Augustine and Calvin.

In this lecture, Caird states that, while the story of the Fall is the story of our childhood as a race, ‘it’s real and hidden meaning’ is expressed as a ‘transition so tremendous as to be described as, ‘Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.’⁵⁴⁰ This observation is taken directly from Hegel’s *Lecture on the Philosophy of Religion*. Hegel took considerable pleasure in pointing out that the serpent did not lie: in eating of the fruit from the tree of knowledge, Adam and Eve would become like God. Unlike Caird, Hegel goes further, noting that God, in the story of the Fall, is a jealous God: Adam and Eve are driven from the garden lest Adam eat from the tree of life and become immortal. Desmond asks:

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

It is this knowing of good and evil that will make us gods, fruit of the fall that proves dialectically necessary to the self-elevation of humanity. But if the transgression is necessary, does this not alter its taint *qua* transgression? If the transgression *had to be*, if humanity were to become the spirit it implicitly is, is this not a rational justification of evil's necessity?⁵⁴¹

Caird concludes his reflection on the Augustinian theory of the origin of evil by conceding that its chief merit is its acknowledgement that individuals do not exist in isolation. We are formed by family and society and, to that extent, we are bound together with not only our contemporaries but unavoidably with all previous generations. There is an organic unity in humanity. There Caird leaves the Augustinian theory.

The Theory of Negation or Privation

All theories on the origin and nature of evil are attempts to account for the existence of evil in the world while preserving the goodness and perfection of the Infinite Being. Caird argues that the only adequate solution is to be found in Christianity, in the God who is self-revealing and self-manifesting in nature and in the spirit and life of humanity. By contrast, within pantheism, the finite world is illusory, it has no 'positive, essential reality,' and, as such, the finite is not of supreme value. In such a world, morality cannot possess any lasting significance and, therefore, evil virtually evaporates.

Pantheism also attaches sin to finitude itself. The limitations imposed on finitude are the origin and nature of evil; the imperfections which are necessarily part of what it is to be finite are the source of evil. Caird states, 'The sculptor gives form and beauty to the marble, but he is not the cause of its lack of life.'⁵⁴² This Christian theory of the origin of evil can be traced back to Aquinas. Aquinas believed that God is the supreme good and that there is no supreme evil. Evil is uncaused. For Aquinas, human happiness is to be found, not in sensual pleasures, not even in

⁵⁴¹ William Desmond *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 153.

⁵⁴² John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* Vol II 5

honour, glory, riches, worldly power or the exercise of skill or moral virtue, but in the knowledge of God. God will bring good out of evil, but evil is somehow rooted in the ultimate being of God, not as something positive, but as a shadow of nothingness, a privation of being which belongs to creation.

Caird does not engage with Aquinas too deeply but argues that the pantheistic view identifies evil with the metaphysical notion of finitude or limitation and so the possibility of attaining the moral good is removed. Evil is only evil when there is the possibility of the choosing the good. If evil is rooted in the very nature of finitude, if finitude can do no other, then it is not evil. Evil must, says Caird, involve the positive activity of the will of the agent, a choice which is both voluntary and avoidable. To choose the good, not the absolute good, but the good which is possible, is the definition of goodness. Caird states:

It is no defect in the plant that it cannot fly, nor in the irrational animal that it cannot reflect or reason, nor in man that his body is not immortal or his mind omniscient.⁵⁴³

In his rebuttal of pantheism, Caird brings together both his understanding of the relation of God to the world and indicates the direction in which he will go with the doctrine of the Incarnation. Of Christ, Caird wrote:

The only perfect man was one who did not leap at once into a full-blown maturity, intellectual or moral any more than physical, but who grew in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man; yet was He perfect from the beginning; His childhood, boyhood, youth, had each a relative perfectness of its own, and His whole human life that moral and spiritual perfectness which lies, not on the transcending of the limits of the finite, but in the finite spirit becoming the perfect organ of the infinite.⁵⁴⁴

As Caird refutes the negation of pantheism, he develops the positive relation of the finite to the infinite, which finds its best expression in Christianity. Caird states that the Infinite cannot be indeterminate because the indeterminate is little more than a non-entity; nothing could be said of a self-identical infinite. The finite is essential to the nature of the Infinite.

⁵⁴³ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* Vol II 9

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

This consciousness of the infinite within the finite spirit, in part at least, manifests itself in the consciousness of guilt. Sin would have no moral currency and there would be no ‘inward disharmony or conflict’⁵⁴⁵ if the finite was not able to transcend finitude. The voice of reason and conscience is the voice of the infinite; the flashes of remorse or self-disgust are ‘the voice of the unextinguished divinity within us.’ The moral beauty of which we are capable makes the evil life inescapably repugnant.

Hegel is always behind Caird, speaking while Caird is writing. When Caird is wrestling with the self-determination of the Infinite, he has Hegel in mind. Caird does not wish to attach evil to God. However, he must have known that Hegel entertained that possibility. Hegel wrote:

It can in fact be conceded that the distinction of good and evil is sublated implicitly, that is, sublated in God as the sole true actuality. In God there is no evil. [However,] the distinction of good and evil exists only if God is also evil....The distinction of good and evil is not present in this One, in this substance, for it first makes its entrance along with distinction in general. The distinction of good and evil makes its entrance together with the distinction of God from the world, in particular from human beings.⁵⁴⁶

In critiquing Hegel, Desmond argues that if God needs otherness for His own fulfilment, if that otherness is part of God’s self-disclosure, if the finite is necessary to the infinite, if evil is necessary for the realisation of good – if the negative otherness of evil is necessary, then is evil essential and unavoidable for God’s own self-reconciliation? Desmond argues that while Hegel states that there is no evil in God, Hegel also states that evil makes its entrance with the distinction of God from the world, with the self-determination of both God and humanity.⁵⁴⁷ Caird does not wrestle with Hegel to this extent.

The Predominance of Sense over Spirit

In his third lecture on the origin and nature of evil, Caird considers ‘The Predominance of Sense over Spirit’, the perpetual warfare between humanity’s

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁴⁶ G F W Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 126.

⁵⁴⁷ William Desmond *Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double*, 144.

spiritual and physical natures, between elements which are ‘not only diverse but discordant...not merely heterogeneous but irreconcilable.’⁵⁴⁸ When compared to each other, while it is possible to satisfy the sensuous desires, it is never possible to satisfy the spiritual self. Of the spiritual nature, Caird wrote, ‘It is the presence in us of an ideal to which no actual attainment in knowledge and goodness can ever be adequate.’⁵⁴⁹ He describes spiritual consciousness as akin to a rational and moral nature, a nature which in submitting to that imperative, becomes identical with perfect freedom. He states:

If man were pure spirit unfettered by matter and material conditions, the range both of his intellectual and of his moral activity would be practically boundless.⁵⁵⁰

Within this schema, the moral nature is forever distracted by the ‘gross physical necessities’ of human life.⁵⁵¹ What is more, this internal conflict is not a battle of equals. The sensuous nature is satisfied immediately, while the higher nature, the spiritual and moral nature is fed and fulfilled by a more distant, slow and uncertain attainment. The latter here demands exercise and patience, intelligence, strength and courage for any rewards to be gained from moral thought and action. Having pushed the metaphor of conflict between the physical and spiritual natures, Caird critiques the theory firstly on its own ground. For Caird, there is no conflict: it is a false premise. How can two natures which are essentially be so different be in conflict with one another? ‘The spiritual consciousness could no more be affected by bodily appetites than the force of gravity.’⁵⁵² The sensuous nature, albeit united or attached as it is to the spiritual nature, is no more moral than it would be on its own.

Caird states that the metaphor of conflict is false though not because the natures are essentially different but because ‘animal nature takes on a new significance when united with a self-conscious being.’ Caird states:

⁵⁴⁸ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* Vol II 26

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 36.

As motives to human action, they lose their purely animal characteristics; they cease to be what they are in the animal – blind impulses acting under a law of physical necessity, and pointing to satisfactions which are limited and transient; they have infused into them a new element or undergo a transforming process, in virtue of which they are raised out of the sphere of nature into that of spirit, and become rivals of the higher desires and aspirations of the spirit on their own ground.⁵⁵³

Thus elevated within a self-conscious being, the self-conscious being has freedom to resist the animal impulses, even the most intense and potent. Caird notes that in times of failure, when the lower nature prevails for immediate satisfaction, satisfaction which is not for the higher good, the pleasure fails to satisfy the soul.

Caird is not at all convinced that the predominance of sense over spirit is the origin and nature of evil. There are many sins, such as pride, avarice, or selfishness, envy, hatred and revenge which, he argues, have no direct affinity to the lower nature, the sensuous impulses. Equally, drunkenness is a sin which has more to do with ‘quelling the darkness of the spiritual nature’ rather than satisfying any sensuous impulse.⁵⁵⁴ For Caird, there is no doubt that the seat of sin lies in the will that yields to it. It is not the flesh *per se*. Not until we act and make a selfish, sensuous impulse our own self-determination does an impulse take on moral significance. Caird states:

Men may lay the blame of their sin on their passion, but unless man can become a mere animal, and as irresponsible as an animal, it is not passion, but the will that could have resisted and yet yields, which must bear the blame.⁵⁵⁵

Caird argues that without desires and passions to be either satisfied or subdued there would be no possibility of moral struggle in the will and no means of attaining the moral life. It is our spiritual nature, through moral struggle, which turns animal passions into the pure affections of compassion, patriotism and philanthropy. The moral giants of human history have not been without animal passion, without moral

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

struggle but, rather, it is because they ‘spiritualised and enobled it’⁵⁵⁶ that their names have been recorded. The key point is the central role of the will.

Religion is the absolute surrender of the soul to God. Caird is not speaking about the self-annihilation of the mystics, but rather experiencing joy in God, the joy of unimpeded union with the life of the Infinite. Self-realisation is not selfishness. Caird states:

The true self of man – that self, the self-realisation of which constitutes the ideal perfection of his nature – is not the private, particular self of this or that individual, but the universal, and, in a sense, infinite self, which is implied in the phrase ‘made in the image of God.’⁵⁵⁷

We know ourselves in and through others and the Other.

The Incarnation

In his sermons, as well as in his some of his lectures, Caird reveals an intense, personal commitment to Christ Jesus. Although ‘right views of himself and of divine and eternal things is the most precious gift which God can bestow on the human spirit’⁵⁵⁸, the essence of religion lies in ‘love and loyalty to Christ’⁵⁵⁹ and ‘the communion of the soul with God.’⁵⁶⁰ In his lectures on the nature of Christ, he concentrates on the spirit and the yielding of the human spirit into unity with God. Caird begins his lectures arguing that it is not enough to say as some do that the doctrine of the incarnation is above reason, that it lies outwith the scope of human intelligence or that it ought unthinkingly to be accepted as a mystery. Caird asks:

How can thought compass the conception of a Being who is at once a helpless Babe on an earthly mother’s breast, and the omnipotent ruler of the universe: conscious of growth in knowledge and to the last ignorant of many things which God alone can know, and at the same time possessed of unlimited, unconditioned, all comprehending

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 63f.

⁵⁵⁸ John Caird, *University Sermons* (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1898), 231.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

knowledge?⁵⁶¹

Moreover, ‘in popular thought’⁵⁶², Scripture informs us that Christ worked miracles, arrested disease, restored life and had power over nature but, says Caird, this tears apart any doctrine of unity of the God-Man. In popular thought, we see one who is at times human and at other times God. The picture of Christ in popular thought is no saviour because He is not fully human: there is no pain, sorrow, vulnerability or death. The central problem is that we popularly conceive of divinity and humanity and their exclusivity. By contrast, Caird wrote:

What lends its supreme moral worth to Christianity is the ideal it presents in the character and life of Christ of what humanity essentially is and of what in all men it may become.⁵⁶³

All superhuman qualities negate that worth and, at the same time, offer no encouragement to us. Caird’s doctrine of Jesus is ‘thoroughly demythologising in approach; we find in his life and person nothing miraculous and nothing supernatural.’⁵⁶⁴

Our understanding of the nature of Christ must also account for the fact that God cannot cease to be God. What does it mean asks Caird for God to divest Himself of His transcendental attributes? Surely, God cannot by an act of will determine not to know what God knows. Equally, a God who divested God’s Self of all divinity, if such were possible, would no longer differ from humanity. At the same, what happens to the universe if God divests Himself of His omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence? Crucially, says Caird, ‘the same Being cannot abandon its infinitude and possess it.’⁵⁶⁵ Nor can it be argued that God was concealed in the person of Christ for the flesh would become but an illusion. What Caird seeks is this:

⁵⁶¹ John Caird, *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, 106.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵⁶⁴ Mander, 155.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

The whole life of the Man of Sorrows – His earthly lowliness and meanness, His weakness, grief, and sorrows, His loneliness and forsakenness, His drinking of the cup to the dregs, yea, in His very crucifixion and death – must be to us the disclosure of an ineffable joy triumphing over sorrow, of a divine bliss in sacrifice, which is the last, highest revelation of the nature of God.⁵⁶⁶

The error in popular thought is to apply outward or mechanical categories to spiritual things. It is a mistake to conceive of Christ as possessing two spiritual natures or two self-consciousnesses, one human, one divine. Rather, it is in self-surrender, the yielding of a human self-consciousness to the divine consciousness, of spirit to Spirit, that unity and communion occur. Caird states:

The perfect life of humanity can never be reached till our separate individual life is surrendered to the universal and infinite life, and by dying to self we begin to live in the eternal life of God.⁵⁶⁷

In our moral and spiritual life, we find our fulfilment in serving others, in stepping outside of ourselves. We realise ourselves in and through others and this is achieved supremely in our self-surrender to God. It is not a losing of self but a realising of our true selves through our union with the divine. Caird states:

Only in the union of the human with the divine can unity which is absolute be reached. Only in union with God can I utterly lose myself and completely find myself again, perfectly surrender my isolated experience, and yet maintain and enlarge my individual life.⁵⁶⁸

Caird says that no one has achieved total self-surrender except Christ. He cannot fully account for how Christ managed this. In one passage, he describes Christ as ‘distinguished from all other members of the human race’ but offers no account of why this one man is different. While Caird successfully overcomes the philosophical problems of the nature of Christ in popular thought, he cannot adequately account for the uniqueness of Christ in his own terms.

Self-surrender or the yielding of the human self-consciousness to consciousness of God comes through the voice that speaks in us, the ‘divine teacher’ and the ‘dictates

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 146.

⁵⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 164.

of conscience.’⁵⁶⁹ There are not two voices: ‘the voice that speaks to me is at the same time that which speaks in me....only one indivisible voice of eternal reason sounding through the inmost depth of the soul of man.’⁵⁷⁰ The crucial point in Caird’s theology of the incarnation is to understand ‘union’ if union be the right word between two spiritual natures, two natures which are essentially one. The Spirit of God is already within us; we realise ourselves as we yield to God’s voice. The metaphysics of two separate natures or consciousnesses as if we are referring to two physical objects is, for Caird, a fundamental mistake.

The Kingdom of the Spirit

In the Christian understanding of the Spirit, the universal presence of God dwells in the souls of individual believers, in the organic unity of the Church. Since His death, Christ has become more fully present to His followers than He was when alive in the body. Christ is mysteriously present, not intermittently but constantly, in all places and times through all generations. Caird said, ‘No other life has so triumphed over death, has gone on as His has done, reliving itself through the ages, penetrating the individual and social life of mankind.’⁵⁷¹ Moreover, the Church’s claim is that Christ’s presence in His believers is more than mere memory.

For Caird, the relation of Christ to His followers in all places and times is, in the language of metaphor, ‘as members of a living organism to the whole or to the vital principle that pervades and inspires it.’⁵⁷² As elsewhere, for Caird, the figurative language of Scripture concerning Christ is not to be read literally: God is not to be conceived of as a potentate seated on a material throne. Equally, following Christ’s ascension, exaltation and being seated at God’s right hand, what does it mean for the Divine Spirit to be sent through space and time to all believers? As in Christ, so in us, it is in the self-surrender of human consciousness that we realise our full potential. Caird wrote:

⁵⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 168.

⁵⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 167.

⁵⁷¹ *ibid.*, 239.

⁵⁷² *ibid.*, 245.

This is no incredible relation, but one which finds its witness in our own consciousness, will, I think, be obvious if we reflect, that it is of the very essence of the religious life to be a life that is at once above us and in us, transcending our finite thoughts and feelings, yet in which we most truly realise ourselves and the ideal of our own spiritual nature.⁵⁷³

It is as we lose ourselves in the Divine, we gain our better and truer selves. As before, it is ‘when the voice of eternal reason...speaks to me....a voice that speaks in me’⁵⁷⁴ that we attain knowledge of divine things.

The presence of Christ is not limited to space or time and neither is it conditional by intelligence, culture, nationality or social status. Caird wrote:

Learned or unlearned, Greek or Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free – there is one principle of affinity which has power to overleap all earthly divisions; nay, which outstripping even the divisions of worlds, is capable of being experienced by every spirit made in God’s image in every region of the universe.⁵⁷⁵

Every soul that surrenders itself to God, to the Spirit that was in Christ, is filled, transformed and united by the same Spirit.

The Idea of Atonement

Here, as elsewhere, Caird’s thought is centred upon the yielding of the individual’s soul or consciousness to the Spirit or consciousness of God. It is in self-surrender that we realise who we are. Caird critiques the theory of atonement of Anselm as well as substitutionary atonement and finds them wanting. A critical mistake made in many theories of atonement as well as elsewhere is the tendency to substitute illustration for argument or description for definition. ‘Ransom’, ‘debt’, ‘cleansing or washing from sin’ and ‘remission of penalty’ have been treated as spiritual truth. The sufferings and death of Christ have been regarded as corresponding to the payment of debt, the enduring of a penalty or the expiation of sins. The debt arose

⁵⁷³ *ibid.*, 248f.

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 250.

⁵⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 252.

because of the sins of humanity against the honour of God. According to Anselm, for a single sinful act not even the entire universe would be adequate compensation. Only the suffering and death of Christ, the obedience of a sinless Man, satisfies the wrath or justice of God. Caird wrote:

It is an attempt to extract, from what is merely a figure or metaphor, the solution of a moral and spiritual problem; or, in other words, to exhibit moral and spiritual relations under the forms of expression which do not adequately represent them.⁵⁷⁶

While Caird acknowledges that the metaphor of debt is good in that it captures the deadweight of sin, its paralysing effects on the soul and mind, it is entirely wrong when we see that our 'debt' to God is love. There can be no one-off payment, a loving relationship is endless, and love cannot be offered on our behalf. Caird states:

However closely another may implicate himself with us, it is nevertheless true that, beyond our relations to others, to each of us, as, spiritual, self-conscious being, there has been given an incommunicable, individuality, or moral career to make or mar, each for himself alone.⁵⁷⁷

What is more, argues Caird, a life lived, sinless and selfless, is no more than a perfect life lived in union with God and there is no surplus merit available for transference. The death of heroes and martyrs as well as Christ is not to be conceived of as a debt paid for sin but as a life surrendered for truth, goodness and fidelity to conscience. The benefits of a righteous life cannot be bestowed not even by God:

The peace of purity, the tranquillity of a holy mind, the happiness of conscious reconciliation and fellowship with God, the joy of being and doing good, the sense of divine favour welling up within the soul as a perennial spring of blessedness which pain and sorrow and death itself can never affect – these things constitute the highest and, in one sense, the only reward of righteousness; and it is a reward which not even Omnipotence could bestow on the unrighteous and unholy mind.⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 185.

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 192.

In turning to substitutionary atonement, Caird asks if there is any sense in which God's justice precludes the forgiveness of sin without 'payment' for sin or can an innocent person satisfy justice by paying the debt of the guilty? 'Can we think of God as the Supreme Judge making endurance of penal suffering the indispensable condition of forgiveness?'⁵⁷⁹ In response, Caird begins by observing that human justice demands outward atonement in terms of payment, such as fines, imprisonment, physical inflictions and even death. But, said Caird, sin belongs to the realm of spirit and atonement belongs there. While society has no remedies other than external sanctions, atonement for sin belongs in the moral and spiritual life. Our sense of sin, of wrongdoing, causes misery, shame and self-abasement and gives rise to a desire to escape or overcome these. In sin, we are mindful of the 'infinite blessedness' which we have forfeited.⁵⁸⁰ No external sanction can remedy this pain and, equally, no innocent person can feel what the sinner feels. The moral suffering for sin can only be experienced by the perpetrator of the sin: not even a perfect being could feel 'conscious guilt, the sense of personal ill desert, the pain and shame we can feel only for evil deeds that have been part of our own moral record.'⁵⁸¹

For Caird, God's condemnation of sin can never pass into self-condemnation. The relationship of faith and, indeed, atonement itself, is properly conceived of as a relationship in which the believer yields to the presence and will of God and the God's Spirit dwells in ours. We are drawn into His story: 'His sorrow our sorrow, His sacrifice our sacrifice, His perfect life in all its ideal beauty and elevation, the very life we live.'⁵⁸² A salvation which was independent of any moral activity on the part of the believer would be one which superseded 'any demand for moral goodness or holiness of life, and that could be claimed and possessed by those who remained in their sin, unrepentant and unbelieving.'⁵⁸³ Caird does not distinguish between atonement in a narrow sense and a process of sanctification. For Caird,

⁵⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 202.

⁵⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 206.

⁵⁸¹ *ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*, 226.

⁵⁸³ *ibid.*, 228.

atonement comes hand-in-hand with sanctification. There needs to be an individual response to God's love: we cannot be justified by another. Caird states:

A spiritual blessing can only be spiritually received. The intelligence must apprehend it, the conscience must recognise it and appreciate it, the will and active energies of the soul must go forth to grasp and appropriate it.⁵⁸⁴

Our relationship with God, if it is to grow and mature at all, rests in our absolute surrender to God, the renunciation of self and the identification of our life with the life of the divine. While it may be that we will never wholly be at one with Christ, a living faith in which we yield to the holy and seek continually to become one with the Spirit of God is our atonement and the realisation of our true selves. As in the Incarnation, Caird dispenses with all supernatural elements. He does not mention the Cross or Resurrection which for many Christians are the 'essential vehicles' of atonement.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 229.

⁵⁸⁵ Mander 156

Chapter Seven: The Gifford Lectures (3)

In this section, I shall present and comment upon Caird's thought of the future life. Much of the material which appears in Caird's concluding Gifford lectures on the future life first appeared in his Croall Lectures and in the sermon to the British Medical Association in 1888.⁵⁸⁶

Background

It is important to acknowledge the theological and church context of the late Victorian period in order to begin to appreciate the significance of what Caird and others were saying. If not unbelief, then certainly doubt or critical scepticism in matters of faith was being publicly expressed by clergy and laity alike. The credibility of miracles was in some quarters called into question. Scientific materialism brought the challenge of atheism while, within the churches, biblical criticism was changing the accepted way of reading the Scriptures. While some clergy welcomed the new insights, 'conservative Christians believed that the broad churchman had no gospel. They were thought not to know what they believed, their sermons were suspected of turning towards mere ethics or mere literature or social reform, they could not declare their message from the pulpit because they were unsure of their message.'⁵⁸⁷

In 1888, the same year as Caird's sermon to the BMA, the novel, *Robert Elsmere*, by Mrs Humphrey Ward was published. This fictional work told the story of a learned clergyman who read widely studying the lives of the saints and the growth of historical legend. In time, Elsmere, the country parson, arrived at the belief that the miracles did not happen. He was faced with the dilemma of resigning his charge on grounds of integrity or remaining in post as a hypocrite in order to continue to provide for his family. This work is significant because there were clergy in this position and because it is typical of the religious temperature of the period and the

⁵⁸⁶ John Caird *A Sermon preached before the British Medical Association on Tuesday, August 7, 1888* (Glasgow: James MacLehose, 1888).

⁵⁸⁷ Owen Chadwick *The Victorian Church* Part II (London: A & C Black 1972), 146.

direction in which events were moving. In 1880, James Thomson, published his poem, *The City of Dreadful Night*. Atheism is there for all to see. Through the seventies, eighties and nineties, Caird is lecturing and preaching about the future life, while poets wrote of the finality of death:

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
 Good tidings of great joy for you, for all;
There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
 It is to satiate no Being's gall.

.....

This little life, is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy place is ever sure,
 We fall asleep and never wake again;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
 In earth, air, water, planets, and other men.⁵⁸⁸

In 1889, the year after Caird's sermon, W B Yeats published his poem *The Song of the Happy Shepherd*. Writing against scientific rationalism, Yeats asserted that the arts are founded on the life beyond the world. Alongside Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe and Keats, he places the Bible, the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer. For Yeats, they are folk-lore and he defends the 'ancient supremacy of imagination.'⁵⁸⁹ In his poem, he protests that the woods of the pastoral paradise of Arcady are gone or that the imaginative Eden is gone, swept aside by the 'Gray Truth' of scientific rationalism. In his first Gifford Lecture on *The Future Life*, Caird declared the nature of humanity to be nothing less than a reflection or reproduction of the nature of God. Caird wrote:

There is an aspect or element of our being – that element which constitutes the principle of our spiritual life and is the source of all knowledge, morality, religion – to which in the truest sense the predicate 'eternal' may be applied. Of this element it is no

⁵⁸⁸ Roderick Watson (Ed.) *The Literature of Scotland – The Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan 2007), 315.

⁵⁸⁹ James Pethica (Ed.) *Yeats's Poetry, Drama and Prose* (New York: Norton & Co. 2000), 262.

exaggeration to say that it rises above the limits and conditions of time, and that we can think of it, not simply as created by the Author of our being, but as a reflexion or reproduction of His own eternal nature.⁵⁹⁰

Mind and Matter – Hegel and Kant

In his sermon to the BMA, Caird appeals for the unity of all things:

If we are to get at the true explanation of the world, it will doubtless be one according to which there will be no unbridged gap or breach of continuity between one order of being and another; but the transition from the inorganic to the organic, from lower to higher forms of life, and, last of all, from the physical to the psychical, from nature to the self-conscious mind that thinks it, will be seen to be that of intelligible sequence and evolution.⁵⁹¹

A key word in Hegel's philosophy is *aufgehoben*, which can be translated as 'taken up,' 'sublated,' 'absorbed,' 'reconciled,' or 'resolved.' Hegel wrote:

The ultimate nature of life, the soul of the world, the universal lifeblood, which courses everywhere, and whose flow is neither disturbed nor checked by any obstructing distinction, but is itself every distinction that arises, as well as that into which all distinctions are dissolved; pulsating within itself, but ever motionless; shaken to its depths, but still at rest.⁵⁹²

In creating the world, God does not step outside of Godself, as if such were possible, but rather everything exists in God. Hegel draws the distinction between *In-itself* and *being-for-self*. For Caird, like Hegel and Spinoza, the world has no independent actuality, although it empirically exists. Only in its relatedness does Hegel talk of God as the whole:

Just because the form is as essential to the essence as the essence is to itself, the divine essence is not to be conceived and expressed merely as essence, i.e., as immediate substance or pure self-contemplation of the divine, but likewise as form, and in the whole wealth of the developed form. Only then is it conceived and expressed as an actuality.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹⁰ John Caird Op. Cit. 256.

⁵⁹¹ John Caird *Mind and Matter: A Sermon preached before the British Medical Association 1888*, 11.

⁵⁹² G W F Hegel *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion* 208.

The world exists in God; God ‘unlocks’ Godself and ‘releases what is not God into existence.’⁵⁹⁴ Hodgson notes:

God remains the One, the abundant universal – ‘not an inert, abstract universal, but rather the absolute womb or the infinite fountainhead out of which everything emerges, into which everything returns, and in which it is eternally maintained.’⁵⁹⁵

The central philosophical problem which Caird was addressing in scientific materialism Hegel addressed in response to Kant. Following Aristotle and others, Kant employed a logic which perceived reality as discrete units. This made it impossible to perceive reality as a unity and a continuum. Kant was prevented from perceiving the abiding unity of all things because, for him, reality in itself could not be known. There was no getting beyond. In Hegel, logic, nature and history exhibited an orderly progression. ‘Finite spirits and Infinite Spirit have an implicit unity-in-difference that is progressively becoming explicit.’⁵⁹⁶ Caird compares the entire order of things to that of a work of art in which ‘the beginning implies the end’ and ‘the first note of a great symphony is not, indeed, the cause of the rich and varied harmonies that succeed; but there is in the work, from beginning to end, an organic unity such that the first preclusive note has in it “the promise and the potency” of all that comes after.’⁵⁹⁷ There could be nothing of this unity and progression in Kant. For Kant, all that we could know is *our* perception of reality, not reality itself. History could have no sense of progression because we could not be sure of reality. Everything is phenomena and what lies behind the phenomenal objects is unknown; things-in-themselves or noumenal objects are unknowable. We cannot, argued Kant, know the world as it is in and for itself. The limitations and distinctions as subjective perceptions are impenetrable. Kant believed that the mind constructed reality out of its intuitions, such as time, space, causality and substance, and that

⁵⁹³ G W F Hegel *Phenomenology of Spirit* in *The Hegel Reader* (ed. Stephen Houlgate), 53.

⁵⁹⁴ Peter C Hodgson ‘Hegel’s Philosophy of Religion’ in *Hegel and Nineteenth-Century Philosophy*, 237.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 238

⁵⁹⁶ Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Louisville: John Know Press, 2007), 173.

⁵⁹⁷ John Caird *A Sermon preached before the British Medical Association on Tuesday, August 7, 1888* 11f.

there was no getting beyond this, no stepping outside of ourselves. Not knowing beyond our experiences of physical objects can lead to materialism and atheism.

Mind and Matter – Hegel and Consciousness

By contrast, Hegel believed in universality, undifferentiated substance, an abiding unity, a continuum, an absolute womb or infinite fountainhead from which everything emerges and to which everything returns. For Hegel, there is a ‘getting beyond.’ We can participate in ‘truth,’ ‘actuality,’ ‘the universal,’ ‘the absolute,’ ‘spirit,’ or ‘God.’ Self-consciousness can only know itself when it enters into relation with objects and others. ‘Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged [*als ein Anerkanntes*.]’⁵⁹⁸ Discovering who and what we are involves learning all that we are not. There is only existence which is relational, that is, in relation to others and, in turn, in relation to itself. ‘The relation of consciousness to its object is not only a relation to something other. It is even more essentially a relation to itself.’⁵⁹⁹

Humanity knows itself through its self-consciousness which is a related consciousness and, says Hegel, God knows Godself through God’s relatedness to the world. The Infinite Spirit knows itself through the mediation of the finite spirit. Hegel wrote, ‘Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is, and is *per se*; it assumes objective, determinate form, and enters into relations with itself – it is externality (otherness), and exists for itself; yet, in this determination, and in its otherness, it is still one with itself – it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once.’⁶⁰⁰ Essence and form together constitute actuality.

Having challenged the way of looking at the world used by Kant and Huxley in their respective fields, Caird raises two objections against the materialistic view.

⁵⁹⁸ G W F Hegel ‘Phenomenology of Spirit’ in *The Hegel Reader* ed. Stephen Houlgate, 178.

⁵⁹⁹ Martin J De Nys *Hegel and Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 19.

⁶⁰⁰ G W F Hegel *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* 86.

Materialistic theory suggests that every physical effect has an immediate physical antecedent. Forms of energy are converted into each other and that each physical effect has the exact quantitative equivalent of energy from that which caused it. Materialistic theory also suggests that ‘the amount of physical energy in the universe is never diminished or increased’⁶⁰¹ and that there can be no transformation of physical energy into anything that is not physical energy. Caird’s first objection, then, is that thought is not physical energy, yet it is able to cause physical energy in the world through action. What is more, the greater the number of thinkers the greater will be the consequent physical activity in the world. Caird states:

The uniformity of nature, the invariableness of physical law, the principle that like physical consequents may with absolute certainty be looked for from like antecedents, is the first principle of scientific investigation, and so, the very law on which the materialistic theory is based is the rock of offence on which it falls to pieces.⁶⁰²

Caird’s second and more substantial objection to the materialistic theory concerns the nature of thought itself. Huxley stated, ‘Consciousness is a function of nervous matter’ and ‘Thought is as much a function of matter as motion is.’ Applying Hegelian idealism, Caird states:

The matter out of which mind is to be extracted is itself the creation of mind, the thought or intelligence that is alleged to be a function of matter is and must be already presupposed in that act of which it is said to be educed.⁶⁰³

Caird says that whether or not there are things-in-themselves which lie outside of thought, beyond thought, things such as atoms, molecules, ethereal waves and nervous fibres, is not the question. There is only matter which is thought about. Before there can be matter and the laws of matter, there must be thought. Matter *is* matter which is thought about. We are back to Hegel. Caird said:

The least and lowest fact for you is not fact minus thought and out of which, somehow, thought maybe conceived to emerge; but it is fact as the object of thought, fact for an observing mind, having mind or thought as an inseparable factor of it. And so, in the very raw material out of which you profess to

⁶⁰¹ John Caird *Mind and Matter: A sermon preached before the British Medical Association 1888* 17

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20.

work up mind, mind has already been at work.⁶⁰⁴

Matter only exists in thought. A universe without thought is a meaningless concept because it is only thought which can observe it and make sense of it. A universe which had no consciousness of itself would be truly a materialistic universe. It would be shallow because it would have no perspective on itself. There is only 'thinkable existence.'⁶⁰⁵ Thought is able to step outside of matter, to gain perspective on matter, and it is this consciousness, this intelligence, which gives matter its existence. Thought must precede matter because without thought matter has no existence. Matter is held in thought, both in the thought of humanity and in the thought of God. It is thought which creates reality and discovers truth. Thought is more powerful than matter for it is thought which conceives and creates.

All finite intelligence exists in the thought of God, in 'the one eternal thought in which all things live and move and have their being, of which all nature, all beauty, all order, all finite thought and life are the ever accumulating expression.'⁶⁰⁶ Caird concludes his sermon to a most prestigious congregation with words which echo the sentiment of Hegel. Hegel believed that 'Philosophy is theology, and [one's] occupation with philosophy – or rather in philosophy – is of itself the service of God.'⁶⁰⁷ Caird closed with these words:

The God of truth, of science – the Being whose dwelling place is not thick darkness, but wherever knowledge sheds its kindly light over the paths of men – whom every true thought, every fresh discovery, every idea of the wise and every intuition of the good, are helping us to know more fully – the Being, in one word, who is Himself the Truth absolute and inexhaustible, after which the greater of the sons of men have sought with a thirst which is unquenchable, and which, when they have in any measure grasped it, is the inestimable reward of all their endeavours.⁶⁰⁸

The Croall Lectures of 1878-79, his sermon to the British Medical Association and his Gifford Lectures were all delivered at a time of great historical excitement. It

⁶⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 25.

⁶⁰⁷ Peter C Hodgson *Lectures in Philosophy of Religion* (English trans.) 1:84.

⁶⁰⁸ John Caird *Mind and Matter: A sermon preached before the British Medical Association 1888*, 27.

was in 1871 that Darwin published his *Descent of Man* and the twenty or so years which followed saw the gradual accommodation of the theory of evolution in the bloodstream of scientific thinking. If not Darwin himself, then certainly Huxley, Tyndall and, in Germany, Ernst Haeckel argued strongly that evolutionary theories were incompatible with traditional Christian teaching. Like others, Haeckel ‘conveyed to his readers the excitement of a science that was going somewhere, rather than one stultified by an obsolete theology.’⁶⁰⁹ We detect the objection of scientists to the oppressive interference of religious authorities.

The Future Life

The underlying principle of human life is eternal. In his book *Spinoza*, published in 1888, Caird states that for Spinoza the true essence of mind is reason which sees things not under the limits of time but under the form of eternity and in relationship to God. Though Caird is not without his criticism of Spinoza, he said, ‘[The true essence of mind] makes man free, for it raises him above the desires that are related to the accidental and transient, and brings him under the dominion of that “intellectual love” which is the expression of his own deepest nature.’⁶¹⁰ It is from this essential unity of the eternal with the temporal that Caird moves to challenge what is in his view the false dualism between mind and matter.

Caird says that it is humanity’s self-consciousness which makes us ‘akin to that Intelligence which is infinite and eternal.’⁶¹¹ Humanity’s ability to observe and understand the nature of matter, ‘events in their co-existence and succession’, raises humanity above creation, lifting us out of time and into eternity.⁶¹² We are superior, says Caird, to change and death because our ‘immortal stillness is unaffected and unperturbed by the fluctuation and evanescence that conditions all finite things’.⁶¹³

⁶⁰⁹ John Hedley Brooke *Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 289.

⁶¹⁰ John Caird *Spinoza*, 288.

⁶¹¹ John Caird, *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity*, Vol II, 258.

⁶¹² *ibid.*, 258.

⁶¹³ *ibid.*, 260.

On death, on entering into the unknown, humanity *reclaims* an inheritance which is 'not merely ours, but, in one sense, identified with our very selves.'⁶¹⁴

In addition to human intelligence and self-consciousness, morality also is a proof that we made for union with God and that our fulfilment does not lie in the temporal and finite. Caird notes:

For of the appetites, desires, impulses, which have their origin in our sensitive nature, *this* is the essential characteristic, that their satisfaction has in it nothing permanent.⁶¹⁵

He goes further:

It is possible for man to lead a life which is on the scale of an immeasurable futurity, nay, with which no temporal existence, however, protracted, is commensurate. For in the moral as in the intellectual life, we rise out of the sphere of time and above the things that are seen and temporal, into a life that is, in spirit and essence, one with the life that is eternal.⁶¹⁶

Caird argues that the intellectual and moral endowments of humanity are more than is needed for this very brief life: they are more than is needed for survival and, if this life were all that there is, they would constitute 'an enormous waste of faculty [and an] unaccountable disparity between the nature of the agent and the function it is set to fulfil.'⁶¹⁷ Taking in the panoramic view of human history and activity, casting an eye over the cultivation, training and maturing of human intelligence and spiritual insight and wealth, Caird argues that it would be a 'strange irony of fate'⁶¹⁸ if everyone and everything disappeared and dropped out of existence at death. Irony of fate it maybe but that is precisely the position of atheists: it is a position of integrity.

Caird is not insensitive to arguments which oppose his view. He notes that, while previous generations in all their maturity and wealth have passed away, not a 'single voice ever reached us to break the awful secret or to convince us that the notion of a

⁶¹⁴ *ibid.*, 260.

⁶¹⁵ *ibid.*, 261.

⁶¹⁶ *ibid.*, 262.

⁶¹⁷ *ibid.*, 263.

⁶¹⁸ *ibid.*, 263.

life to come is other than a dream.’⁶¹⁹ He notes also that humanity lost in nothingness at death would show that we are no different from the rest of creation. The order of things is such that there is a waste of life. Caird states:

Not to speak of the myriads of marred and arrested organisms – blighted plants, spoiled and prematurely extinguished specimens of animal life, on behalf of which no theorist puts forth any claim to survival in another world – there are innumerable instances of blighted, broken human lives, of the fair promise of youth belied by early death or overshadowed by moral failure or disaster, of talents suppressed for lack of culture and an appropriate sphere, of fine moral natures dwarfed and distorted by evil surroundings.⁶²⁰

Caird also points to the many people who live in the ‘darkness and degradation of barbarism’ and whose life is lived ‘scarcely one remove from those of the lower animals.’⁶²¹ He accepts that, on the face of it, there is *prima facie* evidence to counter his view and the claim of the Christian faith that we are made for eternity.

Besides the unbroken silence of past generations from beyond the grave and the vast and abhorrent wastefulness of creation, Caird asks whether or not it has any integrity to speak of the future life of the spiritual and intellectual life of humanity when humanity’s spiritual and intellectual life is, in this world, wholly dependent upon the material and physical body and senses. Caird accepts that there is a physical process which corresponds or accompanies every mental process and that there is a cerebral movement or change for every mental act. He wrote:

So there is, it would seem, a sense in which it may be said that to mere infinitesimal changes in a white or gray material substance in man’s physical organism, not only the thought and feelings that make up our ordinary mental life, but all science, all philosophy, all art, all the vast body of our knowledge and speculation concerning things finite and infinite, and also every act of will, and the whole content of our moral life, owe their existence.⁶²²

This is nowhere more obvious than when the physical organism is weakened, broken, tired or decayed. Caird wrote, ‘Sustained intellectual effort is undermined, the

⁶¹⁹ *ibid.*, 265.

⁶²⁰ *ibid.*, 265.

⁶²¹ *ibid.*, 266.

⁶²² *ibid.*, 277.

insight of clear intelligence is blurred, and the highest genius is reduced to the level of dullness,⁶²³ and in the 1890s he painfully experienced something of this himself.

In his sermon and in his Gifford lecture, Caird quotes from Huxley's *Collected Essays*⁶²⁴:

All vital action may be said to be the result of the molecular forces of the protoplasm which displays it.⁶²⁵

.....

Consciousness is an expression of the molecular changes which take place in that nervous matter which is the organ of consciousness.⁶²⁶

.....

All states of consciousness are immediately caused by molecular changes of the brain substance.⁶²⁷

Caird takes care to demonstrate where he believes materialism is wrong. He acknowledges that Huxley concedes that for thought there is 'an unbridged gulf'⁶²⁸ between bodily organisation and mind. In his response, Caird draws attention to the fact that all physical forces, however unlike they are, are convertible into each other, such that light can become heat, heat can change into chemical energy and chemical energy into electricity. Materialism, says Caird, leaves no room for anything other than physical phenomena: 'life is simply transformed physical energy, and...the energies of the animal frame, muscular, nervous, and the rest, are ultimately resolvable into molecular force.'⁶²⁹ He quotes the mathematician and philosopher W K Clifford:

It goes on as if nothing but physical antecedents and consequents were present...[and]...the entire amount of force operating in the antecedents of thought passes into its physical consequents [without the smallest

⁶²³ *ibid.*, 268.

⁶²⁴ T H Huxley was an English biologist, popularly known as Darwin's Bulldog.

⁶²⁵ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* Vol II 278f. T H Huxley *Collected Essays* Vol I 154.

⁶²⁶ *ibid.*, 279 T H Huxley *Collected Essays* Vol I 163.

⁶²⁷ *ibid.*, 279 T H Huxley *ibid.*, Vol I 244.

⁶²⁸ *ibid.*, 279.

⁶²⁹ John Caird *Mind and Matter: A Sermon preached before the British Medical Association* 1888, 8.

breach of physical continuity].⁶³⁰

From this Caird explains that energy which has passed away from the physical world into the psychical world, from matter into thought, comes back in the shape of re-transformed nerve force which produces movement through muscular action. It is here that he makes his first objection. Caird states that this transformation and re-transformation from the physical to the psychical and back again is inconsistent with materialism and, therefore, undermines the theory which is purports to uphold. It is inconsistent because, as Clifford explained, there are only physical antecedents and yet when we speak of physical movement *following* thought there is no physical antecedent.

The more serious objection which Caird raises against the materialistic view is that thought must proceed matter, whereas materialism would have us believe that thought is a product of matter. Caird argues that the question is not whether there are things in themselves,⁶³¹ things which exist in themselves before any mind could perceive them, but rather it is the case that matter and motion are grasped by thought and, indeed, can only exist in thought. In singling out thought as the primary differentiation between humanity and the rest of creation and matter itself, Caird, like Hegel, is arguing that it is the very existence of thought which makes possible consciousness, spirit and the uniting of spirit with Spirit. For Caird, thought raises us above creation: thought transcends matter. It gives us perspective and is the very means by which we have union with God.

Writing in the 1930s, John Baillie said that ‘the only knowledge we can have of eternal life is that which comes to us through our present foretasting of its joys.’ The future life is a ‘temper’ or philosophical attitude of mind, a conviction, before it is a place. Thought not only precedes matter, it also precedes our embodied life *after* death.

⁶³⁰ *ibid.*, 281f.

⁶³¹ ‘Things-in-themselves’ is a phrase first used by W K Clifford

Compensation Argument

The compensation argument is that the injustices, wrongs and sufferings of this life are recompensed in the future life. It is a recurring religious question as to why good people suffer and immoral characters seems, at times, to prosper. The compensation argument is that in the future life those who have suffered unjustly will be compensated with unmerited happiness and those who have been morally bad will be subject to correction and penalty. As an argument for the existence of a future life, Caird rejects it, at least in its simplest form, on grounds of morality. One cannot speak of the purity of moral action if the motivation for that action is the promise of a future life, and a blissful one at that. Caird quotes Nietzsche:

It may be said that the sacrifice which Christ exacts is no more genuine than that recommended by the Epicurean; for He never fails to promise a full recompense in the world to come. Scarcely once in the Sermon on the Mount does He inculcate self-sacrifice without a reference to the other side of the account to the treasures God has in store for those who despise the gold and silver of the earth. And however much we may admire the Christian martyrs, yet how can we compare their self-devotion with that of the Spartan 300, or the Roman Decius? Those heroes surrendered all, and looked forward to nothing but the joyless asphodel meadow or 'drear Cocytus with its languid stream.' But the Christian martyr might well die with exultation, for what he lost was poor in comparison with that which he hoped instantly to gain.⁶³²

Caird argues that happiness is not always a thing which, at least not in its deepest and purest form, can be sought directly. He quotes Nietzsche a second time and again sympathetically. Nietzsche observed that 'the general law of our desires and affections is, not that the pleasure creates the desire for an object, but that the satisfaction of the desire creates the pleasure.'⁶³³ Caird applies this argument saying that it is our pursuit of the good which motivates us and had we not that desire, then no amount of heavenly bliss would make us covet it. If we did not desire the good for its own sake, then we could never be persuaded of a future life, the definition of which is goodness. Caird states:

⁶³² Nietzsche *Ecce Homo* (11th edition), 114.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

If there be nothing in the Being I call God to call forth my sympathy, kindle my admiration, touch my heart; if in the contemplation of that ideal goodness and beauty of which all finite goodness and loveliness are but the reflexion, no touch of aspiration, no longing of reverential love, arises within me; if, in other words, this desire come not as the expression of a free, unprompted, generous motion, then no bribe even of everlasting happiness can ever force it to come.⁶³⁴

Caird accepts that if the motivation of moral action or the religious life is self-gain, then it cannot be understood as moral or religious. If heaven is sought for self-gain, then the very essence of moral action and the religious life itself is compromised. True religion, for Caird, means ‘love to God, reverence and devotion to the infinite truth and goodness.’⁶³⁵ ‘Absolute self-surrender to the will of God and self-sacrifice for the good of others’⁶³⁶ is not at all selfishness. There is no place in true religion for material or heavenly benefits; they are self-contradictory. Self-surrender, so expressed, is Caird’s re-working of Hegel:

Over against the self in its mutable facticity a reality stands which is essential reality, its own essential reality, and one that is beyond it. The self yearns for unity with this transcendent essence that is its own. It cannot attain this unity, because any effort at so doing is an assertion of itself, that is, of its mutable particularity over against essential reality. Self-consciousness is now the ‘unhappy consciousness.’ But, Hegel maintains, we can see in this situation of alienation the conditions that allow it to be overcome. The last moment of the effort the self makes at uniting itself with the reality that is essential to it and beyond it is the surrender of its own will. In surrendering its will, the mutable, particular self is both acting, asserting itself, and surrendering that about itself that requires that it stand outside of the reality that is essential to it.⁶³⁷

Caird closes his lecture and his Gifford Lectures series by talking of heaven in two ways, negatively and positively. By negatively, Caird imagines heaven as a world free from evil, a world in which ‘love shall be deeper, fuller, more unmingled than the love that here we know’ and ‘purity shall no more be darkened by the faintest

⁶³⁴ John Caird *The Fundamental Ideas of Christianity* Vol II, 290.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

⁶³⁷ Martin J De Nys, 21.

shadow of defilement....and all restlessness from earthly desire or passion shall have vanished away.’⁶³⁸ By positively, Caird wrote:

We can think of it...by reflecting what life would be, if the rarest and highest spiritual experience of the best and noblest of mankind became an unbroken and continuous experience of all – if, that is, the moral and spiritual attainment, which the best of men reach in their best and highest moments, should become universal.⁶³⁹

Could it be, asked Caird, that the perception we have of an infinite loving wisdom, an eternal principle which has endowed us with the capacity of knowing, loving and communing with itself, and a ‘vast moral system with all the hopes and aspirations it encourages us to cherish’ is a total deception? Caird concludes:

It is impossible to believe it, if there be a God; and if that God be manifested in that which is best and greatest in man, above all, in the man Christ Jesus.⁶⁴⁰

⁶³⁸ *ibid.*, 293f.

⁶³⁹ *ibid.*, 294.

⁶⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 296.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed Caird's philosophical Hegelian theology. His theology did not fit within traditional thinking, the Scheme of Salvation, and he sought to secure the intellectual credibility of Christianity and faith in an increasingly hostile age. In the post-Disruption years, Caird showed himself removed from denominational differences and welcoming students from denominations. As principal, he was an ambassador for the city as well as the university and, on the whole, a competent manager of university administration. As a preacher, he made a significant impact on his hearers including the Queen. The picture which emerges of Caird is as a man of his time: he shared the late Victorian values of helping the poor and empowering women, at least to a degree, and he was a leader of great dignity. Caird's brand of social liberalism reached as far afield as Australia.⁶⁴¹ There is little evidence that he engaged directly with the philosophical thought of his contemporaries in Scotland but his greatest contribution is the scrutiny of reason which he brought to religion and popular religious thought, both to the lecture room and the pulpit. None of his students went on to hold chairs of divinity or philosophy and perhaps this is for no other reason than that Idealism was on the wane even during Caird's later years. Warr wrote:

It is not often that a man attains to such public eminence and esteem as did Caird, who lived so quiet and unobtrusive a life. How little identified he was with the ecclesiastical activities of his age....and how completely dissociated from its acrimonies. Never in Presbytery, Synod, or Assembly was his voice heard. He was in the world, but not of it; thinking, teaching, and preaching, he lived in a calm, pure region of his own, unaffected by the strife and enmities of his generation, and in communion with all things fair and immortal....Those who heard him preach, reckon that as among the greatest privileges which life afforded them....But it is among the austere walls and gloomy quadrangles of Gilmorehill, that shrine of his devotion, that his spirit abides in fullest reality.⁶⁴²

Caird remains a notable figure in the history of the Church of Scotland.

⁶⁴¹ Marian Sawer *The Ethical State? Social Liberalism in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press (2003), 37.

⁶⁴² Warr, 252f.

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