

37 Sextant Road
Beverley Road
HULL HU6 7BA

14th January 1986

Rev Don Cupitt
The Dean
Emmanuel College
CAMBRIDGE CB2 3AP

Dear Don Cupitt,

First of all the last time I wrote to you concerned a radio interview which you gave me position to use in my research now being upgraded to Ph.D. The research in the sociology of religion suggests that denominations are façades and that the Church Denomination Sect paradigm is virtually redundant. New denominations stretch across institutional boundaries; I call them liberalism, conversionism and traditionalisms. You may be interested to know that I have positioned you, using the interview with John Dunn, with the liberals—but as one which threatens other liberals. I divide the liberal new denomination into orthodox and heterodox, and I group you just about with John Hick and definitely with Phillip Hewett, the Unitarian.

I recall telling you that I have views not dissimilar to your own and that I hoped to enter the Anglican Ministry. This focussed my views and I joined the Unitarians. I hope to enter their Ministry. I wrote an article for the York and Durham Vocation Bulletin (which they will publish). I state that theology in its breadth challenges doctrine and the church authority which prospective ordinands must come to terms with. I give my views (a rationalised Buddhist and atheist spirituality, Jesus as a mistaken eschatological prophet but with a profound human ethic, and a "resurrection" linked to expectations, experience and charisma focussed on the 'Master') and I state that they are not unacademic but challenge church doctrines, so

that I would have wasted my time with ACCM. I was not prepared to meet the minimum requirement of Christocentric theism. I think wanting to be a minister is like wanting to be a nurse or a railway worker, and I was not prepared to abandon my ministerial urge because I wouldn't conform. So I moved to the Unitarians who judge on suitability alone. This I state.

When in Christianity I disagreed with you in that I used to say that to be a Christian is to draw one's resources from within the tradition. I thought it was a weakness of a new approach to delve so readily into the concepts of Buddhism as you have done. However, I realised a lack of objective theism took away the "boundaries" and, in any case, my own spirituality carried the same rationale despite concentrating on the implications of the Jesus of History.

Now I disagree with you again which is probably due to changing institutions. I have difficulty with your notion of Christian terms as 'inspiring myths'. I understand what you, and Wittgenstein, mean but surely the language of Christianity is so structured that for it to be an inspiring myth you have to shut your mind and believe it is objectively true (even if it isn't) for it to work? One cannot inhabit its world if one is not lost in it. Otherwise it's like a magician watching a magic show. I don't think magicians can shut their minds.

You are concerned whether religion, as a series of inspiring myths, can function today. I propose that a religion can no longer make myths, except within its own symbolic universe. My own view (as a Unitarian) is that religion is a fundamental ethic which can only import myth and symbol from outside. Symbols from nature, art and literature come in to the ethic from outside. Words like resurrection mean nothing, except via Humpty Dumpty ("god" is Humpty Dumpty), but words like inspire, quest, charisma and ideal can have a religious meaning when put into a religious context. Religion itself is the ethical drive and the conquering of the discontent in pluralist society (I like

Berger and Kellner's approach in their book 'The Homeless Mind') we see a role for religion in life when looking at humanity: a good example is the desire for good architecture especially for living in and the rejection of concrete mass living. Art and symbol does touch the human soul (another Humpty Dumpty word) for a modern critical thinker however such symbols come from the widest sphere, a religion cannot of itself generate myths.

I think Christianity has to be objective and historical to work, and the participant has to either look forward to a trumpet call in a fundamentalist manner or look backwards seeing an historic community. I know some local Baha'is and despite its factional history and authoritarian structure (often not seen) it comes across as modern and plausible. This is what Christianity seems to lack.

I applaud your attempts to change how one might understand Christianity (you are very influential, I might say, amongst unitarians) but for myself I do not think a rational approach to religion can do anything but take symbols and words from the environment it is in.

yours,

Adrian Worsfold.

P.S. I suppose a defence would be that words change their meaning anyway but that really isn't the point. The question is whether they as a whole interconnect and whether they create a boundary in order to have internal validity. Here Christianity assumes its objectivity, historicity and therefore its God, and it is this which the modern thinker must go beyond. His relativising the creedal details and the overall scheme destroys the scheme, and he can no longer maintain the boundaries which the scheme needs - it's at this point that words become Humpty Dumpty, and where one is dealing with a new wine.

P.P.S. I have just learnt that I will have a book review in the Spring 1986 'Faith and Freedom' on Kees' 'The Way of Transcendence', and the reviews editor wants me to do more!

17.1.86

EMMANUEL COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE CB2 3AP Telephone

(0223) 65411

Dear Adrian Worfold

Thank you for your interesting letter and news of your plans. In response, why not see religion as being in future something much more like art? Then we might say (i) the creation and production of meaning by structuring, symbolizing & mythicizing experience is the primary human activity; (ii) in any society there is a very extensive common symbolic vocabulary; but (iii) each individual must find his/her own voice and distinctive view of life and style of selfhood. (iv) Artists all have to be different from each other, but these differences don't have to be seen as disagreements; (v) churches may be seen as like academies and colleges of art: they give grounding in technique, knowledge of the tradition etc, but they must not

What he is saying is that Churches have their own artistic tradition - thus can draw resources from within their own tradition.

become prisons for the spirit.

The art analogy suggests that religious pluralism is a good & healthy thing, an expression of creative energy & diversity. And art, though at one level we know it's entirely human, is also 'deep', complex & mysterious. Also, art is inimical to ideology & power — as I think religion should be in future.

All good wishes

Don Cupitt.