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‘Ascetic co-operation’: Henry Scott Holland and Gerard Manley Hopkins

On December 29th, 1868, T. H. Green wrote to his twenty-one year old student, Henry Scott Holland, concerning the latter’s recent visit to the young Gerard Manley Hopkins at the Jesuit novitiate in Roehampton. ‘I am glad that you and Nettleship saw Hopkins’, he began. ‘A step such as he has taken, tho’ I can’t quite admit it to be heroic, must needs be painful, and its pain should not be aggravated – as it is pretty sure to be – by separation from old friends’. Green’s letter, and part of a subsequent longer one on the same topic dated January 9th, 1869, has been preserved in Stephen Paget’s memoir of Scott Holland (1921), and although the original correspondence has been lost, what remains reveals Green’s feelings of concern over Holland’s sympathetic defence of Hopkins. For Holland had written back, admitting a ‘lurking admiration for Jesuitry’. When ruled by the motive of ‘loyalty to Society’, he had argued, ‘beneficent... institutions of ascetic co-operation’ could supply some of the wants of the social order. As Paget commented, this answer ‘drew from Green a full statement of his thoughts on ἄσκησις, training, discipline’. In the long, troubled letter that followed, Green argued that he was indeed in favour of ‘ascetic co-operation’, including its religious forms, but that he could not ‘acquiesce in the seclusion’ of ecclesiasticism. Clerical partisanship of this type risked separatism and hence failed to take seriously civic duty and political obligation. The ‘monastic form’, he argued, ‘does nothing to organise life... It lets the muddy tide have its way, and merely picks up a few stones thrown on the shore, which will take the saintly polish’. Eight years later, in 1877, Holland would still recall Green’s ‘bitter saying’ that Christian priests were content to ‘go into a corner... and polish a pebble or two of our own’.¹

¹ Stephen Paget, *Henry Scott Holland: Memoir and Letters* (London: John Murray, 1921), pp. 29-32.

There has always been a sense that the letters were important. In the original preface to the memoir, Stephen Paget had said that ‘he could not get away from them’. They contained ‘statements of differences of belief’ that were ‘still worth studying’ even after ‘half a century’. They also trespassed on what Paget suggested was a kind of intellectual ‘tragedy’, the mental estrangement of Holland from Green and Nettleship. The parting of ways had been a difficult one, and, in point of fact, Paget wondered whether they were then (in 1920) ‘too intimate for publication’.² It should be little surprise, then, that the letters have from time to time been picked up in academic discussion of Green, Holland, and Hopkins. Re-reading them today, they still possess an oddly demanding seriousness and urgency; it seems there was more at stake than a mere, intellectual disagreement. Of the small amount of subsequent literature that makes direct reference to the letters, two essays by Donald MacKinnon – essential reading for those studying the philosophical period and personalities involved – remain of real importance. The first, ‘Scott Holland and Contemporary Needs’ (1952), argued that Holland’s differences to Green had to be taken seriously, for these differences had helped inspire Holland to develop a theology that still carried weight in post-war Britain; the second, ‘Some Aspects of the Treatment of Christianity by the British Idealists’ (1984), covered some of the same ground again, but concentrated on criticism of the philosophical school when viewed in theological perspective. For MacKinnon, the two letters from Green to Holland on the occasion of Holland’s visit to Hopkins at the Jesuit novitiate, together with a later correspondence expressing concern over Holland’s own ordination as an Anglican priest in 1872, revealed the stresses and pressures affecting Green’s relationships with his more orthodox students at Balliol. He took it that these letters provided a particularly acute sense of the *theological* consequence of Green’s influence at Oxford in

² Paget, *Scott Holland*, pp. vi-vii.

the 1860s and 1870s. But there was more to it than that, for MacKinnon hinted that Green was, in Holland's case especially, more than just a teacher: 'he was in a strange, perhaps unique, sense spiritual director as well'.³ The influence of Green on Holland evidently amounted to something more than formal philosophical education, for, according to MacKinnon, Green exerted formative pressure on the younger man's understanding of the relationship of Christianity to wider concerns of culture, civilisation, and the political order, and, in so doing, provided a framework for his Christian worldview. Green taught Holland of the importance of 'contemporary culture' broadly conceived, 'a sense of the world as under the providence of God and of the worth of taking seriously its problems and causes'. He gave him, said MacKinnon, 'an attitude towards the world'.⁴ Yet for all that Green shaped and formed Holland's basic mental outlook, MacKinnon added the suggestion that the letters preserved in Paget's memoir also indicated the extent to which Green *failed* to persuade his more orthodox students. Holland's calling to Anglican orders was regretted by Green; Hopkins' decision to join the Jesuits perplexed him. The persistence of these Christian commitments, that remained irreducible, ineluctable, and resistant to Green's influence, were, in MacKinnon's analysis, the crux of the matter: 'between Holland and his master, there is a great gulf fixed', he argued, 'and in the letters concerned with Hopkins' resolve to put his life at the disposal of the Society of Jesus, the abyss yawns'.⁵ The persistent irreducibility of the Christian claim on Holland and Hopkins was, according to MacKinnon, the point that demanded attention.

³ Donald MacKinnon, 'Scott Holland and Contemporary Needs' in *Borderlands of Theology* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1968), pp. 105-120, here citing p. 105. On Green's personal relationship with Holland, see further G. W. E. Russell's remarks made in reminiscences dated 1907. According to Russell, 'T. H. Green... "simply fell in love" with his brilliant pupil, and gave him his best'. Russell, *Prime Ministers and Some Others* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1918), p. 93.

⁴ MacKinnon, 'Scott Holland', p. 113.

⁵ Donald MacKinnon 'Some Aspects of the Treatment of Christianity by the British Idealists' in *Themes in Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 50-68, here citing p. 51

For many, of course, interest in the letters is more likely to be focussed on Gerard Manley Hopkins than Henry Scott Holland, and this adds an inevitable complexity to the present discussion. Green described Holland, Nettleship, and Hopkins as ‘old friends’.⁶ If the letters reveal Green’s perplexity at Hopkins’ decision, and signal his worries that Holland might move in a similar direction, they also invite the reader to look again at the mental development of Hopkins as priest and poet. Here, a line of theological and philosophical enquiry relating to Holland and Green intersects with a line of religious and literary enquiry relating to Hopkins. There must be something to be gained by trying to read Holland and Hopkins alongside one another, extending insights taken from MacKinnon’s analysis of Holland to Hopkins, and using them to provide a deeper understanding of the work of the poet.

MacKinnon’s reading of the letters, though (for theological reasons) perhaps necessarily oblique, is, I believe, of critical importance and deserves renewed, careful consideration. The (at very least) indirect influence it has had on Geoffrey Hill’s equally important analyses of Hopkins must be acknowledged, as should the wider, more diffusive influence it has had, via Hill, on at least some recent readings of Hopkins’ poetry. It is not, after all, insignificant that when Hill published his influential essay on Hopkins’ development and literary dilemmas, “‘Perplexed Persistence’”: the exemplary failure of T. H. Green’ (1975), he acknowledged his own indebtedness to MacKinnon’s writing on religious ethics, and attentive readers should discern the trace of MacKinnon’s work on Hill’s reading of

⁶ Paget, *Scott Holland*, p. 29. For evidence of Hopkins’ friendship with Nettleship, see House and Storey (eds), *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 137; Abbott (ed.), *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 18; Abbott (ed.), *Further Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, second edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 45-46. See further R. B. Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), pp. 193-4, p. 362, and p. 375; D. Brown, *Hopkins’ Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 9. Granted Hopkins’ personal relationship with Nettleship, Brown’s work on Hopkins’ intellectual development could be built on to include further reference to Nettleship in particular. This is one of the aims of the present study.

Hopkins' relationship to Green. Here, as elsewhere in Hill's critical writing of this period, MacKinnon's ideas were drawn upon in support of a particular interpretation of what might best be called the *ethics* of Hopkins' activity as a poet. Thus, to take one example, in his inaugural lecture in the University of Leeds, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' (1977), Hill cited a passage from MacKinnon's book, *The Problem of Metaphysics* – a description, to be precise, of Kant's style of ethical writing – and used it to draw out the deliberate difficulties of Hopkins' 'Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee' as an embodiment of the 'positive virtue of negative statements'.⁷ What MacKinnon had said of Kant in *The Problem of Metaphysics*, was that the discovery of the 'authority of conscience' as 'something thrust upon us' – of the inescapable 'unconditional character of moral obligation' as the 'most inescapable feature of our human existence' – was something that, in Kant's writing, had been 'presented through tortuous and strenuous argument'. The 'structure' of this argument, he observed, 'torments the reader; for it includes at its centre the recognition that what we have discovered we can neither represent nor, indeed, rest in recognition of its unrepresentability'.⁸ Hill evidently perceived the significance of MacKinnon's insight into Kantian style, and sensed that Hopkins had come to recognise something similar: that the ineluctable demands of conscience should best be spoken of tortuously and strenuously. Where Hopkins was tortuous and strenuous, it was because the pressure of an imperative demand had been placed upon him, and the nature of that demand could not simply, easily, be explained or, indeed, expressed. The difficulty of the demand had got into his poetry. The argument was substantial, and capable of changing, one feels, almost the entirety of Hill's approach to Hopkins: this was no mere adjustment of literary

⁷ Geoffrey Hill, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' in *The Lords of Limit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 1-18, here citing p. 5.

⁸ Donald MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 66.

understanding, but the adoption of a different philosophical perspective on the problems Hopkins presents the reader.

What this means is this: when it came to reading the persistence of Christian commitments in the school of Green, MacKinnon had taught Hill the value – the necessity – of philosophical difficulty, and Hill had rendered what he learnt from MacKinnon into an appreciation of poetic difficulty. The result in the critical work of Hill was the idea that if Hopkins could torment the reader, this was because he expected the reader to be attentive; he knew this cost patience, but the sacrifice of instant clarity was meant as a type of poetic kenosis.⁹

This helps explain why Geoffrey Hill understood Gerard Manley Hopkins as priest first, poet second.¹⁰ When writing “Perplexed Persistence”, Hill made his debts to MacKinnon’s *A Study in Ethical Theory* explicit, and one senses that the *difficulties* that MacKinnon was attentive to in his discussion of morality and religion lodged in Hill’s mind and became his own when writing about Hopkins.¹¹ Hill had a surer grasp of theological issues than some, and behind his analysis MacKinnon’s views were present, altering the perception of Hopkins’ style and method.

What Hill had to say on the matter, therefore, ought to be read with reference to MacKinnon, and this means that the crossing network of relationships between Green and Holland, and Green and Hopkins, and Holland and Hopkins, deserves attention. In the

⁹ I owe the phrase ‘poetic kenosis’ to David Mahan’s discussion of Geoffrey Hill and Christian theology. See D. C. Mahan, *An Unexpected Light* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), pp. 141-98.

¹⁰ See Hill’s complaint in his Ward-Phillips Lectures delivered at the University of Notre Dame in 2000: ‘so many readers of Hopkins have... been drawn into the error of regarding him as a wild nature poet of a power to rival Keats and Shelley who unfortunately fell among Jesuits and whose gift was consequently repressed. The contrary opinion needs here to be stated, that the *Spiritual Exercises* not only saved Hopkins from repression and despair but also gave to his poetry those distinguishing features which set the seal of greatness upon it’. Geoffrey Hill, ‘Alienated Majesty: Gerard M. Hopkins’ in *Collected Critical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 518-31, here citing p. 521.

¹¹ Geoffrey Hill, “Perplexed Persistence”: the exemplary failure of T. H. Green’ in *The Lords of Limit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 104-20. On the debt to MacKinnon, see p. 181, n. 105.

following, therefore, the task is to draw out what there is to learn when Holland and Hopkins are compared: they both learnt from Green, they both reacted against him and, in the process, made their respective commitments to Anglo-Catholicism and Roman Catholicism. Crossing between theological, philosophical, and literary analysis, the sermons of Holland and the poems and Hopkins need to be read alongside one another.

II

The problem as Green saw it was that Hopkins' move meant his separation and disengagement from 'the fully-educated citizen of the European commonwealth'. Catholicism, he said, put 'the incarnate God as a sensual presence in the sacraments' in the place of something more desirable, the 'moral [*presence of God*] in the Christian society'. But Hopkins had, he thought, now practically deserted that society. The length and the earnestness of the letters dated 29th December and 9th January showed the depth of Green's feelings on both Hopkins' decision and Holland's sympathy for it. He was at once restless and irritated.¹² Later, when Holland was called to and chose the Anglo-Catholic priesthood, Green reiterated his concern: 'All that I desire is that you should not become a clerical partisan', he wrote to Holland on December 21st, 1870.¹³ When Holland was ordained in 1872, he told Green that his decision was 'not... anything inconsistent with what I learned

¹² Stephen Paget, *Scott Holland*, pp. 29-32. If Green found the decisions of Hopkins and Holland regrettable and perplexing, they thrust Nettleship into turmoil and distress. The selection of letters Nettleship sent Holland between 29 July, 1868, and New Year's Eve, 1872, combine a religious and personal intensity that signifies his crisis: 'It is no good: things cannot be as they have been – though it is like burning one's tongue to say so' (Paget, 51). Nettleship could not argue himself into belief in the literal meaning of the Gospels: 'I cannot believe these things, Monk, I cannot' (Paget, 62). The result was this: 'we cannot die together and we cannot live together... you shall be to me the man whom I love... God bless you and keep you' (Paget, 64). Later, A. C. Bradley hinted at the 'emotional struggle', the 'incessant inward struggle', and the 'restlessness of unsatisfied love' that haunted Nettleship (Bradley, 'Biographical Sketch', in Nettleship, *Lectures and Remains*, vol. 1, (London: Macmillan, 1897), pp. xiii-iv, xxxiv, and lvi). For contextual discussion of the correspondence between Nettleship and Holland, see Julia Saville, *A Queer Chivalry: The Homoerotic Asceticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2000), pp. 32ff.

¹³ Paget, *Scott Holland*, p. 52.

from you'. He continued, 'all the meaning I could put into my theology and certainly my ethics was still the old thing. Only, the religious form seemed to me to cap it all, and the cap seemed to me to fit'.¹⁴

Yet there was more to it than that. If ecclesiastical separatism offended Green as a social theorist, theological realism offended him as an idealist philosopher of religion. Green's fears for Hopkins and Holland were built out of his own critical concerns about the future of Christianity. As Green saw it, the time had come for traditional religion to adapt to modernity and evolve into something new. The new Christianity would be, in its primary essence, moral, not ecclesiastical. So, in the same letters, we find Green spelling out his own 'faith [*in*] the new Christianity', which, 'because not claiming to be special or exceptional or miraculous, will do more for mankind than... its "Catholic" form... has ever been able to do'. Far better, he argued, for the rationally 'educated conscience' to speak authoritatively than the priests of the Church.¹⁵ For all that Green pressed himself on Holland's mentality, Holland (and Hopkins) stood on one side of a religious divide, whilst Green stood on the other. For Green, Christianity was an idea, a system of morality. For Hopkins and Holland, in contrast, Christianity was *real*, built upon the revelation of God in Christ.

In his 'Essay on Christian Dogma', Green had sought to transform Christianity into a philosophy, and in so doing, had transformed Christ into a moral idea.¹⁶ Then, in the first of his *Lay Sermons*, delivered in 1870, he had preached that 'Christ... is an idea, or form of intellectual consciousness'. The event of the crucifixion was primarily the central moment in

¹⁴ Paget, *Scott Holland*, p. 63. As Holland himself was to admit, in terms of mental development, he 'owed... everything to Green' (Russell, 'A Final Appreciation', in C. Cheshire ed., *Henry Scott Holland: Some Appreciations* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co., 1919), pp. 50-51). In later years, the 'rhetoric' of many of Holland's sermons continued to be 'suffused by the ethical and political ideas' of Green, and there were 'continual resonances in his pulpit performance' to ideas later published in Green's *Principles of Political Obligation* (MacKinnon 'Some Aspects of the Treatment of Christianity by the British Idealists', p. 50).

¹⁵ Paget, p. 32.

¹⁶ T. H. Green, 'Essay on Christian Dogma' in *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. 3, ed. R. L. Nettleship (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), pp. 161-85, esp. pp. 182-84.

the development of this ideal consciousness, ‘the source of a new moral life’. Ultimately, the ‘immanent God’ and ‘Christ within us’ were ‘mere thoughts of our own’. They were ‘not “objective”’. For Green, then, ‘we are left to ourselves’.¹⁷ Such reductionism was impossible for Holland. As Edward Lyttelton observed, ‘The fact is [*Holland*] built up his whole interpretation of life... wholly and supremely on the facts mentioned in the Apostles’ Creed, *taken as true*’.¹⁸ ‘Green’s etherealized, philosophical conception of the Christian story’ might have been ‘attractive to trained thinkers full of appreciation of the powers of human reason’, but it was alien to ‘Holland’s grip of the... actual, concrete facts as they have been given’.¹⁹ Likewise, Charles Gore emphasised that, ‘The letters between Holland and Green and R. L. Nettleship at the time of Holland’s ordination show that a wide gap existed between Holland and the others, and that, however near he came to them in the region of speculation, he was not in fact a Hegelian, or a Greenite, or even a pure idealist. He had got a different idea of the world’.²⁰ Elsewhere, Gore wrote:

when a student at Balliol he was largely influenced by T. H. Green, but was never enslaved. For Green’s idealism left his pupils with an unhappy feeling that... the real thing in itself, knowable, actual, and there present, as a permanent part of solid Nature, had been somehow reduced in Green’s argument into an unsubstantial shadow in a world where all is mind. But when Holland began to expand his philosophical basis in early sermons (published in *Logic and Life*) he appeared as an emphatic realist. It is the objective world of fact that interests him, and in correspondence with external reality that he finds the function of the reason... This... was what made him

¹⁷ T. H. Green, ‘The Witness of God’, in *Works*, vol. 3, pp. 230-52, here citing p. 235, p. 233, and p. 244.

¹⁸ Edward Lyttelton, *The Mind and Character of Henry Scott Holland* (London: Mowbray, 1926), p. iv.

¹⁹ Lyttelton, p. 150.

²⁰ Charles Gore, ‘Holland’s Philosophy’ in Lyttelton, pp. 199-206, here citing p. 202.

at home at once in the theology of the Incarnation, which is the perfect synthesis of idea and fact – the Word made flesh.²¹

For Holland, Green's reductionist interpretation offered the *idea* of redemption, but not the *reality*. Turning to *Logic and Life* – sermons dating from the latter half of the 1870s and first published in the year of Green's death (1882) – it is easy to see what Gore meant. Here, Holland's concern with sacrifice and suffering was centred on one crucial event, the historical death of Christ.

The more intense our appreciation of the dreadful reality of... sin, the more... needful becomes the vision of the Crucified... Here... is no dream, no mocking vision, coming with cold and shadowy comfort, to offer its misty thinness for the food of a pain-burdened race of worn and suffering men. Here, rather, is a *reality*, vivid, actual, solid, with the vivid solidity of fact. A wounded and bleeding humanity knows what to make of a bleeding and wounded God. God's justification of Himself on the Cross plants itself down with a substantial and undeniable plainness, such as makes it at home in a world like ours, where evil is actually rending and tearing the flesh of men.²²

In Holland's bleakly realistic meditation on the mystery of evil, the 'horror' of the Passion of Christ was 'at least on a level with that which it redeems'.²³ Faced with an intractable theological problem, he refused to simplify an insuperable question in order to arrive at any tidy or conclusive answer; instead, he preached Christ crucified. Reading the sermons, MacKinnon's insight that Holland's theology was, ultimately, a *theologia crucis*, is justified: as he observed, Holland pointed to 'the suffering Christ, the revelation of the

²¹ Charles Gore, 'Henry Scott Holland as a Theologian' in Cheshire, ed., *Henry Scott Holland: Some Appreciations*, pp. 35-41, here citing pp. 36-7.

²² Henry Scott Holland, *Logic and Life*, second edition (London: Rivingtons, 1883), p. 100.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

Father, as the only key we have to the inner ways of God'. The primacy of the person of Christ, crucified, over any other theological or philosophical concern meant that 'Holland did not... speak of the transcendence of God in general terms'; rather, 'he present[ed] that transcendence as something by which we are apprehended in the Crucified'.²⁴ As Holland wrote in the preface to *Logic and Life*, 'It is Christ, not reason, that makes the believer free'. Here, in Christ, was 'at once the limitation, and also the justification, of all our efforts to exhibit the intelligibility of our creed'.²⁵ 'It was precisely this seriousness about Christology that Green's immanentism would not allow him'. 'He saw that the coming of Christ broke up... the... little world... fashioned after the image of... passing idealism'.²⁶

For Holland, of course, this meant that the 'example of Christ's Cross' was 'not some imaginary, speculative, airy-natured offering'.²⁷ The sermons collected in *On Behalf of Belief* – published the same year as *Lux Mundi* (1889) – were equally anti-idealist. Here, Holland was concerned to 'dispel the mists of a shifty, idealistic treatment' of the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ was 'no idea, but a fact; no spiritual ideal, but an actual event... in a sense directly contrary to that of the idealists'.²⁸ To the philosopher, this was a hard doctrine: the gospel of Christ was foolishness to the Greeks (1 Cor. 1:23). Yet the impossibility of Christianity was made possible by grace of the Holy Spirit: 'we cannot believe it of ourselves; we cannot argue ourselves into it. Through the Spirit alone is faith made possible to us'.²⁹

²⁴ MacKinnon, 'Scott Holland and Contemporary Needs', p.110 and p. 117.

²⁵ Holland, *Logic and Life*, p. xi.

²⁶ MacKinnon, 'Scott Holland and Contemporary Needs', p. 113 and p. 116. The point is accentuated if Holland's sermons are compared with Nettleship's notes on 'The Atonement' (in *Philosophical Lectures and Remains*, vol. 1, pp. 39-42). Here, over-confident idealist speculation arguably trivializes the hard facts – the tragedies – of *real* moral experience. The contrast between Holland's *theologia crucis* and Nettleship's speculative theorizing shows how Holland's approach to religious problems – if one allows one brief allusion to Collingwood that Collingwood himself would probably not allow – provided a necessary *via purgativa* of the idealist mind (cf. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924), p. 146).

²⁷ Holland, *Logic and Life*, p. 138.

²⁸ Holland, *On Behalf of Belief* (London: Rivingtons, 1889), p. 3.

²⁹ Holland, *On Behalf of Belief*, p. 49.

III

Holland's obstinate theological realism would hardly convince anyone on rationalist grounds. It was not meant to. The foundation of faith was Christ alone; the authentication of faith was revelation alone – the act of the living God in Christ. Holland's ultimate position on theological epistemology – set forth in his sermon, 'The Witness of Christ' in *Pleas and Claims* (1892) – was this: 'the deed done in Christ had this about it to confirm its authenticity, that it swept away the cloud that had hung over the face of God'. Holland regarded 'the fact and the evidence for the fact as inseparable from one another'. The 'Christian fact' was one which made 'witness to itself', 'as of a living thing'.³⁰ Belief in Christ was, in other words, something thrust upon the believer, carrying with it an unconditional mysterious self-authentication. The mystery of Christ was at once inescapable and inexplicable.

Earlier in this essay, I referred to MacKinnon's remarks on Kant's discovery of the authority of conscience, represented as something which could only be 'presented through tortuous and strenuous argument'. MacKinnon drew attention to the idea that this was something which 'includes at its centre the recognition that what we have discovered we can neither represent nor, indeed, rest in recognition of its unrepresentability'.³¹ The formal parallels between Holland's encounter with Christ and Kant's encounter with conscience should be apparent, and in this part of the argument I will assume that MacKinnon's own discussion of Holland's debts to Kantianism is broadly correct – *viz.*, that Holland's move away from idealism towards Christological realism was enabled (intellectually, if not

³⁰ Holland, *Pleas and Claims for Christ* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892), p. 82, p. 73, and p. 77.

³¹ MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*, p. 66.

spiritually) by a theological appropriation of elements of Kant's work.³² For present purposes it is more pressing to explore Holland's differences to Green, and here one comes to the crux of the matter. MacKinnon saw in Green, too, a similar debt to Kant – less developed, less prominent, yet still present. 'For Green there was a real problem of knowledge. Something mysterious in the structure of the thing... Green learnt from Kant the presence in experience, whether cognitive or conative, of an irreducible complexity'.³³ The question then arises, how does Green's supposed recognition of 'something mysterious' in the structure of epistemology contrast with Holland's more explicit recognition of Christological mystery?

To answer this question it is useful to turn to Mander's recent discussion of British Idealism and poetry. This is not because Mander deals with the *positive* connections between *religion* and poetry and philosophy in an illuminating fashion (he does not), but rather because his discussion helpfully draws out what I think are the crucial issues in Green's writings with reference to Kant. In the course of a description of Analytic philosophers' unease with the Idealists' literary style, Mander lets fall the following sentence: 'it was objected that the Idealists had a very odd way of speaking, that they used words in mysterious ways'. The Idealists, according to Mander, 'did not use... ordinary language... not out of some perverse desire to confuse, but because they simply did not believe that reality could ever be accessed in that way'. Mander continues: 'ordinary language comes from ordinary experience and... for the Idealists, reality was something hidden, something quite other than ordinary experience'.³⁴

Green is basically a Kantian – his eternal consciousness is understood as that which supplies the categories by which we unify and structure our experience, as that which

³² See MacKinnon, 'Aspects of Kant's Influence on British Theology' in MacDonald Ross and McWalter (eds), *Kant and His Influence* (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 348-66, esp. p. 359.

³³ MacKinnon, 'The Victorian attitude to Evil and Personal Responsibility', in Grisewood (ed.), *Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians* (London: Sylvan Press, 1949), pp. 139-49, here citing p. 144.

³⁴ W. Mander, *British Idealism: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 350.

makes it possible. But just like Kant before him, this puts Green in an impossible dilemma, for if what he says is true he cannot say it. The problem is that the concepts and structures apply only within experience, and cannot legitimately be used outside or beyond it, not even to express the conditions which make possible that experience itself. What makes thought possible cannot itself be thought. We find a similar problem in F. H. Bradley. The relational mode of thought is contradictory and points beyond itself. But all thinking is inevitably relational, and so we must conclude that it too points beyond itself – thought’s ‘happy suicide’ – to an Absolute reality in some fashion felt but never said.³⁵

As illustration, Mander points to Green’s *Prolegomena* § 75: ‘In speaking of this principle we can only use the terms we have got; and these, being all strictly appropriate to relations, which this principle renders possible but under which it does not itself subsist, are strictly inappropriate to it’. Now, in theological perspective, Green here puts his finger on the central problem of apophaticism, of the *via negativa*. Green’s ‘principle’ transcended language, and although he writes in *Prolegomena* §54 that he found it ‘generally desirable to avoid’ ‘the use of theological language’, it should be recognised that he nevertheless found himself there compelled to use it in order to communicate what he meant.³⁶ (Remember, Nettleship concluded his ‘Memoir’ of Green by quoting Tennyson’s ‘Holy Grail’: ‘Ask me not, for I may not speak of it; | I saw it’).³⁷ Two critical issues arise from this.

First, if the hidden, transcendent principle of Green’s philosophy is impenetrable and mysterious, inaccessible to thought, “felt but never said”, can it really be held that the epistemological foundation of his philosophy is any more or any less secure than that of

³⁵ W. Mander, *British Idealism*, p. 350.

³⁶ T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, fourth edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899).

³⁷ Nettleship, ‘Memoir’, in *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, vol. 3 (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1888), here citing, p. clxi.

Holland's theology? At least Holland's belief in Christ was experienced as something thrust upon him, carrying with it a mysterious self-authentication – the living Christ making vital witness to himself.³⁸ If both Green and Holland in different ways invoked mystery, by what rational means might one decide between them? And if the decision is finally pre-rational or supra-rational, by what means might Holland's Christian faith be demonstrated as rationally invalid? When constructed in this way, such questions may well be unanswerable in rational argument, so I will proceed to the next critical point.

Secondly, what happens to language in this situation? Mander tells us that if what Green says is true, he cannot say it. At this point, I want to return to Geoffrey Hill's essay, "Perplexed Persistence": The Exemplary Failure of T. H. Green', in order to say something more about the ethical virtue – the sacrifice – of failed communication. Now, in Hill's essay, it should be recalled, Green's handling of the problem of ineffability is used as an interpretive context for a suggestive reading of Hopkins' ethical activity as a poet: an intelligent engagement with conceptions of the unsayable opens up philosophical, theological and moral approaches to poetic creation.

The importance of the philosophy of language in Green's teaching should not be underestimated for there is direct evidence that concerns with language and literature played a principle role in discussions with Balliol students in the 1860s. Thus, according to A. C. Bradley, 'Green suggested to [*Nettleship*] in early days that he might approach philosophy

³⁸ This, of course, is to say that the Christian theologian remains open to the freedom of God's grace, i.e., that type of supernatural co-operation that is positively and definitively denied in Green's "New Christianity". Here Green departs from Kant. For Kant the possibility of the supernatural and free action of God was incapable of denial; it was, rather, *unsayable*, gestured towards through the use of a double negative. (See Kant *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, 6:191, in *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 207). If Holland and Hopkins held theological realist positions and realised that they could only express such belief in language obliquely – as witnesses to the mysterious and unsayable ineffability of God's grace – this only located them within the scope of this aspect of Kantianism. Green, by contrast, was more of a deist than Kant. See R. Norman, 'The Christologies of Kant and the British Idealists' in *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, 19:1 (2013), pp. 113-137.

from the side of language'.³⁹ As Nettleship's reflections grew to fruition, he intuited that poetry was somehow akin to metaphysics. As he explained in a letter to Mrs Green dated November, 1874, words 'of poetry' provided an example of 'material media' through which 'unification' of 'self' with 'truth, beauty, or goodness' could be realised. In this letter, 'poetry' was likened to 'active self-sacrifice', as both provided instances of the actualisation of metaphysical reality – the eternal law of sacrifice. Poetry provided an instance of sacrifice when an individual was 'wholly taken up into the beauty of it', just as one might be kenotically 'emptied into the act' of doing good. 'So that it seems as if to "realize" (in this sense) ought to mean literally to "be the thing," and that words, whether of poetry or of logic, are one of the material media through which this unification of subject and object takes place'. Such 'unification' was, according to Nettleship, equivalent to 'self-obliteration'.⁴⁰

This approach was sketched out in the Section III of Nettleship's 'Lectures on Logic', entitled 'Language and Its Function in Knowledge'. Here we find Nettleship's belief that words were in some sense capable of approaching ontological concretion: 'One should beware of the antithesis of words and things; it really is a distinction between the less full and the more full meanings of words'. Language had a formative role in the development of self-knowledge, for 'the consciousness which we express when we have found the "right word" is not the same as our consciousness before we found it; so that it is not strictly correct to call the word the expression of what we meant before we found it'. Further, language had a role in knowledge of external objects and subjects: 'Again, the old crux, "How can I be sure that I mean the same as the other person?" is in principle the same as the difficulty, "How can I know that anything corresponds to my sensations?"'.⁴¹ As poetic language was potentially an

³⁹ Nettleship, *Lectures and Remains*, vol. 1, p. 1, n. 2.

⁴⁰ Nettleship, *Lectures and Remains*, vol. 1, pp. 53-4.

⁴¹ Nettleship, *Lectures and Remains*, vol. 1, p. 134, p. 130, and p. 136.

act of *kenotic* self-sacrifice, Nettleship's use of the word "crux" carries a weight of theological association.

One can read Green's thoughts on the relation of ethics to literature in the *Prolegomena*, § 148: 'The effect of "moral" interests appears in habits without which the scholar or artist is not properly free for his work, nor exempt from the temptation to be showy instead of thorough in it'. There were, in other words, ethical motivations for literary repression, restraint or reserve. As reserve for the sake of rigour and accuracy could function as a mark of morality informing communication, so *difficulty*, obscurity even, could be virtuous if it led to thoroughness. Since Green could, when it suited him, be lucid, Hill detected here what he called a 'form of vocational renunciation', a mark of humility.⁴² To press the point, one might well consider a remark of Green's (not mentioned by Hill): 'social life is to personality what language is to thought' (*Prolegomena*, § 183). Language was analogous to social phenomenon, and – granted Green's metaphysics of sacrifice – implied a giving-away of the self for the sake of the community. Something was always *sacrificed* in language.

To clarify his argument, Hill drew a comparison with Mill's observations on the politics of language: 'Mankind have many ideas, and a few words. Two consequences follow from it; one that a certain laxity in the use of language must be borne with, if a writer makes himself understood; the other that, to understand a writer who uses the same words as a vehicle for different ideas, requires a vigorous effort of co-operation on the part of the reader'.⁴³ The dilemma here, according to Hill, was between 'two forms of sacrifice: sacrifice *of* [clear communication] and sacrifice *to* [communicate]'.⁴⁴ On the one hand, clarity of

⁴² Hill, "Perplexed Persistence", p. 110.

⁴³ Hill's source here is Mill's 'Review of Use and Abuse of Political Terms', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, 1 (1832), p. 299, cited in Davies and Watson, *The English Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), p. 233

⁴⁴ Hill, "Perplexed Persistence", p. 94.

expression meant imprecision of communication (as the reader imagined they understood what was meant too-easily and missed the writer's meaning); on the other, a deliberate obscurity invited the reader to pay patient attentiveness to a text, to strenuously co-operate in the discipline required for thorough communication.

According to Nettleship, Green at one point advocated the practise of literary asceticism. He 'had a theory in composing... that all superfluous words should be extirpated, the fewest and most compressed used: that, if possible, an essay should consist of one single indivisible paragraph, the connected expression of a single proposition or a single syllogism'. For unsympathetic readers, his prose style could appear 'difficult, laborious, or clumsy', yet it also contained 'an underglow of subdued eloquence'. In Nettleship's own view, 'Of all occupations writing was to him at once the hardest and most absorbing; and because it was so hard and absorbing, it gathered into itself more of his massive, struggling personality than any other kind of work'. Green's style was 'the man himself in words'.⁴⁵

The implication was that the obscurity of Green's lectures was deliberate, and Hill drew on Nettleship, Ashton, and Farnell to elucidate the idea.

Though he had great difficulty in expressing himself at that time... Everyone saw that there was great substantial value and originality in the work; and the very difficulty of his utterance gave one the feeling that he was working the thing out, and not repeating other people's phrases or ideas... The men in fact took a sort of pride in the difficult process which he went through before he got things clear, as if it were in some way the joint action of us all.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Nettleship, 'Memoir', p. xxxviii.

⁴⁶ Nettleship, 'Memoir', pp. lxiv-lxv.

I had the privilege of taking a few essays to Mr. Green... I went to his home with my work, and he used to sit over the fire, “tying himself into knots”. He beat out his music with some difficulty, and the music itself was not an ordinary melody. I once said I was afraid that some phrase of mine was not very clear. “I am afraid,” he said with a rueful smile, “that in philosophy clearness of thought is often in inverse proportion to clearness of expression”.⁴⁷

I... followed his remarkable lectures with enthusiasm and tense strain... I can remember that I did not understand a single word as I wrote down the perplexing tangle of phrases furiously and at lightning-speed: then in the quiet of my rooms I brooded over them till light seemed to gleam from the written word.⁴⁸

Hill recognised the associative echoes: ‘Among the words that figure prominently in this and the previously quoted student-memoir are “music”, “perplexing” and “gleam”, three key-words in “Tintern Abbey”’.⁴⁹ Green’s students, he hinted, responded to him in the vocabulary of Wordsworth’s poetry.

Hill also held the ‘subjective impression’ that there was ‘some analogy between the method and effect of Hopkins’s poem[s] and the method and effect of Green’s lectures’.⁵⁰ At the very least, it ought to be admitted that what Nettleship had said about Green’s lectures could equally apply to Hopkins’ poetry: ‘the very difficulty of his utterance gave one the feeling that he was working the thing out, and not repeating other people’s phrases or ideas’. What Hill sensed, though, was something more: that the difficulty of Hopkins’ poetry

⁴⁷ A. J. Ashton, *As I Went on My Way* (London, 1924), p. 61; cited in M. Richter, *The Politics of Conscience* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), p. 162.

⁴⁸ L. R. Farnell, *An Oxonian Looks Back* (London, 1934), pp. 44-5; cited in Richter, *Politics of Conscience*, p. 14.

⁴⁹ Hill, “Perplexed Persistence”, p. 113.

⁵⁰ Hill, “Perplexed Persistence”, p. 113.

reproduced the ethical asceticism and sacrifice of Green's philosophy of language. In support, Hill cited Hopkins' letter to Bridges dated 6 November 1887:

Plainly if it is possible to express a sub[t]le and recondite thought on a subtle and recondite subject in a subtle and recondite way and with great felicity and perfection, in the end, something must be sacrificed, with so trying a task, in the process, and this may be the being at once, nay perhaps even the being without explanation at all, intelligible.⁵¹

For Hopkins, of course, such talk of the sacrifice in language could hardly escape association with Christ crucified: the ethics of Christ the Word informed the ethics of how one might use words. When, as a mature poet, Hopkins began to 'castigate his art into a more reserved style', a Christian ascetic discipline focussed and concentrated his writing.⁵² In Oxford in 1879, Hopkins had preached on the centrality of Christ's sacrifice: 'Religion is the highest of the moral virtues and sacrifice the highest act of religion. Also self sacrifice is the purest charity. Christ was the most religious of men, to offer sacrifice was the chief purpose of his life and that the sacrifice of himself'.⁵³ Hopkins' 'Christocentric aesthetics', then, has something in common with Holland's Christological correction of Green: Green's idealist and literary theory of kenosis was here, in sermons and poetry, baptised into the real and living mystery of Christ crucified.⁵⁴

When Holland stated that Green 'gave us back the language of self-sacrifice', it was in an important sense just that – *language*. For, as Holland realised, that which was learnt

⁵¹ Hopkins, *Letters to Bridges*, pp. 265-66; cited in Hill, "Perplexed Persistence", p. 94.

⁵² Robert Bridges, 'Preface to Notes' in *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (1918), p. 99. See also F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 139.

⁵³ Hopkins, *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, p. 14.

⁵⁴ On Hopkins' Christocentrism, see R. Cronin, *Reading Victorian Poetry* (Chichester: John Wiley, 2012), p. 169. See further P. A. Ballinger, *The Poem as Sacrament: The Theological Aesthetic of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Louvain: Peeters, 2000), pp. 79ff.

from Green, or Ruskin, or even Marx, nevertheless had to be fused with ‘our own Christian language’, the language of Sacraments, of belief in Word made flesh, ‘in the depth and intensity of significance disclosed by faith in the Incarnation’.⁵⁵

IV

Holland once stated that ‘Green was cruelly inarticulate: and his message was tough and tangled: and the Hegelian jargon was teeth-breaking, and head-splitting: and the way of speculation was hard and grim to tread’. Examination of the context of this statement shows that Holland thought it a mark of strenuous thought that it was ‘not easy or cheap’. A properly philosophical style ‘did not keep to the surface’, but ‘went down to the deep’. There was a risk (which Holland here associated with Illingworth), that too much lucidity could hinder understanding: ‘men... thought that they understood much more than they had actually mastered’.⁵⁶ Earlier, in a different context (in this case a review of Hobson’s book on Ruskin dated 1898), Holland had made the point well:

The world is so easily taken in by logical lucidity. Its obvious clearness seems to prove itself. No effort is needed... In reality... no logic that goes to the heart of things is likely to look very lucid, and will never appear plain to the plain man. Things are very difficult; and their secret will never be secured without effort and struggle.

Philosophy is bound to be a very tough job.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Holland, *The Philosophy of Faith and The Fourth Gospel* (London: John Murray, 1920), pp. 10-12.

⁵⁶ Holland in A. L. Illingworth, ed., *Life of Illingworth* (London: John Murray, 1917), pp. 316-17.

⁵⁷ Holland, *Personal Studies* (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton and Co., 1905), pp. 63-4.

In the review, Holland promoted Hobson's notion that readers thought less of Ruskin because he was too clear. It was necessary to combat the view 'that a man like Ruskin, who writes well, cannot think clearly or deeply'.⁵⁸

How did the risks of intellectual clarity and obscurity, rhetorical ease and difficulty, emerge in Holland's own work?

Christopher Cheshire recalled of Holland's journalism that 'we all somehow felt that as long as Holland kept writing away in that peculiar style of his the wind was moving in the tree-tops, [and] we were being kept sweet and clean'.⁵⁹ In his own account of sermon-style, Holland argued that the spoken word needed spontaneity, 'in immediate contact with the condition of its delivery'. Only thus could a sermon achieve its necessary 'freshness' and 'fire': 'Otherwise it becomes an essay, not a sermon; it passes out of the conditions of oratory'. 'No doubt, to say this is to make Sermons incapable, except in the very rarest instances, of the highest literary excellence'.⁶⁰

Reservations over Holland's style were captured by Charles Gore in his contribution to Stephen Paget's biography. Although Gore recollected Holland's 'brilliant oratory', his rhetoric had been called by others 'fireworks'.⁶¹ So, too, Edward Stuart Talbot drew attention to the problem of Holland's style:

I always felt that his distinctive mental gift was intellectual imagination. It gave its character to his thought; still more to his expression of it. It made his style, both in quality and its defect. He saw everything vividly, in the concrete, flowing out into consequences, wrapping itself in clothing of form and colour. It was intellectual

⁵⁸ Holland, *Personal Studies*, p. 62, referring to J. A. Hobson, *John Ruskin: Social Reformer* (London: James Nisbet, 1898), p. vii.

⁵⁹ Cheshire, 'Introduction' in Holland, *Creeds and Critics* (London: Mowbray, 1918), pp. ix-x.

⁶⁰ Holland, *Logic and Life*, p. xiv.

⁶¹ Paget, *Scott Holland*, pp. 248-49.

poetry. No doubt this baffled some minds: its rapidity and flow distracted them: they were outrun by his nimbleness: they wanted to stop and ask what was the sterling value of the thought. He was too rhetorical for them... Perhaps he was better to hear than to read.⁶²

Some found Holland's style was 'florid'.⁶³ Others referred to his 'torrential eloquence'.⁶⁴ Talbot wrote of his 'abundant phrasing, like the delicate numberless touches of the artist on the canvas'. He argued that it achieved 'fullness of effect, gained by richness and accurate delicacy of delineation'.⁶⁵ G. W. E. Russell took a different view:

He played strange tricks with the English language, heaped words upon words, strung adjective to adjective; mingled passages of Ruskinian description with jerky fragments of modern slang... whereas most of us can restrain ourselves better on paper than when we are speaking, his pen ran away with him when he was writing a sermon, but on a platform he could keep his natural fluency in bounds.⁶⁶

Russell suggested that Holland 'might have revealed himself more easily in music than in speech', and, in an effort to make sense of Holland's style quoted the teaching of Newman's *Parochial and Plain Sermons*: 'Earthly words are indeed all worthless to minister to such high anticipations' – 'Let us close our eyes and keep silence'.⁶⁷

⁶² Talbot, in Cheshire, ed., *Some Appreciations*, pp. 2-3. Paget, also insisted that the sermons were meant to be heard. They were performance pieces: 'the word, in print, is nothing: but when he spoke it, he could make it as effective as the knocking at the door in Macbeth' (Paget, pp. 157-58).

⁶³ *The Spectator*, 7 June, 1919, p. 734.

⁶⁴ Charles Smyth, *The Art of Preaching* (London: SPCK, 1940), p. 234; MacKinnon, 'Scott Holland and Contemporary Needs', p. 105.

⁶⁵ Talbot, in Cheshire, ed., *Some Appreciations*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁶ Russell, in *Some Appreciations*, pp. 82-3.

⁶⁷ Russell in *Some Appreciations*, p. 88; cf. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, vol. 4, pp. 212-13.

The attentive reader of Holland's published works will see that he repeatedly referred to Wordsworth when seeking to find expression for human notions of transcendence. On one level, this means that Holland was engaged in the public performance of romanticism in late-Victorian England, drawing on reference points familiar to his intended audience. But it is also suggestive of a particular debt to Green, who regarded Wordsworth's 'Ode to duty' as 'the high-water-mark of modern poetry'. According to Nettleship, Green viewed Wordsworth as a 'contemplative' poet who had offered a 'deeper' vision of things than that afforded by materialism.⁶⁸ The poet was taken to have moved beyond 'the fingering of sensations' to arrive at consciousness of 'an ideal', that was, ultimately, ineffable and inexpressible. This, argued Green in an essay published in March, 1868, was the true value of Wordsworth's work: he showed that 'nature was something more to man than nature would herself explain'.⁶⁹ Evidently, Green held up Wordsworth as an example of unsophisticated idealism and pressed the idea on his students. The result in Holland's case, was far-reaching. In particular, Wordsworth's 'Elegiac Stanzas, suggested by a picture of Peele Castle' seems to have lodged in his mind: 'add the gleam | The light that never was, on sea or land, | The consecration, and the poet's dream'. 'Gleam' was a word often used by Holland; the line 'The light that never was, on sea or land', was, it seems, never far from him.⁷⁰ 'Christianity'

⁶⁸ Nettleship, 'Memoir', xviii and lxxiv;

⁶⁹ Green, 'Popular Philosophy in its Relation to Life' in *Works*, vol. 3, pp. 92-125, here citing pp. 118-19.

⁷⁰ Thus Holland, 'Follow in Gleam' in *Vital Values* (London: Wells, Gardner, Darton and Co., 1906), p. 24. For further examples of Holland using the phrase 'light that never was on land or sea', see 'Mission of the Oxford Movement' in *Personal Studies*, p. 79 and p. 93; 'Church and State', in Gore, ed. *Essays on Church Reform* (London: John Murray, 1898), p. 113. For 'sea still gleaming' see *Logic and Life*, 145.

he wrote, was ‘the very heart of all Romance... a visionary gleam: an outbreak, a passion, a defiance, a revolt’.⁷¹

Holland’s one substantial public statement on poetry was made in a thirty-page-long preface to a new edition of the *Lyra Apostolica* (1901), later reproduced in *Personal Studies* (1905).⁷² The essay has its own worth. If Holland had offered no more than a restatement of the old Tractarian beliefs that ‘Nature was the symbolic utterance of the unseen God’, that ‘The world was sacramental’, and that ‘poets... shed the gleam of consecration upon land and sea’, then he would have added little or nothing to Keble’s own exhaustive lectures on poetry and ‘penetrating studies of the Imagination’, to Keble’s acknowledgement of debts to Wordsworth’s vision, or to Newman’s sweeping remark of April, 1836: ‘Poetry then is our mysticism’.⁷³ But Holland had more to say than that. The picture that emerges is less what the *Lyra Apostolica* had been in the 1830s, than what it became in the 1860s. In particular, his vocabulary suggests that he was writing about the poems of the *Lyra Apostolica* with T. H. Green in mind, leaving behind a trace or memory of things said at Balliol when he had been a student. So much, at least, is suggested by what he said about Newman’s ‘The Watchmen’, ‘with its splendid swing’.⁷⁴ *Swing* was a Greenianism: ‘Swing’, recalled Nettleship, was a favourite word with him [*Green*] to describe the movement of native eloquence... he would

⁷¹ Holland, *Vital Values*, p. 31.

⁷² The edition was edited by Henry Charles Beeching (1859-1919). Beeching had studied at Balliol from 1878, was ordained in 1882, and proceeded to become Rector of Yattendon (the home of Robert Bridges) from 1885-1900. In the summer of 1887, Hopkins visited Bridges at Yattendon and met Beeching (see Hopkins’ letter to Bridges, August 25th, 1887); Hopkins and Bridges discussed the essay on Milton which the latter was then writing for Beeching’s edition of *Paradise Lost*. The next year, Bridges’ daughter, Elizabeth, was baptised by Beeching in the parish church (see Hopkins’ letter to Bridges, 12th January, 1888). In 1890, Beeching married Bridges’ niece, Mary Plow. From 1901, he was Professor of Pastoral Theology at King’s College, London. Shortly afterwards, he edited the new edition of the *Lyra Apostolica* in Methuen’s *Library of Devotion* series, with an introduction by Holland.

⁷³ For standard remarks on Tractarian poetry and sacramentalism, see Holland, ‘Mission of the Oxford Movement’, pp. 92-3. For Keble’s ‘studies of the Imagination’, see p. 79. For Newman on poetry and mysticism, see his ‘Prospects of the Anglican Church’, originally published in the *British Critic*, April, 1839, and reproduced in J. H. Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering, 1881), pp. 263-307, especially pp. 290-91. For background discussion, see M. Johnson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Tractarian Poetry*, p. 19ff.

⁷⁴ Holland, ‘Mission of the Oxford Movement’, p. 70.

express his dissatisfaction with much contemporary English poetry by saying, with a characteristic gesture of the hand, “There is no *swing* in it”⁷⁵. If Newman swung splendidly, as Holland claimed he did, he fulfilled the throwaway, unreflective, rhythmical criteria that Green had pressed on his students.

In Holland’s essay, then, we may glimpse the trace of a young Greenian’s encounter with the *Lyra Apostolica* in the 1860s. From the beginning, Holland stressed ‘the temper with which the book tingles from cover to cover’, and described it as one of ‘articulate defiance’ – a defiance that might have matched his own, later, defiance of Green. This temper of defiance was, he said, touched with confidence, for the *Lyra Apostolica* was primarily a romance, ‘such as belongs to young souls who have let themselves go under the inspiration of a high adventure’.⁷⁶ In retrospect, Holland’s emphasis on the romantic character of the *Lyra Apostolica* is striking: he seems to have simply assumed that this was how the book should be read, located within the Victorian chivalric revival alongside William Morris’ *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems* (1858), and Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* (1859 onwards).⁷⁷ Perhaps it should be unsurprising that Holland viewed the *Lyra Apostolica* of 1836 as standing squarely in the tradition of the chivalric revival. But for all that Keble’s ‘The Vigil’ exemplified Christian chivalry, and guaranteed the collection a place in the trajectory reaching from Scott to Tennyson, there is no question that Holland over-emphasised this aspect of the book. For, in his introduction, Holland dwelt on chivalry rather too much, reckoning it the dominant characteristic of the *Lyra Apostolica*. Newman, Keble, Froude, Williams, Wilberforce, and Bowden had become, in his reading, ‘friends set out on a high venture in an hour of peril and distress’. ‘They were held together by all the glowing

⁷⁵ Nettleship, ‘Memoir’, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁷⁶ Holland, ‘The Mission of the Oxford Movement’, p. 67 and p. 70.

⁷⁷ For Holland’s appropriation of Tennyson’s ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ (1889), see his Epiphanytide sermon, ‘Follow the Gleam’ in *Vital Values*, pp. 24-35.

confidence which belongs to a chivalrous company, who have sworn themselves to a cause which they will serve unto death'.⁷⁸

It has been argued that the proliferation of chivalric themes in 'a culture that set great store by restrained self-denial' may be accounted for with reference to Freudian or Lacanian analyses of repression and sublimation.⁷⁹ But Holland provided a *Christian* account of such themes when he made the straightforward observation: 'Chivalry is ascetic'. He was explicit that 'poem after poem of Newman's turns on the self-repression which is the essential note of every true soldier of God. Not only do the lower desires need to be brought severely under rule, but the purest and highest instincts fall under the punishing rod and the purging fire'. 'All life of the soul is won through restraint, through repression, through austere law'.⁸⁰ If Holland could discern these qualities in Newman's poems, so too could Hopkins, who, when developing a Christocentric aesthetics, 'castigate[d] his art into a more reserved style'. Where Hopkins was drawn to chivalric asceticism in 'The Windhover' – 'Oh my chevalier!', 'dauphin... Falcon... off forth on swing... valour... pride, plume' – the imaginary vision was, one feels, inspired by the *Lyra Apostolica*, viewed through an ascetic Pre-Raphaelite lens, set in motion, potentially, by the requisite Greenian 'swing'.

VI

Mander has suggested that in the late Victorian period, 'religion in many people's eyes had failed'. Moreover, 'poetry' was 'taking over where theology had failed'.⁸¹ For some

⁷⁸ Holland, 'The Mission of the Oxford Movement', p. 94. The closest approximation to such sentiments in Newman is in the latter's approval of 'the poetry and romance of the moderns... cultivated and cherished in our later times by the Cavaliers and Tories'. See Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 1, p. 291.

⁷⁹ See Saville, *A Queer Chivalry*, p. 24-5

⁸⁰ Holland, 'The Mission of the Oxford Movement' pp. 71-2, and p. 91.

⁸¹ Mander, *British Idealism: A History*, pp. 342-43.

students of Green this was true. For others it was not true. Not least among the latter group was Hopkins himself ('for our time and the future, the only influential poet of the Victorian age, and... the greatest').⁸² Hopkins' development of a Christocentric aesthetics and asceticism, it should be understood, allowed him to flourish as a poet. For Hopkins and for Holland, it was rather Green's philosophy that had failed – had reached a point of silence. Yet this was for them, as Hill recognised, an exemplary failure – a failure marked by the ethics of sacrifice. Green 'gave us back the language of self-sacrifice, and taught us how we belonged to one another in the one life of organic humanity', wrote Holland. If Green remained suspicious of 'institutions of ascetic co-operation', he nevertheless knew the importance of the principle of self-sacrifice. It was just that his vision of sacrifice was narrower in scope than that of his Christian students: it was thoroughly immanent and lacked a living transcendent dimension. Two lines of 'ascetic co-operation' here cross: a horizontal axis of co-operative social sacrifice (that Green allowed), and a vertical axis of Christ's co-operative sacrifice, the work of co-operative grace (that Green would not allow). In Green's idealist reduction of Christianity, 'we are left to ourselves' in the silence.⁸³ In Holland's sermons, that silence was answered – paradoxically – in broken words, by the Word made flesh. 'Ask me not, for I may not speak of it; | I saw it'.

⁸² Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry*, p. 142.

⁸³ T. H. Green, 'The Witness of God', p. 244.