



## John McIntyre 1916–2005

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Characteristic of John McIntyre's theological method was to treat his subject from many different angles, in many dimensions, under many models. It seemed to me that it would not be inappropriate to speak of the multi-dimensional character of John himself. Not before, however, a brief sketch of his life.

A West Lothian carpenter's son, his early schooling was at Bathgate Academy, followed by a distinguished undergraduate career at the University of Edinburgh, in Arts, with Honours in Philosophy, and in Divinity at New College. While still a student, he had assisted in the Philosophy Department, but illness prevented him doing graduate work at Oxford. In any event he was bent on becoming a minister. Ordained as a minister of the Church of Scotland, he served as *locum tenens* at Loch Awe and then as minister of the parish of Fenwick in Ayrshire. It was there, in 1945, that he met and married Jan Buick, the district nurse, and so began a brilliant partnership which lasted sixty years. In that very year, doubtless after much heart-searching as he had only just got married and Australia was a six-week sea voyage away, he accepted an appointment to teach at St Andrews College, Sydney, soon becoming Principal. In his decade in Sydney he undoubtedly made an enormous impression, not only as a scholar, locking horns with the eminent atheist philosopher John Anderson, but as head of the College. It also generated in him a life-long interest in and affection for Australia, where his three children were born. In 1955, he was asked to stand in for the great Reinhold Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary in New York, and although tempted to stay there, he chose to return to Scotland to the Chair of Divinity at New College. There he remained, acting for six years as Dean and Principal, until he retired in 1986. Among the highlights of his career in Edinburgh would certainly include his serving not once but twice as Acting Principal of the University; in 1982 serving as Moderator

of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (in the year of Pope John Paul II's visit to Scotland and the celebrated meeting here in New College); his appointment as Dean of the Thistle and Queen's Chaplain and his award of the CVO; and spells of teaching in the US (in Wooster, Ohio, Richmond, Virginia and Princeton) and in Australia. In his retirement, both Jan and he had to endure ill health and immobility and in John's case the cruel blow of visual impairment which denied him much reading, but they bore these burdens with great dignity and courage.

So much for biography. With which of the many dimensions of his character and achievements shall I begin? I have chosen to speak first of John **as teacher**. I do this because he himself wrote: "Most, if not all, of the subjects which have engaged me theologically have sprung from teaching and the preparation it requires",<sup>1</sup> but also because it was as teacher that I first encountered him – in his second year at New College in 1957. He lectured to us first-year students in the old Divinity Classroom in the Ramsay wing at ten past twelve, I remember, with the class being interrupted when the one o'clock gun went off and four students shuffled out of the classroom (to set the lunch tables in the Rainy Hall) while the poor lecturer was expected to continue for another ten minutes (a very curious arrangement indeed). One's first impression was of a quiet, unemotional man reading through texts generously distributed in advance. This struck some as boring at first, until they realised that between the paragraphs of the printed texts nuggets of wisdom and inspiration were being offered, along with devastating shafts of humour, easily missed because delivered with a completely dead-pan expression.

I was lucky enough in my final year to have tutorials with John along with only one other student. Here we really discovered the breadth and depth of his learning and his ability to get it over. He was enormously patient with questions, adapting his answers to our level but at the same time stretching us. It was an invaluable and inspiring occasion.

So too with his postgraduate seminars, usually on some subject which he was currently researching. His own PhD students would testify

how careful he was in reading and commenting on their submissions, but more than that the personal concern he showed of them. Indeed, the fact that he kept up with so many of them after they left New College speaks for itself.

One other thing about his teaching – it bore fruit. It was sometimes said that his teaching to the general classes was too difficult to be of abiding help – for example to struggling ministers. Not so. Only last month I was speaking to a minister who was at New College in the seventies. I knew he was particularly busy and, trying to be sympathetic, I asked him if he still had his sermon to do for Sunday. But he wasn't worried. "I'll just give them some of Johnny Mac's stuff", he replied.

This leads me to the second dimension I want to mention and that is John's **scholarship**. In his Inaugural Lecture at Edinburgh as Professor of Divinity<sup>2</sup> he made clear what he understood by Philosophy of Religion and Apologetics, the two subjects, he said, comprised by the title 'Divinity'. For him, as a Christian philosopher of religion, "Philosophy of Religion is the church's taking seriously her responsibilities" of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. Apologetics is the church seeking to make her message relevant, which means that theology must be open to other disciplines – science, history and philosophy in particular. Accordingly, although he was a professional philosopher and a skilled teacher in philosophy of religion – he was, after all, co-editor from 1958-73 of the important SCM series, *Library of Philosophy and Theology* – his interests were principally on aspects of Christian doctrine, on which with his gifts of precise analysis and breadth of learning he invariably seemed able to shed new light. Two things seemed to me to characterise his published work: (1) his openness to insights from any source, however unlikely, and (2) his fairness to those he wanted to criticise. There was an eirenic quality about his work which is too often absent from theological writing. His writing style was condensed – he could never be accused of being wordy – even if the tightness of his argumentation and the economy of language sometimes meant for difficult, but always rewarding, reading.

A brief mention of some of his publications will indicate the enormous range of his scholarship. In his first book, *St Anselm and His Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo* (1954),<sup>3</sup> he demonstrated his mastery of mediaeval thought and at the same time was able, rather boldly and to my mind convincingly, to question the immensely influential interpretation of Karl Barth of Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*. His interest in Anselm was a life-long one with many consequences. It led him into correspondence with continental Catholic Anselmian scholars. And on a more practical level, took him more than once to the abbey of Bec in Normandy (incidentally, he was keen to organise a New College retreat to this abbey, but unfortunately that never came off).

In his *The Christian Doctrine of History*<sup>4</sup> he shows himself thoroughly familiar with the work of Barth and Bultmann but is able to bring to theology the insights of Butterfield and Collingwood as well. It is perhaps worth noting, by the way, that McIntyre was making his mark in this field in Scotland at the same time as Pannenberg in Germany. This was certainly not his last word on history – as we shall hear later on from George Newlands.

In 1966 he published the first of his trilogy of 'Shapes', *The Shape of Christology*<sup>5</sup> – rightly regarded as a classic. Here he shows himself thoroughly at home in the language of 'models' and applies it to great advantage to christology, throwing new light on certain influential treatments. With his 'two-nature model' he elucidates the logic of the patristic consensus. Here, incidentally, he made a highly original contribution by his quotation of Ephraim of Antioch, via the writings of Photius of Tyre.<sup>6</sup> And there is a passage I'd like to quote neatly illustrating his no-nonsense approach, in this case to the widely discarded concept of 'substantiality':

It has always been a matter of great curiosity to me that ordinary people all of the time, and philosophers when they forget their calling and indeed their set attitudes, and are simply relaxing over a cup of coffee, should

speak and act as if the substance-attribute distinction were an absolutely valid one. When the latter speak of the coffee being sweet and cold, and having rather unpleasant grounds swilling in it; when they give a brief description of the characteristics of the new no. 6 iron which they have just purchased; then they do not refer to constellations of sense-data held together by some form of inherent attraction, or of nuclear sense-data which are maxima sensibilia occurring at certain points in space-time. They seem to be, by their speech, as committed to the basic Aristotelian language structure as the Philosopher himself. In other words, ordinary language with its distinction between subject and predicate seems almost to imply, if it is going to have any sense at all, something very like the distinction between substance and attribute, or rather substances and attributes.<sup>7</sup>

With his ‘psychological model’ he considers a whole variety of modern christologies which speak significantly of the thoughts, purposes and mind of Christ, and, though sympathetic, questions how far this approach can legitimately go. In his ‘revelational model’ he considers various examples, and in particular offers a brilliant analysis of Karl Barth’s early use and later qualification. In conclusion he pleads convincingly for the abandonment of the employment in christology of a single model, as of the application to one model the logic and categories of another. Models are the product of imagination:

... in theology, we have in a sense to be ready to stand on our feet, to recognise that our theology, our christology, is human thinking about God, human thinking about Christ. There is an element of deceit in pretending that these are not our thoughts but God’s thoughts, blasphemy, perhaps, more than deceit.<sup>8</sup>

We had to wait a number of years for the other ‘Shapes’ – *The Shape of Soteriology* in 1992 and *The Shape of Pneumatology* in 1997.<sup>9</sup> In

the former, he again uses the language of models to show how this doctrine (never classically defined) has been expounded in the history of theology and in his remarkable last chapter, on “The Nature of Forgiveness”, he pleads for a retention of all the biblical models rather than treating exclusively of one, since elimination of any diminishes the implications of the death of Christ and reduces its pastoral potential. The last sentences are worth recalling:

... if we do not forgive those who have offended us, we shall not ourselves know forgiveness ... No account of the shape of soteriology, however otherwise impeccable, can afford to ignore the final finishing touch thus given to it by human agency.<sup>10</sup>

This is typical of all his writing. However technical or abstract his discussion he never forgets that it is as nothing if it does not ‘play out’ in the day-to-day life and worship of men and women.

His third ‘Shape’ is *The Shape of Pneumatology*, published in 1997 and written when the health of himself and Jan was beginning to fail. This did not mean that John had lost any of his sharpness or the breadth or depth of his learning. Rather winsomely, he confesses a certain diffidence in tackling the subject:

It is many years now since the late Dr Angus Sinclair of the Philosophy Department of the University of Edinburgh first introduced me to the saying of Hegel’s that ‘the owl of Minerva takes not her flight till the shades of night have fallen’. It has proved to be an enormous comfort to me on varied occasions – in the early days when Sunday was drawing relentlessly nearer and the ‘shape’ of the sermon was resisting definition, or later when a lecture was failing to respond to my immature imaginative fumbblings, or – most distressing of all – when, at short notice, the call came ‘to say a few words’ and all memory of appropriate stories or humorous

reminiscences disappeared in a mist of amnesia. The same image of Hegel's returns to haunt me whenever I endeavour to construct an account of the nature, being and works of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup>

He is convinced, nevertheless, of the centrality of this doctrine for the church and fears it is in danger of being marginalised. He here expounds the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the now familiar pattern of models – biblical, classical (in patristic theology and as developed by Calvin and Barth, as well as several others), and what he calls *dynamic* models, taking account of much twentieth-century theology. His criticisms are always to the point, as is his masterly disentangling of the logic and terms of patristic Trinitarian theology. His discussion of the *filioque* is highly original. His conclusion is rather sombre, as a challenge to the churches to recover the consciousness of and confidence in the Holy Spirit, so clearly evidenced in the early churches.

Ten years previously, John published his *Faith, Theology and Imagination*.<sup>12</sup> He had been working on this subject for some time and had given various lectures on it but this volume brought together an amazing amount of material presenting the whole subject in a radically new light. In it he drew attention to the lack of interest in imagination in the history of theology, and drawing on the original work of the blind poet-minister George MacDonald, he made a strong case for adding 'imagination' to the traditional attributes of God and seeing 'imagination' as the clue to the *imago dei*.

He examines the neglected role of imagination in the biblical, ethical and philosophical dimensions, and its significance for worship and, typically, for pastoralia. Most importantly, he is concerned with its epistemological status, its importance for our knowledge of God. This was ground-breaking stuff, still yielding dividends and asking questions long ignored. It was perhaps not surprising that no less an eminence than E. L. Mascall, the great doyen of Anglo-Catholicism should ask John out to dinner to discover more.

The last work I want to mention was published as long ago as 1962 but I have left it to conclude this brief review of John's scholarship because it is my favourite. It is his study *On the Love of God*.<sup>13</sup> Here, he demonstrates the vast complexity of God's Love by examining, with a careful and highly imaginative blend of biblical, theological, philosophical and historical illustrations, the various dimensions, expressed not in the technical language of theology but using contemporary, one might say everyday, concepts. So he expounds God's Love as concern, commitment, communication, community – in a growing crescendo – to Love as Involvement and Love as Identification (perhaps for McIntyre the key to Christology), concluding with the consequence, Love as Response and Responsibility. A note of pastoral concern and sensitivity runs through it all. Here is original theology as well as a theology for preachers if there ever was one. George Newlands pays handsome tribute to it in his own important study<sup>14</sup> of the same topic, and John Hick once described it to me as one of the most remarkable theological books of the generation. I could only heartily agree.

John's scholarship, of course, goes well beyond his public works, and his students will recall with gratitude, among others, his lectures on Religious Language, Science and Religion, Demythologising and so on. We are indebted to Dr Gary Badcock for having received John's permission to publish two completed studies<sup>15</sup> which Badcock found after John's retirement in a drawer in New College. I believe John had at some time done a complete commentary on Pascal's *Pensées*, but I have not seen that. And I eagerly look forward to hearing this afternoon what David Fergusson has discovered.

The range and meticulousness of John's research and writing is all the more remarkable when one remembers the other dimensions of his life. For example the **administrative** dimension, to which I now turn. To call John an administrator would be to do him less than justice for that implies a rather distant, uninvolved number-cruncher or regulator. He was too much what they call today a 'people person' for that. Yet he had a quite extraordinary ability to organise, to lead, to get things



done not by command but by enlisting co-operation. No doubt he saw this as part of his ministry, his service.

He started early. Even as a student, he was involved with the YMCA in North Merchiston and for years was responsible for catering supplies at Sir Stanley Nairn's youth camps. If supplies ever went low or hungry mouths were not satisfied John would have had to take the blame.

He valued enormously his experience in Australia, particularly his six years as Principal of St Andrew's College, Sydney. Edinburgh University was soon to become the beneficiary of this experience in a number of significant ways.

In 1960 he was appointed Warden of the Pollock Halls of Residence and for eleven years lived in the centre of the complex watching over the construction, completion and occupation of that vast expansion of student residences. It was gratifying and entirely appropriate that the central catering and dining block finally constructed should be named the John McIntyre Centre. One would have thought this would been a full-time job, but all the while John was doing more than justice to his appointment as Professor of Divinity at New College, indeed becoming Principal and Dean of Faculty of Divinity in 1968. I'll come to his contribution to New College in a moment but I want to point out that the University, impressed by his administrative and pastoral gifts, in 1973 entrusted him with the immensely onerous role of Acting Principal of the University, a role which he filled so admirably that, following the death of Principal Robson, he was again appointed Acting Principal in 1979 at a particularly difficult time.

As for New College, with his appointment as Principal and Dean in 1968 the College entered a period of expansion and renovation in every direction such as it had not known since its foundation. Academically, the curriculum was vastly expanded by the introduction of Religious Studies, now such an important part of New College, without in any way diminishing the College as one of Scotland's main institutions for the education of ministers of the Church of Scotland and other

churches. (A particularly close relationship was forged with Coates Hall and students training for the ministry of the Scottish Episcopal Church.) Religious Studies was throughout Britain proving to be a popular and expanding area of study and in most universities it was finding its place in the Arts or Social Science Faculties. In Edinburgh, however, thanks largely to John's leadership, it found its natural home in the Faculty of Divinity, to the great advantage, I believe, of students, teachers and, eventually, researchers.

It was not only the curriculum that was undergoing change. The buildings themselves were completely overhauled – thanks to John's persuasive powers with the University and to the success of appeals to graduates world-wide. The whole central block was given a face lift of major proportions and it was with great pride and pleasure that the new New College was opened for business. I should perhaps add that the original plan was much more ambitious, with a new chapel/lecture room in the garden, but this proved at that time a step too far.

There was, I think, a new openness about New College – to new subjects in the curriculum, to students interested in theology and religious studies but not intending the ministry, to students of any denomination or none. The first Roman Catholic students were welcomed at this time and the staff included a Roman Catholic priest and a Greek Orthodox scholar who was later to become a bishop. There were even investigative meetings with St Andrew's College, Drygrange, the Roman Catholic Seminary, to see if their students could not take advantage of what the University, through New College, had to offer. But with the closure of St Andrew's College, that came to naught. The ecumenical feeling, however, remained.

It was not just the University or New College which was the beneficiary of John's leadership and administrative expertise. The Royal Society of Edinburgh, having elected him a member in 1977, made him Vice-President six years later. And Australia, celebrating its bi-centenary looked no further than John to help organise and galvanise the Scottish end. They shrewdly recognised that if John was asked to be involved, something was sure to happen.

In moving now to John's **churchmanship**, I am moving to that dimension which I think, family apart, meant most to him. Apparently it was in his last year at school that he decided for the ministry and as early as his student days he was, as I have indicated, actively involved in youth work. I have no doubt that he was not just respected but loved by the congregations to which he ministered. I was amazed to find when I myself was doing duty at Loch Awe in the Parish of Dalmally how fondly he was remembered a quarter of a century after he had left. Incidentally, the feeling was mutual, as for many years after that John and Jan used to make the trip up to Dalmally for the Annual Show.

I don't think it is going too far to say that there was a pastoral element to all his relationships – whether with students or staff (academic and non-academic), clerical and other colleagues. I know for a fact that he was frequently consulted by fellow ministers with problems of one kind or another, not just theological or ethical. Indeed, when he greeted the Pope at New College it might have been said that there was more than one *pastor pastorum* in evidence. He was Moderator of the General Assembly then, and in his far-flung travels that year he did much more than the conventional bringing of greetings. He managed to convey a personal interest and concern with all whom he was to meet, in a relationship which in many cases lasted long after his moderatorial year came to an end.

In his churchmanship, I suppose you could say that his sympathies were with the Scoto-Catholic movement and with much of the Iona Community's ethos and aims. Liturgical respect was very important to him. He could be fastidious, as with his insistence on the inclusion of the word 'broken' in the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, and I have a strong suspicion that the flimsy theology and literary poverty of many modern liturgies would have incurred his ire.

As for his ecumenism, I have already made mention of his efforts to attract students from other denominations to New College, not least Episcopalian and Roman Catholic. In his theology he was very hostile to denominational text-swapping and sniping and very amenable to mutual investigation of presuppositions and common ground.

And as for the distinctions which came his way, he wore them very lightly. He was surely immensely proud to be appointed Queen's Chaplain, even more so to be appointed Dean of the Order of the Thistle. But I never heard him speak of these things, let alone boast about them, or of the distinction which he surely endowed the office.

I'd like to conclude with a personal note. Apart from having studied under John during my BD years, I was a lecturer in his department for fourteen years, and my debt to him for his encouragement, inspiration and example – to say nothing of his friendship – goes beyond words. When I succeeded him as Principal and Dean, I had a very easy passage, largely because of the groundwork he had done. It is therefore not surprising if this talk has been in danger of becoming something of a panegyric. John was surely not without his faults, but it was not for me to discover them. Some might have found some of his views, his moral views, his loyalty to the Bible and sensitivity to tradition, more conservative than the radical nature of his scholarship might have expected. I would only want to add that his distinctions and achievements in so many spheres should not be allowed to conceal his essential humanity. As I indicated in his lecture style, more generally he had a very subtle but attractive sense of humour, sense of fun even. In the old days of lunch in the Rainy Hall, it was the custom of members of staff to sit at the head of each table. Wherever John sat, such were the width of his interests – theological, cultural, even sporting – that there would invariably be lively discussion, punctuated by peels of laughter: a situation which echoed the hospitality so abundantly and generously offered in the McIntyre home.

That is a good note on which to end. John McIntyre will be long and gratefully remembered for his multi-dimensional contribution and achievements, in the College, in the University, in the church and in the wider world. I believe, though, he would like to be remembered as a Christian human being, who loved his family and was loved by them, who saw his life's aim as to serve; and I know that this aim was so admirably achieved.

- <sup>1</sup> *The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), vii.
- <sup>2</sup> “Frontiers of Meaning” in *University of Edinburgh Journal* (Autumn, 1956): 179-190.
- <sup>3</sup> *St. Anselm and His Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1954).
- <sup>4</sup> *The Christian Doctrine of History* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1957).
- <sup>5</sup> *The Shape of Christology: the Annie Kinkead Warfield lectures of 1965 delivered in Princeton Theological Seminary* (London: SCM Press, 1966).
- <sup>6</sup> *The Shape of Christology*, 99-101.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Shape of Christology*, 102.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Shape of Christology*, 175.
- <sup>9</sup> *The Shape of Soteriology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Death of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992); *The Shape of Pneumatology*, *op. cit.*
- <sup>10</sup> *The Shape of Soteriology*, 129.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Shape of Pneumatology*, 17-18.
- <sup>12</sup> *Faith, Theology and Imagination* (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press, 1987).
- <sup>13</sup> *On the Love of God* (London: Collins, 1962).
- <sup>14</sup> George M. Newlands, *Theology of the Love of God* (London: Collins, 1980).
- <sup>15</sup> *Theology After the Storm: Reflections on the Upheavals in Modern Theology and Culture*, edited, with a critical introduction by Gary D. Badcock (Grand Rapids, Mich. and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1997).