Liberation, Not Independence:
A Practical Theological Paradigm for People in Scotland[1]

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Introduction

'There shall be a Scottish Parliament' is the simple, direct statement that begins the Scotland Act 1998 and was realized (again) when the parliament was formally opened by HM The Queen on 1 July 1999.[2] The Scottish National Party secured 47 seats to Labour's 46 in the May 2007 Scottish Parliamentary Election and became, for the first time, the largest party. The SNP manifesto commitment to provide a referendum by which people in Scotland could express their view on independence during this current parliament has placed the constitutional question for the United Kingdom squarely on the table. Although the proposed date of the referendum has not been published the question has been crafted so as to fall within the competency of the parliament. Voters in Scotland will be asked whether or not 'the Scottish Government should negotiate a settlement with the Government of the United Kingdom so that Scotland becomes an independent state.'[3]

The Nationalists previously affirmed their hope of being 'Free by '93'; a declaration that still has a frisson that will probably elude future slogans for independence. 'Self-driven by 2011', should such branding ever be adopted by the SNP, does not carry quite the same punch. Nevertheless, at the core of the nationalist agenda lies the goal of self-determination; independence from Westminster's control. Knowing how *The Scottish Constitutional Convention* (an association of civic and political groups, including, amongst others, churches, local authorities, trades unions and some political parties) had been influential in nurturing aspirations for devolution in the late 1980s until the 1998 Act, and how much it had contributed to framing

that legislation, the SNP launched its own *National Conversation* in August 2007.

Gordon Brown had published a Green Paper, *The Governance of Britain*, in the previous July but, to no-one's surprise, had ruled independence out of any constitutional revision.[4] As a unionist response to the SNP's *Conversation,* the Scottish Parliament voted in December 2007 to establish an independently-chaired commission to review the experience of devolution. The Calman Commission (so-named after its chairman, Sir Kenneth Calman) includes Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative politicians alongside people from civil society, all whom serve in a personal capacity.[5] The Calman Commission expects to make its final report later in 2009 but there is no formal end-point for the *National Conversation*.

Revisions to the constitutional settlement of the United Kingdom continue to be framed in terms of the independence-devolution continuum. The SNP consultation document "Choosing Scotland's Future" carries the motto on its cover: 'Independence and responsibility in the modern world'.[6] Through my engagement with Manuel Castells' theory of the network-state it is my view that the SNP perspective fails to understand the 'modern' world. In this paper I will interrogate 'independence' and find it wanting politically and, through John Paul II's personalism and Jürgen Moltmann's liberative Christology, I will show how it is ethically and theologically inadequate, even although it is wedded to 'responsibility' in the SNP's proposal. I will argue that, instead, 'liberation' will serve us much better as a paradigm in which to frame the future for people in Scotland.

My argument has affinity with Will Storrar's attempt in his 1993 PhD thesis to articulate (and recognize) a move from a contextual theology of identity to one of liberation.[7] It was national identity, often in terms of nationhood, that had occupied Storrar in his earlier book.[8] However, he later concluded that liberation was required from not merely the 'imprisoning structures of the British state' but from social and cultural structures, especially those that restricted women in Scotland.[9] Some fifteen or so years on from Storrar's PhD, I develop a critique of independence from different directions.

Political inadequacy

Manuel Castells, a Spanish sociologist, is most widely known for his work on the global cultural and political dimensions of information networks.[10] Castells has argued that the development of information technology has ushered in a revolution that has altered the paradigm through which we are to understand economy, society and culture.[11] This, he contends, has had profound effects on the nation-state that is losing power, although not influence.[12] Sources of authority and power have multiplied since the 1970s as governments now have to contend with a transnational core to national economies, namely global financial markets, transnationalization of production, and production and trade networks. The nation-state:

> … has lost most of its sovereign economic power, although it still has some regulatory capacity and relative control over its subjects. Yet it retains its capacity as a strategic actor to act upon the conditions that underlie the performance of its economy. This requires that the state becomes *interdependent* within a broader network of economic processes out of its control.[13]

The new paradigm is the *network* of inter-connected nodes rather than linear linkages in hierarchies or 'managing centres'.[14] Nation-states are nodes, but not necessarily the most powerful. They share the network with other sources of authority and power, many of which are 'undefined, and, sometimes, indefinable'.[15] These include networks of capital and production but also include highly significant networks of communication, crime, international organizations, transnational religions, movements of public opinion and all kinds of social movements.[16]

In Scottish terms, the take-over of HBOS by Lloyds TSB is a good example of the response to networks of power that are restricted (although not of course wholly neutered) on the part of *both* national and devolved governments.[17] Similarly, people-trafficking whether for the sex industry, domestic or agricultural labour is facilitated (but also combated) by international networks.[18] It is not merely that the

trafficking is organized by networks of criminals who can make use of information technology but that the practice is embedded within a global political and economic system which is itself a network. Although much recent focus has been on financial networks, Castells work draws our attention to the flows of power where some nodes (and sub-networks) are cultural whilst others are political.

Castells' claim for a new paradigm is of course contested. He is accused of ignoring the 'traditional underpinning' of many successful web-based business-to-business dealings,[19] or an almost 'anthropocentric approach' to the financial networks,[20] of prematurely relegating civil society 'to the dustbin of history'[21] and of fetishizing information and information technology in his reductionism.[22] Most important is Frank Webster's critique that, like others, Castells too readily identifies *discontinuities* with previous forms of social organization and neglects historical continuities.[23]

Whilst I agree that Castells is stretching it to talk of network *replacing* linearity or managing-centre as a paradigm there is no doubt that he is describing how the rules of the game have changed very significantly given the development of information technologies. What concerns us more immediately in our discussion is how the traditional political language of 'independence' lies within the old linear or managing-centre model. An agenda of political and economic independence from, in our case, Westminster, had perhaps some saliency in the 1950s and 1960s (although its political popularity was low prior to Winnie Ewing winning the Hamilton by-election in 1967). However, independence seems at odds with the realities of globalization in which the paradigm of networks (created and sustained by information technologies) are integral.[24]

"Choosing Scotland's Future" turns on its assertion that, 'The people of Scotland remain sovereign'.[25] Whilst there is a nod in the direction of 'pooling sovereignty'[26] in terms of both the EU and the UK, the document singularly fails to set 'sovereignty' in the context of the 21st century. The 'modern world' of the motto is really 'the world until the third quarter of the 20th century'. This form of self-determination is politically inadequate for the exigencies that face people in Scotland because to be 'independent' within a network is nonsense.[27]

Ethical inadequacy

But is this the criterion by which we are to rate 'independence'? I have suggested that it is not politically expedient given the changing nature of society, particularly in terms of global politics and economics. What are the grounds upon which we might reach a decision regarding its ethical value? To attempt an answer I turn to John Paul II and his personalist philosophy. In many ways I want to treat independence in a similar way to the former Pope's consideration of work in his encyclical *Laborem exercens*.

In *Laborem exercens* John Paul II finds the ethical value of work to lie primarily in the subjective, rather than objective, dimension. We classify types of work objectively when we rate them as perhaps menial, as 'service', or 'alienating' whilst to other activities we give greater honour such as those contributing to knowledge, to theoretical developments, to wealth-creation or any number of other classifications. John Paul acknowledges that this is necessary but contends that these rankings not be given primary place in our ethical evaluation of work. Instead of considering the work done we must, he argues, give primacy to the subject of work – to the person who works. The ethical nature of work is to be derived from the person who, through work, manifests him- or herself as an acting subject.[28]

Within this personalist standpoint John Paul is offering us a way to think about the ethical value of actions *per se*. It is in acting that a person both reveals and fulfils herself, her 'appropriate structure of self-governance and self-possession is manifested'.[29] This must not be mistaken for individualism which sees the individual as the 'supreme and fundamental good';[30] it is, rather, an eschewal of the abstract in favour of the concrete 'acting-person' and a recognition that it is together with others that we reach our fulfillment. Our 'participation' with others is always as an acting-person; any other form of collaboration is merely doing things together (whether that be freely chosen or under the influence of powerful voices or mass psychology). This personalist approach requires that we carefully consider how we use terms such as 'community' or 'compatriots' because these too easily are taken to refer to what John Paul calls 'communities of being', especially should they share exclusive traits.

Personalism demands that we think first of 'communities of acting' because membership in 'communities of being' is not to be identified with authentic 'participation'.[31]

If we return to national independence – we must locate its ethical value in who is doing independence.[32] The apparently obvious answer to this is 'the Scottish people' but, even if we can agree on the political qualifications for inclusion in that group, this is ethically problematic. 'The Scottish people' are mistakenly attributed with what John Paul II, in other contexts, calls 'a quasi-subjectiveness'.[33] It is mistaken because whilst they are people exercising a common action (of sorts), 'the Scottish people' is not a *new* subject of acting. Although being and acting are realized together with others it is the persons-acting who are always its proper subject.

It follows, therefore, that we look for the ethical value of Scottish independence in acting of persons-in-Scotland. It is always the acting-person who is the purpose of Scottish independence. To what extent does national independence contribute towards authentic human fulfillment understood in terms of *participation*?[34] That fulfillment may *include* a sense of national social, cultural and political identity but it is not coterminous with it. Scottish independence might, despite my concerns about its political inadequacy, work quite well *on its own terms* but my contention is that such terms are ethically inadequate.

Theological inadequacy

Whilst I in no way wish to suggest that John Paul II's personalist philosophy is not profoundly theological, I believe we can still go further in our critique of independence by taking the route of Jürgen Moltmann's liberative Christology.

Ian Bradley has recently argued in favour of the 1707 Act of Union between Scotland and England from a Trinitarian perspective that draws on the theme of perichoresis.[35] I wish to adopt a distinct, but complementary approach. Moltmann has invited us to frame our theological reflections from the centre – that being the resurrection of the crucified Christ and the cross of the risen Christ.[36] He attempts to draw out the consequences of the theology of the crucified God for anthropology, translating it, as examples, into psychological and

political liberation. Moltmann asks 'who is man in the face of the rejected Son of Man who was raised up in the freedom of God?'[37] I want to ask this same question of Scottish independence movements.

Importantly, I do not wish to address 'nationalism' or 'nationalist movements' in the abstract with the aim of reaching generalisable conclusions that would speak to every 'nationalism' ripped out of its context. It is not my intention to rule out national independence as a theologically valid response in any and all circumstances. For example, Africans' independence from colonial control or the Baltic states breaking free from the Soviet Union each require evaluation within their own context. The historical and cultural particularities in which we face the question of Scottish national independence is that of shortly being asked to express our view on moving towards an independence referendum, possibly within the next three or four years. My anchoring of the discussion here within a specific context is directly related to the personalist approach expounded in the previous section. We locate the ethical value of independence in the acting-person and therefore we must not avoid the concrete realities of what doing independence means in 2009, 2010 or 2011 – whenever the promised referendum is held. This reasoning further demands that we consider our partners in the United Kingdom (from whom the SNP wish to be 'independent') as who they are *now*, not as generalized 'English' constructed from mythical relationships between Scotland and England in either the distant or more recent past.[38]

The crucified God challenges us to reject the priority given to 'identity' in discussions about Scottish independence and nationalism in favour of giving first place to 'freedom'. This is the freedom *of God* in history – what Moltmann calls the 'transformations of God',[39] 'anticipations'[40] or 'praesentia explosiva'.[41] This is not a freedom to construct any particular identity (whether Scottish, British or anything else). Such a hermeneutic relativizes all discussions about political structure to questions of 'freedom'. This is not to say that national identity can never be an 'anticipation' – but only if it is necessary for specific liberation (of a kind that I will consider below).

Even then we must be especially careful of national identity because it is predicated on autonomy and self-determination within a framework of the power of the state, of management and of linearity

(rather than network). National identity is apiece with notions that 'everyone is for everyone else merely the limitation of his own freedom' as Moltmann critiques effectively in his *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*.[42]

A theology of the man-God who was a Jew crucified by Romans, also questions the importance we give to an imagined identity which we like to label as 'national' but which is usually a condensation of myths and lesser narratives, and a sometimes grudging compromise between numerous sub-national identities. In other words, 'Scottish' is a coalition of identities that we observe in its effervescence only.[43] Furthermore, these sub-themes of national identity may not be the *primary* identity for many people. Being 'Scottish' is only *relatively* important when we are invited to choose between national identities. Being a woman, a father, a child, middle-class, working-class, unemployed could easily be the primary identity upon which we draw. "Choosing Scotland's Future" asserts that Scots have 'an acknowledged political and institutional identity' but never attempts to convince us that this is a single identity and why it should be given priority in deciding our future.[44]

Further, the resurrection of the crucified Christ that unfolds into the boundary-breaking outpouring of the Spirit profoundly questions the statements that are explicit and implicit in drawing boundaries between 'Scottish' and 'not-Scottish'. Again, this does not annul national identity *per se* but it interrogates what choosing to assert Scottish nationalism means at the level of inter-personal relations. Although much of the nationalist debate can be framed with reference to 'the English state' or the 'Westminster Parliament' we are not thereby absolved from taking into consideration our message as people in Scotland to actual people in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland. We do not thereby concede a veto to each individual in the United Kingdom but we are not to neglect the human dimension.[45]

Moltmann argues that God's liberation of us from the prison of sin, law and death calls for something to correspond to it in political life, what he calls 'parables of the freedom of faith'.[46] His typology of 'vicious circles of death' concretises those situations in which we ought to look for (and work for) liberation. These are the circles of poverty, force, racial and cultural alienation, the industrial pollution

of nature, and of senselessness and godforsakenness.[47] Whilst there may be potential for refining the precise labels, it is in its capacity to facilitate or hinder liberation in these vicious circles (and not just in Scotland) that Scottish national independence ought to be evaluated.

Conclusion

Here I return to my earlier discussion that found Scottish independence politically and ethically inadequate. Castells' attention to a *network society* and *network-states* tells us that, at least to some extent, the rules of the game have changed. Scottish independence must be justified in terms of its contribution to overcoming the circles of death; and not just because this is politically expedient but, as I hope I have shown via Moltmann's presentation of the political implications of the crucified God, on theological terms. John Paul II's articulation of personalism in which participation is critically important requires us to locate the ethical value of Scottish independence in those who action it. Independence is dignified to the extent that the dignity of those who practice it (and live within it) is affirmed. Crucially, that dignity is inextricably bound up with how we dignify other people.

In framing the National Conversation, "Choosing Scotland's Future" can appear to resonate with the liberative values for which I have been arguing. Section 2 is an interesting example where it makes claims for decision-making on pragmatic grounds for 'a wealthier Scotland', 'a safer Scotland', 'a fairer Scotland', 'a healthier Scotland', 'a greener Scotland', 'a smarter Scotland', and 'a stronger Scotland'. However, we must ask a more fundamental question of these goals – to what extent will they enable authentic participation (of the sort John Paul II's personalism points us towards)? The goals might be achievable by some people 'working together' but, whilst I would not want to set objective improvements in social conditions at odds with the practice of 'participation', I do suggest that this profound ethical dimension needs to be made more visible. Our context is one of facing an imminent choice and Scottish independence must make its case for change to the constitutional settlement on political, ethical and theological grounds of authentic participative liberation, not identity.

<center>**Notes**</center>

1   This paper was originally delivered to a colloquium on *The National Conversation,* at the Department of Theology & Religious Studies, University of Glasgow on 29th November 2008.
2   Great Britain, *Scotland Act 1998 (C. 46)*, 1998.
3   Scottish Government, *Choosing Scotland's Future: A National Conversation* (Edinburgh: Scottish Government, 2007), 46. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/ Publications/2007/08/13103747/12
4   Ministry of Justice, *The Governance of Britain*, 2007. CM 7170.
5   Calman Commission, *The Future of Scottish Devolution Within the Union: A Consultation* (Edinburgh: Commission on Scottish Devolution, 2008). http://www.commissiononscottishdevolution.org.uk/index.php (accessed 5/1/09).
6   Scottish Government, *Choosing*.
7   William Storrar, "From Identity to Liberation: Towards a New Practical Theological Paradigm of Scottish Nationhood" (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1993), 63.
8   William Storrar, *Scottish Identity: A Christian Vision* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1990).
9   Storrar, "From Identity," 353.
10 Castells has held numerous distinguished appointments including membership of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Information Technology and Global Development, and of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Panel on the Global Civil Society. In 2005 the European Commission appointed him as a founding member of the Scientific Council of the European Research Council, Manuel Castells, "Manuel Castells: Scientific Work" http://www.manuelcastells.info/en/cv_index.htm (accessed 5/1/09).
11 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).
12 Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 303.
13 Ibid., 316 (emphasis added).

14   Zygmunt Bauman, "The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture (Book Review)," *Political Studies* 46 (1998), 803–4.

15   Castells, *The Power of Identity*, 357.

16   Ibid.

17   In the financial crises manifesting acutely in late 2008 the inter-connectedness of governments across the world and with inter-connected financial institutions has been demonstrated to be ever more complex than most of us first thought. National responses, sometimes coordinated internationally, have been required and, significantly, made possible by networks. The point is not that governments cooperated but that the crises and emerging responses had to take cognisance of multiple sites of authority (other than merely national governments).

18   BBC News, "Slave Trade 'Still in Operation'" http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/7570634.stm (accessed 24/11/08).

19   Richard Clayton, "Where a Single Girl Can Meet a Guerrilla – the Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society (Book Review)," *Times Higher Education Supplement* 1514 (2001), 24–5.

20   Paul Nightingale, "The Network Society (Book Review)," *Research Policy* 32 (2003), 1141–5.

21   Mark J. Stern, 'Back to the Future? Manuel Castells' "The Information Age" and the Prospects for Social Welfare (Book Review),' *Cultural Studies* 14 (2000), 99–117.

22   Andrew Calabrese, "The Information Age, Vols. 1–3 (Book Review)," *Journal of Communication* 49 (1999), 172–86.

23   Frank Webster, *Theories of the Information Society* (3rd ed., International Library of Sociology; London: Routledge, 2006), 123.

24   There is the danger that Scottish public opinion might continue to be influenced by nationalist rhetoric of the 1970s epitomised in the slogan, 'It's Scotland's oil'. The extent to which the crude oil market was, even then, thoroughly globalised was glossed over. In 2006, Alex Salmond, the SNP leader, lauded an 'arc of prosperity' (including Ireland, Iceland and Norway) which an independent Scotland could join: Scottish National Party, "Scotland Can

Join Europe's Arc of Prosperity – 11/08/06" http://www.snp.org/ node/10359 (accessed 5/1/09). The extent to which the globalising aspects of this arc's recent demise penetrates Scottish consciousness has yet to be tested.

[25] Scottish Government, *Choosing*, sec. 3.3.

[26] Ibid., sec. 4.6.

[27] This is not to suggest that agency is denied to all nodes in a network and that some sort of decentralized consciousness or political determinism prevails. Although some financial systems are partly automated (to quickly respond to complex market conditions) human agency of individuals or boards is not abandoned. Politicians continue to make decisions. It makes no sense to speak of a node as being independent because the conditions, influences and scope for response are highly complex, being multi-layered and inter-related across many fields. For these same reasons notions of 'self-determination' are equally misleading. The self-determination of people in Scotland is not a stable attribute but operates on a continuum. It varies considerably across and within the whole range of fields such as political, cultural, economic and social. Political rhetoric around 'self-determination' obfuscates the scope to which it can be exercised in specific circumstances.

[28] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (Vatican City: Libreria editrice vaticana, 1981), sec. 6.

[29] Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (trans. A. Potocki; Dordrecht, Holland; Boston, Mass.: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 266.

[30] Ibid., 273.

[31] Cf. ibid., 279.

[32] I use the unusual form 'doing independence' to capture the notion of independence as an on-going action rather than a state or disposition of 'being independent'.

[33] Wojtyla, *Acting*, 277.

[34] Meghan J. Clark uses John Paul II's personalist philosophy in a similar way in order to establish participatory criteria as grounds upon which to evaluate a system or philosophy's relationship to human rights, Meghan J. Clark, "Integrating Human Rights:

Participation in John Paul II, Catholic Social Thought and Amartya Sen," *Political Theology* 8 (2007), 299–317.

[35] Ian C. Bradley, *Believing in Britain: The Spiritual Identity of 'Britishness'* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

[36] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (trans. R. A. Wilson and J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1974), 204.

[37] Ibid., 291.

[38] The intensity of grievance that is often expressed in Scottish nationalism (here I distinguish the cultural mood from the political goal of Scottish Nationalism) has its mythic qualities. This is not to say that some specific grievances might still be justified but that a personalist approach denies people in Scotland the easy tactic of imagining 'the English' today in the light of specific actions of some of their ancestors. In more blunt terms, a personalist ethic roundly critiques racism towards people in England.

[39] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 321.

[40] Ibid., 273.

[41] Ibid., 338.

[42] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God* (trans. M. Kohl; London: SCM Press, 1981), 215.

[43] This deconstruction of 'Scottish' as an identity is indebted to Chantal Mouffe's non-essentialist approach to identity in general. She argues that we bear a multiplicity of identities and can be simultaneously, across a range of fields, dominant in one relation whilst subordinate in others. Our identity is 'always contingent and precarious' but condenses temporarily in specific situations only to be reformed in another. It is in 'constant subversion and overdetermination' rather than coexistence of plural identities that we act, Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London; New York: Verso, 1993), 77. By claiming that we experience 'Scottishness' only in its effervescence I do not deny its importance to many people nor its outworking as a motivation for political (and civic) action. It is the dialectic of stablising/de-stablising inherent to this, and any other, identity that enables us to understand its dynamic within our appeals to 'identity'.

44   Scottish Government, *Choosing*, sec. 3.6.
45   Whether our partner-nations within the United Kingdom ought to have a referendum themselves on dissolving the Act of Union is another matter which has its own complications.
46   Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 320.
47   Ibid., 330–5.