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978-1-107-03837-0 - God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of
Early Christianity

Frances Young

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God's Presence

In 2011, Frances Young delivered the Bampton Lectures in Oxford to great acclaim. She offered a systematic theology with contemporary coherence by engaging in conversation with the fathers of the church – those who laid down the parameters of Christian theology and enshrined key concepts in the creeds – and exploring how their teachings can be applied today, despite the differences in our intellectual and ecclesial environments. This book results from a thorough rewriting of those lectures in which Young explores the key topics of Christian doctrine in a way that is neither simply dogmatic nor simply historical. She addresses the congruence of head and heart, through academic and spiritual engagement with God's gracious accommodation to human limitations. Christianity and biblical interpretation are discussed in depth, and the book covers key topics including creation, anthropology, Christology, soteriology, spirituality, ecclesiology and Mariology, making it invaluable to those studying historical and constructive theology.

FRANCES YOUNG previously served as Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology, Dean of Arts, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Birmingham. She is the author of *The Making of the Creeds* (1991), *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (1997) and *Brokenness and Blessing* (2007). She is co-editor of *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (with Lewis Ayres and Andrew Louth, Cambridge, 2004) and the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (with Margaret M. Mitchell, Cambridge, 2006).

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The cover image, created by Silvia Dimitrova, depicts the loving friendship of Jesus for Lazarus understood as a person with learning disabilities, a novel motif (see pp. 19–22) of particular significance for the integration sought in this theological project. Lazarus' chariot doubles as wheelchair and symbol of heavenly ascent, while the building stands both for the daily home-building of his carers, Martha and Mary, and one of the many mansions in the Father's house. The tree of life represents Lazarus' resurrection, which is still to come, and also the way in which trees fascinate one whose sense of the world is limited. The composition's implicit sphere, broken only by Christ's stepping down to earth to touch our lives, is the traditional iconographic symbol of God's perfection and encompassing presence.

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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107038370

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First published 2013

Printed in the United Kingdom by MPG Printgroup Ltd, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Young, Frances M. (Frances Margaret)

God's presence : a contemporary recapitulation of early Christianity / Frances Young.
pages cm. – (Current issues in theology)

“The Bampton Lectures for 2011.”

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-03837-0 (hardback)

1. Theology – History – Early church, ca. 30–600. 2. Church history – Primitive and early church, ca. 30–600. I. Title.

BR118.Y695 2013

270.1 – dc23 2013009536

ISBN 978-1-107-03837-0 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-64278-2 Paperback

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Preface

This book is the fruit of a long-standing dream. Some thirty years ago, when I had completed the first edition of *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*,¹ I felt tooled up to produce what I then conceived as a *Theology of the Fathers*, somewhat on the model of theologies of the New Testament. But that idea stimulated the question as to what exactly such a thing might be. Did it mean an exercise in strictly historical reconstruction? Or would it be a hermeneutical exercise in retrieval or appropriation, or some kind of dialogue between theology then and now? One thing I was clear about – that I wanted to explore theological argument in a historically responsible way, rather than pursue the so-called development of doctrine. Circumstances over the years meant that this project was left for the so-called leisure of retirement, though meanwhile attempts were made to scope what might be involved, and ideas were tried out in various papers, lectures and talks along the way, excerpts being incorporated into the text of this book.² Now, in the aftermath of the second edition of *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, this dream was realized in the Bampton Lectures for 2011. Each chapter in the book corresponds to one lecture, but here considerably more material is presented than could be delivered on any occasion.

I am grateful to the Bampton Electors for providing the opportunity, and for their encouragement and hospitality. I acknowledge

¹ *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

² Key papers have been collected and republished in *Exegesis and Theology in Early Christianity* (Farnham: Ashgate Variorum, 2012).

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PREFACE

with thanks invitations to deliver series of lectures at King's College, London and New College, Edinburgh, in which ideas were developed and tested out; neither the F. D. Maurice Lectures nor the Croall Lectures have been published, but both were significant steps towards what is now here. The enterprise of dialogue with the fathers was anticipated at a more popular level in the Sarum Theological Lectures, published as *Brokenness and Blessing: Towards a Biblical Spirituality*,³ though that work focussed on key themes rather than doctrines.

The encouragement of my erstwhile colleague, David Ford, and his willingness to read the draft of each chapter, was vital in keeping my nose to the grindstone, as was the expectation of certain Oxford friends, notably Andrew Teal, Paul Joyce and Sister Barbara June of the Convent of the Incarnation. The profound influence of Jean Vanier will be frequently evident in the following pages. My thanks to such supportive friends.

But there are two particular persons without whom none of this would have been possible, Arthur, and Bob, my husband and fellow-carer. Neither of them can know or understand how profound has been their contribution, and the least I can do is dedicate this volume to them.

³ *Brokenness and Blessing: Towards a Biblical Spirituality*, Sarum Theological Lectures for 2004 (London: DLT, 2007).

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Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following for permission to abstract material from earlier publications: Cambridge University Press for “Creatio ex nihilo”: A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation, *SJT* 44 (1991), 139–51; Church House Publishing for ‘Christian Scripture and the “Other”’ in Michael Ipgrave (ed.), *Scriptures in Dialogue: Christians and Muslims Studying the Bible and the Qur’an Together*, a record of the seminar ‘Building Bridges’ held at Doha, Qatar, 7–9 April 2003 (2004); Éditions Beauchesne for ‘The God of the Greeks and the Nature of Religious Language’ in W. R. Schoedel and Robert Wilken (eds.), *Early Christian Literature and the Greek Intellectual Tradition*, Festschrift for R. M. Grant, *Théologie Historique* 53 (1979); Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, for ‘Adam and Anthropos: A Study in the Interaction of Science and the Bible in Two Anthropological Treatises of the Fourth Century’, *VC* 37 (1983), 110–40; and ‘The Church and Mary’, *Ecclesiology* 5 (2009), 272–98; Peeters, Leuven, for ‘Christology and Creation: Towards an Hermeneutic of Patristic Christology’ in T. Merrigan and J. Haers (eds.), *The Myriad Christ* (2000), pp. 191–205; ‘Creation and Human Being: The Forging of a Distinct Christian Discourse’, *SP* 44 (2010), 335–48; and ‘God’s Image: “The Elephant in the Room” in the Fourth Century?’, *SP* 50 (2011), 57–71; SCM Press for *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, (2nd edn, 2010), pp. 116–27 on ‘Macarius’; SPCK for ‘From Analysis to Overlay: A Sacramental Approach to Christology’ in David Brown and Ann Loades (eds.), *Christ: The Sacramental Word: Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry* (1996), pp. 40–56; St Vladimir’s Seminary Press for ‘Inner Struggle: Some Parallels

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

between the Spirituality of John Wesley and the Greek Fathers', in S. T. Kimbrough, Jr (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (2002); and 'The "Penultimate" Nature of the Church – the *Eschaton* Is Not Yet!' in S. T. Kimbrough, Jr (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (2007), pp. 199–211; T&T Clark, Continuum Books, for 'Theotokos: Mary and the Pattern of Fall and Redemption in the Theology of Cyril of Alexandria' in Thomas G. Weinandy and Daniel A. Keating (eds.), *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation* (2003), pp. 55–74; and 'Hermeneutical Questions: The Ordination of Women in the Light of Biblical and Patristic Typology' in Ian Jones, Janet Wootton and Kirsty Thorpe (eds.), *Women and Ordination in the Christian Churches: International Perspectives* (2008); the *Australian Biblical Review* for 'Allegory and Atonement' in the *Australian Biblical Review* 35 (1987), Special Issue in Honour of Professor Eric Osborn, 107–14; the Ecclesiastical History Society and Boydell and Brewer Ltd for 'Naked or Clothed? Eschatology and the Doctrine of Creation' in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (eds.), *The Church, the Afterlife and the Fate of the Soul*, Studies in Church History 45 (2009); the Methodist Publishing House for 'University Sermon for the Tercentenary of the Birth of John Wesley', *Epworth Review* 31 (2004), 44–51; the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship for *Presbyteral Ministry in the Catholic Tradition or Why Shouldn't Women be Priests?* (1994); and 'The Materialism of the Christian Tradition', *Bulletin* No. 138 (Epiphany 2011), 4–10. Many thanks also go to Rev. Dr. Andrew Teal, Chaplain, Pembroke College, Oxford, for compiling the index to this volume, with the assistance of Chris Long.

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Abbreviations

ACW	<i>Ancient Christian Writers</i> , New York: Newman Press
ANCF	<i>Ante-Nicene Christian Fathers</i> , Edinburgh: T&T Clark
ARCIC	The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission
CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum Series Latina</i> , Turnhout: Brepols
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> , Leuven: Peeters
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna: Kommission zur Herausgabe des CSEL
CWS	<i>Classics of Western Spirituality</i> , New York: Paulist Press
DLT	Darton, Longman & Todd
ET	English Translation
FC	<i>Fathers of the Church</i> , Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press
GCS	<i>Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller</i> , Berlin: Akademie Verlag
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i> , Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i> , Cambridge University Press
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> , Oxford University Press
LCC	<i>Library of Christian Classics</i> , London: SCM Press
LCL	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i> , London: Heinemann/Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

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ABBREVIATIONS

MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NPNF	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , London: Parker
NS	New Series
NT	New Testament
OECT	<i>Oxford Early Christian Texts</i> , Oxford University Press 1971
PG	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PTS	<i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i> , Berlin: de Gruyter
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i> , Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SP	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i> , Leiden: Brill
WCC	World Council of Churches