Christian Wisdom

What is Christian wisdom for living in the twenty-first century? Where is it to be found? How can it be learnt? In the midst of diverse religions and worldviews and the urgencies and complexities of contemporary life, David Ford explores a Christian way of uniting love of wisdom with wisdom in love. Core elements of his discussion include the ‘discernment of cries’, the love and worship of God for God’s sake, a wisdom interpretation of scripture, and the education of desire in wise faith. The book includes case studies that deal with inter-faith wisdom among Jews, Christians and Muslims, universities as places of wisdom as well as of knowledge and know-how, and the challenge of learning disabilities. Throughout, there is an attempt to do justice simultaneously to the premodern, modern and postmodern in grappling with scripture, tradition and the cries of the world today.

DAVID F. FORD is Regius Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Selwyn College, Cambridge. He is author of Self and Salvation: Being Transformed (1999) and co-editor with Ben Quash and Janet Martin Soskice of Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-First Century (2005).
Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine

Edited by
Professor Daniel W. Hardy, University of Cambridge

Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine is an important series which aims to engage critically with the traditional doctrines of Christianity, and at the same time to locate and make sense of them within a secular context. Without losing sight of the authority of scripture and the traditions of the church, the books in this series subject pertinent dogmas and credal statements to careful scrutiny, analysing them in light of the insights of both church and society, and thereby practise theology in the fullest sense of the word.

Titles published in the series
1. Self and Salvation: Being Transformed
   David F. Ford
2. Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age
   Sue Patterson
3. Trinity and Truth
   Bruce D. Marshall
4. Theology, Music and Time
   Jeremy S. Begbie
5. The Bible, Theology, and Faith: A Study of Abraham and Jesus
   R.W.L. Moberly
6. Bound to Sin: Abuse, Holocaust and the Christian Doctrine of Sin
   Alistair McFadyen
7. Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology
   NICHOLAS M. HEALY
8. Theology and the Dialogue of Religions
   MICHAEL BARNES, SJ
9. A Political Theology of Nature
   PETER SCOTT
10. Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity
    GRAHAM HUGHES
11. God, the Mind’s Desire: Reference, Reason and Christian Thinking
    PAUL D. JANZ
12. The Creativity of God: World, Eucharist, Reason
    OLIVER DAVIES
13. Theology and the Drama of History
    BEN QUASH
14. Prophecy and Discernment
    R. W. L. MOBERLY
15. Theology, Political Theory, and Puralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference
    KRISTEN DEEDE JOHNSON
    DAVID F. FORD

Forthcoming titles in the series
A Theology of Public Life
CHARLES T. MATHEWES
Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action and Authorship
KEVIN J. VANHOOZER
Theology, Society and the Church
D. W. HARDY
Christian Wisdom

Desiring God and Learning in Love

DAVID F. FORD
For my mother, Phyllis Ford, in gratitude for her wisdom and love
As when the heart says (sighing to be approved)
O, could I love! And stops; God writeth, Loved.

GEORGE HERBERT
Contents

Acknowledgements  page x

Introduction: theology as wisdom  1
1 Wisdom cries  14
2 A wisdom interpretation of scripture  52
3 Job!  90
4 Job and post-Holocaust wisdom  121
5 Jesus, the Spirit and desire: wisdom christology  153
6 Learning to live in the Spirit: tradition and worship  192
7 Loving the God of wisdom  225
8 An inter-faith wisdom: scriptural reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims  273
9 An interdisciplinary wisdom: knowledge, formation and collegiality in the negotiable university  304
10 An interpersonal wisdom: L’Arche, learning disability and the Gospel of John  350
  Conclusion: love’s wisdom  380

Index of citations  392

Subject index  399

© Cambridge University Press

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-87545-5 - Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love
David F. Ford
Frontmatter
More information
Acknowledgements

This book began in 1996, stimulated by an invitation from Professor Iain Torrance to deliver the 1998 Scottish Journal of Theology Lectures in the University of Aberdeen. It was a memorable first visit to Aberdeen, with warm hospitality in the home of Iain and Morag and vigorous discussion of the lectures. I came away convinced that they needed a great deal more work before they could be published, but also encouraged to undertake this.

In the intervening years Iain has been very patient as the promised short book of four lectures turned into a longer work that migrated from the Scottish Journal of Theology Monograph series to the Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine. In 2005 there was a happy reconnection of the book with its origins when leading ideas from the chapter on scriptural reasoning were explored in an address and discussion during Iain’s inauguration as President of Princeton Theological Seminary. I am deeply grateful to Iain for his seminal role in the book and for his generous support of it through many phases.

The conversations to which this book is indebted are innumerable. Some partners, including Daniel Hardy, Micheal O’Siadhail, Peter Ochs, Ben Quash and Tim Jenkins, have been constant, and their influence is pervasive.

Others have had a special influence on particular chapters: my colleagues Nicholas de Lange, Graham Davies, Katherine Dell and, above all, Susannah Ticciati on Job; Frances Young, Sarah Coakley, Donald Allchin, Anthony Thiselton, Richard Bauckham, Miroslav Volf, Robert Morgan, Morna Hooker, Graham Stanton and Brian Hebblethwaite on wisdom in Christian scriptures and traditions; participants in scriptural reasoning, in particular Nicholas Adams, Oliver Davies, James Fodor, Robert Gibbs, Mike Highton, Annabel Keeler, Steven Kepnes, Basit Koshul,
Diana Lipton, Rachel Muers, Aref Nayed, Chad Pecknold, Randi Rashkover, Suheyl Umar, Tim Winter, William Young and Laurie Zoloth; participants in biblical reasoning, including Jon Cooley and Donald McFadyen; Frances Young, Jeffrey Stout, Richard Roberts, Gordon Graham and John Rowett for their engagements about universities; fellow members of the University of Cambridge who have also discussed universities with me, including Nicholas Boyle, Christopher Brooke, Alec Broers, Gordon Johnson, David Livesey, Tim Mead, Onora O’Neill, Alison Richard, David Thompson, David Wilson and Richard Wilson; and members of L’Arche and those who have accompanied it over the years, especially Jean Vanier, Frances Young, Donald Allchin, Christine McGrievy and Jean-Christophe Pascal.

There have been other communities and groups that have helped form the book: St Bene’t’s Church in Cambridge; the group that has at various times included Hillary Elliott, Alan and Annie Hargrave, Graham and Ali Kings, and Madeleine O’Callaghan; the University of Cambridge Faculty of Divinity and its seminars on Systematic Theology and the Christian God; the postgraduate seminar that meets in my home; the Triangle Club of scientists, philosophers and theologians who discussed a paper on universities; twelve years of fortnightly meetings of the Syndicate of Cambridge University Press, under Alan Cook and Gordon Johnston as chairmen, during which academics from across the disciplines vetted the titles recommended by editors for publication; the Cambridge Theological Federation and its colleges spanning Anglican, Methodist, Orthodox, Roman Catholic and United Reformed traditions, among which I have had closest institutional connections with Westcott House (and am deeply grateful to Michael Roberts, its principal for many years) and Ridley Hall (to whose principals Graham Cray and Christopher Cocksworth I also owe much); the Centre for the study of Jewish–Christian Relations, which, under the leadership of its founding Director, Edward Kessler, has pioneered Cambridge’s academic engagement in inter-faith questions; seven years on the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, chaired by Stephen Sykes and including Michael Banner, Richard Bauckham, Christina Baxter, Jeremy Begbie, Grace Davie, Martin Kitchen, Ann Loades, Al McDaid, Geoffrey Rowell, Peter Selby, Kenneth Stevenson, Anthony Thistleson, Fraser Watts, John Webster and Linda Woodhead, which produced the 2003 Report Being Human: A Christian Understanding of Personhood Illustrated with Reference to Power, Money, Sex and Time in which wisdom is the core category; contributors to the third edition of The Modern Theologians, and especially
Rachel Muers, who so generously shared the thinking, the writing and the editing that went into it; four years (2000–2003) attending Primates’ Meetings of the Anglican Communion, trying to work out with them in the face of powerful alternatives what a wisdom interpretation of scripture might be; annual meetings of the Society for the Study of Theology, the Society for Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion; the Monastery of St Barnabas the Encourager in Wales; the Network of Theological Enquiry (Christian theologians from five continents who gathered in Cambridge, Hong Kong and Madras); members of the Council of 100 Leaders taking part in the World Economic Forum’s West–Islamic World Dialogue in Davos and Amman; and my native city of Dublin, which has been flourishing in so many ways and with which there have been not only continuing connections but also new ones.

One especially stimulating thread through these years has been that of postgraduate teaching and continuing relationships with doctoral students. Their varied topics and later works have constantly fed into this book. I particularly thank Michael Barnes SJ, Jeff Bailey, Jon Cooley, Tom Greggs, Mike Higton, David Höhne, Paul Janz, Jason Lam, Riccardo Larini, Rachel Muers, Paul Murray, Ben Quash, Chung Park, Chad Pecknold, Young Hwan Ra, Greg Seach, Gemma Simmonds CJ, Tan-Chow MayLing and Susannah Ticciati.

There have also been several people who have lifted or shared academic or administrative and organisational burdens at critical times and so have provided the time and collegiality without which this book could not have been completed. Dan Hardy has done this repeatedly and with extraordinary generosity in the context of graduate student supervision, examining, scriptural reasoning, inter-faith strategic thinking, reading drafts, and editing the series of which this book is part. Since 2002 I have been Director of the new Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme (CIP), a challenging and exciting responsibility, and one that has both complicated and contributed to the thinking of this book. Julius Lipner was Chair of the Faculty Board of Divinity during CIP’s seminal period, and his wise support helped to ensure its flourishing. Tim Jenkins has been unstinting in time, energy and acute advice as chair of the Management Committee of CIP, and his interventions have frequently been crucial. He has been well supported by the other members of that committee, including Janet Martin Soskice, William Horbury, Graham Stanton and Roger Parker. David Thompson as Director of the Centre for Advanced
Religious and Theological Studies has likewise been vital to the developing shape of CIP both in academic design and organisational strategy within and beyond the University of Cambridge. At the core of CIP is its steering group, and there Stefan Reif and Tim Winter have been essential to the way the programme has grown. Among the wider circle of those whose support has been very important to CIP have been Edward McCabe, Tim Ryan, Richard Chartres, Chris Hewer, Emilia Mosseri, Jonathan Sachs, Abraham Levy, Rowan Williams, David Marshall, George Carey, Guy Wilkinson, Alan Ford, William Taylor, Simon Keyes, Aminneh Ahmed, Edward Kessler, David Wilson, Peter Agar, Deborah Patterson-Jones, Graham Allen, and Cambridge’s Vice-Chancellor, Alison Richard. The day-to-day burden of the programme has been borne by Ben Quash, its Academic Coordinator, and my debt to him is inestimable, especially in taking over as acting director during the sabbatical term needed for this book to reach final draft form.

More recently, the final months of the book’s preparation have been greatly helped by the arrival of two outstanding younger colleagues. Catriona Laing has capably taken up the new post of Project Manager of CIP, and her multiple talents, together with her academic and theological understanding, have facilitated progress and liberated much time and energy. To Paul Nimmo I owe deep thanks for his research assistance. He has combined rigorous research backup, footnoting and editing with acute and often challenging comment rooted in a passion for theological truth. The privilege of working with such colleagues has evoked daily gratitude.

There is also the matter of funding. The posts of Ben Quash, Catriona Laing and Paul Nimmo have been financed through generous benefactions given by two very good friends of the University of Cambridge. John Marks (and the Mulberry Trust) was the first to share the vision of CIP to the extent of funding its first post of Academic Coordinator; Mohammed Abdul Latif Jameel (and the Coexist Foundation) brought his vision to unite with ours and helped develop the project combining teaching and research in Cambridge with broad public outreach and education in many modes. With each there has been the added pleasure of a continuing relationship, wide-ranging discussion, and a meeting of minds that has repeatedly led to fresh ideas for how financial resources can be matched with constructive ideas for the good of our world.

Cambridge University Press has, through its long wait for this book, been both patient and helpful. I especially thank Kate Brett, who as
Religious Studies Editor has built impressively on the sound foundations laid by her predecessor Kevin Taylor, and has overseen the final stages of this book, and also Frances Brown and Jackie Warren, who have been of tremendous help in the process of preparing for publication. Within the Faculty of Divinity practical assistance and easing of burdens have come from Ann Munro, Katy Williams, Don Stebbings, Chris Carman, Dorothy Kunze, Rosalind Paul, Nigel Thompson, Peter Harland and Rajashree Dhanaraj, and direct secretarial help with this book from Elisabeth Felter and Beatrice Bertram. Dave Goode’s computer assistance has frequently saved the day, always with patience, cheerfulness and willingness to go the extra kilobyte. At the end of the process Jason Fout dedicated many hours to checking the footnotes and copy-editing, resulting in numerous emendations.

Finally, there is the fundamental and pervasive importance of my family. During the writing of the present book my wife Deborah has studied theology, been ordained as a priest in the Church of England, and worked in a parish, in acute hospital chaplaincy, and with many who suffer from severe mental illness. That has opened up new horizons in our marriage and new spheres of joint study, conversation and collaboration through which ideas in the book have been generated and tested. The study of scripture together has been especially fruitful. At the same time our children Rebecca, Rachel and Daniel have been increasingly stimulating conversation partners and companions whose humour, perceptiveness and growing wisdom is a delight as well as a challenging touchstone. My mother-in-law, Perrin Hardy, has frequently been a ‘life-saver’ amidst the pressures of busy family life, and she and Dan have shared our practical and other burdens in innumerable ways year after year.

This book is dedicated to my mother, Phyllis Mary Elizabeth Ford, in thanks for her love and wisdom throughout my life. I never fail to be amazed and grateful that she has continued to grow in love and wisdom into her late eighties, and am delighted to be able to respond with this little offering.

David F. Ford
Easter 2006