



JOHN KELLY

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John Norman Davidson Kelly

1909–1997

JOHN KELLY'S family background and the course of his education were unusual, and they profoundly influenced both his lifetime of service to the Oxford college that he ruled and his work as one of the leading and most productive patristic scholars of his generation.

He was born at Bridge of Allan, near Stirling. His paternal grandfather, James Kelly, a baker by trade, had worked in Aberdeen where, in 1851, he married Marjory Davidson. Kelly's father, John Davidson Kelly, was born ten years later as the fifth of their eight children. After graduating at Aberdeen University, he became a schoolmaster; in the 1890s, he was headmaster and proprietor of a private school in the Border town of Moffat. There, he became acquainted with Catherine Barnes, the widow of John Barnes, JP, who after a picaresque early career had settled down as squire and gentleman-farmer at Bunker's Hill, in Cumberland.¹ Catherine was anxious to marry the headmaster, but he developed a preference for Ann (or Annie), her attractive daughter, aged 22. In face of family objections, they were quietly married in 1898 at far-distant Weston-super-Mare. Ann was virtually disowned and, more seriously for her and her children's financial future, disinherited by her family. She and her husband moved to Bridge of Allan where he became headmaster and part-proprietor of Stanley House School for Boys. There, their five surviving children were born—John, the fourth of them, on 13 April 1909.

¹ There is much information about the Barnes and Kelly families in F. Levison, *Christian and Jew: The Life of Leon Levison 1881–1936* (Edinburgh, 1989); I am considerably indebted to it. Leon Levison married Ann Barnes's sister Katie.

During the first decade of his life, the school flourished as a small and perhaps somewhat hot-house institution for able boys; but during the First World War it fell into financial difficulties which came to a head when rumours of scarlet fever are said to have precipitated the withdrawal of many of its pupils. As part of the economy measures which followed, John Davidson Kelly ceased to be headmaster and was bought out as co-proprietor on unfavourable terms. Thus, on his father's side, too, Kelly's family was in straitened circumstances. They first moved to a more modest house near Bonnybridge, and ultimately into Glasgow itself. John Davidson Kelly never worked full-time again but devoted himself to the education at home of his young family. He was remembered as a round-faced man with a handlebar moustache; his fur coat and spats, together with the cigar in his hand, gave him an air of bravado that masked his anxieties for his family; one senses a model here for the more flamboyant side of Kelly's later public personality. Kelly himself remembered his father as 'a very tough, vigorous man, a man of a certain impetuosity of character'. On the other hand, it was to his father's personal tuition that Kelly initially owed his dedication to academic excellence and to hard work.

In return for his instruction, Kelly's father expected his children to follow careers for which he individually destined them: John was to graduate at Glasgow University, to proceed by means of a Snell Exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford, and thence to enter the Indian Civil Service. In the event, his father's death in October 1928 left him free to choose his own future course. He had duly gone to Glasgow University in 1925 aged 16, and he graduated there with first-class honours in classics. So far, his education may seem more conducive to intellectual precocity than to rounded personal development; nevertheless, while at Glasgow Kelly vied with another classicist, Gilbert Highet, in a sentimental attraction to their contemporary, Helen Macnicie, the future novelist, who eventually married Highet. The attraction was an episode in a long rivalry. A year Kelly's senior, Highet was compelled by illness to delay his finals; in 1929, he won the Snell award with Kelly as *proxime accessit*. It was the sole academic setback in Kelly's career. Moreover, since Kelly's father had recently died and there were others in the family to educate, Oxford now seemed to be ruled out by shortage of money. But one of Kelly's Glasgow professors suggested that he try for an open scholarship at The Queen's College; he paid his way there by means of it and the succession of prizes that he won, sometimes in competition with Highet. It was a character-building experience which

goes far to account for the self-reliance and self-sufficiency that later always characterised him.

First-class honours followed in classical moderations, greats, and theology; Kelly was also elected senior taberdar and president of the junior common room at Queen's. He discarded a Scottish accent and overcame a stammer, adopting the legendary manner of speech of his later years which, not at all to his displeasure, lent itself readily to imitation by his friends. A presbyterian when he came to Oxford, he was confirmed in the Church of England. He was influenced in this by the chaplain of Queen's, E. C. Ratcliff, the liturgical scholar; it was to Ratcliff that Kelly owed his lasting understanding that Christian doctrine should not be studied apart from the forms of worship in each age and from the current belief and practice of ordinary Christians. Kelly went on to train for the ministry at St Stephen's House, Oxford, where the principal, G. A. Michell, to whom Kelly acknowledged a lasting indebtedness, was also a liturgical expert.

Kelly was made deacon in 1934 to serve in the parish of St Lawrence, Northampton, where he quickly won a golden reputation for exceptionally assiduous house-to-house visiting. But within months he was invited by A. B. Emden to return to Oxford as chaplain of St Edmund Hall; upon his departure Kelly explained to the parish that 'I am quite sure that it is in the sphere of scholarship that I shall do my best work as a minister of the church.' In 1935, after ordination as priest, he joined the Hall to which he devoted the rest of his working life; after two years Emden made him his vice-principal.

Kelly was also a tutor in theology and philosophy; one of his most distinguished theology pupils later wrote that 'Tutorials with him were the most stimulating events in packed Oxford weeks, and one looked forward to them with excitement and dread. Inaccuracies were treated as an offence against the spirit of truth.' The war years and their aftermath brought an increased burden of teaching and administration. During the war, Kelly was eager to serve as a chaplain to the armed forces in which capacity he would have excelled; but Emden's own commitments, which included being commanding officer of the University Naval Division, left him unprepared to release him, and he was always just within the reserved age. Amongst other wartime activities, Kelly did part-time work for Chatham House which enlisted his linguistic skills to read and to digest for the Foreign Office a large part of the Latin American press; he also helped to organise leave courses at Oxford for servicemen from overseas.

For St Edmund Hall, the year 1937 had marked the beginning of the twenty-year process by which it secured complete independence from Queen's College. While promoting the expansion and freedom of the Hall, Emden as principal was resolutely determined to maintain the aularian status which had marked it since the thirteenth century: as a lover of ancient institutions he wished to preserve it as the last of the medieval halls, not to transform it into the latest of the colleges; moreover, his own temperament favoured benevolent principalian autocracy. As vice-principal, Kelly appreciated that incorporation as a college had become inevitable if fellows and tutors of sufficient ability were to be recruited and retained. While remaining loyal to Emden, Kelly skilfully ensured that the way to incorporation remained open. When, in 1951, ill-health that was perhaps brought on by the ultimate impracticability of his vision for the Hall led to Emden's early retirement, Kelly was universally regarded as his natural successor. Until his own retirement in 1979, he gave himself indefatigably as principal to promoting the Hall's development and well-being.

As principal, Kelly's first major concern was the complex one of making St Edmund Hall a college; it was realised in 1958 when the Duke of Edinburgh presented a royal charter of incorporation. Expansion continued apace; Kelly's principalship saw a more than threefold expansion in the number of senior and junior members including the establishment of a middle common room for graduates, and also in the buildings of the Hall. The high point of expansion came in 1970, which saw the opening of extensive new buildings centring upon the Wolfson Dining Hall as well as of the neighbouring, by now redundant parish church of St Peter-in-the-East as an undergraduate library; both developments were made possible by Kelly's masterly negotiating skills. At the end of his principalship, Kelly took the necessary steps to allow the admission of women to the Hall. Although the first women came only after his retirement, it was a development that he welcomed; as with the achievement of collegiate status, he perceived that its time had come. (By a like token, in the church he accepted the ordination of women to the priesthood, to which he saw no theological objection.)

The new constitution of the Hall and the expansion of its fellowship eased his burden of administration; in mid-term, he remarked that, whereas Emden left the principalship a job and a half, he had made it half a job. But the self-reliance engendered by the unusual circumstances of his family and early education led Kelly to cultivate the benevolent and all-embracing paternalism of an old-style aularian

principal. Before all else he was an undergraduates' principal. His exceptional memory enabled him to know by name and subject virtually every one of the enlarged student body. He took an insatiable interest in changing undergraduate ideas and mores, and had no inhibitions in discussing them. A superb and witty conversationalist in all contexts of social life, he was not only the eloquent talker whose words became legendary but also a ready and sympathetic listener; he had a rare gift of putting the young at their ease, whether in tutorials or in casual conversation, so that they voiced and thus developed their own perceptions and enthusiasms. His ability to identify uncensoriously with all kinds of people had its debit side: to young and also to old, he could himself seem to lack firmness and consistency, even, to a degree, integrity. But it won him enduring friendships that were beneficial and life-enhancing to both sides. His especial concern for the sporting success of the Hall was partly an attempt to win public attention for a new and hitherto little-known society. But, again, his own early life was probably significant; there was self-compensation for having been deprived of normal schoolboy sporting activities (at the Hall he became until the age of 60, when his doctor called a halt, of an almost invincible standard at squash and a keen lawn tennis player); it was compounded by his being denied the national service which was for long the experience of most undergraduates as well as dons. Likewise, however, he no less warmly encouraged and supported the stage. He was himself a discerning collector and commissioner of works of art; he left a selection of his pictures by will to the Bodleian Library to sell for its benefit. The salutary result of Kelly's style as college principal, which as in all that he did was that of the bravura performer rather than of the team player, was to generate an exceptionally strong college spirit which stood the Hall in good stead to weather the student disaffections of the early 1970s.

In the affairs of the university he played relatively little part. When, in 1966, the vice-chancellorship came to him by the then prevailing convention of seniority among heads of house, an untimely visitation of jaundice contracted in Turkey enforced his almost immediate resignation; thereafter he never altogether recovered his physical energy.

In the theology faculty he had a prominent place which he retained after becoming principal. He was successively Speaker's Lecturer in Biblical Studies (1945–8) and University Lecturer in Patristic Studies (1948–76). In Oxford, the post-war decades were a thriving period in patristics. Besides Kelly, those in post included H. J. Carpenter, F. L. Cross, G. W. H. Lampe, and G. C. Stead; in 1959, H. Chadwick came

over from Cambridge. There was also the beginning of Cross's International Conferences of Patristic Studies; in 1955, Kelly chaired the committee of the second of them. He lectured and began to publish in a stimulating academic environment.

Kelly stood by his prediction to the good folk of Northampton that his best work would be done in the sphere of scholarship. When Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury offered him the senior chaplainship at Lambeth Palace that was usually the first step to major preferment and the episcopate, he declined, recognising that he could not easily have worked with Fisher. Under the more congenial Michael Ramsey, he was from 1964 to 1968 chairman of the Archbishop's Commission on Roman Catholic Relations; in 1966, he accompanied Ramsey to Rome for his historic visit to Pope Paul VI. In 1970, he wrote the archbishop's Lent book, *Aspects of the Passion*, in which he gave the fullest exposition of his own deepest religious convictions. His most enduring commitment outside Oxford was to Chichester Cathedral. In 1948, Bishop George Bell, sure as ever in his identification of future promise, appointed him a canon with the prebendal stall of Wightring (exchanged in 1964 for that of Highleigh). The association lasted until 1993; Kelly valued it in all its aspects, particularly musical and social. His duties as canon-theologian included giving such lectures as those of 1952 which were published under the title *What is Catholicism?* Uniquely among Kelly's writings, they were sharply controversial in tone. Declaring the doctrine of the church to be the crucial theological issue of the twentieth century, he offered an energetic vindication of the Church of England as the authentic Catholic Church of the country. As always, he acknowledged that, over the centuries, Rome 'had borne a wonderfully uncompromising and consistent witness to the essential truths of our religion'. But he challenged papal claims to infallibility as fragile and even preposterous, while its attitude to the validity of Anglican orders 'seems to betoken a cynically frivolous disregard for truth'. Kelly made a trenchant restatement and defence of the classic Anglican position about authority. He thus adumbrated the standpoint that he would adopt on the Archbishop's Commission.

Kelly's first book, *Early Christian Creeds*, appeared a year before his election as principal of St Edmund Hall; his others punctuated his principalship and his long retirement. One may well wonder how while principal he made time and found energy for regular study and writing. The answer lies partly in the complexities of his personality and partly in his self-discipline. He was a complex of opposites.

He had a gregarious and even flamboyant public *persona* which found expression, for example, in his choice of motor cars. His colleagues were alarmed by his rapid progression upon learning to drive from second-hand Morris Minor to powerful Jaguar. But it made possible holidays in which, with his nephews or favoured undergraduates, he explored the lands of the Eastern Mediterranean. Hence the phenomenal knowledge of topography and evocation of place that enhanced the scholarship of his later books. But he also needed solitude. When writing his *Jerome*, he spent much time at Bethlehem on his own. At Oxford, he chatted endlessly with undergraduates in the quadrangle; dinner was a time to indulge his love of food, wine (not beer or spirits), and conversation. But he habitually lunched frugally and alone; his afternoon walk was an inviolable occasion for solitary meditation. So, too, certain hours of the day were normally reserved for the Bodleian and others for his own study, and the hours increased during the vacation. He ordered his life with the discipline of a monk.

Over the last third of his life, Kelly seemed to experience a change of outlook which, to the best of the present writer's knowledge, he never fully articulated unless privately in the pages of the diary that he sedulously kept, but which is tacitly apparent in his later writings. Partly through the candour of his conversations with succeeding generations of young people, he was increasingly preoccupied with how human beliefs and mores are coloured, or even determined, by the inner workings of the psyche, not least by sexuality; hence, in part, his fascination with Jerome. He found it hard to come to terms with declining powers and, above all, with the loss of daily personal contacts with the young which he had enjoyed while principal of the Hall.

There were signs of an inner malaise, and even sadness, which had an outward symbol in his now solitary and sedentary holidays, always in Florence and Athens. Yet, to the end of his life, a well thumbed office book by his study chair silently testified to his continuance in the daily duty of a priest, and he did not allow physical disability to bring to an end his attendance at the Sunday eucharist in St Mary Magdalen's church. Nor did he lose his underlying zest for life, which was especially apparent in his continuing part in the formal and informal activities of St Edmund Hall. Until 1989, he delighted to serve as its dean of degrees, which gave scope for his aplomb in academic ceremony; he wrote to the college that 'The office of Dean of Degrees, so long as I can stumble forward erect on the floor of the Sheldonian, is a wholly welcome diversion.' In the same year, he published an attractive and

thoroughly researched account of St Edmund Hall's seven centuries of history.

The cast of Kelly's mind as a scholar was epitomised with almost uncanny accuracy, even before he sat greats, by his philosophy tutor at Queen's, O. S. (later Lord) Franks, in a letter to A. B. Emden, who had evidently already 'talent-spotted' him:²

He is probably a historian rather than a philosopher. . . . I have myself taught Mr Kelly philosophy during the past two years, and though his mind is probably less suited to the more abstract speculations of philosophy than to other subjects, Mr Kelly has made a great impression of ability and clarity and power upon me. I think he is probably the ablest man I have had the fortune to teach in the last five years, though not the best specialist in Philosophy.

Kelly did not possess creative originality as a thinker after anything like the model of his friend and contemporary Austin Farrer, nor had he a capacity for making new departures in systematic or speculative theology. His forte was the exploration and exposition of the thought and activities of the towering personalities of the past. This is not to say that his work was unoriginal. He had a sure touch in searching out evidence and in placing a considered and fresh interpretation upon it. In all that he wrote, in whatever genre, his work was in the best sense authoritative: it carried conviction by its intrinsic qualities of perception and judgement.

Kelly's books fall into three main groups. The first, which already won him international repute as a scholar, was concerned with the doctrinal development of Christianity from apostolic times especially up to the Council of Chalcedon (451). His *Early Christian Creeds* surveyed a subject to which, in the inter-war years, continental scholars had devoted much attention, although in England little account had been taken of their work. Kelly was thoroughly conversant with it and critical of many of its conclusions. He was, therefore, uniquely equipped to explore the development of the historical texts of the creeds and to consider at each stage of this development the theology that they expressed.

As regards the earliest period, Kelly successfully rebutted the thesis of O. Cullmann that the original pattern of Christian profession was almost exclusively of a Christological kind. While such a pattern pre-

² The probable link is H. H. Williams, Bishop of Carlisle, who confirmed Kelly in Queen's College chapel; he was a sometime principal of St Edmund Hall and a friend of Emden.

dominated in the apostolic church, there developed one-, two-, and three-membered confessions of faith which might refer also to the Father or the Holy Spirit; a variety of parallel and mutually independent formulations of the Christian kerygma or proclamation flourished side by side. The second-century 'rule of faith' was not merely foreshadowed in the church of the apostolic age but the modes of expressing it, various as they were, developed from elements already present in scripture. Kelly turned decisively away from the views of older scholars like A. von Harnack who set a second-century time of incipient formalism and institutionalism in contrast with a Spirit-directed, more spontaneous New Testament age.

The next problem to arise was how and when the manifold formulations of the earliest period gave way at the van of development to the precisely worded, official creeds of the fourth century. Kelly's cogent discussion of it illustrates several of the distinctive features of his work. His historical sense warned against approaching the evidence with unwarrantable assumptions, such as that each church had a single official creed from as far back in time as the early second century. He insisted upon the avoidance of anachronism, such as that of supposing that there may have been a *disciplina arcani* that served to conceal the evidence for such creeds at a premature stage before the third century; only then did there begin the growth of a catechumenate, together with the handing over (*redditio*) of the creed, as part of the immediate preparation for baptism. Moreover, scholars should not give excessive weight to the anti-heretical intention of clauses in the creeds, important though this may have been; as the church actually lived, such an intention was usually less significant than the positive setting forth and passing on to everyday Christians of God's saving work in Christ. Kelly's early Oxford mentors left him with a sense of the value of liturgical evidence in its own right, as not only a quarry for extracting credal material but as also providing a context of what happened at a given time and place. Thus considered, until the fourth century credal formulas were important in an interrogatory form put to candidates for baptism and accepted by them before they entered the font, not as a declaratory statement made by the candidates themselves. Kelly convincingly argued that the interrogatory form of the creed based on the threefold Name was primary; only gradually did the declaratory creed emerge alongside it as a local profession of faith.

Of such creeds, one of the earliest and most important was the Old Roman Creed (R). Against F. J. Badcock, Kelly vindicated the view that

its text is recoverable from the writings of Rufinus of Aquileia and Marcellus of Ancyra. He held that the Greek version probably had a slight priority in time over the Latin. Considering it to be the ancient Roman baptismal creed, Kelly epitomised it as 'nothing more or less than a compendium of popular theology, all the more fascinating to us because we can still discern, crystallised in its clauses, the faith and hope of the primitive church'. Such an assessment followed from its liturgical setting; the key to understanding it was to regard it as an expression of the ancient faith in a new form which recent changes in the pattern of Christian initiation had brought about.

With the Council of Nicaea (325), a new chapter opened in the history of creeds. Hitherto, although creeds were intended to enshrine the universal faith, they had been local in character and predominantly liturgical in context. The introduction of synodal or conciliar creeds had the prime motive of prescribing orthodox doctrine for Christians everywhere rather than of epitomising the faith of a local church. Kelly therefore exhibited their emergence as a great revolution, though he characteristically added that, like most historical transitions, it was not unforeshadowed. Still, the ecumenical character of the Council of Nicaea and the recognition of the church within the empire made sure that its creed with the attached anathemas (N) would be a novelty in that its primary purpose was the testing of orthodoxy; N thus complemented rather than replaced older credal forms. As regards its text, Kelly rejected the contention of F. J. A. Hort and A. E. Burn, as well as (for most of his life) Harnack, that N was a recasting with anti-Arian additions of the baptismal creed of Eusebius of Caesarea; he was left with what he admitted to be the 'meagre' conclusion that it was drafted from some baptismal creed of Syro-Palestinian provenance into which Nicene keywords were rather awkwardly interpolated. In his exposition of N, Kelly dwelt particularly upon the ambiguity of the keyword *homoousion*.

In modern usage, the name 'Nicene Creed' has become associated, not with N, but with the formula often, if misleadingly, called the 'Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed' (C); made familiar by recitation at the eucharist, it is declared by Kelly to be 'of all existing creeds . . . the only one for which ecumenicity, or universal acceptance, can be plausibly claimed'. The hybrid title arose from the widespread but historically insecure supposition that it represents N as revised and enlarged in 381 by the Council of Constantinople. But the first clear mention of C comes only at the Council of Chalcedon; most modern

scholars, notably Hort and Harnack, therefore rejected the view that it was composed or promulgated at the council of 381; N and C must be regarded as entirely different formulas. In mitigation of this contrast, Kelly's major contribution to the debate was to point out that, up to 451, phrases like 'the Nicene faith' might refer not only to N but also to any creed embodying the essential Nicene clauses. He suggested that C had as its framework a local baptismal confession of the 370s from Syria or Palestine which the Council of Constantinople adopted and adapted as a statement of the Nicene faith including the *homoousion*. It thus set C on its way to becoming the sole baptismal confession of the East and the universal eucharistic creed of Christendom.

Kelly turned finally to the exclusively Western Apostles' Creed, first presenting the *textus receptus* (T) which, although in essence a variant of R, reflected a wider range of applications, especially liturgical and confessional. The earliest attestation of T is as late as in the writings of the early eighth-century Pirminius, founder and first abbot of Reichenau. Although it came into being as one among many variants of the ancient baptismal confession of the Roman church, its redaction was not Roman; Kelly argued for a Hispano-Gallic milieu. Its dissemination seems to have owed much to Charlemagne's desire for liturgical uniformity, and from the early ninth century it enjoyed a virtual monopoly as the baptismal creed of Western Europe. By the eleventh century it was adopted at Rome, perhaps as a result of the general liturgical subjection at this time of Rome to German influences. If so, as one reviewer commented, 'in its last stages as at the beginning, the history of the creed in the West is directed by the general stream of liturgical development'. It is not the least important feature of Kelly's achievement that he made this clear. His historical survey of the creeds still has an authoritative status. Especially in the third edition of his book he made modifications, mainly in his two chapters on C, in the light of discussions that he stimulated. But only recently have there been signs of more radical challenge and of a reopening of the debate by German scholars.

Kelly also published, in the series *Ancient Christian Writers*, a translation of Rufinus's *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed* which had been one of his key sources and which was also a text by which new students made their entrée into the thought of the early church. Written for recent converts and others undergoing elementary instruction, it shed light upon the pastoral life of the church and so upon the everyday background against which Kelly wished to set creeds like R and,

ultimately, T. His full and helpful annotation, with abundant reference to biblical and patristic ideas, well served a student readership.

An invitation to deliver the Paddock Lectures for 1963 at the General Theological Seminary, New York, gave Kelly an opportunity of complementing his work on the early creeds by a comprehensive discussion of the 'Athanasian Creed' (*Quicumque Vult*); it was the first full-dress treatment since that of the German Jesuit H. Brewer in 1909. Dismissing C. H. Turner's oft-quoted assertion that 'it is, in fact, not so much a creed as a hymn', Kelly held that it was designed to be a summary of orthodox teaching about the Trinity and Incarnation for instructional purposes which sought to avoid technicalities and controversial formulas; its inclusion in psalters and its widespread liturgical use were a later and secondary development. However, Kelly's masterly examination of its rhythmic prose, the quality of which virtually fore-ordained its use as a canticle, shed fresh light upon its possible date-range and authorship. The predominance of a rhythm based upon stress-accent, together with the survival of elements based upon quantity, firmly pointed to a date between the mid-fourth and mid-sixth centuries. The structure and rhythm, and the closely knit texture and consistent tone, pointed strongly to its authorship, at least in its final form, by a single person and at a single time. Kelly dismissed Brewer's hypothesis that St Ambrose (died 397) might be its author, primarily because of the anti-Nestorian concern that Kelly identified. Instead, the form, vocabulary and theological ideas of the *Quicumque* pointed to composition in south Gaul, and to an association with the school of Lérins. But no ascription to a particular author was possible, for although Caesarius of Arles (monk of Lérins and then Bishop of Arles, 502–42) was the first author certainly to know it there were differences of thought and temper; although the author was probably of Caesarius's milieu and perhaps worked under his direction. As regards the 'damnatory' clauses of the *Quicumque*, Kelly held that the outlook of the time precluded an anachronistic reading into them of mitigating interpretations. Nevertheless, he argued for a lasting place nowadays for the *Quicumque* as an expression of belief if not for use as a regular liturgical form because of its affirmation of faith as not only intellectual assent but also as *worshipping* (his italics) the divine Trinity; because of its insistence upon right decision in matters of fundamental belief; and because of its unequalled mastery in setting out incisively and with majestic clarity the New Testament affirmation of the work of God in Christ. Kelly was delighted when, at the end of his concluding lecture,

the whole company rose to its feet and sang the Athanasian Creed; he recalled that this must have been an almost unique event since the reorganisation of the American church after the War of Independence.

Like Kelly's studies of the creeds, his *Early Christian Doctrines* grew from lectures to largely undergraduate audiences. In writing it, his declared intention was 'the modest one of providing students, and others who may be interested, with an outline account of theological development in the Church of the fathers'. Kelly's concern was thus with doctrines, in the plural, as in fact held and taught at different times and places by various authors who stood in distinctive traditions; it was not with dogma as a systematic body of teaching which should rightly be adopted in accordance with ancient or modern requirements of belief. The emphasis was upon development as it may be observed historically. A propos of the doctrine of the Trinity, Kelly observed that 'it was out of the raw material . . . provided by the preaching, worshipping Church that theologians had to construct their more sophisticated accounts of the Christian doctrine of the Godhead'. It was essential to avoid the anachronistic reading back of the developed formulations of later times; nor must the thoughts of Christian writers be considered apart from the contemporary actuality of Christian churches as they worshipped and prayed or from the teaching *magisterium* as currently exercised.

To show how doctrines developed, Kelly divided his book into two principal sections, one concerned with pre-Nicene theology and the other with the period from Nicaea to Chalcedon. The gradual elaboration of doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation necessarily looms large; but, consistently with the subject-matter of the creeds, proper attention is given to such topics as nature and grace, the redemption, the church and sacraments, and the last things. To a large extent, ancient authors are allowed to speak for themselves; there are full footnote references to their writings but very few to modern scholars. Nevertheless, the book is far from being merely expository. Where there are difficulties, Kelly repeatedly offers succinct and balanced discussions which embody his own conclusions about them. Some examples are his exploration of the different uses of the word *homoousion* which are to be observed for long after the Council of Nicaea, his consideration of whether St Athanasius's Christology underwent development in the early 360s to accommodate the human soul of the incarnate Christ, and his cautious defence of the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia against the strictures of Cyril of Alexandria. Some, indeed, have found *Early*

Christian Doctrines almost too good a book for the everyday purposes of theological education. The mastery and orderliness of its construction belie the many gaps in the evidence and the uncertainties in its interpretation which it is well for those embarking upon the early history of Christian doctrine to appreciate and remember.³ Some mature scholars have found it lacking in attention to the critical approach of such authorities as Harnack and F. Loofs. Nevertheless, the book's comprehensiveness, judiciousness, and objectivity have won it a lasting place as a manual of the subject amongst Christians of all traditions; it has been translated into several languages, including Polish and Japanese.

The second group of Kelly's works comprises commentaries on books of the New Testament. In a sense, they were a diversion of his attention from the patristic field; he had deliberately set the starting point of his *Early Christian Doctrines* after the New Testament period. Yet concern with it was a natural next step. Kelly had argued that the credal formulas of the patristic age were deeply rooted in the New Testament. He had also repeatedly denied any contrast or discontinuity between 'creative' and 'traditional' stages in the early development of Christian doctrine, which from the very start claimed the sanction of tradition; nor was there a radical shift in time from charismatic to institutional forms of church order and worship, or from preaching to sacramentalism. Such a view called for further testing in writings of the New Testament period. Moreover, the conventions of Black's New Testament Commentaries, which allowed authors to offer their own translations of the Greek original, made for the integration of text and exposition to the best advantage, and gave scope to Kelly's linguistic and analytical skills as means to investigate the apostolic age.

In matters of date and authorship, he tended to be conservative. He argued powerfully for the ascription of the Pastoral Epistles (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus) in their entirety to St Paul, and for their having been written after his imprisonment at Rome as recorded in Acts 28. They reflect a further period of missionary activity which ended in a second and final imprisonment at Rome, datable to either 63 or 65/6. 1 Timothy and Titus are envisaged as letters written in the interim, the former from Macedonia, to Paul's apostolic delegates in the somewhat differing churches of Ephesus and Crete; 2 Timothy came later during the second imprisonment. Kelly held that arguments for later, non-Pauline

³ See esp. the penetrating review by K. J. Woollcombe in *Theology*, 62 (1959), 266–71.

authorship excite surprise that the writer made so unconvincing a job in constructing from Paul's known life a suitable framework, while there is no implausibility in that which Kelly postulated. Critics have, however, pointed out that a second imprisonment remains conjectural. More seriously, the peculiarities of language and teaching in the Pastoral Epistles compelled Kelly throughout to allow much liberty to Paul's secretaries; one reviewer, C. K. Barrett, pertinently and simply commented that 'the secretary is given too much rope'. Kelly himself finally conceded that, as regards authorship, 'the most convinced adherent of either view must, if he is open-minded, admit the strength of the opposite case'; for all the skill of Kelly's case for Pauline authorship, the question remains, and probably will always remain, open. The trend of recent discussion has, on the whole, been against it.

When turning to 1 and 2 Peter and to Jude, Kelly was equally confident of the literary unity of each of these three books, but he was not so decisive about authorship. He favoured an early date for 1 Peter—perhaps soon after 64; he did not exclude pseudonymity but argued that the earlier the epistle was to be dated the more difficult it became to deny some connection, indirect or direct, with the apostle Peter. Like most scholars, he concluded that Jude predates 2 Peter with which it has material in common. The attribution to Jude may well be pseudonymous, the reference being probably to the apostle Jude 'of James' (Luke 6:16). He inclined to a date in the last two decades of the first century. He concurred with the generally held view that 2 Peter is pseudonymous; his preference for a date between 100 and 110 would seem to many somewhat early. The important upshot is that, as Kelly would date them, the six books upon which he provided commentaries supply evidence for the early church in the 60s and then a generation or so later, thus showing developments in face of the practical issues of the time. The persecutions envisaged in 1 Peter seem to have been in character less official and general than private and local, having their origin in the hostility of the surrounding population rather than of the Roman authorities. The false doctrines to which the other books refer combined Jewish and Gentile elements which must not be anachronistically understood in terms of second-century Gnostic and Marcionite systems of thought. The main concern of the authors was with simpler matters of faith and morals. Kelly succeeded in providing translations and commentaries which by universal consent are a pleasure to read. Drawing deeply but unobtrusively upon his classical and patristic learning, they succeed in being at once significant contributions to New

Testament scholarship and expositions readily accessible to the general reader.

The third group of Kelly's academic publications had as its high points his lives of Jerome and John Chrysostom; its biographical character marked a new departure in his writing. He did, indeed, continue to show his mastery of the thought and practice of the early Christian church, but he was now able to exploit more than before his exceptional knowledge of the secular history and institutions of the later Roman empire in both West and East. Above all, he became centrally concerned with individual human beings, with especial regard to how their lives and beliefs are shaped by the deep inner workings of their personalities and by the impact of their everyday environment. The changed outlook of his later years was apparent. The objectivity that had always characterised his approach to Christian doctrine now became nearer to detachment. The exploration of beliefs that he shared and felt deeply gave way to the acute observation of human and historical phenomena. The darker side of human nature was never far from Kelly's purview, and he made much of Jerome's strong, and far from well sublimated, sexuality. But he also duly recognised how men of cultivation and powerful personality like Jerome and John Chrysostom rose to the heights of what was attainable in their age and generation.

Given this penetration and balance, his achievement was to make two near-contemporaries—Jerome as a scholar and controversialist shaped by the Latin West and John Chrysostom as a preacher and bishop of the Greek East—readily accessible alike to an academic and to a general modern readership. The need for studies, especially in the English language, was great; by English-language authors there was no comprehensive study of Jerome and there had been none of John Chrysostom since that of W. R. W. Stephens in 1880. As Kelly presented these hitherto seemingly unprepossessing if not repellent figures, they showed in their different ways and environments how Christians responded to the problems confronting them in the post-Constantinian age. By their lifetimes, Christianity had become inextricably part of the temporal order, while the church had absorbed much of the culture and ethos of late-Roman secular society. On the spiritual level, what was to happen to the Christian aspiration for perfection as the church became increasingly involved in the everyday affairs of the world? Morally, a preoccupation, if not an obsession, with chastity signalled an attempt to vindicate the otherness of Christianity. Socially, at Antioch and still more when he became a

bishop in the capital and court at Constantinople, a major factor in the tragic drama of John Chrysostom's life as Kelly unfolded it was the scandalous juxtaposition of the indigent poor and the ruling rich, each of whom in discordant ways represented Christ in a supposedly Christian empire. In scholarship, Jerome had to wrestle with the interpenetration of Christian and classical culture; his insistence on the *Hebraica veritas* as against the supposed superiority of the Greek versions of the Old Testament for which even Augustine of Hippo contended was, in part, a vindication of biblical revelation over the culture of the Hellenistic world; yet in his contribution to the Vulgate translation of the Bible he created a Latin style which placed the Latin language at the disposal of later Christian authors and eventually won Erasmus's admiration. Kelly's sense of the complex interplay of the sacred and the secular, together with his insight into human personality, resulted in two biographies which were as readily accessible as those written about modern figures. Kelly's studies of Jerome and John Chrysostom are free from the artificiality and stereotyping of hagiography, yet there is no devaluation, still less debunking; although Kelly was left with 'an unresolved enigma about the real Jerome' and found most of John Chrysostom's letters stereotyped and repetitive of well-worn topics, they both emerge as credible human figures and as mirrors of their time.

Few indeed of the readers of Kelly's study of John Chrysostom, with its assured range and command, would divine that, when it was completed and published, its author was 86 years old. But in fact, for some years he had laid it aside, fearing that he was too old to control the composition of so large a book. Instead, he had embarked on a biographical enterprise that was even more ambitiously conceived but which could be implemented by limited stages—his *Oxford Dictionary of Popes*. From St Peter to John Paul II, each pope and anti-pope (with an appendix on the legendary Pope Joan) was the subject of a succinct but trenchant and comprehensive article in which Kelly included, wherever possible, details of family background and pre-papal career as well as of activities while in the papal office. Kelly's interest in the papacy stemmed from the 1930s, when his first research, into the problem of the slow emergence of one-man episcopacy at Rome, had been undertaken during a period of study in Berlin under Hans Lietzmann. The fruits of Kelly's life-long interest in the papacy were increased by his extraordinarily comprehensive historical and cultural reading. Since the *Dictionary* is chronologically arranged, it

provides not only a Who's Who of pontiffs but, in effect, a one-volume history of the papacy itself in which each Christian century is covered with unfailing sureness of touch. Kelly combined a profound respect for the authority and continuity of the papal office, not least as apparent in recent pontificates from John XXIII to John Paul II, with a keen awareness of the problems and even objections that are raised in history and in practice by the evolution and exercise of papalism. But, in the *Dictionary*, his approach was scrupulously fair and detached; the result is a book which has been acclaimed by those of all religious loyalties and of none, and which is an indispensable reference-book for scholars and a delightful companion for the general reader who wishes to browse. Until the last weeks of his life, Kelly was at work on a companion dictionary of archbishops of Canterbury; he prepared articles on many of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval archbishops.

Kelly, who died peacefully in Oxford on 31 March 1997, received his due measure of honours, including fellowship of the British Academy in 1965. He never married, but in his warm and reciprocated affection for his brothers and sisters and in due course for his nephews and their wives and children, he was a family man. After he died, a relative wrote of him that 'He was, it seems to me, a deeply private man, but also one of the most loveable and impressive I have known.' Those who had the privilege of knowing him in whatever connection would overwhelmingly agree.

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Note. I am indebted for information to members of Kelly's family, especially to Norman and Daphne Davidson Kelly and to John McCracken, and for other help and advice as regards his publications and life in Oxford to Reginald Alton, John Kaye, John McManners, Dennis Nineham, Maurice Wiles, and Hugh Wybrew. Robin Baird-Smith, formerly of Gerald Duckworth and Company Limited, kindly made available photocopies of book reviews.

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