

APPENDIX 1

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Date.....5th August 2015.....

Abstract:

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the further development of a Christian theology of laughter, and to present a little-discussed aspect of laughter as a 'word against death'. The methodology employed is that of historical theology. In seeking to further develop a Christian theology of laughter, the thesis considers the initial ground-breaking work in this field of theological research suggested by Richard Cote in *Holy Mirth: A Theology of Laughter* (1986), together with that of Karl-Josef Kuschel in *Laughter: A Theological Reflection* (1994) concerning the positive aspects of laughter and humour, together with the more recent work of Jacqueline Bussie on that negative laughter which is devoid of either humour or comedy, which she entitled *The Laughter of the Oppressed* (2007). Held in tandem and further developed, I argue this provides us with a Christian theology of laughter with a more balanced approach to use as a tool for further theological research.

The thesis includes a critical review of how laughter is treated in the Bible, together with a consideration of how early Christian Gnostic texts (including material from the Nag Hammadi Library discovered in 1945) contribute additional evidence of Christian approaches to laughter. With these historical foundational texts in place, further treatment of how laughter has been viewed in the Christian tradition is critically considered, from its negative condemnation by various early Church theologians and in monastic circles, to its persistence during the Medieval period in both carnival and Church feasts, through to its gradual rehabilitation, particularly during the Renaissance and Reformation periods, and then through the period of the enlightenment into the modern and post-modern eras.

Because the theme of laughter is broad and many-hued in its nature, and because scholarly discussion of Christian laughter has not yet produced a 'critical mass' for providing a recognisable Christian theology of laughter, a preliminary discussion of how laughter and comedy need to be distinguished, and a survey of key contributors to the debate, forms an introduction to this thesis, further developed in a literature review. The specific nature of Christian laughter as it may be used in several contexts to challenge the view of death has the last word, particularly in its own resurrection hope in providing the 'last laugh' against death, is a distinct lens through which Christian laughter is focused in this thesis, making a distinct contribution to a theology of laughter.

