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978-0-521-46476-5 - Theology, Ideology and Liberation: Towards a Liberative Theology

Peter Scott

Frontmatter

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How is theology liberating? In the context of a post-Gorbachev world, where many demand freedom, but which the Western powers seem ill-equipped to deliver, is it even possible to envisage a liberative theology? Taking as his starting point the Marxist complaint that Christianity is ideological, Peter Scott argues that it is not enough for Christian theology to talk about liberation: it must *be* liberative. Stressing with feminist and liberation theologies the embodied, contextual nature of theology, the constructive proposal made here locates God's liberating abundance towards society in an interpretation of resurrection as social. Only in this way, in the author's view, can a trinitarian Christian account of liberation be adequately grounded. This book will be of interest to all those who wish to know if theology may speak truthfully about the transformation of society: it offers the shape of a liberative theology which points towards social freedom.

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Religion increasingly is seen as a renewed force, and is recognised as an important factor in the modern world in all aspects of life – cultural, economic, and political. It is no longer a matter of surprise to find religious factors at work in areas and situations of political tension. However, our information about these situations has tended to come from two main sources. The news-gathering agencies are well placed to convey information, but are hampered by the fact that their representatives are not equipped to provide analysis of the religious forces involved. Alternatively, the movements generate their own accounts, which understandably seem less than objective to outside observers. There is no lack of information or factual material, but a real need for sound academic analysis. Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion will meet this need. It will give an objective, balanced, and programmatic coverage to issues which – while of wide potential interest – have been largely neglected by analytical investigation, apart from the appearance of sporadic individual studies. Intended to enable debate to proceed at a higher level, the series should lead to a new phase in our understanding of the relationship between ideology and religion.

A list of titles in the series is given at the end of the book.

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THEOLOGY, IDEOLOGY AND LIBERATION

Towards a liberative theology

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*For Amanda,
with thanks for so much*

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In the early 1970s it was widely assumed that religion had lost its previous place in Western culture and that this pattern would spread throughout the world. Since then religion has become a renewed force, recognised as an important factor in the modern world in all aspects of life, cultural, economic and political. This is true not only of the Third World, but in Europe East and West, and in North America. It is no longer a surprise to find a religious factor at work in areas of political tension.

Religion and ideology form a mixture which can be of interest to the observer, but in practice dangerous and explosive. Our information about such matters comes for the most part from three types of sources. The first is the media which understandably tend to concentrate on newsworthy events, without taking the time to deal with the underlying issues of which they are but symptoms. The second source comprises studies by social scientists who often adopt a functionalist and reductionist view of the faith and beliefs which motivate those directly involved in such situations. Finally, there are the statements and writings of those committed to the religious or ideological movements themselves. We seldom lack information, but there is a need – often an urgent need – for sound objective analysis which can make use of the best contemporary approaches to both politics and religion. Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion is designed to meet this need.

The subject matter is global and this will be reflected in the choice both of topics and authors. The initial volumes will be concerned primarily with movements involving the Christian

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religion, but as the series becomes established movements involving other world religions will be subjected to the same objective critical analysis. In all cases it is our intention that an accurate and sensitive account of religion should be informed by an objective and sophisticated application of perspectives from the social sciences.

In this book Dr Scott addresses the question whether Christian theology can be other than alienating and oppressive. This leads into a sustained debate with the Marxist critique of ideology, and with varying theological responses. But the main thrust of the argument is forward-looking, examining carefully and critically the possible shape of a Christian theology that is liberative. The argument is controversial, and will be a significant contribution to a contemporary debate.

DUNCAN FORRESTER AND ALISTAIR KEE

New College, University of Edinburgh

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Preface

I first became interested in the relation between theology and society more than ten years ago. But that is merely to mark the chronology, and not the investment. In the writing of this book, I have been seeking to show for myself the liberative character of Christian theology. Such is the personal nature of the investment. The argument has taken me in unexpected directions. (Indeed, this version is very different from a previous attempt.) During this process, I have often had my expectations disconfirmed and connections, previously taken for granted, put into question. That perhaps is how it should be: if the basic dynamic of this book is a critique of idolatry, there is no reason why its author should be free from its criticism.

In developing this interest I have accrued many debts. Indeed, it is difficult cheerfully to write a book on theology and ideology without realising the very particular nature of such debts: as a guard, in my own writing, against ideology. In the first instance, I am grateful to Rex Ambler for helping me to see, just as I was about to set out in a very different (ideological!) direction, the theological importance of the issues raised here. Denys Turner supervised my initial research in theology and ideology; his influence can be traced throughout the text. I am grateful for his support and encouragement through many conversations. He has also read parts of the text – as has David McLellan, who has also encouraged me in my writing. I am grateful to both of them for their comments. They have tried to get me to write a better book; I hope that they will not be too disappointed. Alistair McFadyen has

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responded to the rehearsal of the themes of this book more times than can have been good for him. Such conversations have been important in the development of my thinking, and his willingness to engage with my concerns marks him as a friend as well as a partner in conversation.

I owe a rather different sort of debt to my colleague, Stanley Rudman, who has, in many practical ways, enabled me to complete this book. I am grateful also to Alex Wright of Cambridge University Press for pursuing this book with calm efficiency through its trials and tribulations.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge a special debt to Amanda Pitt, my wife. She, in times that were busy enough for her, has encouraged me both to start and finish this book. Through this, she has put up with many things: my absences, on occasions (I regret to say) my presence, and my cooking. To her this book is dedicated.

PETER SCOTT

Bristol