

Old Brampton and Great Barlow

Cosmos and Christianity 2008

Session 1: 10 September — In the beginning

- Chaos and creation
- From nothing or something?
- Black holes and Christ

We will not cover all this. This is an imagination-tickler.

This evening's session is something of a *scene-setter* for the next five. There will, therefore, be more from me than in weeks following.

In the beginning

- arche
- chaos
- cosmos
- primeval soup: do mitochondria tell us anything? folk memory? collective unconscious?

God

- Images of God
- *ein sof; Immortal, Invisible, in light inaccessible; Ancient of Days*
- 'Godness', can we know fully? Paul's mirror
- How does Trinity work? (the Divine economy)

Created

- from nothing? What about before the moment of creation?
- from something? What?
- platelets

Logos

- John 1: What does this passage say about creation, creator, created?
- Heraclitus (about 500 BC). *Logos*—the underlying coherence of all things is expressed in the Logos, the formula of arrangement common to all things.
- God, science, nature, fire
- Logos and Christ
- Stoics, immanence, transcendence
- Begotten of his Father before all worlds

Sophia

- Psalm 104:24-34, Proverbs 8:22 ff, Sirach 1:4
- What do these passages say about creation, creator, created?
- Wisdom and Christ
- Bulgakov

Parallel universes, or contractions and expansions

- Images of the Christ-event:
 - incarnation, crucifixion/resurrection, ascension, pentecost
 - time and cosmos: what is time? is God working his purpose out?
 - sacraments and snowballs
- getting older: brain wiring

Now let your imagination run riot. How do you see all this?

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Session 2: 17 September – *In whose image?*

- Human and divine?
- Body and soul?
- Continuing creation

In whose image?

- First creation story
 - Genesis 1:26: 'in our image, according to our likeness' (note plurals)
 - Genesis 1:27: in the image of YHWH-God he created them; male and female
- Second creation story (Eden)
 - Genesis 2:7 the earth-creature (Adam) from the dust.
 - Genesis 2:15 ff: the earth-creature. Ravenna mosaic. Modern biology.
 - Does Eden symbolize the moments *after* creation? Or *before* creation?
 - At death our bodies decompose to molecules that return to the earth. Dust to dust.
 - God within.
- Look at
 - Wisdom 7:26: reflection of God's image. Refulgence.
 - Psalm 8. Hebrews 1.
 - Matthew 5:48. Galatians 2:20; 4:19. 2 Peter 1:4. 1 John 3:2; 4:12; 5:18.
 - 2 Corinthians 3:18
- Mystical body: Everyone is in God? Everything?
- Aggression: natural? If so, divine? Deliver us from [the] evil [one].
- Where is Jesus of Nazareth in all this?
- Do we, as Christians, have anything special to say about human life?

Body and soul?

- What is *person*?
- Body *and* soul: separable or not? 'Holy Scripture nowhere splits the person into bits.' Christianity proclaims the unity and wholeness of the human person. The whole person matters (HR managers, please note).
- Healing and wholeness.
- Ego, id, superego.
- Hebrew: adam (soil), nephesh (soul), ruach (spirit), basar (flesh).
- Greek: soma (body), sarx (flesh), psuche (mind, soul), pneuma (spirit).
- Latin: corpus, anima/us, mens, intellectus, ratio.
- Where is self? major issue in interfaith dialogue (Buddhist – there is no self, self is illusion).

Continuing creation

- 'Eternally begotten of the Father'. Pre-existent son, word, wisdom.
- Paul's theology. 2 Corinthians 3:18.
- Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Irenaeus.
- What does this mean for us all within the application of the Christ-event to daily life?

What do you think of these?

- 'What is not God is nothing' (Bulgakov).
- Jesus the Christ is logos - word, and word is 'the activity of [God's] thought outwards.'
- Chaos (disorder) to cosmos (order). Jesus Christ reversing chaos.

Reading

It's difficult to recommend any single book: we're all at different stages and have different tastes. Nevertheless, you might try one of these:

- Radcliffe, Timothy. *What is the point of being a Christian?*
- Ware, Kallistos. *The Orthodox Way*.

Or any brief introduction to Theology (e.g. David Ford's).

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Session 3: 24 September — Human beings: nice but naughty?

- Sin, evil: entropy?
- Making amends: forgiveness and psychology
- The work of Jesus

Sin, evil: entropy?

- What is sin?
 - OT. error, blunder, clumsiness, miss the mark, rebellion, wrong intent, betrayal of community.
 - NT. injustice, violence, wrong intent, diversion, erring, straying, making mistake
 - Synoptics. Debt. Turning away. Disobedience. Lawlessness – Luke 15. Enslavement to enemy – Matthew 13. Attachments. Idolatry. Ignorance.
 - John. Sin of world. Lawlessness, disorder, chaos (1 John). Sin as reversion to chaos – cosmos back to chaos, reversing the work of creation. Entropy. Christ provides the energy to prevent entropy.
 - of Satan? What/who is Satan?
 - Paul. Galatians, Romans. Active force, works through misuse of the law. Enslaving. Contrary to pull of the Spirit. Hebrews 3: missing the mark.
 - Stanley: sin is anything that comes between you and God, or anything that you do that puts a barrier between someone else and God. What do you think of this?
 - Stanley: failure to achieve perfection? Supermarket trolley being allowed to go off course?
 - a life unlived? What about when duty (e.g. to sick relatives) prevents you from 'living'?
 - Powerlessness? Romans 7:19. Is it a sin not to resist? Political implications.
- Why do we sin: did we fall? Not everyone thinks so. Perhaps we seek to rise (Hegel, Westermann).
- Born sinful? Original sin? A western thing? Romans 5:12. Based on faulty translation? If no original sin doctrine, it makes it worse (paradoxically), because then we can not claim *not* to be held responsible.
- Classifying sin: mortal/venial; individual/corporate, etc. Waste of time IMHO.

Making amends: forgiveness and psychology

- Forgiveness: who forgives whom? Any conditions? Lord's prayer hardest bit, have to be willing to change.
- Can I ask to be forgiven unless I forgive?
 - Story of the King's servant.
 - One of the early church fathers: 'it's a bit like teaching a child to do something. The parent does it carefully a few times, then steps back and says now you show me. God forgives us and then steps back and says now you show me how to forgive.' (from R Williams).
- When I feel forgiven it changes me and all my relationships.
- Where is repentance in this? St Ann's Dublin case history
- Care of victim and perpetrator.
- Forgiveness and guilt. What do you think of these?
 - What matters to Jesus is not sin and wrongdoing, but repentance. Gracious father. Prostitute.
 - Eckhart: Truly to have committed a sin is not sinful if we regret what we have done.
 - Forgiveness and punishment: 'a bottomless well of uncritical forgiveness would devalue virtue.' 'Love and caring do not remove the obligation for personal effort.'
 - Paul saw that the only way to change a human heart was through acceptance and forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32. It is only when I find someone who does not criticise my behaviour that I can find the will to do something about it: I need help when I'm down, not just on the way back up.
 - South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- Ethics of punishment. How does 'love one's enemy and pray for one's persecutors' affect adjudicators and the law?

The work of Jesus

- How does Christianity *work*?

Reading. It's difficult to recommend any single book: we all have different tastes. Connolly, Hugh. *Sin*. Radcliffe, Timothy. *What is the point of being a Christian?* Ware, Kallistos. *The Orthodox Way*. Any book by Gerard Hughes: *God in all things, God of surprises*.

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Session 4: 1 October — *Sex and sacredness*

- Gender biology, nature, nurture
- Priesthood and sex hormones
- Does it matter what the Bible says?

Gender biology, nature and nurture?

- Sex determination at fertilization
- Sex hormones in utero
- Internal and external genitalia, psychological sexuality, intersex states

Scripture and sexuality

- Hebrew scripture
 - Background
 - Ezekiel 16, Sodom, Lot, Gibeah
- Gospels
 - disciples and society
 - women
- The problem of translation
 - Paul: Romans 1; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10
 - Jude 17: ekporneuo, other flesh
- Song of Songs
 - God and man, Christ and church, worship, sacrifice
 - ecstasy, ritual, puritanism, cerebral and sensuous (multisensory) worship
- Love, sanctity, wholeness
 - cupidity, charis
 - agape, philia, eros
 - danger of idolatry, then pornography
- Deus caritas est – Benedict XVI:

Priesthood and sexuality

- Representing Christ?
- Headship
- Theology and/or discipline
- Culture

The authority of scripture? Why do we heed some rules and not others?

- Hebrew Scripture: e.g. food, clothing, business, family
- Paul: e.g. women in church, speaking in tongues
- Jesus: e.g. prayer, family obligations, flogging dead horses, burying the dead

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Session 5: 15 October — *Journeys end: lovers' meeting?*

- Saved? from what? to what? by what?
- After death
- Judgment

Saved? from what? to what? by what?

- What is salvation?
- What metaphors would you use if you were describing it to a prisoner, an architect, Mr Micawber, someone wracked with guilt, someone with pneumonia, someone who needed information to survive, a shipwrecked crew, someone with a fractured bone, someone 'in the dark'?
- What is the force that powers salvation? Can *anything* be salvific?
- Images of Jesus – what do the gospels tell us about who/what he was? Son of man, son of God, eternal son of God.
- C G Jung: 'Man needs to experience the god-image within himself and to feel its correspondence with the forms that his religion gives to it.'
- Grace, works.
- What is the purpose of salvation? Why did the Christ-event happen in the middle east 2000 years ago, rather than, say, in central Asia (or wherever) 5000 years ago (or whenever)?
- Sense of time defeated, resurrection put Jesus Christ into Galilee, Ascension put humanity (the human Jesus) into the Godhead, Pentecost put Spirit of God into individuals. Even if you can only see Jesus Christ as example to be followed, then these events can be for you poetical representations.
- Was Gandhi a Christian?
- Harvest supper.

After death

- Thy kingdom come ...
- Eternal life: now or then?
- Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. What happens to our bodies at death?
- What happens to inseparable body/soul at death?
 - Homing pigeons
- Why did Paul write, for example, 1 Thessalonians?
 - What provoked it?
 - What images did he use, and why?
 - What effect might it have had?
- What can reasonably be preached at funerals that is not pagan?

Judgment

- then and/or now?
- What is judgment anyway?
- Purgatory
- Limbo
- Second coming
- Paul's mirror, the face of God, *imago dei*, imago, metamorphosis, Gerontius

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Session 6: 22 October — *Images and perception of God?*

- Parenthood – is this helpful?
- *Three in one* – what's this all about? The oil of heaven?
- Perception of God: is God hard-wired in the brain?

Images of Jesus

- Friend?
- Example?
- Teacher?
- Healer?
- Other?
- What questions would you ask him if he were to walk into the room?

Images of God

- Parenthood? Creator?
- One substance
- Three? Persons? Why only three?

Images of heaven

- Nancy Mitford
- Apocalypse: incense laden air
- Paradise garden, with delicious fruit
- Song of Songs: union with the Divine
 - Divinisation, sanctification, the end of the process of salvation/redemption/justification—call it what you like?
 - Returning home

How do we perceive God?

- Biology
- Emotion
- Revelation
- Inspiration
- Otherness

Judgment: we didn't cover this last week? Do you want to?

- What is judgment anyway?
- then and/or now?
- Purgatory
- Limbo
- Second coming
- Paul's mirror, the face of God, *imago dei*, imago, metamorphosis, Gerontius

What next? Thursdays 27 November, 4 & 11 Dec: Advent readings and reflections