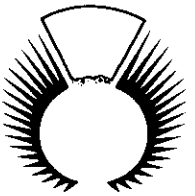

THE ARKLETON TRUST

IS GOD A COUNTRYMAN?

by

The Right Revd. Michael Hare Duke
Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane

THE ARKLETON LECTURE 1988

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THE ARKLETON TRUST uses its resources for the study of new approaches to rural development with emphasis on education and training. It aims to promote dialogue between politicians, administrators and practitioners at all levels on the problems of Europe and the Third World.

The Trust's activities include the holding of high level seminars on specialised subjects of immediate relevance to Europe and/or the Third World and the collection and collation of relevant experience for its publications programme.

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PREFACE

The Arkleton lecture is given during the Trust's seminar. This year the seminar's topic was Partners in Welfare and during the week's meeting Bishop Michael Hare Duke gave the Seventh lecture at the MacRobert conference centre, Douneside, Aberdeenshire.

Michael Hare Duke is Bishop of St. Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane, and a familiar voice on Scottish radio, 'weel kent' for his stimulating approach to christian values in an age of materialism, to nuclear disarmament and to women in the priesthood.

We were very lucky to have Bishop Michael, not only giving his outstanding lecture to those at the meeting and an invited audience, but also to have the benefit of his wisdom and wit during the whole seminar.

The challenge of Partners in Welfare was that of discerning the role of the church and clergy in rural society - what people look for and how the church and clergy could and should respond. It was therefore of immense help to have the lecture to sharpen and challenge our perceptions.

"We must not go back to that 'snake haunted garden' nor yet to the daisy fields of 19th century hymn writing. The journey must be 'onward to the tall city of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit'".

Elizabeth Higgs
Chairman, The Arkleton Trust
November 1988

The Bible, with all its imagery, comes from an agricultural society. Livestock, crops, grapes and olives furnished the background to the lives of the authors of the Old Testament. Apart from this, what they knew best was family life and warfare. It is not surprising, therefore, that when religion needed a descriptive language it drew on all three areas of experience. God appears as shepherd and vine dresser, husband, parent and warrior king. Israel is flock, vineyard, bride, child, victorious people.

Moving beyond the idea of simile, one strand of the Biblical tradition draws on nature to establish its picture of God, looking to see images of the creator in his creation. The psalmist sums it up:

> "The heavens declare the Glory of God,
> and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

Centuries later Mrs Alexander, living in the hills of County Wicklow, caught the same spirit with her hymn "All things bright and beautiful". Leaving aside the specific language of the church, Dorothy Gurney travels the same path:

> "With the kiss of the sun for pardon,
> the song of the birds for mirth,
> You are nearer God's heart in a garden,
> Than anywhere else on earth".

Across this spectrum of writers the conviction emerges that God is truly described in terms of the world he has created. If he has not got soil on his boots he's got spring in his heart!

Yet even then this point of view is not without problems: The book of Job has a struggle to justify a creator with so much suffering on his hands. The latin poet-philosopher Lucretius emphasised this objection. "If anyone required an argument for atheism" he wrote "let them look at the natural world". He could discern no hand of God or good purpose behind what he saw there.

There are certainly difficulties in seeing nature as a mirror of a loving, compassionate God, unless it is viewed with very partial eyes. There is violence and waste on the most profligate scale. We have become increasingly aware of this as science has traced the course of evolution. Biological research has uncovered the processes which go into the successful maturation of a single fish. Behind that lively creature, taunting the fisherman on the river, there lie literally millions of wasted egg cells which fall away in the breeding process. Even if they do not pose too great a problem, the breeding pattern of the white pelican sharpens the question. At each nesting the breeding pair normally lay 2 eggs. The parents do not have the capacity successfully to rear more than one offspring. Therefore the second hatches out simply as a backup in case the first chick fails. In the normal run of events, the second chick is neglected, lives a very brief, miserable period, before it dies of starvation. If we glibly proclaim "All thy works praise thee O Lord", in what sense can be argue that the second chick praises its maker?

You may think that these are the kind of questions only sentimental clergymen ask, but they take us into a discussion of meaning and purpose; and those are fundamental human questions wherever you live. Is the natural world or human history all chance, a random kaleidoscope of cause and effect or can we claim that there is some kind of pattern? If there is, how can it be described? One way of tackling the difficulty would be to re-cast our thinking about God within the rural mode.

Perhaps the problem is that the wrong sort of compassion, pity for the backup chick, obscures the dramatic outlines of the great sweeping purpose. True countrymen understand the ruthlessness of nature and make allowances for the purpose of God which ensures that a whole species survives and not any particular instance of it. Children get worried over the weakling lamb, but the farmer accepts its death as a necessary part of economic

husbandry. This is a tolerable view so long as we see humanity standing above the process of natural selection. Once we acknowledge that we are part of an evolutionary system emerging from primates but having a common ancestry with the primaeval slime which cradled all life on the planet, then there are difficult questions to be asked about individual members of the human race. If we can ignore the pelican chick, do we have to worry about each human body? Are the children who die in African famines or the victims of devastating epidemics significantly important? If we lift our eyes to the great sweep of history, it seems as though the theory of Dr Malthus might have something to be said for it after all. He was a clergyman at the end of the 18th century who argued that Divine Providence knew how many human beings the earth could sustain and operated through disease and war as a rational process of population control. Had he observed the emergence of AIDS, he would have seen it, not as Divine retribution for immorality, but as a necessary adjustment. In a world where sophisticated medicines has defeated the properly provided regulators, eradicating killer epidemics and containing infant mortality, it is necessary to find a way to restore the balance. Such a line of thought would depend upon Malthus' assumption that god intervenes in history, not as a loving father, but to guarantee a sustainable economy. All this is a long way from the God of the garden. It is also a long way from the God as he is declared in Jesus, in spite of the rural imagery that the gospels, like the Old Testament, provide. Just occasionally the ruthlessness of the farmer breaks in, pruning the vines and burning unproductive branches, destroying the weeds at harvest time. Mostly, however, the family scene dominates; God is the father who restores the wandering son to favour. The ultimate purpose is salvation, not destruction.

So that looks like a dead end. If there is a God, we cannot get him off the hook by seeing him as a strategic planner.

How helpful is it, however, to stay with language stemming from the culture of two thousand or more years ago? On every front advances in human knowledge make previously satisfactory symbols no longer appropriate. Our view of creation itself has developed. Generations of Christians have sung the words from St Patrick's breastplate:

> "The stable earth, the deep salt sea
> around the old eternal rocks".

Modern geology has put paid to such language. The adjective 'stable' as applied to the earth is only a relative one and the rocks are in no sense eternal. Although the process is not immediately open to our inspection, we know the earth's crust is part of the total flux of the ecosystem which by faith we call creation. The intricate, subtle inter-relations of the natural world are opening up to the white-coated scientist looking through the microscope, running programmes on his computer and experimenting in the laboratory. Not only has our information about the world's origins changed, but science offers alternative regimes for its management, very different from the previous generation of Godly farmers who operated on a mixture of muck and magic.

This shift of perception permeates the whole of 20th century living. It has unlocked the secret of the structure of matter when splitting the atom; it has deciphered the genetic code. These are the building blocks of the world as we now know it and therefore the way that we understand its creator, if we still use the title, will have to alter to meet the new insights.

Our expanded awareness will demand a new kind of theology. This, in its turn, will have to be supported by a new spirituality if it is not to remain an arid exercise in speculative thought. Immediately, at this point, we encounter conflict because the habits of devotion were acquired from a previous age. The God to whom most church goers bring their offerings at harvest festival is the

God of the 1662 Prayer Book who knew nothing of modern methods of agriculture, nor of veterinary practice. A "murrain" on the cattle was only to be interpreted as a punishment for sin within the community which needed to be rooted out. There was a similar view of disease in human beings. It never occurred to people to look at the sanitation as they hurried along to church to pray for the epidemic to pass. The later hymns such as "We plough the fields and scatter" had a neat division of labour between the farmer who spread "the good seed on the land" and the feeding and watering attributable to "God's almighty hand". In our day Fisons and judicious irrigation blur the easy line of demarkation.

If the facts no longer fit with inherited devotion, then the personal piety which still brings many people to church is neither intellectually honest nor can it be the basis of a renewed vision of society. The dilemma is neatly summed up in a story told by Father Anthony de Mello SJ from India.

> A mother could not get her son to come home before sunset. So she told him that the road to their house was haunted by ghosts who came out after dusk.
>
> By the time the boy grew up he was so afraid of ghosts that he refused to run errands at night. So she gave him a medal and taught him that it would protect him.

Bad religion gives him faith in the medal. Good religion gets him to see that ghosts do not exist. This, however, puts the clergy into a personal and a pastoral dilemma. How do you steel yourself to unsettle the simple faith which keeps people in the pew, (worse still, how do you survive when their covenants are withdrawn?). The alternatives are to come clean and acknowledge a whole new thought world which must then be related to a fresh understanding of God; or else to fudge the issue.

The clergy have been struggling for more than a

generation about a similar dilemma of how to use the Bible. All of them have been taught a critical approach to it in their theological college. Yet, in many cases, they reject this as soon as they find themselves mounting the pulpit steps. There they preach from the scriptures as though they were all equally and unchallengibly true. The consequence is that when someone like the bishop of Durham uses popular language to express commonplaces of New Testament scholarship, there is a great outcry of "heresy". The sacred medal makers are enraged. The anxious clergy conceal their knowledge, playing the game of "Not in front of the children".

Yet there is a world waiting for fresh insights. When the initial controversy about the Bishop of Durham was at its height, I found myself in Czechoslovakia talking to a young lawyer who was a party member but working in the ministry of religion. He asked me about what was happening with the bishop. Was he going to be expelled? I assured him that I had just been to a UK bishop's meeting and there was no question of any kind of heresy hunt from them.

"That is good" he replied, "Because if a bishop can think these fresh thoughts, then it is possible for me to hope that I might become a believer".

The conclusion ought to be crystal clear; the paternalist deity of earlier generations, responding to prayers for rain, keeping disease away from the cattle and the faithful, sending his warnings by thunder and calling us to repentance by inflicting ills, is no longer an intellectually believable possibility. God cannot be old farmer Giles.

It is not easy, as I have already said, for the parson in the village to follow such logic through. In an attempt to hold his congregation together he either avoids the contemporary dilemmas and continues to use language that belongs to another period, or else he desperately searches to find a

supporting role for a God who still appears in the familiar guise, rather like casting Sir Laurence Olivier in a cameo part for a new film. The religious furniture of the country, the Norman parish church, the nostalgic hymns, the assumptions of past generations, all encourage the temporising approach, the provision of a thatched-cottage God. The Kirk has recently produced a modern supplement to its hymn book which itself was only recently revised. This contains much splendid material from the Iona Community - but, also by popular demand two golden oldies, dropped from the previous revision, "By cool Siloam's shady rill" and "What a friend we have in Jesus". Austere theological taste has been over-ridden by popular sentiment. By avoiding a fresh look at what contemporary belief demands, the churches are becoming a refuge for those who find it difficult to face the challenge of the 20th century. They do not minister to the leaders of thought, offering new ways of handling mysteries or helping with new ethical dilemmas. This is bad, both for church and for society.

If all this sounds too negative, let me offer positively an example of the shift in mental gear which is required. I find it summed up in the poetry of R.S. Thomas, the Welsh country parson. I owe much to one particular piece which is entitled "Emerging".

> Not as in the old days I pray,
> God. My life is not what it was,
> Yours, too, accepts the presence of
> the machine? Once I would have asked
> healing. I go now to be doctored,
> to drink sinlessly of the blood
> of my brother, to lend my flesh
> as manuscript of the great poem
> of the scalpel. I would have knelt
> long, wrestling with you, wearing
> you down. Hear my prayer, Lord, hear
> my prayer. As though you were deaf, myriads
> of mortals have kept up their shrill
> cry, explaining your silence by

their unfitness

It begins to appear
this is not what prayer is about.
It is the annihilation of difference,
the consciousness of myself in you,
of you in me; the emerging
from the adolescence of nature
into the adult geometry
of the mind. I begin to recognize
you anew, God of form and number.
There are questions we are the solution
to, others whose echoes we must expand
to contain. Circular as our way
is, it leads not back to that snake-haunted
garden, but onward to the tall city
of glass that is the laboratory of the
spirit.

The discovery of the God of "form and number" and the rigorous thinking of a scientific age is crucially important. We must not go back to "that snake haunted garden" nor yet to the daisy fields of 19th century hymn writing. The journey must be "onward to the tall city of glass that is the laboratory of the spirit". As we look at the countryside, it poses new questions about ecology and a future for the earth which our science could destroy. We need a God who can be understood in such a context. We must travel out from our religious past and leave God, seen as the Old Laird, beside the shady rills.

What are the requirements for such a journey? The beliefs of earlier generations drew their strength from the fact that they addressed real questions in terms that were currently understandable. As we look at them now, it is sometimes hard to make sense of the answers because we have not experienced the questions. It is important to see theology as fundamentally made up of answers to questions which were being asked at the time. This is why in a contemporary situation some theological statements appear incomprehensible if not down right misleading. This becomes clear as we look at

primitive forms of religion. What lies behind some of the rituals and the myths is the urgent question, asked in Winter, of whether the Spring is certain to return. Sometimes, deeper than rituals, lie the philosophical questions about why there is pain and sorrow or where the world comes from. These, however, are never academic questions; they are related to practical action. How do you face death? How do you cope with a failed harvest? What is good for the continuance of the tribe?

Today the fundamental questions have changed from those to which even our grandparents sought and found answers in religious terms. The communications explosion has made available in some form or another to every individual the ideas of science about the origins of life, the size of the universe and the time-scale over which we are operating.

In personal terms, I vividly remember a night when, seeking respite from an overcrowded boat on the Broads in which a number of post-war undergraduates were holidaying, I rowed away on my own in the dinghy and lay back to look up at the Milky Way. I was suddenly aware of the enormous discrepancy between the cosy language of an evangelical religion with which I had grown up and the facts of the stars. Contemporary people are faced with a similar contrast when they listen to the parson's prayers on Sunday and then watch David Attenborough on television with a popular programme on evolution. There is also an awareness of the way in which religious beliefs and practice vary round the world and also how they have changed through time. History and geography have made it impossible to believe in an absolute and inerrant faith. Although, at the same time, it has to be noted that in both Christianity and Islam there is a growing strand of fundamentalism, perhaps because some people feel a need for certainties. This may be one of the most dangerous temptations for the modern pilgrim to trade the painful journey of faith for the quick fix of unquestioning dogma.

Our concern in this seminar is primarily with country-dwellers. For most of human history that life has been the norm. Now increasingly people are being drawn into the great cities with populations numbered in millions. Even when they live in the countryside it is the city which sets the agenda. This is particularly noticeable in such things as medical care and the provision of goods and services. It is the city which houses the seat of government and determines the style of life. There is no way in which the countryside can opt out because we live a life-style which is totally interdependent. What happens in one place affects all. For instance, the price of oil fluctuating because of politics in the Middle East, has repercussions upon the farmer in Orkney and the rural economy in Tanzania. Even if we like to think we live in the garden, the tall city of glass pulsates through our experience.

Another aspect of our radically altered world is the measure of control which human beings have begun to exercise. Our science has not only made us aware of evolutionary process, but equipped us to take charge of it. We can, for instance, take decisions about birth and death which would have been inconceivable at the beginning of the century. Religion had always taught that both the beginning and the end of human life were mysteries held in the hand of God. We have now started to manage both with increasingly sophisticated medical procedures. We prolong human life in the teeth of nature; we have taken control of the process of birth by genetic engineering.

These techniques have had their effect on country life in a more earthy way. There is at the moment an increasing demand for Highland cattle which cannot be met by normal breeding. Therefore cows from a dairy herd are being used as surrogate mothers to carry the fertilised embryos of Highland cattle. I have talked with one landowner, significantly a woman, who was having doubts about whether this was a proper enterprise or whether it had something faintly immoral about it. She was

troubled by a less intense version of the debate about human genetic engineering. I found it interesting that she raised the question with myself. Where does one go for guidance when there are doubts of this kind? In a stable society the wisdom of the elders would have been the answer. The galloping technology which poses our dilemmas have outrun any situation which grandparents could ever have imagined. So where does one turn?

A healthy society must have a framework of beliefs and values against which new questions and developments can be tested. It is part of being human to seek a meaning and a purpose. We need answers in order to cope with living. Not every individual formulates such questions, which is why the religious quest is sometimes carried by a relatively small group within society. From their answers or speculations, however, there emerge accepted rituals which provide the context in which the overall majority can set their lives.

Part of the problem of our present society is that we have not developed an image of God that speaks to our condition. There is a religious vacuum because the majority of church goers have settled for nostalgia in place of living theological speculation. This has allowed market forces, the pursuit of what is possible and profitable, to determine the way our lives are run. Yet the religious dimension will not altogether go away. As the secular market-place has taken over, we experience pressures which it is possible to equate with the demonic forces of St Paul's "Principalities and powers". Each socio-economic system has its own dehumanising, destructive components. They are powerful forces which are the antithesis of the creative, liberating spirit of the living God. This is an invitation to discover new expressions of faith and spirituality which are appropriate to describe a God who waits for us to recognise him in the new situation, if only because we experience his absence in such powerfully negative ways.

Here I want to pause for a moment to clarify our understanding of the purpose of religion. I have suggested that it performs a practical function of answering questions about purpose and direction, meaning and value. Without some kind of faith we do not know where we are going. We have no scale by which to judge our choices. But how exactly does religion fulfil this task? I want to argue that it takes us beyond ourselves into a relationship with what in jargon terms I would want to call "the transcendent". That is to say, it does not provide hard-edged, unarguable solutions, like the Ten Commandments. It invites us to participate in a mystery which we half know already. It is rather like the way in which the infant begins a tentative relationship with the real world of adult relationships operating on a mixture of experience and fantasy.

The child psychiatrist, Donald Winnicott, has identified things like teddy bears and security blankets as "transitional objects" by which we move from the encapsulated world of infancy to genuine, objective relations. In one of his books "Playing and reality" he appends a footnote to the affect that, for the adult, art and religion perform the same bridging function. This in no way reduces God or "the transcendent" to the status of teddy bear. God is part of the utterly real world which we only apprehend "in a glass darkly". What we are doing is using transitional objects, religious rituals, sacramental systems, even credal statements, to help us grow towards the mature, face-to-face relationship. The "toys" that our forefathers found helpful surround us as part of history. It is important to give them their value as indicating the direction from which we have come and perhaps indicating the way forward to the journey's end. Yet, because we live in a different context, we must recognise their transitional objects for what they are, not invest them with ultimate value. We must find ways of answering our questions and not theirs.

Such a view of religion starts from the conviction that for everybody a relationship with the other world, "the transcendent", is important. For some it may take the form of direct mystical experience, others will reach towards it through the transitional modes and stay in the middle area of "play". Others may relate to it only by proxy, through the faith of others. But at every level what is offered must be congruent with the assumptions about the world in which their lives are set.

The associational model of church life which offers membership only to those who opt in on specific terms, can at best only be a temporary expedient, a holding operation on the way to a universal mission. In principle, every birth needs to be celebrated, every marriage solemnised, each death related to an ultimate meaning. It is therefore a retreat from the universal claims of religion when the church operates only for the insiders and restricts baptism to children of believing families, or allows its pastoral offices, marriage and funerals in particular, to be written in language that belongs to members only.

Let us put that in terms of a pastoral reality. How should a minister of religion respond to a request for a wedding service to take place between a Christian and a Buddhist? He might either demand that the Buddhist gets baptised, press ahead with a Christian marriage service ignoring any other religion, or try to devise a service which neither betrays the conviction of the gospel nor excludes the Buddhist. The course which you approve will depend upon how far you absolutise any particular form of religion or how far you are prepared to see God as beyond all religion.

This, however, is not simply a matter for personal decision; bound up with it is the fundamental issue of how faith relates to contemporary experience.

One of the changes which we have noticed in the whole of our culture is mobility. The villages are

no longer inhabited by the families whose names are on the gravestones round the church. People live in one place for an appropriate period of their life and move to another when their job changes or they come to retirement. We are aware also of continual movement in knowledge and invention. Text books get out of date, procedures in medicine or industry are evolving all the time. Therefore we live with the sense of the journey. A vital spirituality and faith must reflect this. Earlier generations took the image but saw the transcendent world as the place to which we were travelling.

> "We are travelling home to God
> in the way our fathers trod"
>
> "And nightly pitch our moving tents
> a day's march nearer home".
>
> Journey's end had a name "Jerusalem, my happy home".

The Biblical imagery offers us an alternative model, not of the God who lies at the end of the journey but the God who travels with us.

Hebrew religion had a sense of God who was present. He led his people out of Egypt in the pillar of cloud and fire, he went out with their armies. In the thinking of the Rabbis, the "world to come" was another sphere of being which in some way hung over the contemporary world and from the world to come were communicated such ideas as the law and the form of the temple. The Christian faith has turned this into the sense of the incarnate Lord who leaves with his church the promise "behold I am with you always to the end of the age". A god who is a pilgrim God, travelling with his people, must in some sense be a God who shares their experience and in absorbing it changes.

Such a perception demands a rethinking of our most fundamental imagery. When society was static and the mediaeval villager probably met no more than 150 people in the course of his whole life, the

Lord of the Manor appropriately lived in the large house and the feudal superior of the district had his castle. These were matched by the parish church and the great cathedral. This was how people related to the God of a settled society, a stable, unchanging world.

Our housing patterns have changed. The castles are handed over to the National Trust and if the owners inhabit them at all, it is in a small area equipped with central heating and all the conveniences of modern life. They are valued as part of history but they are not incorporated into the structures of present day living. This poses the churches with a very radical question as to how they use their buildings, not only practically but also symbolically.

As objects of effective play in past generations, they have attracted a great deal of emotional commitment. They should no longer be the major focus for the energy and devotion of a pilgrim people, precisely because they anchor us in the past. It is not just the list of former rectors, dating from the Doomsday book or the war memorials that breathe an out-dated form of patriotism. In their very construction, by the solidity of their towers and the width of their walls, they are representing the fortress of a settled God. The corollorary of this is the appeal notices outside so many churches "We must have X hundred thousand pounds to save our parish church". Yet we are playing with the wrong toys to help us relate to the God who speaks through the discoveries of science and the brilliance of technology.

Before you write me off as a vandal who has only a computer where he ought to have a soul, let me return to the theme of creation. I have rejected God as the countryman in the terms in which previous generations perceived him. What has now happened is that the researchers within the tall city of glass have given us a new depth of understanding about the whole universe which we inhabit.

The awe remains, but it is evoked by the artistry of the intricately balanced whole. What stirs us is not the Turneresque quality of a sunset, but the subtle interplay, more like a living organism than a work of art. The various parts interact, adapt, collaborate, to maintain a direction. Within the total complex, the human race has its own particular part. The old image of mankind given dominion and told to subdue the earth merges into a kind of cosmic dance. The human body is part of the physical system, drawing on minerals, air and water for its survival. It is one strand in the whole tapestry of evolution. It is as fragile and interdependent as any other part of creation, whether animal species, plant or inanimate object.

At the same time the human race has the intellect to lift itself outside the rest of the life system. By the exercise of reason, it has come to take its place in a way quite different from all the rest. At the present time, as no other species could have done, it can not only change but pose a threat to all that is. Yet in doing this, it would also destroy the base of its own existence. A question which contemporary religion has eventually to help us answer is how humanity can grasp the glory of its achievements with sufficient humility to acknowledge its fragility and therefore cherish its fragile home.

We will not be helped to accomplish this delicate balance by worshipping a triumphant feudal lord who demands the obedience of his vassals. We are not simply God's planting, the vine that he will prune and shape as divine wisdom decrees. He has nourished us and encouraged us in our explorations. He has become a pilgrim with us in order to show us how, by the way of self-denial and surrender of power, the dance of the universe may not be a mechanical construction but a willed evolution.

In so far as the whole is based in the physical world, we do well to take that seriously. In this sense the mind of the creator must delight in the rich and risky rhythm of adaptation. He is not a

farmer trying out a new strain of pigs, but, in a way that is beyond all human comprehension, a part of the process. It is more than being a fellow pilgrim on a journey; perhaps we can discern him as the thrust of inspiration which takes the artist beyond his own technical skills and capability and unites him with a wider vision. If I say God is not a countryman, it is not because he despises all that goes on there, but because he has penetrated it so that he is the activity which is nature. He is at work in the human genius which unlocks the mysteries of being. He is the eye of a lover that delights in the whole creation.

Maybe it is only when we have understood this that we will begin to take creation itself seriously and instead of becoming like a malignant development within it, once again take our place as part of that gift of life standing both within it as an integral part, and yet also beyond adapting and modifying it with fear and trembling.

Here let me return to the practicalities of what the church must do. First, it must develop a contemporary spirituality, not by going back to the past, nor by surrendering to any kind of scientific reductionism. We have entered "the tall city of glass" and in that sense lost our innocence. We can no longer pretend that life or death is a mystery in the sense of an unknown process. We do not fall on our knees before the miraculous, inexplicable events attributed to the hand of God. We have begun to penetrate the infinitely intricate web of being and it is the marvel of this which takes us into a dim discerning of the mind of divinity. That is where worship begins for modern man. This, however, requires silence and awareness. An intake of breath is more appropriate than a hearty blast of hymn singing. We are more likely to open ourselves to new insights in a closely related group who share each other's insights, encourage deeper exploration, than we will by sitting in rows in a dependent congregation.

In the mediaeval church the stained glass told strange stories in jewelled colours. They were the way in to contemporary worship. What is our comparable equipment today? The combine harvester has replaced the wooden yoke, the procedures of the countryside all relate to the tall city. We need something in the same idiom to kindle our imagination and devotion.

Structures of church life as well as church architecture need a new flexibility to lead us on. Barchester, which is alive and well in so much of church structures, is an enormous incumbrance.

For the sake of the world to which we must communicate the deep things of God, we must let go of a great deal of things that make us feel secure. The frail barque of the Church has got to get out into the stormy seas or else it will quietly rot and rust safely secured to the quay side.

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