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978-0-521-40929-2 - The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships

Alistair I. McFadyen

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This book is an attempt to answer the question, 'What is a person?' Although the answer is given in largely theoretical terms, the primary concern of the book is with practice: what does it mean to live as a human person in community with others? What personal, social and political practices are required by personal being?

Christian trinitarian theology is woven together with contemporary social thought to give an account of individuality and of the various dimensions of personal existence (the psychological, the interpersonal, the material, the institutional, the political, the spiritual) in terms of communication. We are called into personhood and become the unique persons we are through relation with others.

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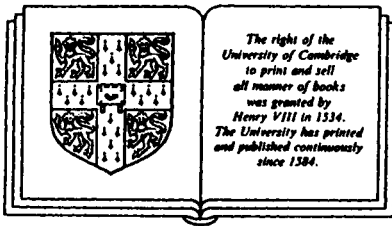
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The call to personhood

*A Christian theory of the individual
in social relationships*

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**For Patsy, my mother,
 who has taught me most about being for others in relationships;
and for Lynn, my wife,
 who knows better than anyone how little I know.**

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Acknowledgements

We become the people we are through our relationships with others; it is other people who enable us to become persons who, as such, may exercise a degree of autonomy in our lives and may say, think and do certain things as contributors to various discourses and fields of interaction. That is the basic premiss of this book. It is therefore no easy thing to discern the range of people who have influenced one in a specific respect, or to gauge the degree of their influence. I am painfully aware of this as I come to acknowledge publicly my indebtedness to those who have, in some way or another, contributed to the reflections contained in this book and who continue to influence me in more ways, I am sure, than I can ever hope to be aware of. Given the premiss of this work, the list of all those who have contributed to and influenced it implicitly and tangentially would probably have to extend to everyone I have ever met and include many whom I have never met but whose influence is more generally dispersed. Trying to identify all these people, even if it were possible, would be rather pointless, would be rather precious on my part and would make for incredibly tedious reading. I have therefore confined these acknowledgements to those who I know have had a significant and direct influence on this work – as well as on me whilst I have been writing it – and hope that others will understand the reasons for limiting the list in this way.

Daniel W. Hardy supervised the research and the writing of the Ph.D. thesis on which this book is based. It would certainly have been a very different and much impoverished project were it not for his interest and generosity in leading me on to new insights through our conversations. These conversations, apart from communicating specific insights, proved invaluable when I came to think through how one becomes a subject of a particular discourse, how one's autonomy may be called out by the creation of space within the relation, how coercion can be avoided.

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