

• THEOLOGY IN DIALOGUE •

---

Sociology,  
Theology  
AND THE  
Curriculum

---

EDITED BY  
LESLIE J. FRANCIS

## Sociology, Theology and the Curriculum

## Theology in Dialogue Series

Series Editor: Ian Markham

The Theology in Dialogue series is an internationally supported response to a pressing need to explore the relationship between theology and the different, ostensibly secular, academic disciplines which appear within the degree programmes of colleges and universities. It has been developed by The Council of Church and Associated Colleges (CCAC), a network of UK-based colleges and universities which have Church foundations.

Each volume begins with a chapter and a reply, providing a thoughtful justification for the interaction of theology and each subject. This is followed by a theoretical analysis of this interaction, and a range of case studies illustrating the difference this makes in the classroom. All volumes contain contributions from the most highly respected scholars in their field.

Other books in the series:

*English Literature, Theology and the Curriculum* edited by Liam Gearon

The grand narrative of theology and the many narratives of literature have interacted with complex and culturally enriching results over the centuries. This volume provides an enlivened, interdisciplinary debate between the fields of English literature and theology. The analysis of this textual dynamic ranges from varied, historical case studies in theology and literature, to practical concerns centring upon effective models of curriculum innovation, especially, but not exclusively, in higher education.

*Spirituality and the Curriculum* edited by Adrian Thatcher

'Spirituality' and 'spiritual development' are increasingly widespread concepts, particularly within the pastoral profession of education. In this volume, leading theologians and educationalists discuss spirituality from the point of view of theology, its home discipline, and apply the results of their enquiries to the curriculum in colleges and schools.

Theology in Dialogue Series  
Series Editor: Ian Markham

# Sociology, Theology and the Curriculum

Edited by Leslie J. Francis



CASELL  
London and New York

**Cassell**

Wellington House, 125 Strand, London WC2R 0BB  
370 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6550

© Leslie J. Francis and the contributors 1999

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

First published 1999

**British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-304-70485-7

Typeset by BookEns Ltd, Royston, Herts.  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Biddles Ltd,  
Guildford and King's Lynn

# Contents

<i>Series Editor's Foreword</i>	vii
<i>The Contributors</i>	ix
 Preface	 xi
<i>Leslie J. Francis</i>	
 <b>Part I Foundations</b>	
1 Christian Foundations, Sociological Fundamentals <i>David Martin</i>	1
2 A Theological Response to Sociology <i>Ronald Preston</i>	50
 <b>Part II Theoretical Perspectives</b>	
3 Theological Reflection and Sociological Method <i>Andrew Dawson</i>	63
4 Social Theories of the Human Agent and Monastic Dialogue <i>Jeff Vass</i>	72
5 The Problem of Charismatic Religious Experience for the Sociology of Religion: Label or Libel? <i>Martyn Percy</i>	82
6 Sociological Methodologies and the Changing Nature of Contemporary Fundamentalism <i>Stephen J. Hunt</i>	93
7 Sociology in Evangelical Theological Colleges <i>Tony Walter</i>	104

## Contents

8	Is Self-assigned Religious Affiliation Socially Significant? <i>Rosalind S. Fane</i>	113
<b>Part III Empirical Perspectives</b>		
9	The Socialization of Glossolalia <i>Mark J. Cartledge</i>	125
10	Pentecostalism: Charismata and Church Growth <i>William K. Kay</i>	135
11	Student Expectations of a Church College <i>Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins and Mandy Williams-Potter</i>	145
12	Sociology Students and Christianity in a Church College <i>Bernadette Casey, Neil Casey and Colin Dawson</i>	155
13	Immanent Faith: Young People in Late Modernity <i>Sylvia Collins</i>	165
14	Church Leaving in the Late Twentieth Century: Eschewing the Double Life <i>Philip Richter</i>	175
15	Gay and Lesbian Christians: The Lived Experiences <i>Andrew K. T. Yip</i>	187
16	Developing Identity as a Local Non-stipendiary Priest <i>Michael West</i>	197
	<i>Name Index</i>	207
	<i>Subject Index</i>	211

# Series Editor's Foreword

One of the central questions facing theological discourse must be its relationship with other discourses in the academy. For the academy this issue is acute. The twin pressures of secularization and plurality have inhibited theological reflection; theology has been confined to a 'department'; the result being that students on different degree programmes do not explore the overall framework and assumptions of their study. Certain fundamental value questions are entirely neglected.

This series is a challenge to the confinement of theological reflection to a single department. We believe that a full and rounded education ought to provide the space for wide-ranging reflection. Education is not value-free: all students ought to be encouraged to confront questions of value.

Each volume examines both questions of approach and questions of content. Some contributors argue that an overtly Christian or religious framework for higher education actually affects the way we approach our study; a religious framework supports faith, while the secular framework is opposed to faith. Other contributors insist that a religious framework simply makes the curriculum wider. The approach will be the same as our secular counterparts; however, where the content of a course has a religious implication this will be included. Each volume brings out the diversity of positions held within the academy.

We have attracted the best writers to reflect on these questions. Each volume concludes by reflecting on the curriculum implications – the precise implications for educators in our schools and higher education colleges.

Ian Markham



*This page intentionally left blank*

# The Contributors

**The Revd Mark J. Cartledge** is Chaplain and Tutor at St John's College, Durham.

**Dr Bernadette Casey** is Media Studies Subject Leader at the University College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth.

**Dr Neil Casey** is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth.

**Dr Sylvia Collins** is Lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at Kingston University.

**Dr Andrew Dawson** is Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at University College, Chester.

**Dr Colin Dawson** is Sociology Subject Leader at the University College of St Mark and St John, Plymouth.

**Ms Rosalind S. Fane** is Research Assistant in the Centre for Theology and Education at Trinity College, Carmarthen.

**The Revd Canon Professor Leslie J. Francis** is D. J. James Professor of Pastoral Theology and Mansel Jones Fellow at Trinity College, Carmarthen, and University of Wales, Lampeter.

**Dr Stephen J. Hunt** is Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of Reading.

**The Revd Dr William K. Kay** is Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Theology and Education at Trinity College, Carmarthen.

**The Revd Professor David Martin** is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Honorary Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Lancaster University.

### *The Contributors*

**The Revd Canon Dr Martyn Percy** is Director of the Lincoln Theological Institute, University of Sheffield.

**The Revd Canon Professor Ronald Preston** is Emeritus Professor of Social and Pastoral Theology at the University of Manchester.

**The Revd Philip Richter** is Educational Development Officer at the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme, based in Salisbury.

**Ms Mandy Robbins** is Junior Research Fellow in the Centre for Theology and Education at Trinity College, Carmarthen.

**Mr Jeff Vass** is Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Social and Political Studies at the University of Southampton, New College.

**Dr Tony Walter** is Reader in Sociology and Director of the MA in Death and Society at the University of Reading.

**The Revd Canon Dr Michael West** is Principal of the Local Ministry Scheme in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

**The Revd Mandy Williams-Potter** is Chaplain at Trinity College, Carmarthen.

**Dr Andrew K. T. Yip** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Social Sciences at Nottingham Trent University.

# Preface

*Leslie J. Francis*

Christian universities and colleges have a unique opportunity to promote dialogue between theology and other disciplines. The dialogue may emerge within the undergraduate curriculum, within staff development, and within specific emphasis in research. The Engaging the Curriculum initiative has promoted this dialogue in a very specific way by sponsoring consultations on the interface between theology and many of the disciplines in which Christian universities and colleges have an investment.

These consultations bring together individuals concerned with the dialogue between theology and other disciplines from the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Free Church colleges in England and Wales, together with colleagues working in secular colleges and universities. While Christian universities and colleges make no claim to have a monopoly on such dialogue, through the Engaging the Curriculum initiative they have recognized and implemented their responsibility to provide a forum through which such dialogue can be properly recognized and progressed.

Part of this enquiry opens with a position paper by the Revd Professor David Martin on how sociology might be pursued in colleges with a Christian foundation. The Revd Canon Professor Ronald Preston responds to Martin's presentation from a theological perspective. Colleagues then respond to these essays by illustrating how their current research interests demonstrate the dialogue between theology and sociology in practice. Two particular kinds of responses are offered.

The first kind of response focuses on *theoretical perspectives* and illustrates how theology may contribute to an understanding of sociology or how sociology may contribute to an

## Preface

understanding of theology. Examples of this kind of dialogue are presented in Part II through essays by Andrew Dawson, Rosalind S. Fane, Stephen J. Hunt, Martyn Percy, Jeff Vass and Tony Walter. These examples engage both with the broader issues of sociology as a discipline and with the specific concerns of the sociology of religion.

The second kind of response focuses on *empirical perspectives*, illustrating the kind of empirical research which might be undertaken by theologically informed and theologically motivated sociologists. Examples of this kind of dialogue are presented in Part III by Mark J. Cartledge, Bernadette Casey, Neil Casey and Colin Dawson, Sylvia Collins, Leslie J. Francis, William K. Kay, Philip Richter, Mandy Robbins, Michael West, Mandy Williams-Potter and Andrew K. T. Yip. These examples show sociology engaging with issues like glossolalia, the religiosity of young people, student motivation at a church college, church leaving, gay and lesbian Christians and local ministry. The sociological study of such issues cannot be properly pursued without theological awareness. At the same time, the church would be unwise to address such issues without taking a sociologically informed perspective into account.

All too often churches run the risk of undervaluing or ignoring sociological perspectives on matters of theological concern. At the same time, sociologists may run the risk of undervaluing the contribution which theology can make to their discipline. The present volume demonstrates just how much these two disciplines can engage in profitable collaboration both with Christian universities and colleges and within the wider academic community.

My work as editor of this collection of essays has been much helped by the patient and careful work of the contributors, and by the skill of my colleagues within the Centre for Theology and Education at Trinity College, Carmarthen, Diane Drayson, Ros Fane, Stephen Loudon, Anne Rees and Mandy Robbins.

Leslie J. Francis  
Trinity College, Carmarthen  
September 1998

# Part I Foundations

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Christian Foundations, Sociological Fundamentals

*David Martin*

## Introduction

**T**his essay is concerned with the problem of sociology and cognate subjects in colleges with a Christian foundation. That foundation might mean simply that such colleges tried to foster a different kind of community to that found elsewhere and set aside space for worship and for pastoral care. But in circumstances in which colleges are asked by government to reflect on their 'mission', meaning by that their fundamental purposes and objectives, the question arises as to whether the curriculum itself in its scope and tenor might take into account those purposes.

For reasons which will be set out below, any such question is fraught with problems when it comes to the human sciences. Whereas accountancy, for example, is presumably an unproblematic activity from the viewpoint of Christian foundations, the human sciences, and maybe sociology in particular, are far from unproblematic. They are, after all, angled disciplines, offering perspectives which include perspectives on religion. But over and beyond that, this problematic character is itself located in a tension between institutions of higher learning and religion deserving more sociological analysis. Thus, some distinguished American sociologists and historians recently engaged in elucidating the reasons why so many great institutions were founded with Christian intent, but are now



identifiable as such only historically (such as Boston University) or by the retention of a name (such as Wesleyan University in Connecticut). Certainly in England the ordinary student will know nothing about the dissenting roots lying below the surface of such major institutions as Birmingham and Manchester universities.

With regard to sociology one needs also to take into account the historical genealogy of the discipline. In the United States sociology reproduced the national culture in its combination of the Enlightenment and the Christian Social Gospel, and in a weaker form one could locate parallel elements in Britain. In Europe, however, as its history and culture would lead one to expect, the genealogy bifurcates rather more sharply into the Enlightenment stem and a vigorous response, which was in part Catholic. But again, as with the origins of the universities, these complicated genealogies in the United States and Europe are well below the surface. Only historians of the subject know the extent of the roots of sociology in the Social Gospel, and the current stereotype of sociology is of a subject often taught from a political perspective and one whose basic assumptions are not easily reconciled with religious modes of understanding.

Nor is the stereotype entirely incorrect. If you were to go back to the mid-century you would find it amply illustrated. Students reading Barbara Wootton, for example, would have encountered the suggestion that Christians confronted with sociology would normally relinquish their faith. Certainly they would have had to be rather active and persistent in pursuit of intellectual support to the contrary, though such did exist, for example, in the work of J. Langmead Casserley (1951) and in the work of Catholic anthropologists and (somewhat later) in the approach of Edward Tiryakian (1962) or Jacques Ellul (1964). In any case, one aspect of the sociology of sociology was the contribution of Jews at the point of their emergence from the ghetto into a secular, even into a secularist, Enlightenment. There was an understandable edge discernible at that point in their treatment of religion which has now, for the most part, disappeared. Consider, for example, the tone and sympathetic vantage point of Daniel Levine (1992) in his *Popular Voices in Latin American Catholicism*.

The present moment is, therefore, interesting, since on the one hand some of the old hostilities have abated, and on the

other hand the long-term tension between Christian institutional foundations and the content of academic work has emerged, yet again, in the context of what were often once teacher training colleges and are now of university status in their size and level of activity.

It goes without saying that there can be no attempt to revive a 'Christian' sociology, even though interesting work was once done under that head. Rather, I shall argue in what follows for an exploration of the full range of possible approaches within the rubric of independent and rigorous intellectual endeavour, given that some of these approaches are arguably compatible with religious understandings, or at any rate, with *some* religious understandings. Inevitably, there is a personal element here given that in this kind of discipline there are no absolutely mandatory paradigms apart from attention to logical inference, coherence and criteria of evidence. In a preliminary way one should always be wary of exclusive claims to the effect that only this or that mode of sociology is properly scientific. There is an extensive literature in the philosophy of science to rebut that particular kind of imperialism. For the rest, one might emulate Max Weber in seeing how much one can bear, and maybe also recollect what Herbert Butterfield (1957) had to say about being 'totally uncommitted' in the conclusion of his *Christianity and History*.

### **Language**

Christianity is, among other things, a language and a mode of understanding. Some believe that language to be entirely self-contained, and if that is so, there can be no problems of negotiation over territories. But this is a costly solution which simultaneously restricts the range of Christianity and of other domains of human understanding and insight. Yet others believe there is a negotiation but one which is solely to the disadvantage of Christianity. Once the queen of sciences ruled and incorporated knowledge successfully into her wide empire, but each domain in turn acquired independence until the theological heartlands shrank to nothing. What the physical and biological sciences accomplished from the seventeenth century onwards, the social sciences completed from the eighteenth century onwards. The 'theological' mode was a

stage in historical development, and is no longer a power worthy of dialogue or negotiation since it has nothing left to offer. As it happens, this view is still residually present in contemporary sociological writing and more than residually present as an unexamined premise inside and outside sociology. It runs in parallel with the view that religion itself is a constantly shrinking power, doomed by social evolution to ghostly flittings at the margins of the real social world. That shrinking of religion would include its retreat in the university and in the 'Christian college', the very topic currently under review (see Marsden, 1990, 1994; Marsden and Longfield, 1993).

The two views just canvassed are that religion is safe within a bounded discourse, and that religion has undergone successive curtailments of power until it is inconsequential. These are contrary views. Both of them can show impressive intellectual pedigrees, distinguished proponents and significant power bases. They indicate immediately just how complicated are the relationships between Christian and sociological understandings, especially so if, as will be suggested later, there are essentially philosophical elements intervening in the negotiation and ensuring that sectors of argument are conducted on philosophical grounds.

Such contrary positions also indicate some of the sources of the sensitivities which surround the issue. Independence is an emotive matter, whether it is the postulated independence of theological discourse or the independence of work in the human sciences.

Without pursuing any further the two views just canvassed, it is at least clear that neither is compatible with a discussion of the forms a genuinely serious dialogue might take between religious and sociological understandings. Nor are they conducive to a discussion of what sensitivities might be cultivated and what issues probed by those who take seriously the Christian religion. This essay adopts a third view. The considerations here advanced presuppose that there is some possibility of fruitful dialogue between languages even if their scope and texture is different. But once that possibility is accepted it becomes clear that the character of the dialogue between sociology and theology differs considerably from the dialogue that might exist between theology and accountancy or

law or physics. However briefly, we have now to sketch out *a distinctive* problem. Some zones of intellectual activity are relatively unproblematic for faith while others are problematic in very distinctive ways.

Amongst all the hundreds of books with titles based on some variant of 'Christianity and X' there can be few on Christianity and accountancy or Christianity and statistics or, extending the list, Christianity and engineering, numismatics, or horticulture. There are certain subjects which are concerned primarily with useful manipulations, or else are mostly descriptive in ways that appear quite neutral with respect to religious discourse. Other subjects, such as law and medicine, are almost equally neutral, apart from the moral issues to which they give rise, though in the case of medicine there is also a huge area of uncertainty with respect to the role of faith in, say, holistic therapies. There is a further group of subjects such as psychotherapy which raise questions of the relation between religious and secular terminologies, for example, whether or not the secular terminologies supersede the religious ones or extend them or emerge alongside them. Indeed, precisely this question of terminology emerges in sociology.

Before turning directly to sociology it is important to notice an important group of subjects, such as physics, cosmology, geology, palaeontology which have in the past raised questions about the biblical record. This frontier area is now quite well patrolled, apart from the recrudescence of such topics as 'creation science'. Much more frequent are eirenic discussions about design, order and beauty and elegance, related to the classical arguments for God's existence, in which scientists advance theological insights on their own account or claim to show some sort of consonance between religious and scientific concepts. These important discussions are assuredly not where the centres of contemporary turbulence lie. Somewhat more turbulence can arise with regard to modern developments in ethology, biology, genetics, behaviouristic psychology and brain science, particularly where these bear on human freedom or dignity or have implications for moral psychology. Even members of the general public are aware of the attacks launched by the biologist Richard Dawkins for whom religion itself can be characterized as a variety of virulent infection (see for example Dawkins, 1995; Bowker, 1995).

Whether the frontiers are silent or well-patrolled or subject to border-crossing or turbulence, the problems just mentioned are for the most part not of the same kind as those found in sociology, or in subjects deploying the same approaches as sociology, or in some way affianced to sociology in terms of humanistic method. The point about the deployment of sociological approaches is important, because while sociology is exposed to a great deal of vulgar and ignorant abuse as a pseudo-science or pseudo-subject, its perspectives have in fact infiltrated other cognate subjects to a remarkable degree. One may rephrase that by saying that sociology and these other subjects are porous. Setting aside the relationship between sociology and anthropology, which at the fundamental level is one of simple identity, there is a strong sociological element in politics and history as well as in educational studies and religious studies. So strong is this element that in a historian such as Keith Thomas it is built into his approach and, indeed, to his choice of subject matter, while in a historian such as Geoffrey Elton it elicits appeals against bowing down before the false gods of sociology. In the work of Fernand Braudel and others of the Annales School sociological understandings are an essential and entirely explicit layer in the overall texture of interpretation.

Whether these sociological understandings are generated from within sociology or have simply become one of the undisputed modes of 'modernity' (itself a much disputed sociological concept) hardly matters. There is a seepage in all directions, even at the level of terms, so that 'charismatic', for example, emerges in sociology and in politics from its original location in theology, and from thence it emerges again in everyday language. The word 'culture' is another instance. This means that those issues causing turbulence at the frontier of theology and sociology (or religion and sociology) are present along the whole frontier of the human sciences. They are, in short, intrinsic to *Geisteswissenschaften* and, thus, of signal importance. Indeed, they disturb subjects like English literature at least as much as subjects like sociology. Once the social context of literature is invoked, and once you are engaged in semiology and the interpretation of signs, it is not merely a question of difficult borders with theology but rather of all-round mutual penetration across borders between 'language'

and 'society' and between language and science. Just how confused and contentious all that can become in terms of structuralism, post-modernism, etc. is well illustrated by the recent critique presented by Ernest Gellner (1992) in *Post-Modernism, Reason and Religion*.

Sociology, then, is as much a mode of understanding as a delimited subject. And just as that mode is present alongside others within other subjects, so a variety of modes are present within sociology. If such a characterization suggests there is no such entity as an essential sociology, the point is that there exists a recognizable cluster of approaches specifically intended to elucidate the web of social interactions considered as a whole. That cluster turns on the heuristic deployment of a *Homo sociologicus*, who is much closer to the 'whole' human being than *Homo economicus* and, therefore, exists at no great distance from *Homo theologicus* and all other fundamental understandings of the human, for example the philosophy of existentialism. The result is paradoxical. Once you have come that close to a holistic analysis you have to deploy different kinds of intention, different styles of elucidation, depending on the subject matter and the questions put to the subject matter. At one moment, for example, analysis may be synchronic, at another diachronic, and if it is the latter, then you are tracing connections over time and doing history. A sociologist analysing a ritual takes into consideration spatial arrangements and juxtapositions, the interpretation of texts, a complex choreography, and the dramatic shape of the liturgy. The point is that sociologists deploy many approaches. More than that, sociologists have at their disposal a variety of paradigms alongside the variety of approaches. Analyse any sociological text and it will yield root metaphors, implying, for example, organism or mechanism or theatre.

So holistic understanding requires many levels, many approaches, several paradigms, several root metaphors. Within this variety are some which are compatible with Christianity, others which are in tension with it, others perhaps even contrary to it. It is certainly not the business of a Christian college to select those which are compatible at the expense of those which are less so or at the expense of those which are clearly contrary. That is pre-emptive and inimical to the pursuit of truth. But arguably it *is* the business of a Christian college at

least to allow some space and room for approaches which are compatible alongside those which are less so, unless and until they cease to generate fruitful results. Naturally, the notion of 'fruitful result' is difficult to apply, just as Lakatos' notion of a 'degenerating' research strategy is difficult to apply even in the physical sciences (Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970). It is a matter of judgement. In practice it is not all that difficult to discern a dead end and in sociology dead ends are quite few.

Two points are worth making at this juncture. One is that in the early stages of sociology many practitioners sought to devise a vocabulary which imparted an alien chill to the subject matter and so created an atmosphere of science. That phase of opaque technicality is by no means over, but it has become possible over the last few decades once more to use ordinary English. Subject matter can be less 'itself' when characterized in esoteric vocabularies than when characterized by all the resources of normal language. That is because sociology is by no means contrary to common sense in the way that the physical sciences are contrary. There was even a phase when some sociologists constantly surrounded ordinary concepts with inverted commas, in part to imply difficulty and in part to suggest esoteric special meanings. Now the inverted commas can be taken off again because in a very large number of instances there is no arcane otherness lurking beyond the ordinary. The contrived alienation of experience can be abandoned in favour of enhancement and enrichment. Permission to use English has once more been granted and should be exploited because the darkened glasses of esotericism did, indeed, convey an alienation of experience. Experience is not *systematically* false and a use of language which implies a special kind of scientific distance between experience and reality can itself be more of a falsification than it is an illumination.

The second point is this. Where metaphysics is concerned or maybe even where ethics is concerned, Christianity is often contrasted with humanism. That contrast is only marginally present in the human sciences because a Christian understanding of the human profoundly overlaps a humanistic or existentialist one. This is not to say that Christianity concedes 'Man is the measure of all things' but that it shares with humanism a view of what it is to be a human being in terms of