THE GOSPEL IN A PLURALIST SOCIETY

Lesslie Newbigin

William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company
Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K.



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2140 Oak Industrial Drive N.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. 49505 /
P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K.

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Printed in the United States of America

18 17 16 15 14 28 27 26 25 24 23

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Newbigin, Lesslie.
The Gospel in a pluralist society / Lesslie Newbigin.
p. cm.
ISBN 978- 0-8028-0426-6
1. Christianity and culture. 2. Christianity—20th century.
3. Apologetics—20th century. I. Title.
BR115.C8N468 1989
261—dc20 89-35973
CIP

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Foreword

The witness of the church has always taken place within a pluralistic milieu. During recent years, however, new perceptions of this milieu have emerged, and pluralism is fast assuming the character of an ideology. Hence the need to understand afresh the nature and role of the church's mission in today's pluralistic world.

Lesslie Newbigin's book is an important contribution to the ongoing search within the ecumenical movement for an authentic expression of the meaning of the gospel and the mission of the church in the midst of a plurality of cultures and religions. Newbigin identifies the danger of relativism evident in a good deal of current discussion. He rejects the dichotomy between the "world of facts" and the "world of values." He regrets the consequent attitude of timidity or of anxiety on the part of Christians, especially in the West. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* is a call to renewed confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is an attempt to see "how as Christians we can more confidently affirm our faith in the kind of intellectual climate" in which we find ourselves.

Newbigin has the courage to take up a position and the conviction to defend it against what sometimes appear to be impossible odds. What he has to say—and says with refreshing clarity—comes out of his background of long pastoral experience, missionary commitment, ecumenical vision, and unwavering confidence in the gospel.

There is no dearth of books dealing with the status of the Christian faith and the task of the church in a pluralistic context. Many of them are written for academic audiences. Newbigin addresses a much wider readership. At several points he suggests how Christian people may respond in practical ways to the issues raised by our pluralistic sit-

1. *Dogma and Doubt in a Pluralist Culture*

It has become a commonplace to say that we live in a pluralist society—not merely a society which is in fact plural in the variety of cultures, religions, and life-styles which it embraces, but pluralist in the sense that this plurality is celebrated as things to be approved and cherished. In much of the Western world pluralism is contrasted with a situation perceived to have existed in earlier times in which there was an accepted public doctrine, shaped by Christianity, providing the norm by which all belief and conduct was to be judged. Pluralism is conceived to be a proper characteristic of the secular society, a society in which there is no officially approved pattern of belief or conduct. It is therefore also conceived to be a free society, a society not controlled by accepted dogma but characterized rather by the critical spirit which is ready to subject all dogmas to critical (and even sceptical) examination. It will be part of my business in these studies to consider how far these perceptions are true and what elements of myth are present in them. For it is quite certain that long-established dogma only gives way to critical attack when that attack is based on some other beliefs. Criticism does not come out of a vacant mind.

It is often said, or implied, that the dominance of the Christian worldview in western European society was overturned by the rise of modern science, but this seems to be an oversimplification. Graf Reventlow, in his massive work *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World,* shows how the attack has its origins, far earlier than the rise of modern science, in the strong humanist tradition which we inherit

from the classical Greek and Roman elements in our culture, and which surfaced powerfully in the Renaissance and played a part in the Reformation. This humanist tradition is itself composed of many elements which can be grouped into two main strands. There is the rationalist tradition, drawing especially on Greek and Stoic sources, which affirms human reason as the organ through which alone truth may be known; and there is the spiritualist tradition, drawing on still more ancient sources which Europe shares with India, the tradition which affirms the capacity of the human spirit to make direct contact through mystical experience with the ultimate source of being and truth. What these have in common is the conviction, one might say rather the unquestioned assumption, that historical events are not a source of ultimate truth. Truth can only be that which is accessible equally to all rational human beings apart from the accidents of history, through the exercise of reason and the experience of direct contact with the divine. The most famous expression of this is the much-quoted saying of Lessing that the accidental truths of history can never establish universal truths of reason. For the humanist tradition this had, and still has, the force of an axiom.

Graf Reventlow's study shows how, during the latter part of the seventeenth and through the eighteenth centuries, while ordinary churchgoers continued to live in the world of the Bible, intellectuals were more and more controlled by the humanist tradition, so that even those who sought to defend the Christian faith did so on the basis that it was "reasonable," that is to say, that it did not contradict the fundamental humanist assumption. Reviewing the story, one can see how the defense moved through successive tactical retreats. There was, to begin with, the view that God has provided two ways of making himself known to us: the book which we call the Bible, and the book of nature. Truths which we cannot by the exercise of reason read from the book of nature are provided for us, as a sort of supplementary source, from the Bible. We are not, in this view, part of a story, a drama of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. We are in a timeless world where timeless truths, valid for all times and all peoples, are being communicated in two different ways. As the eighteenth century rolls on, we find that the really essential truths are available to us from the book of nature, from reason and conscience; the truths which we can only learn from the Bible are of minor importance, adiaphora about which we need not quarrel. But inexorably we move on to the point where the Bible is subjected to the scrutiny of reason and conscience and is found to be full of inconsistencies, absurdities, tall stories, and plain immorality.

What is striking about the books which were written, especially during the eighteenth century, to defend Christianity against these attacks, is the degree to which they accept the assumptions of their assailants. Christianity is defended as being reasonable. It can be accommodated within these assumptions, which all reasonable people hold. There is little suggestion that the assumptions themselves are to be challenged. The defense is, in fact, a tactical retreat. But, as later history has shown, these tactical retreats can—if repeated often enough—begin to look more like a rout.

Perhaps the experience of a foreign missionary may usefully illuminate the point I wish to make. When I was a young missionary I used to spend one evening each week in the monastery of the Ramakrishna Mission in the town where I lived, sitting on the floor with the monks and studying with them the Upanishads and the Gospels. In the great hall of the monastery, as in all the premises of the Ramakrishna Mission, there is a gallery of portraits of the great religious teachers of humankind. Among them, of course, is a portrait of Jesus. Each year on Christmas Day worship was offered before this picture. Jesus was honored, worshipped, as one of the many manifestations of deity in the course of human history. To me, as a foreign missionary, it was obvious that this was not a step toward the conversion of India. It was the co-option of Jesus into the Hindu worldview. Jesus had become just one figure in the endless cycle of *karma* and *samsara,* the wheel of being in which we are all caught up. He had been domesticated into the Hindu worldview. That view remained unchallenged. It was only slowly, through many experiences, that I began to see that something of this domestication had taken place in my own Christianity, that I too had been more ready to seek a "reasonable Christianity," a Christianity that could be defended on the terms of my whole intellectual formation as a twentieth-century Englishman, rather than something which placed my whole intellectual formation under a new and critical light. I, too, had been guilty of domesticating the gospel.

India was then, as it still is, a religiously plural society. Within the fairly rigid structure of the Indian social system, there was and is freedom to follow whatever religious path one chooses. Our society in Europe has moved, in the years since the war, a long way toward the same kind of religious pluralism. During the years when I was sitting in discussion with the Hindu friends, Britain was still nominally a Christian country. Apart from the small Jewish community there was no significant non-Christian presence. Preaching the gospel was calling people

back to their spiritual roots. There was little distinction between evangelism and revival. Today the situation is different. Our large cities have substantial communities of Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, and Muslims. Their native neighbors soon discover that they are, in many cases, much more godly, more devout, and more pious than the average native Christian. What, then, is the meaning of evangelism in this kind of society? It cannot be the sort of "recall to religion" which has often been the way evangelism was understood. They do not need recalling to religion; they are generally very religious already. Is it not arrogance to thrust our religion on them when they have already a religion of their own which is clearly worthy of profound respect? From such very natural questionings as these, we soon reach the situation which was noted by one member of the recent General Assembly of the United Reformed Church: when thinking of our unbelieving English neighbors we speak of evangelism; when speaking of our Asian and West Indian neighbors we speak of dialogue. The gospel is, like the facilities in the parks in South Africa, for whites only. It is a conclusion which the Asian Christians in our cities find exceedingly odd.

I am of course touching here on profound questions about the Christian understanding of the great world religions, on which I shall have more to say later, but this reluctance to use the language of evangelism in a multifaith context is a symptom of something very fundamental in our contemporary culture. I spoke earlier of the conflict already present in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries between the biblical and the humanist elements in our culture, between a worldview shaped by the Bible and a worldview shaped by the assumptions of rational and spiritual humanism. At that time both elements were part of the shared public view, even though in tension within it. The Bible and the catechism which purported to summarize its teaching were taught as public truth. The great thinkers whose work heralded the dawn of the modern world were Christian believers and took it for granted that theology belonged no less than physics or mathematics to the one seamless robe of truth. A large amount of Isaac Newton's intellectual energies were devoted to questions of theology, and there was no mental barrier for him between this and his work in mathematics, physics, and astronomy. Yet, as we have seen, there was a tension in which the humanist tradition proved the stronger of the two. The Bible had more and more to justify itself at the bar of reason and conscience. Insofar as it appeared that it could not do so, the tension grew into a separation. The Bible became the book through which the life of the soul, the interior life, the

spiritual life was interpreted—at least for those who were content to remain under its influence. It could not hold its own in the public sphere. Scientists and philosophers were no longer theologians and biblical scholars. The catechism could no longer be part of the curriculum in the public schools. There could be what are called "religious studies" because religion is a fact of human life. But the things which religious people believe in are not facts in that sense. Only what can stand up under the critical examination of the modern scientific method can be taught as fact, as public truth: the rest is dogma. One is free to promote it as personal belief, but to affirm it as fact is simply arrogance. How, in this situation, does one preach the gospel as truth, truth which is not to be domesticated within the assumptions of modern thought but which challenges these assumptions and calls for their revision? That is what we shall be concerned with in these chapters.

It may be convenient to start from the word which I have just used, the word "dogma," for, as we know, the adjective derived from this word—"dogmatic"—stands in our language precisely for all that is ignorant and arrogant, for the very opposite of a sincere searching for the truth.

"Dogma" derives from *dokein*, "to seem." It is the word used to designate that which seemed good to a competent authority and was promulgated as such. It is so used in the apostolic decree of the Council in Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 16:4. More generally in the history of the Church it has been used to designate that which has been authoritatively given and is to be received in faith. It was so used for many centuries. In our contemporary world, by contrast, the readiness to question dogma is regarded as one of the marks of intellectual maturity and competence.

Now it is beyond question, however we may evaluate the fact, that Christianity began with the proclamation of something authoritatively given. Paul presents himself not as the teacher of a new theology but as the messenger commissioned by the authority of the Lord himself to announce a new fact—namely that in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus God has acted decisively to reveal and effect his purpose of redemption for the whole world. Obviously the New Testament contains many differing interpretations of this fact, but it is always one fact which is being interpreted, what my old teacher Carnegie Simpson used to call "the fact of Christ." And, whatever their differences, New Testament writers are at one in regarding this fact as of decisive importance for all peoples everywhere.

This proclamation invites belief. It is not something whose truth can be demonstrated by reference to human experience in general. Rather, it is that by the acceptance of which all human experience can be rightly understood. It is the light by which things are seen as they really are, and without which they are not truly seen. It rests on no authority beyond itself. When challenged to show their authority, its spokesmen can only say, "In the Name of Jesus." But it is proclaimed with boldness as the truth, not as one possible opinion among others. And of course it can be rejected, and is rejected. The New Testament repeatedly affirms a radical contradiction between the apostolic message and the wisdom of the world. The affirmation of this contradiction reaches its terrifying climax in the Johannine accounts of the arguments between Jesus and the authorities of his own people. But it is implicit from the beginning in the words by which (according to Mark) Jesus began his ministry. The initial call was to repent, to be converted, to have a radically new "mind-set," to face the opposite way as the necessary precondition for being able to recognize the new reality—namely the presence here and now of the reign of God.

However grievously the Church may have distorted and misused the concept of dogma in the course of history, and it has indeed done so grievously, the reality which this word designated is present from the beginning and is intrinsic to the gospel. Something radically new has been given, something which cannot be derived from rational reflection on the experiences available to all people. It is a new fact, to be received in faith as a gift of grace. And what is thus given claims to be the truth, not just a possible opinion. It is the rock which must either become the foundation of all knowing and doing, or else the stone on which one stumbles and falls to disaster. Those who, through no wit or wisdom or godliness of their own, have been entrusted with this message can in no way demonstrate its truth on the basis of some other alleged certainties: they can only live by it and announce it. It is something given, dogma, calling for the assent of faith.

And of course it is at this point that the other strand in our culture, the humanist, rationalist element, is roused to protest. To subject every alleged truth to the critical scrutiny of reason is, in our culture as in the Greek world of Paul's day, the mark of a mature person. Perhaps our culture has prided itself more than any previous culture on its willingness and ability to subject every dogma to fearless criticism in the light of reason and experience. It is therefore natural that the missionary, the evangelist, with his confident assertion of a truth to be accepted in faith, should be the object of suspicion or at least of scepticism. Is he not simply a survivor from a previous epoch? Must we not all accept that truth is larger, richer, and more complex than can be contained in any one religious or cultural tradition? Is it not more fitting that we adopt the attitude of a humble seeker after truth, keeping an open mind, ready to listen to all that comes from the varied religious experience of the human race? Is it not more honest as well as more humble to stop preaching and engage rather in dialogue, listening to the experience of others and offering our own, not to displace theirs but to enrich and be enriched by the sharing of religious experience? Only an open mind can hope to reach the truth, and dogma is the enemy of the open mind.

One might make an immediate and rather superficial comment on this by saying that it is very obviously a view which we apply only to certain kinds of truth. In spite of the enthusiasm of many educational experts for encouraging their pupils to have an open mind and to make their own decisions about truth, a teacher who asks her class whether Paris is the capital of France or of Belgium will not appreciate the child who tells him that he has an open mind on the matter. The principle of pluralism is not universally accepted in our culture. It is one of the key features of our culture, and one that we shall have to examine in some depth, that we make a sharp distinction between a world of what we call "values" and a world of what we call "facts." In the former world we are pluralists; values are a matter of personal choice. In the latter we are not; facts are facts, whether you like them or not. It follows that, in this culture, the Church and its preaching belong to the world of "values." The Church is among the "good causes" which must be supported by good people, and without this support it will collapse. The Church is not generally perceived as concerned with facts, with the realities which finally govern the world and which we shall in the end have to acknowledge whether we like them or not. In this cultural milieu, the confident announcement of the Christian faith sounds like an arrogant attempt of some people to impose their values on others. As long as the Church is content to offer its beliefs modestly as simply one of the many brands available in the ideological supermarket, no offense is taken. But the affirmation that the truth revealed in the gospel ought to govern public life is offensive.

The purpose of these chapters is to examine the roots of this culture which we share and to suggest how as Christians we can more confidently affirm our faith in this kind of intellectual climate. Let me

here make only a few preliminary points which will have to be developed later.

1. Dogma is not the unique peculiarity of the Church. Every kind of systematic thought has to begin from some starting point. It has to begin by taking some things for granted. In every domain of thought it is always possible to question the starting point, to ask "Why this rather than another?" or "What grounds are there for starting here?" It is obvious that this kind of questioning has no theoretical limit. One can go on questioning, but then one would never begin to form any clear conception of the truth. No coherent thought is possible without taking some things as given. It is not difficult to show, in respect of every branch of knowledge as it is taught in schools and colleges, that there are things taken for granted and not questioned, things which could be questioned. No coherent thought is possible without presuppositions. What is required for honest thinking is that one should be as explicit as possible about what these presuppositions are. The presupposition of all valid and coherent Christian thinking is that God has acted to reveal and effect his purpose for the world in the manner made known in the Bible. Of course it is open to anyone to ask, "Why choose this starting point rather than another—for example, the Qur'an, the Gita, or *Das Kapital*?" But then one has to ask the questioner about the assumptions from which he starts, and which perhaps have not been examined. It is obvious that for most of our time we take for granted the assumptions which the society of which we are a part takes for granted. It is difficult to question them, and normally it is only someone coming from outside who asks the questions about what "everyone knows to be true." Here we have something to learn from the sociologists.

2. We need to attend to what has been taught us in recent years by the sociologists of knowledge about the social conditioning of belief. Every society depends for its coherence upon a set of what Peter Berger calls "plausibility structures," patterns of belief and practice accepted within a given society, which determine which beliefs are plausible to its members and which are not. These plausibility structures are of course different at different times and places. Thus when, in any society, a belief is held to be "reasonable," this is a judgment made on the basis of the reigning plausibility structure. In discussions about the authority of the gospel the word "reason" is often used as though it were an independent source of information to be set alongside tradition or revelation. But clearly this is a confusion of categories. Reason does not operate

in a vacuum. The power of a human mind to think rationally is only developed in a tradition which itself depends on the experience of previous generations. This is obviously true of the vast edifice of modern science sustained by the scientific community. The definition of what is reasonable and what is not will be conditioned by the tradition within which the matter is being discussed. Within an intellectual tradition dominated by the methods of natural science it will appear unreasonable to explain things in terms of personal will and purpose. But if God exists and he is capable of revealing his purpose to human beings, then the human reason will be summoned to understand and respond to this revelation and to relate it to all other experience. It will necessarily do this within a tradition which determines whether or not any belief is plausible—in this case the tradition of a community which cherishes and lives by the story of God's saving acts.

It is no secret, indeed it has been affirmed from the beginning, that the gospel gives rise to a new plausibility structure, a radically different vision of things from those that shape all human cultures apart from the gospel. The Church, therefore, as the bearer of the gospel, inhabits a plausibility structure which is at variance with, and which calls in question, those that govern all human cultures without exception. The tension which this challenge creates has been present throughout the history of Western civilization.

3. A third point which may be made in this critique of doubt is as follows. There is an admirable air of humility about the statement that the truth is much greater than any one person or any one religious tradition can grasp. The statement is no doubt true, but it can be used against the truth when it is used to neutralize any affirmation of the truth. How does the speaker know that the truth is so much greater than this particular affirmation of it—for example, that "Jesus Christ is the truth"? What privileged access to reality does he have? In the famous story of the blind men and the elephant, so often quoted in the interests of religious agnosticism, the real point of the story is constantly overlooked. The story is told from the point of view of the king and his courtiers, who are not blind but can see that the blind men are unable to grasp the full reality of the elephant and are only able to get hold of part of the truth. The story is constantly told in order to neutralize the affirmation of the great religions, to suggest that they learn humility and recognize that none of them can have more than one aspect of the truth. But, of course, the real point of the story is exactly the opposite. If the king were also blind there would be no story. The story is told by the

king, and it is the immensely arrogant claim of one who sees the full truth which all the world's religions are only groping after. It embodies the claim to know the full reality which relativizes all the claims of the religions and philosophies. As Polanyi has trenchantly put it: "The emphatic admission of our fallibility only serves to re-affirm our claim to a fictitious standard of intellectual integrity . . . in contrast to the hidebound attitude of those who openly profess their beliefs as their final personal commitment" (Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 271).

In a pluralist society such as ours, any confident statement of ultimate belief, any claim to announce the truth about God and his purpose for the world, is liable to be dismissed as ignorant, arrogant, dogmatic. We have no reason to be frightened of this accusation. It itself rests on assumptions which are open to radical criticisms, but which are not criticized because they are part of the reigning plausibility structure. But if we are to meet the criticism, if we are to be faithful bearers of the message entrusted to us, I think that we have to pay attention to four points with which I conclude this first chapter.

a. Part of the reason for the rejection of dogma is that it has for so long been entangled with coercion, with political power, and so with the denial of freedom—freedom of thought and of conscience. When coercion of any kind is used in the interests of the Christian message, the message itself is corrupted. The truth is that it is the dogma rightly understood, namely the free gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ, which alone can establish and sustain freedom of thought and of conscience. We must affirm the gospel as truth, universal truth, truth for all peoples and for all times, the truth which creates the possibility of freedom; but we negate the gospel if we deny the freedom in which alone it can be truly believed.

b. Second, it is plain that we do not defend the Christian message by domesticating it within the reigning plausibility structure. That was surely the grand mistake of the eighteenth-century defenses of the reasonableness of Christianity. There is a profound confusion of thought when it is suggested that reason and revelation are two parallel paths to truth, or when, in a further development of this line of thinking, it is said that alleged revelation has to be tested at the bar of reason. All this kind of language involves a confusion about the terms we are using. The faculty which we call reason, the power of the human mind to think coherently and to organize the data of experience in such a way that it can be grasped in meaningful patterns, is necessarily involved in all knowing of any kind. The question at issue, for example, in the debates

about the respective roles of reason and revelation is really about how the data of experience are to be understood. They are—to be more specific—debates about whether the events which are narrated in the Bible are to be understood entirely in terms of political, social, economic, and psychological categories such as are used in a secular writing of history, or whether, without denying the usefulness and relevance of these categories, we recognize this story as communicating the personal will of God acting in and through all the events recounted. Reason is not an independent source of information about what is the case. It is one aspect of the human activity by which we seek to understand the world and ourselves. The difference involved in the long-running debates about reason and revelation is not a difference between two sources of information: it is a difference between two ways of interpreting the data which are (potentially) available to all. The Christian believer is using the same faculty of reason as his unbelieving neighbor and he is using it in dealing with the same realities, which are those with which every human being has to deal. But he is seeing them in a new light, in a new perspective. They fall for him into a different pattern. He cannot justify the new pattern in terms of the old; he can only say to his unbelieving neighbor, stand here with me and see if you don't see the same pattern as I do.

Perhaps the most crucial example of the point I am trying to make is to be found in the way we interpret the story of the first Easter. In the effort to make Christianity acceptable to contemporary thought many theologians explain the scriptural accounts of the empty tomb and the appearance of the risen Jesus in purely psychological terms, as visions created in the minds of the disciples by their faith in Jesus. Thus the resurrection story is the result of a preexisting faith, in exact reversal of the biblical record, which affirms that unbelief was turned into faith by what happened on Easter morning. Here is a classic example of the domestication of the gospel, of the attempt to defend it by co-option into the reigning plausibility structure. It is obvious that the story of the empty tomb cannot be fitted into our contemporary worldview, or indeed into any worldview except one of which it is the starting point. That is, indeed, the whole point. What happened on that day is, according to the Christian tradition, only to be understood by analogy with what happened on the day the cosmos came into being. It is a boundary event, at the point where (as cosmologists tell us) the laws of physics cease to apply. It is the beginning of a new creation—as mysterious to human reason as the creation itself. But, and this is the whole point,

accepted in faith it becomes the starting point for a wholly new way of understanding our human experience, a way which—in the long run—makes more sense of human experience as a whole than does the reigning plausibility structure. That the crucified Jesus was raised from death to be the firstfruit of a new creation is—in the proper sense—dogma. It is something given, offered for acceptance in faith, providing the starting point for a new way of understanding which, instead of being finally defined by the impassable boundary of death (our personal deaths and the final death of the cosmos), moves from death outward to an open world of infinite possibilities beckoning us into ever fresh regions of joy. One does not defend this new perspective by trying to demonstrate its compatibility with the old. One challenges the old with the demand and the offer of a death and a new birth.

c. But, and this is my third point, it is essential to the integrity of our witness to this new reality that we recognize that to be its witnesses does not mean to be the possessors of all truth. It means to be placed on the path by following which we are led toward the truth. There is indeed a proper place for agnosticism in the Christian life. There is a true sense in which we are—with others—seekers after the truth. The apophatic tradition in theology has always insisted on the fact that no human image or concept can grasp the full reality of God. Christians are—or should be—learners to the end of their days. But it is equally important to insist that this learning is, like all genuine learning, an exercise which is guided and disciplined by a tradition—the tradition which stems from God's decisive acts in Jesus Christ. No learning takes place except within a tradition whose authority is accepted as guidance for exploration. No seeking can be called serious which is without any clue. Wandering about in a twilight where all cats are grey is not seeking truth. When Christians affirm, as they do, that Jesus is the way, the true and living way by whom we come to the Father (John 16:4), they are not claiming to know everything. They are claiming to be on the way, and inviting others to join them as they press forward toward the fullness of the truth, toward the day when we shall know as we have been known.

d. And this leads to the final point. The dogma, the thing given for our acceptance in faith, is not a set of timeless propositions: it is a story. Moreover, it is a story which is not yet finished, a story in which we are still awaiting the end when all becomes clear. Here, I think, is the point at which we may well feel that the eighteenth-century defenders of the faith were most wide of the mark. The Christian religion which they sought to defend was a system of timeless metaphysical truths about God, nature, and man. The Bible was a source of information about such of these eternal truths as could not be discovered by direct observation of nature or by reflection on innate human ideas. Any valid defense of the Christian faith, I believe, must take a quite different route. The Christian faith, rooted in the Bible, is—I am convinced—primarily to be understood as an interpretation of the story—the human story set within the story of nature. Our dialogue as Christians, therefore, with the modern world, will be as much a dialogue with the historians as with the natural scientists. Every understanding of the human story, even more obviously than every understanding of the natural world, must rest heavily on a faith commitment—for we do not yet see the end of the story. But no human life is possible without some idea, explicit or implicit, about what the story means. The Christian faith is—as often said—a historical faith not just in the sense that it depends on a historical record, but also in the sense that it is essentially an interpretation of universal history. Its defense, therefore, will be as much concerned with how we act as with what we can say.