

there are traditions in the Christian Church which see it meaningful to include the dead in remembrance and prayer in a way which is thought to enrich the spiritual life of the living. In evolutionary biology, the dead have no purpose except in terms of the legacy of genes. In Christian understanding, the dying and the dead form part of the community of faith which generates hope in the kingdom and the *eschaton*.

4.70 Another telling example of how much further our Christian hope extends is given in this extract. An explorer from Oxford has a theological conversation with his indigenous guide:

'At Kapit, I reach the fifth grade. We taught to be Christian at school. The old men they think like that. They believe in the spirits. Me and Inghai, sometimes they think they right, sometimes we laugh at them. What about you, Redmon? Do you believe it?'

'No, I don't. But I don't believe in Christianity, either. I think that when we die, we rot. And that's the end of it.'

'Then I very sorryes for you,' said Leon, looking immeasurably sad, getting up and collecting his things. 'I tired, I sleep now.'⁴⁴

4.71 In this story, Leon feels that Redmond is deeply lacking a part of his essential self, and regrets Redmond's reductionist view of his ultimate destiny. It is this basic understanding that we are more than the sum of our parts that makes sense of the Christian conviction that religious faith is more than the influence of 'memes'. In this sense, then, we are able to refute the reductionist view and seek to assert that the experience of the life scientists feeds into, rather than destroys, our view of the world.

4.72 There is one further problem which Christians must address, both from the point of view of reductionism and of modern technology. In the field of enquiry known as Strong AI (Artificial Intelligence), the study of the capabilities of computers, human beings are not an end point in evolution, but a means to the equipping of supercomputers. This kind of suggestion again moves away from the centrality of humans in the narrative of existence. In *The Dragons of Eden*,⁴⁵ the astronomer Carl Sagan suggests that computers are 'intended' to travel through space and colonise other planets, carrying our acquired wisdom and (if we insist on being anthropocentric), our genes

and memes. Again, this is a speculative inference from what we know about computers, but even the idea confronts the religious notion of a special and privileged relationship with a Creator God who created us in his image.

4.73 Further, a God who becomes a human being is missing the point if human beings are only an intermediate stage in cosmic history. This means that Christian apologetics must move beyond the argument for God as Mind, which may for many of those searching for faith be seen as unhelpful.⁴⁶ God's action in and among human beings is personal and involves not just mind but body as well. This is borne out through the Incarnation of the eternal Word as Jesus and only makes sense in the totality of what we are. Our theology of kingdom and resurrection is based on fulfilment of our human potential: 'yet in our flesh shall we see God'. Our creatureliness is therefore an integral part of this vision and not negotiable with Sagan's version of Strong AI.

4.74 If we separate out scientific knowledge and speculation we can say that as science continues to advance into unknown areas, it will not push God further and further back into the dark spaces, but reveal God as intricately bound up with all that is, has been and will be. If God guarantees the laws of physics, sustains the quarks and gluons, then God is present in singularities and black holes and in adenine, guanine, cytosine and thymine, the building blocks of DNA. Everything we explore and seek to know can become a potential agent of revelation, mediated to us through our explorations, if only we do not lose sight of the religious perspective that informs the world with meaning and hold on to our faith as providing a complementary and significant insight into the results of scientific enquiry.

Technology and ethics

4.75 One further aspect of the relationship between science and religious faith raises an important challenge for the Christian Church. Because technology is so advanced and its mechanism so specialised that only those specially trained are likely to understand it, this means that many people may have to make decisions which are increasingly complex about how their lives are affected by technology. The area in which this becomes acute is that of medicine, where people may be baffled by the kinds of choices they have to make and need help in making (literally) life and death decisions. It

is therefore a challenge to the mission of the Church that it should be equipped to stand alongside people as they make their way through moral labyrinths in order to allow them to make choices which include their search for faith, or their own spiritual journey. We may say that any such complex decision has a spiritual dimension, and that the decision made, whatever it is, affects a person's relationship with God. The Church is able to empathise with the difficulty of decisions and painful choices and should not be afraid to promote a vision of the kingdom through the complex ethics of decision-making.

4.76 For example, medical technology can alleviate problems of infertility. *In vitro* fertilisation (IVF), the use of donor gametes, and surrogacy arrangements may give joy and hope to some childless couples but also bring the need to face new decisions. Most of the techniques involved give rise to questions of ethical complexity. What may be the effects on a couple of introducing sperm or ova from another party in order to make it possible for them to have a child? In IVF, more embryos are produced than is required for implantation into the mother's womb. What should happen to these so-called 'spare' embryos? Is it permissible to use them for experimental purposes, perhaps to further research into the causes of genetic disease or miscarriage? To whom do they belong if the parents die? People entering IVF may be buoyed up by hope of a family, but bewildered by the choices that they alone must make in the process of achieving it.⁴⁷ There are ontological questions involved, for what is the status of a frozen embryo or frozen eggs or sperm?⁴⁸

4.77 For some people, these technologies may appear to represent a way of safeguarding and controlling an otherwise hazardous and uncertain future, irrespective of the complex issues involved. At the extreme end of this perspective, there are those who desire their bodies cryogenically frozen in the hope of a resurrection to earthly life via technology, like the *Cold Lazarus* of Dennis Potter's final work.

4.78 Testing for genetic diseases also presses difficult choices on people. It is possible for embryos to be screened before implantation for an expanding number of conditions. Should an embryo carrying a gene which predisposes towards the onset of cancer in early adulthood not be implanted in the mother? Again, there is a difficulty in making a decision for a future that is unknown. How do couples weigh the decision whether to choose abortion

for a foetus shown to carry a disease gene against the levels of suffering likely to be experienced by the child and the ability of parents to care for that child? A recent case of a mother's distress at the abortion of a healthy foetus, whom she believed to have Down's Syndrome, highlights the problems of placing one's faith exclusively in technology. How does the child of an adult whose genetic disease reveals itself late in life decide whether they themselves should be tested to see if they carry the disease gene?

4.79 Technology also raises questions about the quality of life available to people. Although technology may prevent death, its application can, in some instances, leave people with severe impairment. How do patients, doctors and relatives make decisions about whether treatment should be pursued at all costs? How can doctors be supported in situations where technology has to be rationed between patients? A related example is provided by the decision where some people raise huge sums of money to send the desperately ill to other centres in the hope of finding a technology which will provide the cure. Not only do they risk using up what time they have left with the loved one in pursuit of this ambition, they also face increased pain if their efforts are in vain. There are difficult decisions facing families who are asked to consent to switching of life support machines and who ask that their loved ones be allowed to die.⁴⁹ This is not to say that such people should not act in this faith, but surely those who place it in technology should be offered something more through the Church's witness, if technology lets them down? At the same time, we should not forget the witness of the doctors who, together with hospital chaplains, also have an important role in the recognition of, and alleviation of, spiritual pain:

Doctors need increasingly to be aware of these issues, to have thought out their own beliefs and to be able, sensitively, to offer spiritual help if this is asked for. They should be aware of the patient's religious belief so that the specific practices of the Christian, Jew, Moslem, Hindu, or Buddhist can be adhered to.⁵⁰

4.80 At the other end of the spectrum from IVF, people may be faced with difficult choices arising from technological ability to keep people alive. Discussion about PVS (Persistent Vegetative State) as highlighted by the Tony Bland case, has recently come back into focus following some reported recoveries from this apparently hopeless condition. There are many stories

about the dilemma of families faced with switching off a life support machine, or agreeing to organ donation, but these stories point particularly to the need of the Church to provide a story about life and death which can make sense of the decisions which people make, *whichever way they make them*. What we are saying here is that the mission of the Church is not served exclusively by the application of Christian ethics, which may perhaps untangle what it is needed to do, but by providing a larger context in which any kind of difficult decision may be offered into God's future.⁵¹ Perhaps the most helpful way of describing this is by former Archbishop Runcie's words at Helen House, the hospice for children with life-threatening illnesses in Oxford: 'No life, however short, is ever wasted; ... no life in which love has been given and received is anything other than complete.'⁵² This perspective allows the anguish of intensely difficult decisions to be balanced against the importance of memory and relationships, and of the gaining of a future which is not uncertain, but already prepared and in which all tears will be wiped away.

Summary

KEY WORDS

● myth ● creed ● science ● choice ● complementarity
 ● whole person ● purpose ● value ● meaning ● God-of-the-gaps ● God as sustainer ● evolution ● genes ● ethics

Questions about the world and about ourselves may often lead to a perception that science and religious belief, including Christianity, provide frames of reference which are very different, if not mutually exclusive. The Christian frame of reference is provided by the creed, but where people encounter this later rather than sooner, they may find it hard to map on to the way Christian belief makes sense of the world. For some people, science can displace, disprove, or explain away religious understanding and experience, or marginalise religious truth altogether. People may feel the need to choose between scientific and religious frames of reference, and not realise the possibilities for complementarity. It may be necessary to look towards an holistic approach to which both scientific and religious perspectives contribute. This may be especially true in healing issues. Christians have a way

of thinking which generates hope, a way of understanding that is personal and relevant and a way of describing reality in terms of value, purpose and meaning.

The discoveries in the natural sciences may lead to a defensive God-in-the-gaps theology, but God can be seen as the sustainer of all, including the laws of science. The 'anthropic principle' asks us to look again at what we think is our place in the universe. Chaos and complexity theory asks us to look for a new set of relationships between cause and effect in the world we know.

The Church is also challenged by theories of evolution and by reductionist tendencies among some life scientists. The Church can respond in seeing nature as an agency for discovering God and in rediscovering teleological principles. The way in which the Church thinks about life after death also challenges the view that we are only vehicles for our selfish genes.

We also have to deal with the role and purpose of computer technology and with the status of human beings in a computer-controlled world. We may see that computers are but one manifestation of complex technologies which may be used by people every day without their understanding how they function. People are sometimes faced by complex ethical decisions, especially in situations where life and death are surrounded by medical technology. It is important for the Church's witness that Christians stand alongside those who have to make such decisions.

Further reading

- Appleyard, Bryan, *Understanding the Present: Science and the Soul of Modern Man*, Pan, 1992.
- Dawkins, Richard, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Penguin edition, 1988.
- Hawking, Stephen, *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam Press, 1988.
- Montefiore, Hugh, *Credible Christianity: The Gospel in Contemporary Society*, Mowbray, 1993.
- Polkinghorne, John, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity*, Triangle, 1994.
- Swinburne, Richard, *Is There A God?*, OUP, 1996.
- Wijnngaards, John, *Making Sense of God*, Sheed and Ward/Housetop, 1995.

Things to do

- **AIM:** to become less defensive about Christianity in the face of scientific advances.
- **PURPOSE:** to find ways to allow people to make Christian faith prominent in dealing with science and technology.

BIBLE VERSE

Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? (Job 38.33)

Things to do include:

- a. Thinking about household items
- b. Drawing imaginary animals
- c. Discussing hospital treatment
- d. Discussion questions

E. HOUSEHOLD ITEMS

Ask people in small groups to make a list of common household objects and appliances (you could use pictures from magazines or catalogues) and discuss:

- whether you could mend it if it broke
- whether you could do without it (and if not, why not)
- what the level of inconvenience without it would be.

Then consider:

- what life would be like without God
- whether you could do without God
- what you would do if you suddenly lost your faith.

2. IMAGINARY ANIMALS

Ask one pair of people to be judges. Ask people singly or in pairs to describe or to draw an imaginary animal or plant which is not like any other. If

people can be encouraged to spend time doing this beforehand this may help the exercise.

Ask the judges to decide which are the best three animals. All the others are deemed extinct.

Now ask the 'creators' of the winners to say what their animals are 'for' and why they should survive. Ask the judges to decide which animal gets to rule the world.

Now discuss how people felt about the exercise. Did it matter if your animal died out? Did this exercise help at all in understanding how God relates to creation? Would you prefer it if you had lost your animal by blind chance?

3. OPERATIONS

Ask which members of the group have had an operation, or other hospital treatment, or had babies in hospital. Group people as far as possible with similar experiences. All others can go in a 'dentist's chair group'!

Ask the groups to talk about their feelings with respect to:

- what was happening to them
- the doctors and nurses
- the pain
- the machines and instruments.

Did this experience make you think about faith in God?

4. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Choose such questions as may be relevant to your group.

- a. Does our belief offer anything to people which science does not?
- b. Are we wrong to say we have a privileged place in the universe?
- c. What place have awe and wonder in religion and science?
- d. Is the future only as good as our computers?
- e. Is the Church guilty of creating a God-of-the-gaps?

- f. Do the theories of evolution and the creation stories in Genesis mean that we have to abandon one or the other?
- g. How do we help those making difficult decisions relating to medical technology?
- h. Should schools teach scientific and religious views about the world at the same time?

Notes

1. Quoted as the beginning of a preface to *Subtle is the Lord ... The Science and the Life of Albert Einstein*, by Abraham Pais, OUP, 1982.
2. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam Press, 1988, p.122.
3. From Craig Raine, 'Listen with Mother' in *A Martian Sends a Postcard Home*, OUP, 1979, p.3.
4. See Hawking, op. cit., p.141.
5. Oliver Sacks, *Migraine: Understanding the Common Disorder*, University of California Press, 1985, Pan edition, pp.106-9.
6. For example, in *The Periodic Kingdom*, Basic Books, HarperCollins, Weidenfield and Nicholson 1995, Peter Atkins lays out the patterns underlying the table of chemical elements and shows how the missing elements, not naturally occurring in nature, can be created (if practicable) by human beings. All 'gaps' can be filled in by human reason.
7. For example, the Revd Dr John Polkinghorne at Cambridge in e.g. *Science and Christian Belief: Theological Reflections of a Bottom-up Thinker*, SPCK, 1994, and the Revd Dr Arthur Peacocke at Oxford in e.g. *Theology for a Scientific Age*, Blackwell, 1990.
8. See Lewis Wolpert and Alison Richards, *A Passion for Science*, OUP, 1988, p.22.
9. Hugh Montefiore, *Credible Christianity: The Gospel in Contemporary Society*, Mowbray, 1993, p.18.
10. See Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics*, Penguin edition, 1990, p.229. Also see *The Mind of God*, Penguin edition, 1993.
11. In Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, the remedy for Mrs Yeobright's adder bite is reckoned to be rubbing the wound with the fat of fried adders.
12. *Four Quartets*, East Coker IV.
13. Jeremy Woodcock, 'Refugees and Western Sensibilities', in *The Way*, Vol. 36, January 1996, No. 1, p.13. Also see Anne Nasimiyyu-Wasike, 'Christianity and an African Woman's experience' in Robert Schreier (ed.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, SCM, 1992.
14. The Revd Dr T. Mervyn Willshaw, *What on Earth is God Doing?*, paper to the Methodist Apologetics Group, 3 April 1995, pp.6, 10.

15. For example, see Pietro Redondi, *Galileo: Heretic*, translated by Raymond Rosenthal, Penguin edition, 1989. Also see J. H. Brooke, *Science and Religion*, CUP, 1991.
16. This example is taken from a talk given by the Revd Dr David Wilkinson entitled 'Spirituality and Modern Cosmology' given to the Alister Hardy Research Centre London Group on 13 September 1994.
17. Hawking, op. cit., pp.140-41.
18. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Post-Modern World*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, pp.47-8.
19. The illustration from Dr David Wilkinson, op. cit.
20. Elizabeth Jennings, 'Delay' in *Collected Poems*, Carcanet, 1986, p.15.
21. See Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics*, Penguin edition, 1990, p.179.
22. See, for example, John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, OUP, 1986, or John Leslie, *Universes*, Routledge, 1989.
23. For example, see John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity*, Triangle, 1994, p.57.
24. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Airmont edition, 1965, pp.287-8.
25. *God in Us*, SCM, 1993.
26. This movement takes its name from Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach':
The sea of faith
was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle fur'd;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the nightwind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
27. The Bishop of Oxford, the Rt Revd Richard Harries engaged Anthony Freeman in a public debate on the issue and his response is contained in *The Real God*, Mowbray, 1994.
28. John Polkinghorne, op. cit., p.17.
29. John Maynard Smith, 'Making it Formal', in Lewis Wolpert and Alison Richards, op. cit., p.129.
30. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, Penguin edition, 1968, pp.458-9.
31. *Climbing Mount Improbable*, Viking, 1996.
32. Here, the Church has the opportunity to uphold the transcendental basis for the apprehension of and appreciation of beauty, and theories of aesthetics.
33. Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, Penguin edition, 1988, see chapter 1, 'Explaining the Very Improbable', pp.1-18.
34. Richard Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, OUP, 1996, pp.62-3.
35. Dawkins, op. cit., pp.59-60.
36. *Ibid.* See pp.63-4.

From Lamb of God to dead sheep

I won't tell you my name. I experience the world as a dead, dark place. The Christian Gospel is just a system of ideas which have been passed around for centuries. Half those Christians couldn't agree with the other half most of the time – so much for 'truth'. What's that supposed to say to people in this crazy, broken world? Anyway, the Church hasn't got anything relevant to say to people like me nowadays: to women, for instance, or gay people. What's more, it doesn't adapt to the way we have to live these days; it doesn't accommodate what we're capable of. What does the Church have to say about the Holocaust, tell me that?

Christians should put up or shut up. Except that they haven't got anything to put up. So just what are you going to do about it?

Introduction

Where do our ideas in western society actually come from? Are people free to formulate their own mental worlds? Are we the inheritors of thinking traditions, or are we, and they, conditioned by the kind of society we live in?

This chapter examines the history of ideas, looking at the way our own modes of thinking about God have changed over the centuries. What does Christian theology, including mission theology, look like today, and has it got any real relevance in contemporary society?

We can see, by examining the history of ideas, that the Christian message has been challenged and affected by other ways of thinking about the world and the relationship between human beings and God. In particular, theological thinking has been especially challenged by ideas which provide satisfactory explanations of the way the world is and the place of humanity in it, so that there seems to be no point bringing God into it at all. Where God has apparently been pushed into the background, it is up to the Church to form an apologetic that helps people to see that human ideas are but an approach to the overarching knowledge which God has of us.

37. Walter Wink, *Unmasking the Powers*, Fortress Press, 1986, p.147.
38. Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden*, HarperCollins Science Masters, 1995, p.60.
39. See another view of the role of God in evolution in John Wijngaards' argument about God's creative energy and the emergence of 'face' in *Making Sense of God*. Sheed and Ward/Housetop, 1995, pp.178–9.
40. See *River out of Eden*, chapter 4, 'God's Utility Function'.
41. J. Bowker, *Is God a Virus?*, SPCK, 1995 is a Christian response to Dawkins's 'memes'.
42. And see Timothy Anders, *The Evolution of Evil*, Open Court, 1994.
43. See, for example, Philip Hefner, *The Human Factor*, Fortress Press, 1993.
44. Redmond O'Hanlon, *Into the Heart of Borneo*, Penguin edition, 1985, p.122.
45. Hodder and Stoughton, 1977.
46. See 'God as Cosmic Mind' in John Wijngaards, op. cit.
47. See *Choices in Childlessness*, Free Church Federal Council/British Council of Churches, 1982.
48. See, for example, *Personal Origins*, Church House Publishing, 1985, revised 1996.
49. See *Euthanasia – No!*, a joint submission by the House of Bishops of the Church of England and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales to the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, Catholic Truth Society, 1993.
50. M. J. Baines, 'Terminal Illness' in D. J. Weatherall, J. G. G. Ledingham and D. A. Warrell (eds), *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*, third edition, OUP, 1996, p.4359.
51. See Kevin T. Kelly, *Life and Love: Towards a Christian Dialogue on Bioethical Questions*, Collins, 1987.
52. Quoted in David Atkinson, *Jesus, Lamb of God: Biblical Meditations*, SPCK, 1996, pp.11–12.

As we approach the twenty-first century, it is up to us to find ways of showing that the promises of the Christian Gospel bring meaning, purpose and hope into experiences in human life where there seems nothing left to say.

The history of ideas

Where we're at

5.1 Damien Hirst, the artist, who drew attention with his *Dead Sheep*, recently won the Turner Prize for Art 1995 with his exhibit *Cow and Calf* at the Tate Gallery. This consisted of the two animals, each cut in half and preserved in their separate halves in four glass cases. The viewer perceives the deadness of the suspended animals, little bubbles clinging to their fur; meaningless viscera; the separation of mother and progeny and self from self. Hirst refuses connections even with natural processes, for the animals cannot even decompose naturally. The viewer may end up outraged, inspired, bewildered, sad ...

5.2 In a way, this prize-winning exhibit is a good mirror of the so-called post-modern culture in which we live. We cannot say what *Cow and Calf* means – it might be meaningless, no more than two dead animals in four pieces in a room. We have to create meanings. It is possible to walk between the two halves of the animals and look at their insides, but effectively learn very little; observers cannot examine or test the viscera. Everything is walled off: the attendant will not allow touching or leaning on the glass. If there is a message, it is one of fragmentation, one of inability for reconstruction. If a theologically minded observer were to ask 'Where is God?', the answer would probably be 'Not here'. For as the Roman Catholic artist and writer David Jones wrote: 'I have felt for His Wounds/in nozzles and containers ... A, a, a, Domine Deus, my hands found the glazed work unrefined and the terrible crystal a stage-paste.'¹

5.3 Some of the other artists in the Turner Prize exhibition offered canvases created by dripping turpentine on to painted backgrounds; empty cages illuminated by a single suspended light (do not touch) and a continuous videotape of the interior of the artist's body via an endoscope.

5.4 We may well sympathise if people are bored, irritated or mystified by rooms full of bricks, rice or dead animals, even more when such art wins prizes and is highly valued. But perhaps such exhibits are really worth this price, where they reflect accurately the nature of our western culture, and where material worth is the touchstone of validity or 'realness'. It is uncomfortable and disturbing to look at images which sum up the way we are all required to live if we participate in society. Peter Greenaway, the film director, as interested as Hirst in death (but also in decomposition) is pleased with the description of his work as bright painted butterflies, held down by brass pins: a drawerful of dead exhibits.² His films, such as *A Zed and Two Noughts*, *The Belly of an Architect*, *The Thief*, *the Cook*, *his Wife and her Lover* and *Prospero's Books*, occupy themselves with showing how the bright, sophisticated exterior of human society conceal rottenness and decay, a world in which human beings eat each other: the inside of the cow.

5.5 Immediately, we are faced with a crucial question: how can the Christian Church act in *mission* in such an environment? For what we are seeing and the tools we are given for sense-making include refusal of privileged position, separation and estrangement, a kaleidoscope of fragments. Is there anything to say? And if there is, and we say it, how can it be received by people whose lives are conditioned by threading their way through a pick'n'mix society? How can we uphold the story of the Lamb of God in the culture of modern western society where a vision of artistic excellence is a dead sheep?

5.6 The Church of England's General Synod Board of Education has helpfully provided a broader description of post-modernism:

The world acts in a post-modern way when

it 'picks'n'mixes'

it is laid back and playful

it distrusts logic and rationality,

it is suspicious of history and tradition

it distrusts the idea of progress

it likes fuzzy boundaries

it refuses to judge

search for faith and the witness of the Church, we have to ask whether those who search for faith are accustomed to thinking and rationalising in ways which do not, in fact, make reception of the gospel an easy task.

5.10 In the spirit of post-modern playfulness and as an analogy we may consider our method to be like a journey, passing through strategic points, but not stopping to explore every detail of the new place. We shall also concentrate on three of the various forms of ambush, all of which have particular consequences in the twentieth century:

- the challenge of 'heretical' thinking
- the 'triumph' of human reason
- the threat of death and silence

Where we're coming from: the development of Christian thought in the west

Philosophy

is a walk on the slippery rocks

Religion

is a light in the fog

(Edie Brickell and the New Bohemians, 'What I Am', The David Geffen Company, 1988)

5.11 As Christians interested in mission, we might account for ourselves as follows:

The significance of what God has done for human beings, in creation, in salvation history and supremely in giving his Son Jesus Christ, is too great to be comprehended in its entirety. For the story is complete, but not ended; the history of Christianity has continued and is continuing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit towards the establishment of God's reign and a time when there is not anything that does not point directly to God: that theophany of the New Jerusalem that we call the *eschaton*. Christians act in mission both individually and as the Body of Christ precisely because the story is not ended, for we understand it to be part of God's purposes to include all human beings and all of creation in the ultimate story.

Its critics would say that in a post-modern world 'pick'n'mix' avoids the difficult and disquieting babble replaces discourse and dialogue pools of ignorance replace founts of knowledge everything is good for a laugh the coinage of qualifications is debased opinion passes for truth³

5.7 If, then, we live in a world of babble, opinion and pools of ignorance, we can see that we may be in danger of losing that which is essential to the mission of the Church. If generations go by who have not heard the gospel, or who lose it in the babble, and if Christian witness is seen as another option among many and if the contiguity of Christian lives is ruptured by capriciousness, how shall they (and we) hear?

5.8 In his book *After Virtue*,⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre begins by proposing that if everything we know about science were to be destroyed and fragmented and then put back together, we could only have a very partial and distorted view of what science was once like. His imaginary scenario is similar to some contemporary visions of what human society might be like after a nuclear holocaust if all our technology were destroyed. A great deal of information would have been lost and might possibly be irreplaceable. His vision is also complicated by his contention that if such a scenario came about we would not be able to diagnose what was actually wrong, because such a synchronic view would not supply the relevant information. For this reason he argues for a diachronic, historical overview which provides a context for seeing where we are, for locating ourselves.

5.9 In this chapter we shall adopt MacIntyre's suggestion, for if we are to respond with a mission strategy for our times, we need to see how we have arrived at this kind of culture and to see how the Church has responded in the past to challenges from western culture. In a chapter like this, it is not possible to spend a large amount of time discussing the complexities of the various movements and history of ideas.⁵ It will be our aim merely to give a general outline and some illustration of the way we have inherited the various systems of thought in our own time. Furthermore, when we consider the

How is it that we might come to make such a statement?

5.12 The theology which informs Christian teaching and our understanding of mission has grown up out of a grounding in Scripture and tradition. These are our own primary narratives, the stories we live by, but we do not inherit just a story, or a collection of ideas. We also inherit the experience of Christian people living Christian lives whose faith becomes part of our heritage and collective cultural memory. It is perhaps useful to remember that all theologians are human beings whose thinking is subject to their worldview and temperament. Further, when Christianity began to spread from its point of origin throughout the world, it had the property not just of presenting a system of ideas, but a way of being that was transformative. It became embedded in the culture of peoples, overriding or absorbing old ways and old beliefs. This means that we have to consider two strands when we look at the history of ideas: the development of thinking and the development of culture. When we act in mission we also appeal to people to think about themselves and God, and we relate the story of God's saving acts to the experience of being in the world and participating in it. The correlation of the two is supported by our witness: we are Christians and our lives are examples, no matter what Christian denomination we belong to.

Heresy: the grit in the oyster:

5.13 First then, we may begin our journey through the first millennium and visit the places where believers tried to clarify what God had actually done in Jesus Christ. And here, we must consider the role of heresy (or 'alternative' Christian teaching) as driving the need to define the content of Christian orthodoxy. There are two ways in which we can think about heresy. The first is that alternative ideas about what God has done and is doing arise to challenge neglect of aspects of the faith. In early times, this sometimes happened as a consequence of a political or power struggle, but also meant that dialogue, resulting in redefinition of belief, made sure that Christianity did not stagnate. Because of a continuing dialectic, our understanding of Christianity has accumulated. This is fundamentally important to mission, for as we explore more ways of understanding God's story, so the missionary task becomes better described. Today, for example, the contribution of liberation theologies⁶ and, in particular, Third World theologies challenges us in the west not to be complacent about what we think we

know about God. It is most often a fresh perspective arising from different contexts, or outwardly an alternative or complementary view which can become the prophetic word.

5.14 The second way in which we need to talk about heresy is where it becomes the label attached to distortions of the Christian faith which need to be identified and exposed. The importance of dealing with heretical ideas is made clear to us in studies such as C. FitzSimons Allison's book *The Cruelty of Heresy*, where he tries to show that it is a human trait to try to adapt God's truth to our own ends and that this happens in every age, including our own, so that:

We are susceptible to heretical trends because, in one form or another, they nurture and reflect the way we would have it be rather than the way God has provided, which is infinitely better for us. As they lead us into the blind alleys of self-indulgence and escape from life, heresies pander to the most unworthy tendencies of the human heart.⁷

5.15 He reminds us that it is our task in mission to point up 'the way God has provided' and to show the deficiency of readings of the gospel which suit only the devices and desires of our own hearts. 'As we hear and retell the gospel, we unwittingly distort the story, thus reinforcing any heresy of which we may be a victim.'⁸ Allison therefore suggests that we cannot form a response without self-examination and this is as true today as it was in the early centuries of Christian thought. We need to keep these two rather different perspectives on 'heresy' in mind, as we continue on our journey.

5.16 In the early Church, orthodoxy was honed against other teachings concerning who God is and who Jesus is. Docetism said that Jesus had only one, divine nature; Ebionism suggested the opposite: that Jesus had only one, human nature. Neither of these views made sense of the resurrection of Jesus as occasioning the salvation of humankind. If 'the way God has provided' for us was to be upheld, then Jesus had to have had two natures: being fully human and fully divine. This recognition underpins the words of Athanasius: 'God became man that man might become God.' This statement has important consequences for mission theology, for the notion that God's action in giving us his son Jesus Christ is to effect an ultimate act of becoming underpins the whole reason for witness and proclamation of the gospel.

5.17 As Christian theology developed, so did the notion of Trinitarianism. The Council of Nicaea, reacting against the teachings of Arius (c. 256–336), determined that Jesus was of one being with the Father, of the same substance (*homoousios*) and not of merely like substance (*homoiousios*), and therefore that being-in-relation was a characteristic of God. Being and being-in-relation became seen as the twin touchstones for existence. This was not just a matter of intellectual discussion in a vacuum, but borne out by the experience of the Christian community's own fellowship (*koinonia*). Being a Christian, then, is not just about adopting a set of beliefs, but about being in relationship with other Christians. Moreover, this fellowship is not just that of human relations, but is allied to our participation in the divine life. This divine life is described as being in (or as) communion where the persons of the Trinity exist as an interpenetration (*perichoresis*) of mutuality and love, such that it is not possible to speak of the Father without simultaneously referring to the Son and to the Holy Spirit: one being (*ousia*) in three persons (*hypostases*).⁹

5.18 The great Councils of the early Christian Church, at Nicaea (325), at Constantinople (381), and at Ephesus (431); St Augustine (354–430) in the west, together with the triad of fourth-century thinkers, Basil of Caesarea (330–379), Gregory of Nazianus (329–389) and Gregory of Nyssa (d. c. 394) in the east, all helped to establish the critical doctrines which underlie the description of God as a sending, or missionary God, experienced in history by human beings: 'the more explicit creeds of the fourth century helped to mark the boundaries and limits of what we can authentically teach about God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, without sacrificing something of the redemptive experience of Christians.'¹⁰ The rejection by the eastern churches of an added phrase in the creed that says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque* clause) has meant that some issues remain open and worthy of exploration and ecumenical discussion right up to the present day.¹¹

5.19 We can see, then, that the establishment of the Canon of Scripture, the development of the creeds, the decisions about the nature of Jesus's being and the resolution of the discussion concerning the Trinity, brought into existence the tools for mission in and to the world. But we may also see that these would be challenged by ways of thinking which privileged the holder of alternative ideas. Consequently, the Church has not always held the same

views about everything continuously, as Professor Paul Badham has pointed out.¹² Rather, the Church has had to move forward on the basis of aggregated knowledge, culled on the experience of being Christian and from the continuous debate about Christian belief. What we must also understand is that 'heresy' is not just a thought-system but a way of behaving and so its characteristics, which challenge the historic faith, may appear at other times and places.¹³ For example:

Concrete situations of diapers, debts, divorce or listening to and being with someone in depression and despair, is the test of real love. Docetism is the religious way to escape having love tested in the flesh. All of us are tempted to audit life rather than to participate fully and be tested by it. (p. 38)

Gnosticism, then and now, is characterised by claims to special knowledge held by an intellectual elite who are on their way to becoming super-spirits. (p. 55)

Sabellian believers, becoming like what they worship, will inevitably resort to being poseurs, persons who affect a particular manner or character as changing circumstances seem to require. This pervasive but pitiful compulsion in contemporary society to create for oneself an image or an identity is a symptom of a religious wasteland that has been given no confidence in a God-given identity. (p. 76)

Much of conventional Christianity today is Apollinarian. 'Don't ask questions, just have faith' ... Much of the appeal of cults has been, and still is, that they offer to turn our minds off (or over to a group or guru). Not ever having to use one's mind to think, to question, or to decide makes Apollinarian solutions perennially attractive. (p. 108)

5.20 This reminds us that the Christian Church is always being challenged to conform to 'the way God has provided' and when we engage in mission as Christians, we need to point to that way and not be distracted from it. It is all too easy, however, for those who search for faith to be offered by us a less rigorous or a self-serving kind of Christianity. The fact that we ourselves often fall short in our Christian witness becomes clearer to us as we look back at the past tensions between heresy and orthodoxy. Yet we cannot forget the

first sense in which we defined heresy and some, such as Robert van der Weyer, suggest we need to be heretics today in order to prevent the Church from stagnating into meaninglessness; heretical challenge forces the Church to account for itself.

The ontological proof

5.21 On the next stage of our journey, we must encounter those fathers of the Church who, in seeking to reach those who had not heard God's story, tried to show that belief in the Christian God was logical, aesthetically desirable and the only way of supporting a sense of coherence and harmony. For example, in the eleventh century, St Anselm of Canterbury proposed a thought-system which aimed to show that atheism is a logically indefensible position.¹⁴ He said:

Now, Lord, since it is you who gives understanding to faith, grant me to understand as well as you think fit, that you exist as we believe, and that you are what we believe you to be. We believe that you are that thing than which nothing greater can be thought.¹⁵

5.22 This argument can be formulated as follows:

If the greatest being possible does not exist, then it is possible that there exists a being greater than the greatest being possible.

It is not possible that there exists a being greater than the greatest being possible.

Therefore:

The greatest being possible exists.¹⁶

5.23 This argument produced objections immediately, but has remained an overriding philosophical debate ever since. Aquinas, Hume and Kant rejected it, while Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz accepted it from their respective standpoints.

5.24 In the thirteenth century, St Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-74) produced his famous 'five ways' of showing that there must be God, even if God is an unknowable mystery. Consequently, each of his five ways begins with the effect of a divine act and is traced back to God as its cause. From the

observation that things move, Aquinas discovers God as First Mover; similarly God is found to be First Cause in the chain of causation; God is found to be necessary of himself, the cause of all goodness and perfection, and finally the originator of teleology whereby all things tend towards a purposeful end.

5.25 In the history of ideas, much time and thought has been spent on the evaluation of the ontological proof, but as far as mission is concerned, we may say that the act of living and behaving as if (and only if) the gospel were true, constitutes a working out of the truth of what Christianity is. Indeed, some historians contend that Aquinas's *Summa contra Gentiles* is intended to be missionary, especially towards followers of a certain kind of Islam, as are the writings of other Church fathers such as Bernard of Clairvaux. This means that the continuing arguments over the logic of the ontological proof do not affect the importance of acting in mission. If this sounds a bit like Pascal's wager (it is better to believe in God than not believe, because if you die and there's nothing, you have lost nothing, but if you die and there is, you've lost everything), this is not intended. Rather, the fathers of the Church tried to show that belief in and proclamation of the Christian gospel enriches life to such an extent that no other epistemological position can offer exactly the same quality of life. Therefore, if we return to St Anselm:

God of truth,

I ask that I may receive,

so that my joy may be full.

Meanwhile, let my mind meditate on it,

let my tongue speak of it,

let my heart love it,

let my mouth preach it,

let my soul hunger for it,

my flesh thirst for it,

and my whole being desire it,

until I enter into the joy of my Lord,

who is God one and triune, blessed forever. Amen.¹⁷

The medieval worldview

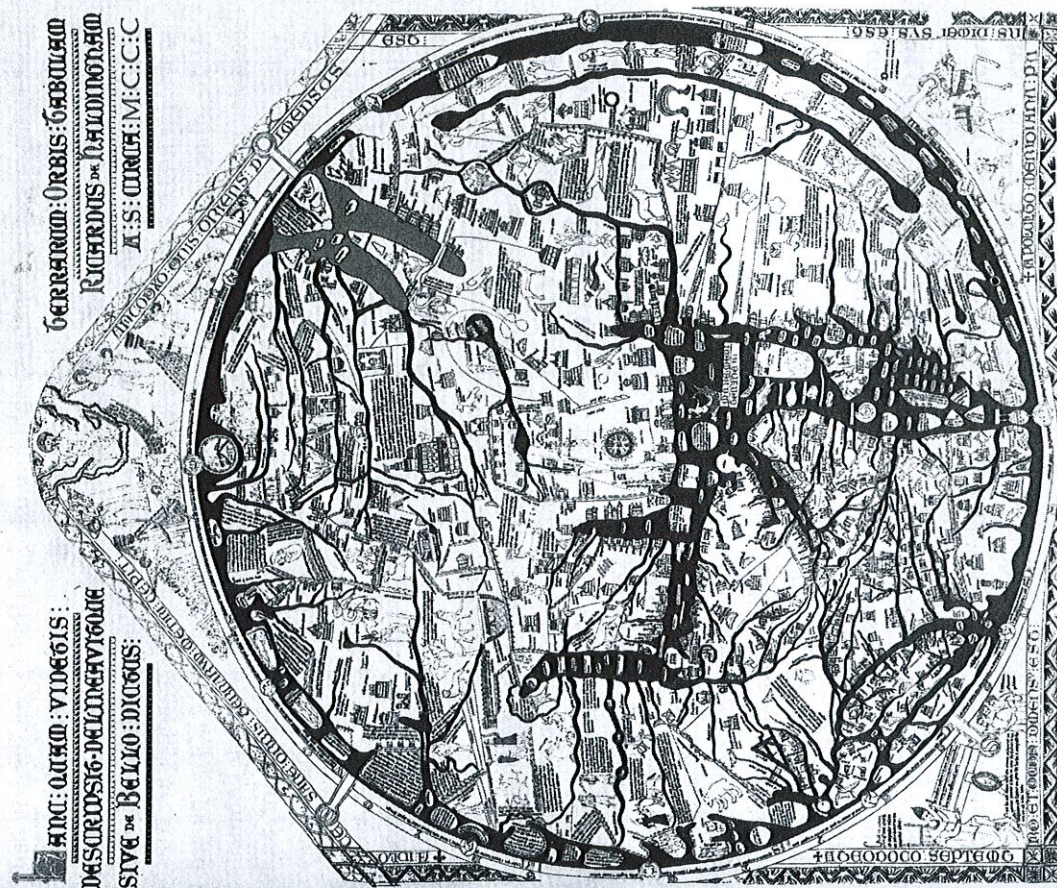
5.26 We now have to consider the way in which people saw the world to be ordered in the medieval period, for the worldview at this time was ordered and hierarchical. The feudal system ensured that people understood that they were born into a particular station in life and related to others in their society according to a prescribed system. The earth formed the centre of their cosmology, with a fixed vault of stars wheeling above it. Beyond this was heaven, the abode of God. Imposed on this was a system of sense-making that placed religious thinking as the ultimate sense-maker. We may see an example of this in the Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, a map of the known world with Jerusalem placed firmly in the centre: the centre of the geographical space, the centre of God's activity, the centre of the human heart.

5.27 In this period, there was therefore a coherence between the physical life and the spiritual life; the two were superimposed in such a way as to make belief the rationale for the experience of being alive. Society and culture were infused by being Christian, even if, at the popular level, this was mediated by superstition and the nearness of death and suffering.¹⁸ The role of fate, as operating absolutely in people's lives, was especially important in the worldview, where lives could be cut short at any time. Consequently, if we journey for a few moments with Chaucer's (c. 1340–1400) pilgrims, we will learn that:

The destinee, minstre general,
That executeth in the world over al
The purveiaunce that god hath seyn biforn,
So strong it is that, though the world hath sworn
The contrarie of a thyng by ye or nay,
Yet somtyme it shal fallen on a day
That falleth nat eft withinne a thousand yeer.
For certainly, oure appetites heer,
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
Al this is reuled by the sighte above ...
What is this world? What asketh men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Allone, withouten any compaignie'¹⁹

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Figure 7 The Hereford *Mappa Mundi*



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5.28 In such a worldview, the afterlife is particularly imbued with the richness of human imagining. Dante immediately springs to mind, with his vision at the end of the *Paradiso* of the arrangement of saints in the Rose and the sublime vision of the Trinity as two brilliant rainbows from which flame goes forth, an overwhelming insight into the 'Love that moves the Sun and th'other stars'.²⁰ Similarly, the fourteenth-century English poem *Pearl*, for example, turns the loss of a baby daughter into a glorious vision of heaven in which the daughter returns to the grieving parent to promise the unimaginable joy and beauty in the paradise beyond, for all God's promises are true. At the other extreme, the artist Hieronymus Bosch (born c. 1450) employed complex symbolic imaginings of the destruction and torture of the damned. These imaginative acts of looking forward were urgent and important, and the transcendental reality not just a matter of promise and hope, but a way of indicating the need for change in the present.

From Renaissance to Reformation

5.29 As feudal society began to break down, Renaissance thinking, influenced by the translation of Arab philosophy and science, began to challenge the medieval system of ideas. In particular, the cultivation of excellence in the arts and sciences and the pursuit of order and control ushered in an attitude of enquiry and refinement. This has also been seen as a switch from looking to the vault of heaven for inspiration and authority, to the lower world of animals, plants and objects for systems of understanding and sense-making, bringing with it a significant change in perception and thought. For some this meant engaging in a struggle between the unquestioned Christian framework of ordinary life and the spirit of questioning. The Christian paradigm was also necessarily the source of the Church's political power. It is not surprising, then, that the Church often reacted against what appeared to be the discovery of new and dangerous knowledge. Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, for example, suggest the range of Renaissance enquiry, for he meditates on science and knowledge, the universe, the powers of nature, flight, the arts, architecture and reflections on life itself.

5.30 Among his fables, or parables, Leonardo (1452–1519) returns several times to the image of a moth or butterfly around a candle:

The vain and wandering moth, not content with its power to fly through the air at its ease, and overcome by the seductive flame of the candle, decided to fly into it; but its joyous movement was the cause of instant woe; for in the flame its delicate wings were consumed. And the hapless moth dropped all burnt at the foot of the candlestick. After much lamentation and repentance it wiped the tears from its streaming eyes and raising its face exclaimed: 'O False light! how many like me must thou have miserably deceived in times past; and if my desire was to see light ought I not to have distinguished the sun from the false glimmer of dirty tallow?'²¹

5.31 In a further fable, the light replies 'Thus do I treat whoever does not know how to use me aright' and Leonardo comments 'This applies to those who, when they see before them carnal and worldly delight, hasten to them like the butterfly, without ever taking thought as to their nature, which they will learn to know to their shame and loss.'²²

5.32 Leonardo identifies the descent into 'necromancy' and superstitious practices in the Church and makes important distinctions between the living faith and the 'dead' nature of Church culture and in his 'prophecies' remarks on abuses in the practice of the faith, particularly involving money transactions. In this way he prefigures the disturbance and unrest that led to the Reformation. The true light is in danger of being eclipsed by followers of other lesser lights. Human beings in this culture are seduced by the trivial and by worldly pleasures and this is the hallmark of such a society.

5.33 Erasmus (c. 1469–1536) understood this, which is why he wrote his book *In Praise of Folly* in the way he did. In the letter to Martin Dorp, he writes:

The truth of the gospel slips more pleasantly into the mind and takes firmer grip there if it is attractively clothed than it would if it were presented undisguised ... I saw how ordinary men were corrupted by opinions of the most foolish kind in every walk of life. I longed to find a remedy more than I hope for success. And I believed I had found a means whereby I could somehow insinuate myself into these over-indulged souls and cure them by giving them pleasure.²³

5.34 Here, then, we can see that critical ideas were introduced into public circulation to expose the disparity between what was seen as the core of faith carried in mission by the Christian Church and the distortions of that faith brought about by the culture and by the problems in the Church. This observed disparity then led to new theological thinking arising from a dialectic with the criticism. In this case abuses relating to God's saving promises led to theological concentration on the nature of salvation.²⁴ Protestantism was then erected on a number of issues, two of which included: a reaction against the political and power structures of the Church, and the theological distortions arising from misuse of that power, for example, the idea that money could buy heavenly life. At the same time, criticism of abuses led to important reaction within the Catholic paradigm; for example, Ignatius Loyola and the Society of Jesus brought a fresh missionary emphasis to the faith.

5.35 Martin Luther (1483–1546), himself branded a 'heretic', formulated the idea of justification by grace through faith by a return to the biblical heart of teaching about salvation – a foundational re-reading of Pauline teaching. David Bosch has identified five key features of the new Protestant paradigm: justification by faith; the inherent evil of the world; the subjective dimension of salvation; the priesthood of all believers and the centrality of the Scriptures. John Calvin (1509–64) looked to establishment of a theocracy on earth by a process of radical transformation through the Spirit. These outworkings of new theology meant that in western Europe the Church offered simultaneously a number of diverse ways to be Christian.

5.36 This diversity has also had profound implications for mission, for the mission of the Church to reflect God's reconciling will for the whole creation became from this period also the history of reconciliation between parts of the Christian Church. Mission includes a move towards unity, and towards those acts of reconciliation between churches which are reflected in worship, witness and service and which illustrate God's intention for the world and for all human beings. The dialogues and agreements which are hallmarks of the twentieth century, such as the ARCIC discussions between Anglicans and Roman Catholic churches, Methodist–Anglican dialogue, the Meissen agreement between the Church of England and the German Lutheran churches, the Porvoo agreement between the Church of England and the Scandinavian and Baltic churches and the overtures between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox, and between Roman Catholics and Lutherans, demon-

strate to western society an impulse towards dialogue and reconsideration in a world of fragmentation and lost direction. Moreover, such dialogues illustrate a simple and basic truth: that Christians are impelled to talk about God and their understanding of what God has done.

5.37 One of the profound effects of the fragmentation of the Christian Church on the history of ideas and values in the west was the rise of philosophical scepticism or doubt.²⁵ In the face of competing Christian truth systems, different political entities and increasing discovery about the world, a culture of doubt began to arise that valued sceptical testing of ideas over inherited faith. The search for coherence between the physical and spiritual realms therefore often became relegated in some places to the arcane or the mystical, as in this poem of Henry Vaughan (1621–95), where he speaks of coming to know God as a mysterious experience of the night:

Through that pure Virgin shrine,
That sacred veil drawn o'er thy glorious noon
That men might look and live as glow-worms shine,
And face the moon:

Wise Nicodemus saw such light
As made him know his God by night.

Most blest believer he!

Who in that land of darkness and blind eyes
Thy long expected healing wings could see,
When thou didst rise,

And what can never more be done,

Did at mid-night speak with the Sun! ...

There is in God (some say)

A deep, but dazzling darkness; as men here

Say it is late and dusky, because they

See not all clear;

O for that night! where I in him

Might live invisible and dim.²⁶

The Enlightenment

5.38 We have passed through the various tunnels of fragmentation, viewed a maze of passages and now enter the Enlightenment. Here, we may see that a profound shift in the history of ideas came about during the period known as the Enlightenment. Indeed, there is a significant movement in the twentieth century to blame the Enlightenment for the mental framework that makes it so difficult for many people to believe the truth of the Christian Gospel. The chief proponent of this criticism is Bishop Leslie Newbigin whose books on the subject of gospel and culture²⁷ have had much influence and given rise to a contemporary theological movement.

5.39 The philosophers of the Enlightenment period are distinguished by their various forms of enquiry into how we know anything at all. How do human beings acquire knowledge? What is the nature of understanding? What was being put to the test here was the nature and quality of human reason: was it reasonable, or rational to believe in God? Scholasticism was for the most part, though not entirely, disdained. Another point made by David Bosch is that these philosophers disposed their thought in logical forms much more akin to mathematical thought than to traditional discourse (see the version of Anselm's proof above) and that this inevitably moved away from the thought forms and expressions which were traditionally employed to speak about God.

5.40 In his *Discourse on Method*, René Descartes (1596–1650) took his readers on a journey to understanding. In this work, he reminds us that our minds must be considered finite while God is incomprehensible and infinite. He then provides us with meditations on: why we can doubt all things; the non-existence of what is doubted; God as the cause of ideas; the nature of truth and falsity; and the proof of God and understanding from imagination. Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), however, suggested that in order to achieve salvation we must free ourselves from emotions and use reason to obtain an intellectual love of God. Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716) was much engaged in an argument for moderation of the sceptical view in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, while John Locke (1632–1704) introduced 'the idea' as fundamental, examining epistemology itself. Bishop George Berkeley (1685–1753) took this further, moving from ideas to 'idealism'. God's continuing perception keeps things in existence and the things themselves are

to be thought of as collections of ideas. The strongest opponent of all rational arguments concerning God emerged in the figure of David Hume (1711–76) who saw all religious debates as futile and sought to demonstrate the failure of arguments about God. Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) wrote in response to Hume, most famously in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, but ultimately agreeing with him that we cannot ourselves have knowledge of ultimate reality.

5.41 The Enlightenment, then, is the result of much philosophical dialogue involving argument and response, feeling as much for effective method in philosophical discourse as it is dealing with the theological arguments.

5.42 Newbigin's principal indictment of the Enlightenment thinking is not so much what was actually written (to which he acknowledges debt), but the effect it had on western culture through the history of ideas. In particular he feels that the Enlightenment created categories of public truth and private opinion, and that religious belief became relegated to the latter category. For this reason, Newbigin has written extensively on the need of the Church today to re-enter the realm of 'public truth'. Thus:

Christian faith became – for most people – a private and domestic matter strictly separated from the public worlds of politics and economics. The Bible no longer provided the framework within which world history was understood. World history was now taught as the history of civilization with – quite naturally – the civilization of western Europe as its climax. The other way of understanding history, which found its climax in the person of a first century Jew, was relegated to a separate department of 'religious instruction' and treated as a parable of the history of the human soul.²⁸

5.43 For Newbigin, then, the coherent world of the *Mappa Mundi* has been skewed so that the human map has replaced that of God. The spiritual map has been interiorised and marginalised. Consequently, Newbigin sees the notion of the transcendent as particularly diminished. However, Newbigin does not consider the possible advantages of taking religious discourse out of the political wrangling in the public arena. Further, he does not allow for the embedding of the Christian narrative in language and culture such that foundational shapes of Christian witness continue to underlie the behaviour, endeavour and invention of western society. The reaction of Newbigin

and his movement to this split between public and private discourse is a call to rediscover the gospel as public truth. While it sounds as though this must be an essential part of Christian witness, we have to remember that there is a distinction between theocracy and public truth. An added difficulty here is Newbigin's apparent disregard of today's religious plurality, and the contribution made to our society by those of other faith traditions, since instituting the gospel as public truth *could* mean a refusal of tolerance and dialogue. It is perhaps preferable to argue that no human order is perfect, but mission theology looks towards a kingdom in which God's order prevails. The gospel becomes effective as public truth when Christians become involved in public issues informed by their faith.

5.44 If now we board a train for faster progress through the Industrial Revolution, we can see out of the window that the increasing role of automated processes created pressure to understand the place of human beings in the world and in the universe, biologically, socially, and economically. For example, the development and exploitation of the pump provided a context for understanding the action of the human heart. The Industrial Revolution also particularly highlighted the question of class, considered hierarchically and as holding different types of power. Ideological systems such as Marxism could also arise by making economics the dominant perspective for making recommendations about how human beings should live and conduct themselves. Similarly, with the rise of Darwinism, these conclusions about the world and its processes had to be tested against the deeply embedded view of the Creator God and the sense of being 'other' than the animal world.

5.45 These changes, which emphasised the status and role of (mostly male) human beings trapped in time, created the conditions for Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) to suggest: 'Modern men, obtuse to all Christian nomenclature, no longer feel the gruesome superlative that struck a classical taste in the paradoxical formula "god on the cross"' and 'it seems to me that the religious instinct is indeed in the process of growing powerfully – but the theistic satisfaction it refuses with deep suspicion.'³⁰ He proposed a system 'beyond good and evil', a system in which God's operation in the world need not be debated at all. Human beings are made in the image of their higher humanity or super-self: the one who overcomes without any reference to outside or transcendental agency. This is not a pessimistic vision

of a world without God, but an affirmatory vision of the best that we can be. Such a viewpoint also provides us with a reference point for the school of theology known as Sea of Faith (see Chapter 4) which sees God not as supernatural agency, but as the summation of human ideals. According to this view, God is just a word which can be applied to the best that we are or can become.³¹ Speculation about a supernatural destiny is futile. Discussion about the last things is not necessary to these thought systems and it is therefore not surprising that theologians within the Church have recently shown new interest in recovering the eschatological dimension. For mission, this is certainly crucial, otherwise mission theology would be reduced to describing a biblical utopia, the only rationale for the existence of which would be its inclusiveness and stability.

Language and silence

5.46 As we move in our journey ever faster into the twentieth century, we discover, with Einstein, that what we observe depends on whether we are on the train or standing on the station. The demonstration that there are no privileged reference frames in the physical world, might then make us think harder about taking ideas for granted. Relativity may have no direct relationship to relativism, but we may have to revise our preconceptions about ideas when we recall that Nietzsche (who was a philologist) tells us that language can be considered a system of untruths, because words only approximate to reality. He says:

What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which become poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned, and after long usage seems to a nation fixed, canonic, and binding: truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn-out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the sense; coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account but merely as metal.³²

5.47 In this way, Nietzsche describes the scenario for one of the defining debates in the twentieth-century history of ideas. In the twentieth century, language and meaning come increasingly under scrutiny, so the question is

not 'What are the limits of human understanding?' but 'What are the limits of language and of semantic reference frames?'. Freudianism, for example, generated a new set of ideas when it was suggested that people can use mental symbols which when reported concealed the truth. Talking to an interpreter, the 'real' meanings (whether theirs or the interpreter's) could be liberated from the subconscious mind.³³ Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) also pointed up the role of memory and forgetting in human suffering, and pointed to the presence of intense mental pain. The dream world could be seen as an alternative place for working out problems and difficulties as well as suppressed desires. The transcendental world was locked up in the head.

5.48 Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), breaking away from Freud, then sought to show that the 'collective unconscious' could be considered the encyclopaedic memory for all symbolic structures including religious symbolism. Further, getting away from God, and finding ways to get rid of guilt could be a liberating and self-affirming experience.³⁴ It is notable that Jungian analysis and some forms of psychotherapy based on Jungian ideas are popular with those whose search for faith requires a strong emphasis on self-discovery.

5.49 Where language is slippery and the richness of religious discourse devalued, we can see how the question of the place and role of signs and symbols might be seen to be absorbed in the dream world or the unconscious. We can also see that the influence of this thinking makes the role of silence more acute. In T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, dreamlike snatches of voices carry the suggestions of Christian stories: there is a hint of Gethsemane, a distorted glimpse of the Damascus road experience. Death, dying and loss of articulation characterise the 'Unreal City'. Twentieth-century living and loss of personal loving relationship become tangled to suggest sterility and little hope of salvation. Here, Eliot asks the question that still preoccupies us: what coherent, underlying structure can possibly make sense of all this?

5.50 Similarly, if we continue our journey across the wastelands of two world wars and, in particular, the events of the Holocaust, we can see how acts of inhumanity and genocide around the world have led some religious thinkers to suggest that there is no longer a function for a theology of hope. If there is no theological understanding which can make sense of the atrocities of the Holocaust then we should be content to say nothing.³⁵ To

continue to witness to a loving God who intends good for his people is a mockery and an arrogance. Faced with this charge, we may find it difficult to respond, unless we remember what Elie Wiesel says in *Night*, when the despairing cry 'Where is God now?' at the hanging of a boy, is met by the reply 'He is hanging here on this gallows.'³⁶

5.51 Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) also gives us important clues about the range and limits of meanings in relation to language. Thus the way in which we witness or proclaim may be subject to the mendacity to which Nietzsche pointed and Wittgenstein elucidates. We are not capable of saying what we mean, only of showing by example. The distinction between showing and saying is an important contribution. George Steiner says:

The greatest of modern philosophers was also the one most profoundly intent on escaping from the spiral of language. Wittgenstein's entire work starts out by asking whether there is any verifiable relation between the word and the fact. That which we call fact may well be a veil spun by language to shroud the mind from reality. Wittgenstein compels us to wonder whether reality can be spoken of, when speech is merely a kind of infinite regression, words being spoken of other words. Wittgenstein pursued this dilemma with passionate austerity. The famous closing proposition of the *Tractatus* [whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must be silent] is not a claim for the potentiality of philosophic statement such as Descartes advanced. On the contrary; it is a drastic retreat from the confident authority of traditional metaphysics. It leads to the equally famous conclusion: 'It is clear that Ethics cannot be expressed'. Wittgenstein would include in the class of inexpressible (what he calls the mystical) most of the traditional areas of philosophic speculation. Language can only deal meaningfully with a special, restricted segment of reality. The rest, and it is presumably the much larger part, is silence.³⁷

5.52 In such culture, filled with the memory of the dead, it is unsurprising that fragmentation of a severe kind should occur. Further, it is also not surprising that groups have emerged which indict Christianity for not being descriptive of their cause. Some women, for example, redefining themselves

in terms of feminist theory, find themselves obliged to reject Christianity as having nothing to offer them, being both hierarchical and patriarchal. Some theologians, such as Daphne Hampson, have argued themselves to be 'post-Christian', having gone beyond the confines of a religious system which contributes to the marginalisation of women.

The yew tree points up. It has a Gothic shape.

The eyes lift after it and find the moon.

The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.

Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls.

How I would like to believe in tenderness –

The face of the effigy, gentled by candles,

Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.

I have fallen a long way. Clouds are flowering

Blue and mystical over the face of the stars.

Inside the church, the saints will all be blue,

Floating on their delicate feet over the cold pews,

Their hands and faces stiff with holiness.

The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild.

And the message of the yew tree is blackness – blackness and silence.³⁸

5.53 Sylvia Plath is excluded from the church, relegated to the graveyard with her familiars the moon, the bats, the owls. Despite the despairing desire for the image of womanhood the church offers, she cannot accept it. What is left to her is the void of darkness and silence. In the realm of historic Christianity, she has no contribution to make. It is suggested in response that such women are misconstruing Christianity because of their own constriction by a theoretical position which is inconsistent with the experience of faith. For example, the vulnerability of Christ on the cross is seen as refuting the claim that Christianity is patriarchal and dominating. Only the historic traditions of Christianity are so dominating and need, through

women's critique, to repent. A new kind of Christianity is open to women who bring their insights to bear. Theologians such as Grace Jantzen, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Janet Martin Soskice, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and Mary Grey, are all contributing ideas to the Church about its witness and proclamation by and for women.

5.54 Other people searching for faith will argue that the Church has nothing to say about sexuality or the experience of being creatures and that this merely leads to repressiveness based on gender or sexual orientation.³⁹ Again, these are areas in which there may seem to be an ominous silence, and the witness of the Church may appear defective where it does not address these issues comprehensively.

5.55 For example, the poet W. B. Yeats disagreed with Christianity because he believed it was constructed on two negative ideas: the virgin womb and empty tomb.⁴⁰ Yeats wanted physicality, sexuality and corporeality to affirm the world against death and silence. This also links with the criticisms made by feminist theologians. Ursula King writes:

Feminist spirituality lays greater emphasis on immanence and correlations than on separateness. It also stresses concrete embodiment and advocates an embodied rather than an idealized, abstract spirituality divorced from everyday experience.

Thus many women reclaim the power of the erotic as a feature and source of spiritual energy.⁴¹

5.56 Further, in considering the position of those who feel marginalised and cut off from (or by) mainstream Christianity, we cannot overlook the existentialist rejection which sees the extension of silence to include suicide. Texts such as Kafka's *The Trial* and Sartre's *Nausea* are brilliant and terrifying expositions of how the world becomes distorted and unliveable without adequate reference frames. However, the choice for suicide may also emerge out of happiness or a feeling of completeness, like Keats's 'now more than ever seems it rich to die'. This is illustrated by an example:

Scott (not his real name) was a young man in his early twenties. He had served his time at a trade and had a good job. His bosses were happy with his work and he got on well with his friends. His parents were separated but he got on well with both. He was good friends with his brother and his brother's fiancée and he was a part of a group of young people who went about

together. He had a car, interests, holidays. There were no difficulties or problems. One weekend he drove to one of his favourite parts of the countryside and took his own life. The goodbye note expressed his love for his family. This was his choice. Trying to respect this choice helped his mother a little as she grappled with coming to terms with losing her son.

5.57 In the Inspector Morse episode called *Cherubim and Seraphim*, Inspector Morse looks for misery and pain in the lives of teenagers who committed suicide. In fact, he cannot solve the case until he realises that the suicides are caused by a drug and disco culture which confers feelings of ecstasy and having achieved the ultimate. The frustration and bewilderment of Inspector Morse as he tries to understand a youth culture based on joy are a reminder also to Christians that the culture into which we speak the truth of God's promises may assimilate this truth but its re-expression may be quite novel.

5.58 Existentialist thinking from Heidegger onwards attempts to rescue the world of thought from encroaching silence by looking to the recovery of the transcendental dimension.

Two forms move among the dead, high sleep

Who by his highness quiets them, high peace

Upon whose shoulders even the heavens rest,

Two brothers. And a third form, she that says

Good-by in the darkness, speaking quietly there,

To those who cannot say good-by themselves.⁴²

5.59 The 'flash of voice' that maintains our ability to speak of what lies beyond death; the presence of an articulate wisdom, is apposite. Consequently, in such a thought system, the theology of Christ as *Logos*, the Word becomes an important concept for seeing how death and silence can be overcome by the presence of the *Logos* in those places which seem abandoned by God.

5.60 We must also deal with the critique advanced by, for example, Iris Murdoch under the general idea that there is no God but Good. In today's society, the principle of Good must be recovered, but its attachment to a deity

who sets the standard for goodness is not only unnecessary but anachronistic. This is not to say that the history of religious moral philosophy as it derives from Christianity is to be rejected, but it becomes the background colouring for principles in which human beings are the main and 'only' players:

Christianity now, faced with the withdrawal of belief from the supernatural, may be tempted by various forms of 'cosmic answer' of which Jung's view is one. Religion as a sort of science. I attach, as I have been arguing, great importance to the concept of a transcendent good as an idea (properly interpreted) to both morality and religion ... We need a theology which can continue without God. Why not call such a reflection a form of moral philosophy? All right, so long as it treats of those matters of 'ultimate concern', our experience of the unconditioned and our continued sense of what is holy.⁴³

5.61 To return to the post-modern world, we may have to consider very carefully the Ven. David Atkinson's description of our times as the *Ashtray of Modernity*. Here, the 'butt ends of our days and ways' as T. S. Eliot put it, are stubbed out in the crucible of ideas and we run vainly to and fro trying to relight this one and then that one for a short while. For some, our pick'n'mix culture is really a sifting of ashes:

So the past becomes a theme park, for the amusement of the visiting tourist. For instance, Gregorian plainsong (popular for chilling out to after taking the drug Ecstasy, it is said) is now highly commercial. Record shops have shelves of it. But the truth about plainsong, that it is an ancient expression of collective prayer, is largely missed. This is one more illustration of the opacity of religion in a post-modernist culture. It is that very opacity that has rendered religious style and experiences now safe to play with – there is no danger of their underlying meaning taking hold.

Experience is the touchstone of post-modernism, but only good experience. If religious movements succumb to post-modernism, they must do so by suppressing the difficult and painful bits of their message. Worship must 'feel good' and offer a 'spiritual high' ...

Belief in the real experience of a real God is definitely not a post-modernist position; it is far too uncomfortable and disturbing, post-modernism chooses the bits it likes and discards the rest.⁴⁴

5.62 For others, the search for meaning is a positive and strengthening experience, in which the ashes hold many possibilities for rekindling. Those who search for faith may be precisely those who fall into this category and it is up to us to provide them with the Christian witness as the source of a light which never dies.

5.63 Now we have to look back at our journey through the history of ideas. We have only stopped briefly at some of the many stations, not gone out to explore the town thoroughly. Yet each of these stopping places presents a challenge to the historic witness of the Christian faith and some, as we have seen, have offered branch lines to distort the continuity of that witness. Other passengers have got on whose ideas have affected the dialogue with the carriers of Christianity and have added new perspectives to their imaging of the final destination.

5.64 But perhaps in our time the Good News can go no further, because it is no longer clear which are termini and which is the continuation of the line. We have perhaps two options; the first is that we can get out for a while and explore where the line goes – which we have done in our various chapters – or trust in the recapitulation of history: 'it is easy to miss Him at the turn of a civilisation'.⁴⁵ We may trust that a time will come when human beings will seek again for coherence out of fragmentation, a new story of restoration in which the Christian epistemological framework will again offer its vision of reconciliation and hope. In that case, we need no longer sit on the rails, but fly away. But we may also properly argue that it is part of the missionary task not to fly off the rails but to endure in solidarity with others.

5.65 Until the world returns to God, then, we have Newbigin's argument in his book *Proper Confidence*:

Through most of human history, religion has been the most powerful factor in the shaping of culture. To look outside of the gospel for a starting point for the demonstration of the reasonableness of the gospel is itself a contradiction of the gospel, for it implies that we look for the logos elsewhere than in Jesus ...

Until then, my commitment to the truth of the gospel is a commitment of faith. If I am further pressed to justify this commitment (as I have often been) my only response has to be a personal confession. The story is not my construction. In ways that I cannot fully understand but always through the witness of those who went before me in the company of those called to be witnesses, I have been laid hold of and charged with the responsibility of telling this story.⁴⁶

5.66 This represents a back-to-the-wall approach to our culture, in which the residue of the global character of the Christian message experience becomes concentrated into the self as witness and testimony. Learning and change are resisted, for Newbigin is a Christian who can be tested and not found wanting. The strength of the story in him must attract others; a giving away of the gift into the dark world of contemporary culture cannot be risked.

5.67 Though we may admire this steadfastness and powerful adherence to the task of witness, what Newbigin says may undermine the missionary quest. In this chapter we have seen that the Christian faith can and does take risks and that any one contemporary situation may look very different when viewed from the perspective of history. The Church, then, does enter into dialogue with the world in the expectation that God is at work there and must seek to share its message of hope to those whose mental framework has been shaped by the inheritance of thought systems which have become the Zeitgeist of our world today. By bringing our Christian faith and the language of our salvation into places of doubt, transformation can take place. For it was only through a culture that could find significance in a dead sheep that we are able to experience the richness of the symbolism that imbues the Lamb of God, discovered at the throne of glory at the end of all that is.

Summary

KEY WORDS

- post-modern ● orthodoxy ● heresy ● Trinity ● ontological proof ● five ways ● Protestantism ● dialogues ● scepticism ● Enlightenment ● public truth ● feminist theology

A look at the characteristics of the post-modern world might suggest to some people that we live in a totally godless society. If generations go by who know little about Christianity or any other religious tradition, or who have heard religion reduced merely to babble, then surely the missionary task of the Church is severely threatened and perhaps cannot be sustained?

In order to respond to this, it is necessary to formulate an historical overview of the development of Christian thinking in the context of the history of ideas. We need to find out how we have arrived at this kind of culture and what of the inherited tradition remains for us to work with. In particular, it is necessary to examine three trends in the history of ideas which have consequences for how we think about things today. These are: the effect of 'heretical' teaching on Christian belief; the emphasis on human reason during the Enlightenment; the threat of death and silence in the twentieth century.

The development of Christian theology, setting out what we understand about God and the way God works, has been a gradual process which derives much of its cutting edge from challenges to its primary teaching from other Christian thinkers. The response to 'heretical' views produced more clarity on the notion of Jesus as fully human and fully divine and helped to shape the theology of the Trinity. Side-effects of heretical thinking, particularly those which shape theology for our own ends, work against the clarification of what we believe and can still litter our thinking about God today.

Some Christian thinkers can be shown to have made thinking itself into a missionary act. Thus, the various arguments for God, such as the ontological proof, have been designed to show that atheism is a logically indefensible position. However, such arguments also depended on the prevailing world-view. Where the human and divine worlds mapped on to one another, such arguments made good sense; when invention and discovery in the history of

progress began to place more emphasis on the human world, new thinking began to challenge the role of Christian orthodoxy. Where Christian practice fell short of Christian ideals, this too caused a culture of questioning, requiring response and redress by the Church.

During the period known as the Enlightenment, philosophers began to ponder the limits of human knowledge and to discuss the efficacy of human reason. One of the important effects of this was to bring about a separation between public and private roles for thought, such that religious belief became seen to belong to the private sphere of a person's life. The liberation of Christian thinking from the private realm back into the public arena has been seen as a crucial task for the mission of the Church in the present age, a view which is particularly propounded by Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. Further, other ideological positions arising from the history of progress can be seen to have further eroded the place of Christian thought even in the private sphere. This has led to philosophical thought-systems in which the supremacy of the human person, *qua* human, has left no room or necessity for God.

In the twentieth century there has been fresh emphasis on the limits of human thought, especially in terms of how we express ourselves. The experience of two world wars and the fragmentation of societies has asked whether our language is adequate to deal with the totality of our experience and whether or not our ability to discourse with each other is threatened by the inexpressible and by silence. Some people feel that Christianity itself is silent in respect of their own situation and challenge the Church to provide inclusive thinking which brings them fully into the promises of the Christian story.

The challenge, then, is to create a Christian apologetic which can speak effectively to the post-modern situation, and which is sensitive to the way in which we have inherited ideas. We cannot assume that people will be receptive to Christian ideas if the rest of their mental life is conditioned by the post-modern world, and we need to find images and ideas which can carry the meaningfulness of the Christian story back into people's lives.

Further reading

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Things to do

- **AIM:** to think about our own faith in the context of living in today's world.
- **PURPOSE:** to see that telling the gospel story faithfully has a value for mission even if life makes that difficult.

BIBLE VERSE

While he was making this defence, Festus exclaimed, 'You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!' But Paul said, 'I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth.' (Acts 26.24,25)

Things to do include:

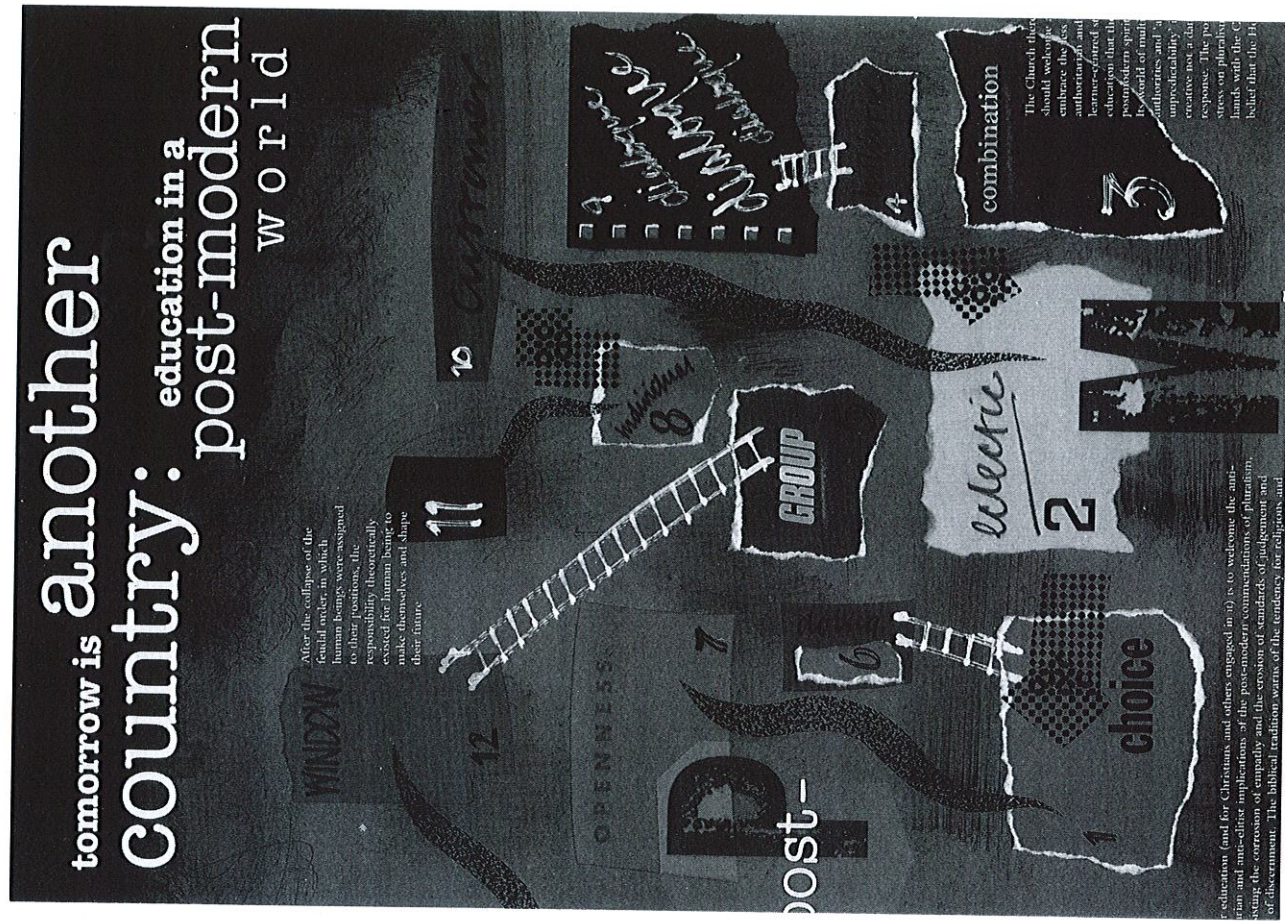
- a. Looking at pictures
- b. Looking at videos
- c. Explanations of faith
- d. Discussion questions

1. PICTURES

Look at the post-modern image (see Figure 8).

Ask people to discuss with their neighbour what it says to them.

Figure 8 Tomorrow is another country



2. VIDEOS

Look at excerpts from some modern pop videos or video some advertisements (particularly those for cars). What is the 'story' in these videos?

3. FAITH SHARING

In small groups, ask one volunteer either to 'explain' his or her faith, or to give a testimony. Ask the listeners to say what impresses them about what is said. See if people feel there is a difference between 'rational explanation' and 'telling the story'.

As a group, consider whether it would be as easy or comfortable to share the same story at work, at a party, in another group or church. If people have done this, ask them to say what happened.

4. QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Choose some questions relevant to your group:

- Does the world we live in seem hopeful or hopeless to you? How do other people you know think about it?
- Do you think it is easier today to be an atheist than an agnostic?
- Why do you think some people *cannot* believe the Christian Gospel?
- Is reason as important as faith?
- Is it more difficult to be a Christian in today's world?
- Is it harder to make choices about what to believe?

Notes

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Conclusion

A reply to Mrs V. Angry from the Mission Theological Advisory Group

Dear Mrs Angry,

We hope that you have had a chance to look through the material in our book and to see that we do feel challenged by what you and others like you have to say to us. Sometimes the kind of points you raise make us feel very uncomfortable, but also make us feel that we have a great deal to offer to people who are prepared to be open and honest with us about how they see us. In our book we have tried to listen to what people who are searching for faith have to say about their search and about the nature of their faith. For us, as Christians, we have to find ways of reaching out which do not compromise the integrity of that search and do not seek actively to override people's faith with our own convictions. We entirely agree with you that you are right to see your friend and neighbour Val as a missionary. Yet you should be assured that we are committed to both a view of God and an experience of God which are treasured by us and which we regard as the stuff of our religious commitment and expression.

We are aware that some Christians may think that because we have not given the Christian answers straightaway, we have risked selling the historic faith short, but we do not believe this. In order to witness our faith to people like you, Christians may have to weigh the integrity of their faith against standing alongside you and your anger. We have seen for ourselves that taking risks for the gospel can look like compromise, but we believe exploration of the issues helps us to see the challenges and allows us to make proper response.

We hope that your challenge to us, on the one hand, and our fellow Christians' concerns, on the other, will be met by reconsidering the issues through using the 'things to do'. We would like you really to think about the difficult issues, not in order to give concrete answers, but to raise questions that may help all of us confront more clearly the task of being the Christian Church in the twenty-first century. This is something which all of us in the

group, who come from different churches and backgrounds, have been working together to produce: what we *can* do ecumenically to build bridges between the search for faith and the witness of the Church.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Richards

on behalf of the Mission Theological Advisory Group

Glossary of theological terms

Eschaton: We use this term to describe an ultimate act of God, in which there will be established a new creation. The eschatological reality, visionary glimpses of which we obtain from the Book of Revelation, will, we believe, be a total theophany: everything and everyone will express God and praise God. Mission theology therefore also includes eschatological thinking, since our faith in acting in mission is that the loving God has in mind at all times our ultimate destiny.

Evangelism/evangelisation: Evangelism embraces the many ways of reaching out to other people to share the story of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Evangelisation is a slightly broader term. Evangelism is included in mission, but is not synonymous with it. Aggressive acts of evangelism, which put people off, could be said to act against mission. Evangelism needs to be supported by other ways of acting in mission, such as prayer.

Kingdom: A term used by Jesus. Christians speak of the kingdom as a vision of a world order in which God's values are paramount. The kingdom can be spoken of as established now, since Jesus has changed the world for ever, but also as something to be achieved. The latter idea is important for mission theology because it means that we have to look forward to what God intends for us and work towards it through mission, by doing God's will.

Koinonia: This term refers to the bond between Christians, which is also called fellowship. This is fostered by corporate worship. Christians are often described as being in communion with one another, particularly through eucharistic fellowship. When we act in mission, we aim to extend our *koinonia* to others in whatever way we can.

Metanoia: Conversion, a turning round, or radical change. When we act in mission, we open up possibilities for change in people's lives at all levels. While conversion often means the act of making a decision for Christ, it can also refer to the opening up of occasions for repentance and forgiveness, and to the radical action of the Holy Spirit in people's lives.

Missio Dei: This means 'the mission of God'. Mission is seen as an attribute of God. The *missio dei* is commonly understood as the mission of God's love to

the world, since God sends his love into the world. God's supreme act of sending love was to send his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world.

Mission of the Church: The Church is an instrument of God's love to the world. The Church exists to serve the mission of God. When Christians act in mission as part of the Church, they participate in the movement of God's love towards all people.

Mission theology: A way of relating what we know about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit and about the life of the Church, to what we can discover about the *missio dei*. Mission theology also tries to describe what we can do to further the mission of God.

Witness: An act of proclamation, or other ways of showing forth the Good News contained in the gospels. The idea of witness brings out the importance of showing God's love by example.

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