

FAITH IN FOCUS

WEST CHURCH, BANGOR

CHRISTIAN THINKING IN THE MODERN WORLD



Week 4, 7 May 2019

The problem of evil & suffering
~ the Uniqueness of Christianity

SERIES OVERVIEW



AIM: help to think through some of today's big issues so we can make wise decisions and share the Christian faith confidently with others

Week 1 Tuesday 19th February @ 7.30 pm

A Christian approach to making choices ~ the Sanctity of Life

Week 2 Tuesday 19th March @ 7.30 pm

Is it ever right to end a life? ~ Facing death faithfully

Week 3 Tuesday 9th April @ 7.30 pm,

Explaining our faith ~ Understanding and Engaging Worldviews

Week 4 Tuesday 7th May @ 7.30 pm

The problem of evil & suffering ~ the uniqueness of Christianity

www.paulcoultter.net/focus

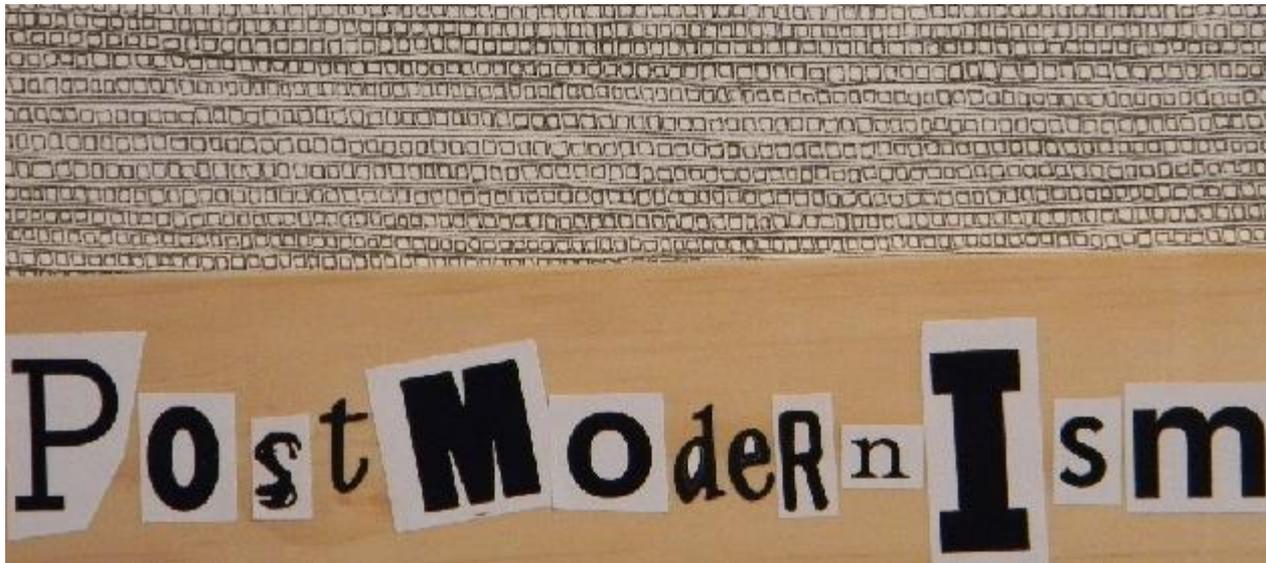


RECAP

THE MODERN WORLD?



THE **Post** Christian CENTURY



CHRISTIAN THINKING



Expresses love for God

Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” **Matthew 22 v37**

Exposes Satan’s lies

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. [...] Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **Ephesians 4 v14; 6 v11)**

Enables effective evangelism

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. **2 Corinthians 10 v5**



in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy,
always being prepared to make a defence to
anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope
that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and fear

1 Peter 3v15

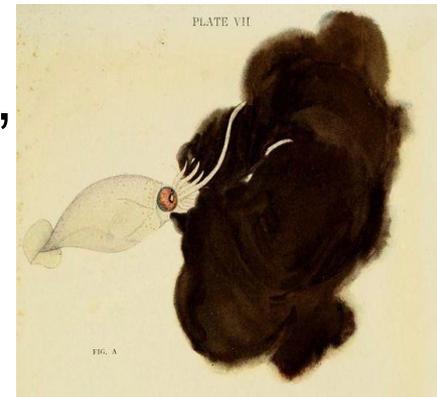
WHY THIS QUESTION NOW?



Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

Proverbs 26v4-5



**NOTHING
READ
IS EVER
BETWEEN
WHAT IT
THE LINES.
SEEMS.**



MAKING THE GOSPEL CLEAR



God rules [Father - creation]

- Does God exist? Creation / Science? Suffering?

We rebelled [sin]

- Morality? Human nature? Identity and sexuality?

God rescues [Son – Messiah, Saviour, Lord]

- Can I trust the Bible? Is Jesus the only way?

We respond [faith]

- What must I do to be saved?

God restores [Spirit – hope]

- Does God really love me? Can I be sure?





THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

A QUESTION



Why does God allow such suffering?

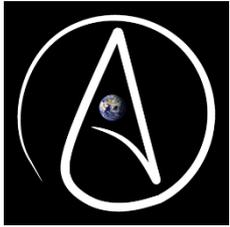


WHY THIS QUESTION NOW?



- Why does God allow such terrible things to happen?
- Where is God in natural disasters (earthquakes / tsunamis)?
- Is sickness a punishment for sin?
- How can God allow innocent people to suffer, like a child who dies a painful death through cancer?
- Did God really command His people to wipe out whole nations – men, women and children?
- How could a loving God torture people forever in Hell – is He some kind of sadist?

A PROBLEM FOR EVERYONE



Atheism – ultimately meaningless



Hinduism – always pay back (karma)



Buddhism – an illusion



Islam – God testing faith from a distance

A GOSPEL PERSPECTIVE



- **God rules** – an original creation without suffering; God's goodness and power
- **We rebelled** – sin as the ultimate cause of all suffering (directly or indirectly)

THE ROOT QUESTION



Can God be trusted?

Good?

Why?

Powerful?

Why did God allow evil in the first place?

Freedom to choose sin was a necessary part of creation of people who can love Him

Why does God not (always) intervene to stop suffering, especially of good people?

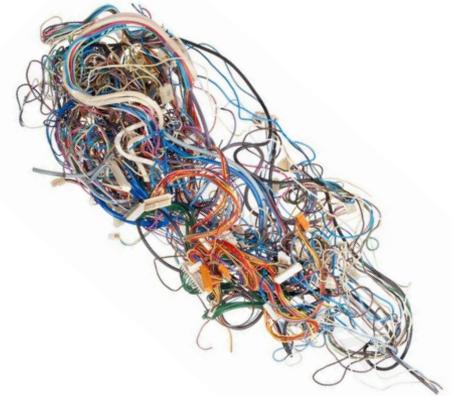
The answer is seldom given to us, but Scripture assures us of God's goodness and power

WHY THE DELAY?



Time for people to repent

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. **2 Peter 3 v9**



Potential for growth through suffering

we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope **Romans 5 v3-4**



A cosmic drama

The book of Job



ROOM FOR MYSTERY



life is not something we manage to hammer together and keep in repair by our wits; it is an unfathomable gift. We are immersed in mysteries: incredible love, confounding evil, the creation, the cross, grace, God.

The secularized mind is terrorized by mysteries.

[...] But **a solved life is a reduced life.**

Eugene Peterson

A GOSPEL PERSPECTIVE



- **God rules** – an original creation without suffering; God's goodness and power
- **We rebelled** – sin as the ultimate cause of all suffering (directly or indirectly)
- **God rescues** – God affected by and involved in our suffering to save us from sin

WHY DO GOOD PEOPLE SUFFER?



“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”



CONSIDER JESUS



“Whatever game [God] is playing with His creation, He has kept His own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from man that He has not exacted from Himself. He has Himself gone through the whole of human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair and death.”



Dorothy L. Sayers

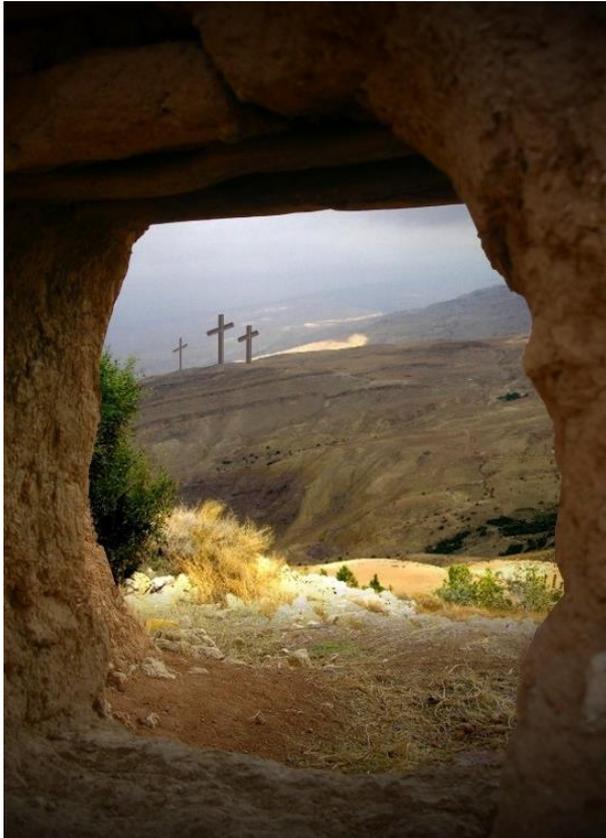
‘The Greatest Drama Ever Staged’
in *The Poetry of Search and the Poetry of
Statement*, copyright (1963)

A GOSPEL PERSPECTIVE



- **God rules** – an original creation without suffering; God’s goodness and power
- **We rebelled** – sin as the ultimate cause of all suffering (directly or indirectly)
- **God rescues** – God affected by and involved in our suffering to save us from sin
- **We respond** – admitting our own part in the cause of suffering
- **God restores** – hope of a future free from suffering and help now in a community of hope

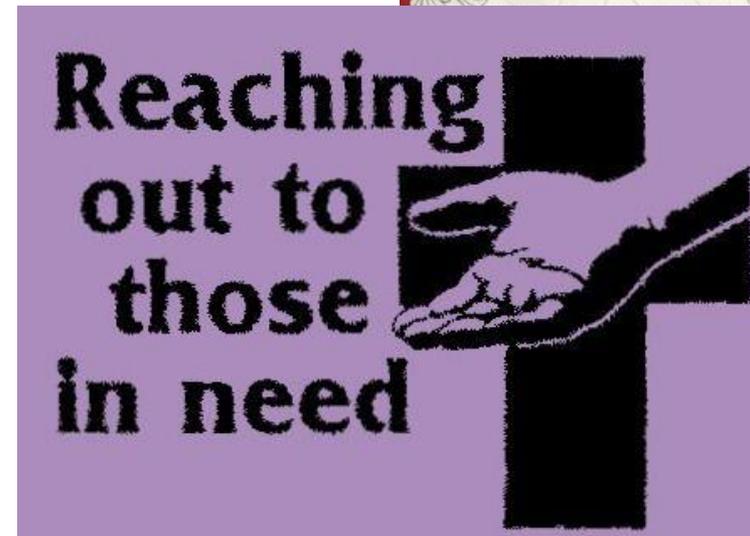
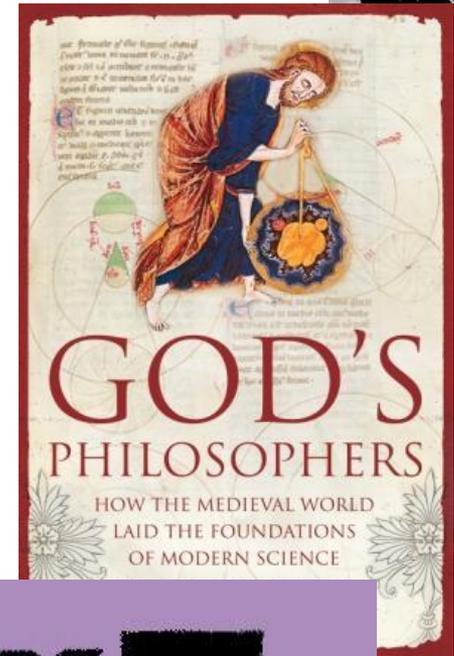
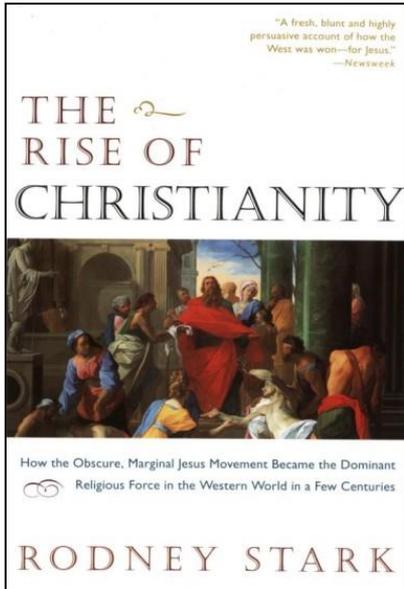
CROSS AND RESURRECTION



No human future can repair the crimes of the past. But in order to live with that past of ruins and victims, without having to repress them or relive them, we need this transcendent hope for the resurrection of the dead and the rebuilding of the ruins. Because of the resurrection of the destroyed Christ, Christians have hope for the future, in the nucleus of hope for resurrection. **Without hope for the past, there is no hope for the future.**

Jürgen Moltmann

A MISSION OF HOPE & HELP



CHRISTIANITY INTEGRATES



- Suffering is real
- Suffering is often unjust
- Suffering is unnatural
- God entered into our suffering
- We must take responsibility for our part
- A duty to relieve suffering







THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY

A QUESTION



Isn't it arrogant for you Christians to claim Jesus is the only way to God?



WHO CAN JUDGE?



CHRISTIANITY'S UNIQUE ...



Size – 1/3 of the world's population

Influence – science, human rights, education etc.

Book– the Bible

Person – Jesus Christ

KNOWING GOD



Mystical religions

- Ultimate spiritual reality can be known through experience – the truth lies within
- Indian (e.g., Buddhism and Hinduism) and Chinese (e.g., Taoism) origins



Prophetic religions

- Ultimate spiritual reality (God) can only be known through revelation
- Semitic or Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, Islam



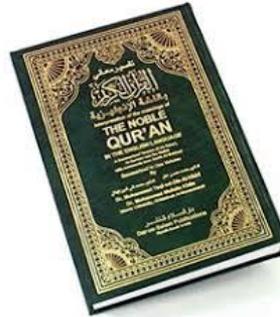
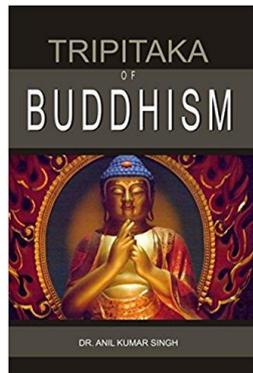
AUTHENTIC RELIGION?



200-300 years

20 years

20-40 years



No back story
One source
Standardised officially
No coherent story

Continues Old Testament
Multiple authors – one story
No central control
External verification

SIMILAR BASIC TEACHINGS?



“Christianity and Buddhism are very much alike, especially Buddhism.” **G.K. Chesterton**

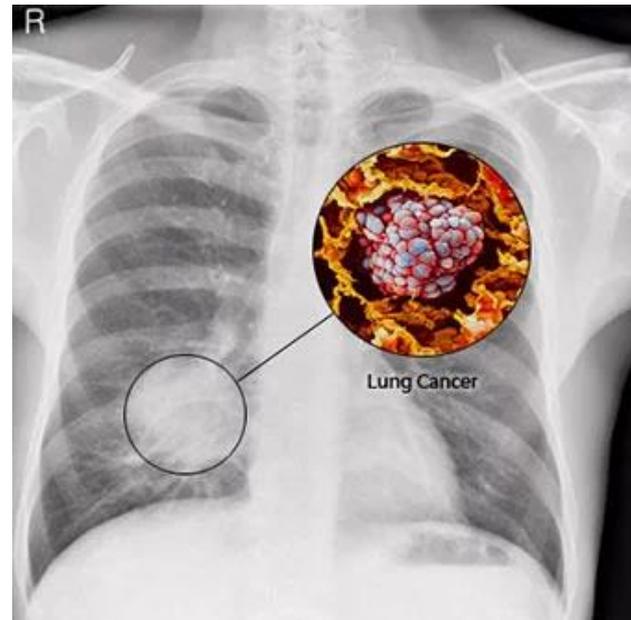
We believe that all religions are basically the same, at least the one that we read was.

They all believe in love and goodness.

They only differ on matters of creation sin heaven hell God and salvation.

Steve Turner, *Creed*

DIFFERENT DIAGNOSES AND CURES



CHRISTIANITY V SEMITIC RELIGIONS



Agreement

- Monotheism
- God has revealed truth through prophets and books
- Sin = personal offence against God

Divergence

- God as **Father** (Matthew 6:9-13; 7:9-11)
- **Jesus'** incarnation, death and resurrection
- The indwelling **Holy Spirit**

TRINITY

CONSIDER JESUS



Christianity may look more or less like other world religions in many generic respects: Christianity offers salvation, as do others; Christianity teaches high moral values, as do others; Christianity encourages regard for the neighbour, as do others. But Jesus himself does not look like every other religious leader. No other such figure is said to be God incarnate; no other suffers for the sins of the world; no other rises from the dead as the firstborn of a general resurrection to come; and so on.



John Stackhouse (2002) *Humble Apologetics*, p.191

WAS JESUS GOD?



- Christians worshipped Jesus as God from the **earliest times** (e.g., John 1:1-18; Romans 1:3-4; 9:5; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9; Titus 1:3-4; 2:13; 1 Peter 3:14-15; Hebrews 1:1-4; Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:12-16)
- The evidence of the Gospels
 - Gospels are historically reliable documents
 - He claimed it – John 8:38, 58-59 (cf. Exodus 3:14); 10:30-31;
 - He accepted worship – John 20:28-29
 - His actions and teachings demonstrated it
 - The resurrection confirmed it

LEWIS'S TRILEMMA

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

C.S. Lewis (1952), *Mere Christianity*, p.54–56)



THE RESURRECTION



- 1. Jesus really died**
 - a) Medical evidence (John 19:31-37)*
 - b) Pilate's investigation (Mark 15:44-45)*
- 2. The tomb was empty** (see Matthew 28:11-15).
- 3. Proclaimed from the very beginning** (Acts 2:24; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)
- 4. Over 500 witnesses** (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- 5. The transformation of the disciples**
- 6. The transformation of sceptics** (e.g., Paul)
- 7. The spread of Christianity**

JESUS' UNIQUE CLAIM



“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

