Ontology, Missiology, and the Travail of Christian doctrine:
A Conversation with Kevin Hector's
Theology without Metaphysics

Kevin J. Vanhoozer
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Introduction: Team Hector - Gilkey *redivivus*?

Kevin Hector's book is an important formal account of the conceptual scaffolding on which all theologians depend but seldom make explicit. *Theology without Metaphysics* offers us a comprehensive account of concept formation, meaning, reference, and truth, all under the rubric of Trinitarian theology and theological realism. What's not to like? Indeed, *Theology without Metaphysics* was a delight to read and made for engaging company for several hours. My attention never wandered, and I never found myself wishing that the author would shut up and go home. On the contrary, I would have liked him to stay a few more hours, long enough to answer my several questions. Though I have minor queries about the philosophy behind his argument, for the most part I leave those to more qualified analytic theologians and philosophical theologians. My primary interest pertains to the consequences of Hector's account for theology and the church. For what we have in the book is a sophisticated, highly analytic account of what it is to speak of God. Hector makes important *formal* (i.e., methodological) moves – most notably the appeal to Jesus and the Spirit – but by and large there is little *material* (i.e., dogmatic) description of the contents of theology. One or two extended case studies would not be out of place. In short: we are told *how* to talk of God, and how to do so authoritatively, but we are not told *what* to say.

Hector nevertheless provides an impressive account of the mechanics of authentic God-talk. It is a coherent proposal, and he is careful not to wax totalitarian and insist that everyone has to think or use terms the way he does. Others will no doubt challenge his basic premises about the non-necessity of metaphysics. I want to do something a bit different. I want to take the ball and run with it. A football analogy will therefore set the stage for what I shall here do, and this despite the conspicuous absence of football at the University of Chicago. Hector thinks and acts like a quarterback, for *Theology without Metaphysics* is essentially a matter of runs and throws, of hand-offs and passes, even the occasional lateral – all ways of conveying meaning, reference, and truth to players on one's team.[1] As we shall see,

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[1] See, for example, the reference to the "passing of truth claims" in Hector (2011, 220).

this interpersonal exchange of concepts that leads to marching down the field – what Hector calls "going on in the same way" as concerns the meaning, reference, and truth of concepts – lies at the heart of his argument. It would therefore behoove us to keep our eye on the ball, for as fans of the game know only all too well, fumbles and turnovers – errors that reverse direction and hence prevent players from "going on in the same way" – are the most costly.

As to my own role, well, I am no defensive end. My intent in this paper is not to rush Kevin, much less blitz him. Indeed, for the most part, I'll be on his side, running with the ball, trying to go on in the same way. I'm not sure how far down the field we'll be able to advance this afternoon, but I'd like to run a few plays. Only at the very end will I switch sides, play "prevent" defense, and try for a Protestant sack.

Speaking of the University of Chicago, Hector's book reminds me of Langdon Gilkey's celebrated 1961 essay "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language." Who knows? Perhaps Hector occupies Gilkey's old office? At any rate, there is an uncanny resemblance to Gilkey's essay, written a half-century earlier, and this despite the absence of Gilkey's name from the book's index. Gilkey's article single-handedly took down the Biblical Theology Movement. Whether Hector's book will have a similar effect on metaphysical theology remains to be seen. Be that as it may, it is instructive to compare his account to Gilkey's, for there are several intriguing parallels.

In the first place, like Hector vis-à-vis metaphysical theology, Gilkey identifies the Biblical Theology Movement's greatest problems as a confused ontology and an inadequate account of theological reference: "its world view or cosmology is modern, while its theological language is biblical and orthodox." (Gilkey 1961, 194) Here is the basic confusion: when these commentators speak *theologically,* they speak of God acting in history; when, however, they speak as historians they evacuate the event of special divine action. Consequently, the ontology – what they actually want to say about the reality of God – is left hanging.

Like Hector, Gilkey believes that the Biblical Theology Movement pins the possibility of speaking of God on an anchoring event: there is a single mighty divine act, namely, the Exodus-covenant event. Gilkey says that the Genesis accounts of God's speech and action were viewed as expressions of Israel's post-Exodus faith: "Thus the Bible is a book descriptive not of the acts of God but of Hebrew religion." (Gilkey 1961, 197) God may be the grammatical subject of the verbs, but the Bible is really about Hebrew religious faith.

The question this raises is whether a single anchoring event is enough to secure the possibility of speaking well of God. Did God literally speak to Moses on Mt. Sinai, or from the burning bush? If not, then how could Israel know that its interpretation of the Exodus-covenant event was correct? While it appears pious to appeal to faith for discerning God's acts in history, the Biblical Theology Movement left unanswered the question of where this faith came from in the first place. Gilkey's essay rightly called attention to the importance of the originating revelation: "In what way does this faith come from God and from what he has done rather than from man and what he has discovered, or even just poetically imagined?" (Gilkey 1961, 202).

Here Hector is clearly in a superior position to the Biblical Theology Movement, for he makes the event of Jesus Christ, not the Exodus, the prime anchoring event. Nevertheless, it is still fun to ponder how Gilkey might respond to the project of doing theology without metaphysics. Et tu, Hector? I think Gilkey would want to know whether Hector ever gives an ontological account of divine action, or of the referent of biblical language. Is the Bible a book that describes not only the religion of Israel and the early church, but also the acts, and being-in-act, of God?

Metaphysics: he knows if it's been "bad" or "good"…

Hector acknowledges early on that we use the term "metaphysics" to refer to various things. He is interested in doing without only one of these things, namely, the kind of metaphysics to which Heidegger objected which "identifies the being of beings as that in and upon which they are *grounded*, and identifies this ground, in turn, with human *ideas* about them" (Hector 2011, 3). So do I. For this is the kind of metaphysics that runs straight into the open arms of Ludwig Feuerbach, for whom God is actually a projection of one's own greatest thoughts.[2] This kind of metaphysics is a pre-meditated violence that we do to things, and God, inasmuch as we cut everything down to human size. I share this concern, as should all theologians who seek to heed the warning that concludes 1 John: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 Jn. 5:21).

Having generously acknowledged that there are other metaphysics that are not as reductive, it is somewhat surprising that Hector says little further about what they are.[3] The choice seems to be between a "bad" metaphysics and doing without metaphysics altogether. Is the term really beyond redemption? In *Remythologizing Theology* I distinguish between "bad" and "good" metaphysics. Metaphysics is "bad" when it seeks to impose a system of categories on God *without attending to God's own self-communication*. It is "good" when, by way of contrast, it derives its categories from the train of God's own communicative action (Vanhoozer 2010, 8-9, 222).

So: Hector lodges his complaint against one type of metaphysics, one kind of correspondence (i.e., the "correspondist" picture of correspondence). In a telling footnote, he acknowledge that some theorists resist the problem of reducing reality to our ideas about it "by insisting that the 'direction of fit' moves from world to mind, as it were, but not vice versa" (Hector 2011, 11). This is exactly right. At least, it is exactly what I mean by "remythologizing": to remythologize theology is to begin with God's self-presentation in Scripture (and with Scripture as itself a mode of God's self-presentation) so that the biblical *mythos* or plot governs our concepts, meaning, and reference to God. To remythologize is thus to work with a special

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[2] Cf. what Hector calls Heidegger's bottom line, namely, that "metaphysics is anthropomorphism" (Hector 2011, 9).

[3] Cf. the alternative definition of metaphysics as "the underlying intelligible structure of [our most important] commitments … what constitutes them as more than arbitrarily willed options" (Williams 1995, 6.

rather than a general metaphysics, recognizing that God is *not* a member of some general system of being (Vanhoozer 2010, 218-27). In sum: a special (i.e., remythologized) metaphysics takes God's self-presentation in and through Scripture, rather than the concept of "perfect being," as its lodestar. Its watchword is not *analogia entis* (a bottoms-being-up approach) but *analogia dramatis*: we learn about God's eternal being by attending to his speech and acts in the economies of revelation and redemption. The question of theology and metaphysics looks somewhat different when one begins with God's speech acts.

Metaphysics, in Hector's view, eliminates the "middle man," that is, people in general (i.e., community; intersubjectivity). According to the standard picture of the "essentialist-correspondentist" account of metaphysics that he sets out in the first chapter, the community that uses language plays no important role. Indeed, one might say that a theology *with* metaphysics (in the sense that Hector is using the term) is a theology in which the church plays no significant role, unlike the central role it plays in Hector's account.

Let me here simply mention a few questions that pertain to the way in which Hector conceives, and executes, the relationship between philosophy and theology. Let us grant, for the sake of discussion, that he has made no philosophical mistake: every necessary qualification is in place; every logical inference is correct.[4] My interest lies, first, in what he thinks of the nature and role of philosophy, especially as this concerns its use in theology. Is his account of concept formation in theology simply a regional instance of a more general phenomenon, or has he successfully plundered the Athenians, à la Augustine?

A second query concerns the nature of truth. As I have indicated, Hector's book is for the most part admirably clear. Only rarely did I have to put question marks in the margins (my device for indicating possible authorial confusion). One of these instances pertains to Hector's concept of "correctness." My guess is that he is tacitly working with some kind of understanding of truth as correspondence. This is, I suspect, what he means by "correctness" or "getting its subject matter right" (Hector 2011, 214). There is a difference between a definition and a criterion of truth. The former says what truth *is*, the latter how we come to recognize it. What, then, does Hector mean by *correctness*? The reference to subject matter suggests that something additional to the norms implicit in our language is in play.

Theology: Following Christ with the Spirit of Recognition

"To follow Christ … is to intend for one's beliefs, actions, and attitudes to go on in the same way as those which Christ recognized as doing so." Hence "Following Christ is … a normative affair" (Hector 2011, 262). We come now to my major area of interest: Hector's account of what Bernard Ramm calls the "pattern of religious authority." My main question will be whether Hector maintains what Ramm calls the "Protestant Principle" (Ramm 1959a, 28).

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[4] I do wonder whether he is able to account for his own concept of concept-formation, or is his theory unable to account for itself, the way Alvin Plantinga has shown classical foundationalism to fail?

Going on in the same way: (1) mission and transmission

Enough with the warm-ups. It's game time – first down, to be exact. As I said earlier, Hector's main argument is all about hand-offs and passes – different ways of "going on in the same direction."

What is perhaps most impressive about Hector's account is how he turns the water of rather dense philosophical accounts concerning pragmatics into the wine of theological pneumatics (to coin a term). What secures right reference to God is not essentialist description, but rather being socialized into a community that knows how to talk rightly about God. In Hector's words: "there is a commitment, first, to explaining semantical notions such as meaning, truth, and reference in terms of pragmatics – in terms, that is, of the norms implicit in what we do with language – and to explaining pragmatics, in turn, in terms of intersubjective recognition" (Hector 2011, 37). The ease with which he relates this technical account to the story of Jesus, the Spirit, and the apostles is both beautiful and extraordinary. It may also prove controversial.

Andrew Walls's (1996) *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* is not concerned with metaphysics, either in promoting or debunking it, but the parallels with Hector's book are nonetheless striking. The way Hector's "Spirit of recognition" operates is another way of describing the Spirit's missionary movement in Christian history: both are ultimately concerned, I think, with the transmission of faith from one person, time, and place to another. It is therefore instructive to compare and contrast Hector's account with Walls's.

"Going on in the same way": (2) translation, tradition … treason?

Traduttore, traditore ("translator, traitor"). There is more than an etymological connection between tradition, translation (Fr. *traduction*), and treason (Fr. *trahison*)! The common thread is "handing on" or "handing over." The apostles did this, to be sure, but so did Judas! The burning question, therefore, is how we can distinguish the handing over proper to authorized as opposed to unauthorized tradition. To put it (too) simply: how can we tell the difference between translation and treason?

According to Walls, the story of Christian mission is one of successive translations of the gospel into the languages, thought forms, and practices of other cultures. The church is simply imitating God's own missionary movement (so to speak), the sending of Son and Spirit: "Christian faith rests on a divine act of translation: 'the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us' (Jn. 1:14)" (Walls 1996, 26). Theology too is the attempt to "translate" teaching from God about God in concepts and categories that speak to people today. I think this is what Hector means by "going on in the same way."

To my mind, the most significant questions concern the norm in such "goings on." Specifically, what is the nature and locus of the norm and how does it function? Hector builds on Schleiermacher's account, according to which God redeems one by "attuning" one to Godself through Christ in the Spirit. It's a Trinitarian account!

Christ is the perfect attunement to God made flesh, the historical fulfillment of God's promise to create a new covenant by writing his law on people's hearts (Jer. 31:31-33). Jesus' historical life is the realization of this redeemed state: "Every moment of Christ's life enacts his devotion to God, such that Jesus Christ's being just is this enactment" (Hector 2011, 262). Jesus's view of God is normative, but as we shall see, he confers authority on his disciples because he recognizes them as knowing how to follow him in speech and action. I wonder, then, if Hector's ultimate norm is not: what would Jesus do? For what the apostles pass on from one person to another is a competence in being able to answer the WWJD question.

Good translation, tradition, and transmission depend upon maintaining a certain kind of faithfulness or "sameness" to what came before and, ultimately, to the original. Hector therefore speaks of "trying to go on in the same way as precedent uses that one recognizes as correct." We'll come back to the question of correctness in a moment, but for now, let's examine the concept of "sameness" itself.

Somewhat surprisingly, Hector does not examine the concept as such; there is no index entry for "sameness." Others have examined the concept, and Ricoeur's distinction between *idem* and *ipse* identity proves especially helpful. *Idem*-sameness is the sameness of numeric identity, permanence through time, and thus of unchanging substance. It leaves little or no scope for development. Clearly this is not what Hector has in mind. By way of contrast, *ipse* sameness is the kind of sameness a self has. We speak of personal identity but this allows for growth and development over time. Ricoeur's paradigm for *ipse* sameness is "that of keeping one's word in faithfulness to the word that has been given" (Ricoeur 1992, 123). I'll return to the centrality of "word" in due course.

How, then, does Andrew Walls propose to recognize "sameness" as the gospel is translated/transmitted from one culture to another? After reviewing the six stages of Christian history, Western and non-Western, he states his conviction that "we can discern a firm coherence underlying … the whole of historic Christianity," (Walls 1996, 23) though we cannot capture it in a set of propositions. However, Walls does think there is "a small body of convictions and responses" that come to expression in every culture: (1) the worship of the God of Israel (2) the ultimate significance of Jesus Christ (3) that God is active where believers are (4) that believers constitute a people of God transcending time and space, marked by common practices of reading Scripture and the special use of water (baptism), bread and wine (Lord's Supper) (Walls 1996, 23-4). Whereas Hector offers only a formal criterion (the dynamics of the Spirit of recognition), Walls provides material criteria as well. Hence my question: is a formal criterion alone sufficient to discern sameness?[5]

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[5] Robert Schreiter proposes five criteria for assessing Christian identity (Schreiter 1985, 113-17). Interestingly enough, each criterion has to do with Christian "performance," though his first criterion – the cohesiveness of Christian performance – comes closest to what I call the "canonical principle" (Vanhoozer 2005, 322). Christian speech and action must be "according to the Scriptures," though this "according to" requires not literal replication but creative imitation, or in my terms, improvising with the biblical script.

The locus of authority: on the very idea of a normative trajectory

What exactly is the locus of authority in Hector's account? We don't have to play hide and seek; the answer is in plain sight. Norms are implicit in what the followers of Jesus do with language. The norms are implicit in "our social practices" (Hector 2011, 53). As we have seen, these practices are passed on by others who have been recognized as equally having the Spirit and thus competent to speak of God and to pass on the practice to others. From time to time Hector speaks of "the authoritative tradition" for that is what the process of transmission amounts to (Hector 2011, 63). My question is this: whose trajectory (and social practice) is it? There are at least two answers, and I'm wondering whether Hector is more comfortable with the one rather than the other.

First, there is George Lindbeck's suggestion that theology is cultural-linguistic. On this view, theological language is meaningful and true only when ruled by the practices of the church. Community life makes sense of the biblical story. Learning to speak well of God is a matter of being socialized into the linguistic practices of the church.

Second, there is the lesser-known canonical-linguistic option (not mentioned in *Theology without Metaphysics*). There is much in my *The Drama of Doctrine* that resonates with Hector's proposal. For example, I say things like: "Theology is 'according to the scriptures' when it passes on and participates in the 'same' (*ipse*) theo-drama" (Vanhoozer 2005, 131). We both accord significance to tradition, the process of handing on. However, on my view Christians are socialized first and foremost into canonical practices, that is, practices regulated by the written discourse of the prophets and the apostles. The various books of the canon comprise the language games that both generate and govern the covenantal forms of ecclesial life. On my view, the Spirit "socializes" us into canonical practices – communicative practices with covenantal aims – making us part of what we would term the "society of biblical literature." By becoming apprentices to canonical practices, we learn how rightly to speak of God *and* what to say. We learn how to go on in the same way as the prophets and apostles.

On Hector's account, what gets handed on is not simply the content of previous teaching or revelation but the norms themselves (Hector 2011, 263). Hector equates the norms by which we assess beliefs and actions that purport to go on in the same way as Christ with the "mind of Christ," which is to say, the Spirit of Christ. How does this connect to Paul's exhortations to "follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me" (2 Tim. 1:13)? This question leads me to my next question, about the dynamics of authority and the Spirit of recognition.

The dynamics of authority and the Spirit of recognition: Do norms blow where they will?

And this brings use to the heart of the matter: the pattern of theological authority. Hector acknowledges that he is offering "a novel understanding of the Holy Spirit's work, according to which the normative Spirit of Christ is carried on

from person to person by means of intersubjective recognition" (Hector 2011, 38). In recognizing the disciples as competent, Jesus recognizes them as able to recognize his Spirit in other persons and performances that purport to be following him (i.e., Jesus bestows on them the status of authorized recognizers). Hence "the Spirit implicit in Christ's own normative assessments was passed along from person to person." Christians are inheritors not only of the promises, but also of the *references*, of God. In this way, the "supernatural," one's Spirit-enabled ability to speak of God, enters into the "natural" (i.e., ordinary discursive practices).

According to Hector's pattern of authority, however, "the normative trajectory implicit in a series of precedents changes every time something new is recognized as carrying it on" (Hector 2011, 282). The norm is dynamic, but we can discern it by examining the trajectory. In a sense, this is similar to William Webb's redemptive-spirit trajectory hermeneutic, though we discern the Spirit's movement not in the text, as Webb (2001) says, but in the process of apostolic succession.

Is this a Protestant dynamic? How Protestant is it? I think it would be fascinating for Hector to relate his thesis to the work of Bernard Ramm, an exceptionally astute evangelical theologian. Though he never offered a sophisticated account of meaning, truth, and reference, he did think that the philosophy of language was an area that evangelicals needed to work in much more seriously. I'm thinking, however, of his three best books: *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, *The Witness of the Spirit*, and *The Pattern of Religious Authority*. Each of these books poses a relevant question about either the nature and dynamics of theological authority or its locus and criteria.

Special Revelation and the Word of God: what is the place of biblical authority in Hector's account? The one mention of Scripture's normativity is buried in a footnote, and it is not clear that Scripture, as a member of a series of precedent performances recognized to be authoritative, enjoys supreme authority (Hector 2011, 233 n.35). Is Scripture a product of special revelation, unlike any other source of theology, the fixed "transcript of Jesus Christ" (Ramm 1961, 186)?

The Witness of the Spirit: this book, on the internal testimony of the Spirit, has one reference to Schleiermacher, and it is positive: "thanks to Schleiermacher ... the insight of the Reformers was recovered and the deadening influence of scholastic orthodoxy was broken" (Ramm 1959b, 120). But his main point is that the primary work of the Spirit, after uniting us to Christ, is to minister the word. The Spirit is the inner sealing of the objective revelation, the subjective efficacy of the Word. My question, then, is whether Hector's account preserves the Protestant emphasis on *word* and Spirit.

The Pattern of Religious Authority: in this book, Ramm rightly resists what he calls the "abbreviated" Protestant principle, represented by Chillingworth's claim that "The Bible only is the religion of Protestants" (Ramm 1959a, 29). Ramm's more expansive account is that it is the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures that is the supreme authority in the church. Ramm knows the Spirit of inspiration, and the Spirit of illumination, but I'm not sure if he would recognize your spirit of recognition. That's neither here not there. The relevant question is whether Hector can subscribe to Ramm's account of the pattern of Protestant authority: how does

Scripture serve as the *supreme* norm if the norms are implicit in our dynamic social practices?

Interceptions and other interruptions of "going on in the same way"

So much for taking Hector's hand-offs and running with the ball. What about interceptions? How can Hector prevent the passing on (*paradosis*) of a concept from being picked off by, say, a heretic, or an open theist? Is it really the case that we mediate the Spirit to others through a process of socialization? This seems to be the implication of one statement on: "This Spirit always comes to one from without ... both because it was sent by Christ and because it must be mediated to one before one can internalize it and mediate it to others" (Hector 2011, 263).

It is true that the Spirit appears to be mediated to others as they are socialized into the church, for example, by baptism. A striking example of such apparent mediation is Acts 19, where Paul comes to Ephesus and discovers "disciples" who did not know about the Holy Spirit because they had received John's baptism of repentance only. When the disciples are baptized into Jesus' name, and when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them" (Acts 19:5,6).

On Schleiermacher's account, which Hector seems himself to follow (at least I can't recall any place where he departs in a significant way from it), "one receives Christ's normative Spirit by submitting one's judgments and performances to those whom one recognizes as knowing how to follow him" (Hector 2011, 264). Is this really the way one receives the Holy Spirit and thus becomes united to Christ?

Of more particular concern is the question of how one discerns when new uses of a concept change from being transmissions into transformations: does the *content* of a concept, and in particular its anchoring use in Scripture, exercise decisive control over what counts as further "going on in the same way"? How, for example, does Hector's view account for the development of doctrine? In particular, how might it account for the invention of a *new* concept, such as Athanasius' *homoousios*? Does the theory of spirit recognition account for the way in which, say, the Council of Nicaea achieved its consensus? And what happens when what was once acknowledged as an authoritative trajectory (e.g., Nicene orthodoxy) is later rejected (i.e., by the Arians)?

The doctrine of divine impassibility presents another challenging case study, if not counter-example, for Hector's account. Scholars widely acknowledge that the early church almost universally agreed that one had to ascribe divine impassibility in order to speak well of God. That consensus today lies in shatters: divine passibility has become the "new orthodoxy" (Goetz 1986). Surely it is nonsense to suggest that the concept of divine passibility "goes on in the same way" as divine impassibility? Hector does not suggest this, but neither is it self-evident how his "pneumatological pragmatics" would handle this theological controversy. Does the concept of divine impassibility change or should we abandon it? Could Hector's

account of "going on" ever lead us to abandon a concept once taken as authoritative by almost everyone, everywhere, at *most* times? Why or why not?

Finally, what about *moral* theology without metaphysics? Consider the following specific, and admittedly difficult, issue: that of homosexual unions in the church. Luke Timothy Johnson acknowledges that the biblical commands in regard to homosexuality are fairly straightforward. He therefore proposes to appeal to another authority – experience – to justify the goodness and holiness of same-sex unions. The particular "experience" in question to which Johnson appeals is precisely the "spirit of recognition," namely, the Holy Spirit forming the mind of Christ in disciples. He sees a formal parallel between, on the one hand, the disciples' discerning the Spirit among the Gentiles, evidence that God accepted them despite their non-observance of Jewish religious practices (Acts 10-15), and God's activity in the lives of contemporary homosexuals on the other. Hence the church should extend the "spirit of recognition" to monogamous homosexual couples too (Johnson 1996, 145-48). Whereas Johnson merely poses the question, Stephen Fowl answers in the affirmative, employing what is essentially Hector's argument about normative trajectories (Fowl 1998, 119-127). The question, then, is whether Hector would exclude homosexual unions from the normative trajectory of the concept "marriage" and, if so, on what basis.

"*Without*": Mr. Hector's Emancipation Proclamation

Back to Chicago, or rather Illinois, the land of Lincoln. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation ordered the Union Army to treat slaves as free men and women. It did not outlaw slavery, not did it recognize the ex-slaves as citizens with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereunto. Hector concludes his book with a similar Emancipation Proclamation, declaring theological slaves free from metaphysical captivity.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the most spectacular abuses of authority are the ones that take place in the sanctity of the church. Hector is right to decry the tendency not to recognize some persons' voices. He writes eloquently about the ways in which patterns of unjust behavior and maltreatment of others are often so internalized as to be something *through* which people look at the world. We laugh at the late comedian Rodney Dangerfield, but it is surely no fun "to get no respect."

Hector proposes to deal with oppressive authoritarian structures by attending to experiences of disrespect that disclose how the normative commitment implicit in certain church practices may "outrun" the current state of its outworking (Hector 2011, 282). Again, the norm is implicit in the social practice (though, again, it is not always clear whether the Spirit bears along the social practice or the practice the Spirit). In any case, Hector contrasts his social-practical approach with its chief rivals, the Roman Catholic "institutional-hierarchical" and the (Pietist?) "immediate-interior" approach. The former posits the ecclesial hierarchy as "the final arbiter of what counts as a work of the Spirit" (Hector 2011, 284), whereas the latter appeals to the direct working of the Spirit in one's personal experience.

On Hector's "social-practical" account, the Spirit works gradually, and without final resolution, through the messy, but true-to-life dialogical process of point and counterpoint: "the Spirit is publicly mediated, yet cannot be identified in advance with the authority of any person or the configuration of any prevailing order; rather, the Spirit's work is continually reconfiguring that order from within" (Hector 2011, 286). This is emancipatory because the Spirit works for increasingly just social arrangements "by exploiting the normative surplus implicit in those arrangements" (Ibid).

This prompts two questions, neither of which is directly related to the topic of Hector's discussion (but I want to ask them anyway). First, would Hector's account of emancipation create the conditions in which Luther's Reformation, and his declaration of the freedom of a Christian, could have taken place? Or is Luther's protest – which was motivated more by his perception of disrespect for the gospel than for himself – an instance of the "immediate-interior" approach? Regardless, how would Hector account for the Reformation? On the eve of its 500th birthday, is it an exhibit of what is right in his approach or a counterexample? Stated pointedly: how Protestant an account of authority does he intend *Theology without Metaphysics* to be?

Second, are there not some voices towards which the church should turn, if not a deaf, then a skeptical, or at least cautious ear? If not, then what are the consequences for the church? Another way of getting at this issue would be to ask whether theology after metaphysics is a centered- or a bounded-set (or perhaps a set of some other geometrical configuration)?

Listening to other voices is a familiar strategy in a number of mainline churches, deployed whenever some group seeks to make a case for greater inclusivity. The strategy is to get representative authorities to recognize that others too (e.g. those wanting the church to recognize homosexual unions) speak and act like Christians. What should we say: does a marriage between a man and a man, or a woman and a woman, count as "going on in the same way"? Does the concept of "marriage equality" include same sex unions and, if so, does this stretch, or perhaps break, the biblical concept of marriage? Can Hector's approach deal with this adequately without metaphysics – without, that is, a descriptive (perhaps essentialist) account of what marriage is (i.e., its ontology)?

Hector's book commends theology without metaphysics. He expressly does not say "without orthodoxy." I do not for a moment think that Hector is operating without a net (i.e., without a sense of the orthodox tradition). My question, however, is whether he treats the criteria of orthodoxy as if they were *internal* to the social practices of the church. At the end of the day, in freeing us from metaphysics, has Hector also released us from *any* external standard against which our theology, academic and lived, must be measured? To be sure, when Hector says that his approach enables us to identify more fully with our beliefs, words, and actions since these are no longer to be contrasted with something that stands at a remove from ordinary life, he is thinking of metaphysics, not Scripture. Yet Scripture is indeed set apart – "holy" – an authoritative word that is the condition of both the church's liberation and its judgment.

Let me conclude by returning to what I have called the unabbreviated Protestant principle: the intrinsic association of the written word and the living Spirit. I commend Hector for giving an account of authority that gives prominence to the Spirit, making what is typically the Cinderella of Christianity the belle of the theological ball. Yet this is the Spirit whose authority is, on my view, first and foremost a matter of his speaking in the Scriptures, and it is not entirely clear to me how on Hector's view we are to use Scripture in order to "test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1).

The canon is arguably the Spirit's most important work of recognition. My fundamental question therefore concerns Scripture's status as supreme authority for Christian faith and life. I have already spoken on behalf of canonical practices, and I have written elsewhere on theodramatic improvisation, so it is not as though I want to commend an approach where fidelity inhibits freedom. On the contrary, both Hector and I are looking for ways in which theology can pursue creative fidelity. The (possible) difference between us concerns the nature and function of theological normativity. To be sure, there is a place for freedom under the authority of Scripture (cf. Barth). But, precisely because it is *under* Scripture, my response to Hector's case for expressive freedom must be: "No emancipation without canonization." Theology without metaphysics is one thing; theology without *sola scriptura* quite another.

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