

The Bedell/Boyle Lecture 1996

The Bible - God's Word for Today

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Response

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NATIONAL BIBLE SOCIETY OF IRELAND

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INTRODUCTION

The Bedell/Boyle Lecture Series

The National Bible Society of Ireland has inaugurated an annual lecture series known as the Bedell/Boyle Lecture. It is intended that the series will provide an opportunity to promote the Bible and the effective use of the Holy Scriptures. Each year a speaker of stature will be asked to lecture on a topic relating some aspect of the Bible to current developments. It is hoped to publish each Lecture.

The Lecture series is named in honour of William Bedell (1571-1642) Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh, because of his commitment to the translation of the Bible into Irish. Linked with Bedell's Irish Bible, published for the first time in 1685, is Hon. Robert Boyle (1626-1691) who ensured the publication of Bedell's Bible. Boyle was very committed to Bible distribution and he was a distinguished scientist known for Boyle's Law. Thus key elements of modern Bible Society work - translation, publication and distribution - were foreshadowed by these two men.

The 1996 Lecture was given by Rev. Selwyn Hughes on 15th November 1996 in Alexandra College, Dublin. Selwyn Hughes is the founder of CWR and author of Every Day with Jesus Bible reading notes. A pastor and evangelist in the early days of his ministry, Selwyn is now primarily involved in Christian writing and conducting training seminars both in the UK and abroad. The Response was given by Rev. Maurice Fearon a Dominican priest based in Dublin and a member of the National Board of the National Bible Society of Ireland. We are pleased to publish the complete text of the Lecture and the Response and believe that this will aid our reflection and response to the living Word of God in the Holy Scriptures.

Judith Wilkinson

Also in this series:

Alive and Active *Dei Verbum* and Ireland Today, Most Rev. Donal Murray (1992)

The Bible in World Evangelization, Rev. Tom Houston (1993)

Lectio Divina in the Monastic Tradition, Rt. Rev. Christopher Dillon (OSB) (1995)

The Bible — God's Word for Today

'My title is **The Bible - Gods Word for Today**. My purpose in this lecture is to show how the Bible uncovers the roots of human problems and give us clear answers for living effectively in today's world. Contemporary society increasingly views the Bible as outdated and outmoded and claims it has no relevance to the personal problem we face in today's world. The Bible certainly doesn't use jargon like Email and Sound Bytes, but it does show us, I believe, how to become experts in the art of living.

There was a time in my life not long ago after I entered Christian ministry, that I considered becoming a psychologist or psychiatrist. I was disturbed by the number of deep problems that people brought to me and the sense of powerlessness I had when trying to deal with them. I thought to myself — perhaps I can help people in a more effective way by training to become a psychologist. I talked this over with a professor in one of our British universities. I was told that if I became a psychotherapist I should be aware that it would not be ethical to impose my Christian standards on people. I had great difficulty with this idea because I carried the strong conviction that if people broke the Ten Commandments then they need to be told that the guilt they feel cannot be resolved, short of the redemption and forgiveness found in Jesus Christ and in him alone.

This led me to revise my life ambitions and I decided to continue in the Christian ministry and set myself the goal of searching the Scriptures to see it could provide me with answers for people's problems that I could apply to their lives in a way that would be faithful to my Christian convictions — and reach into the deep issues of their lives. I hope this does not sound arrogant but after many years of searching the Scriptures and applying my discoveries to people's lives I believe I have found that way.

There are many of course who would take issue with me and say that whilst the Bible may have something to say about people and their problems it is not really a book for today. The world has moved on they tell us and it is no longer a contemporary book. This view of course has been popular since the dawn of the Enlightenment.

The paradigms by which people operated for the first sixteen or seventeen centuries after Christ were as you know largely Christian paradigms. The Bible's influence was powerful and pervasive. Then in the 17th century there arose a movement of intellectual thought in Europe which rejected external authority and enthroned personal subjective judgement. It celebrated intellectual individualism and execrated or banished any thought of living by a repository of wisdom outside ones own intellect. This paradigm shift was thought by many to close the era of Christendom and we are now living it is said in a post Christian era. It carried almost everything before it and now here at the end of the 20th century it seems to reign supreme.

Permit me to comment for a moment on the word paradigm. In the field in which I work dealing with people's personal problems — I find that the word paradigm is fast replacing the word 'model'. The academic work on the subject of paradigms was done by Thomas Kuhn, a Princeton scholar who wrote a book in the early 70s on the subject of scientific revolutions. His definition of a paradigm was this: "a large scale hypothesis which defines a viewpoint about reality". He pointed out that over the centuries people's paradigms have changed.

First he said came the Ptolemaic view of the universe which supposed the universe consisted of spheres revolving within spheres. Then came the Copernicum revolution

and instead of spheres revolving within spheres he taught a world view in terms of a solar system that was a series of planets, ours being one of them, revolving around the sun. Then came Newton and he formulated a few laws and some mathematical equations about the universe which caused people to change their views again. Finally came Einstein who modified Newton's views and said that in reality space was curved so we look now at the universe in a different way, with different paradigms than those who went before. What do you suppose will come next?

Who knows?

The point Thomas Kuhn made was this: the paradigms which people used to understand the cosmos has changed several times. And as they shifted the natural order looks different. I tell you frankly I am not at home in the area of theoretical physics, I am more at home in the area of the Scriptures and its application to effective living. And as far as this is concerned there has been in recent times a paradigm shift of enormous proportions. The Enlightenment turned its back on the traditional Christian view that we draw our information about how to live from the Scriptures and established the idea that each thinking person must work out the truth about life for oneself. Thus the conclusion was, and still is in many quarters, that the Bible is not God's word for today. The beginning of the Enlightenment in effect closed the area of Christendom in which the churches teaching was the controlling factor and thus began what is known as the post Christian era. It has taken time to anchor itself in the British Isles but now it has firmly established itself — and reigns supreme.

We now live in a world where secular culture takes for granted that every ordinary person works out for themselves all matters of basic belief and life strategy. Clergy in many parts of the world are the objects of scorn on TV. Our children are brought up in schools, colleges and universities where there is a post Christian, sub Christian, even anti Christian mindset. This paradigm controls the opinion makers, and the media. There has been a rejection of external authority for the guiding of the human life and instead we are seeing the enthronement of what we can only call personal subjective judgment whereby you work everything out for yourself.

When I entered the Christian ministry in the early 1950s I could take for granted that the minds of the people I talked to would have a Christian paradigm guiding their thoughts. But not any more. I now feel like a cross-cultural missionary talking to people whose paradigms are a world apart from what they once were. What is the result of all this on our modern world? We live in an age of a shrinking God and an outdated Bible. J.B. Phillips, a translator of the new Testament, in his book **Your God is Too Small** tells of a group of students, all theists, who were asked whether they thought God understood the principles of radar. They all replied in the negative. When the same students were asked if they thought the Bible was relevant to today's world they answered this question too in the negative.

In my own circles and travels I continually come across Christians who ask me if I think the Bible has been replaced by modern day psychology. I am often asked by students that because the Bible does not mention problems like anorexia nervosa, bulimia, multiple personality disorder, obsessive compulsive neurosis, then ought we not close our Bibles and turn instead to our psychology text books? As those terms are not mentioned ought we not turn to new paradigms? My position is this: before we turn to other books to understand people and their problems maybe we ought to look a little more closely at the book we have got.

Now let me make it perfectly clear: I am not anti-psychology. I have spent a good deal of my life studying the subject and I am grateful for the insights I have gained from it. But psychology does not have the last word on the human condition. In the field of human problems where we struggle with the issues of life, it is my conviction that the Bible has a word - and it is, I believe, *the word for today*.

In showing how the Bible has clear answers to give to the problems of human personality we need to raise four questions. The answers to those questions will form a framework for understanding people and helping them from a Biblical perspective.

The four questions are these

1. **How do people function? That question goes to the roots of anthropology.**
2. **What are the real problems? That goes to the roots of psychopathology.**
3. **How do I deal with them? That is methodology.**
4. **How do I know I'm right. That is epistemology.**

I propose now to deal with these questions in a slightly different order than above. Take the first: HOW DO I KNOW I'M RIGHT? THE ISSUE OF EPISTEMOLOGY.

I remember when I began a short period of studies in counselling at the Rosemead Graduate School of Psychology in California many years ago I walked into the vast library there and thought to myself: How am I going to make sense of all these theories and approaches to the human personality? I was told that there are at least 300 approaches one can take toward counselling: My immediate thought was; but which is right? Perhaps all of them are right. Maybe the best idea is to settle for the one that has the most appeal and go for that.

Epistemologists tell us there are three routes to knowing — intuition, reason and experience. Take the first — **intuition**. Some ideas just hit us in the face with their obvious accuracy. No proof or reasoned support seems necessary to win our conviction that the idea is true. Intuition is the path to knowledge that requires only subjective certainty and not rational or external evidence in order to justify belief.

The second path to knowing is **reason**. The mind has been regarded by many as the centre of the personality, the capacity that most clearly separates mankind from animals. Aristotle held that our minds are capable of bridging the gap between the natural and the supernatural. Thomas Aquinas believed that the fall of man into sin did not affect the mind and that our thinking ability remains uncorrupted and intact despite our sinfulness. Theologians differ on this. My own view is that a curtain has descended on the human mind as a result of the fall and that unaided reason is incapable of understanding all that is true.

The third path to knowing is **experience**. There are those who say this is the best form of knowing. Experience is the best teacher they tell us. Intuition is purely subjective; reason can lead to irreconcilable differences of opinion. But experience — that is different. Empiricism is a philosophy of knowing which suggests that the hard data of observable and measurable experience provide the needed authority.

Whenever someone propounds a theory they believe to be true the empiricist shouts: "Prove it. Show me the evidence". Take for example the current debate (in the UK anyway) of whether parents should spank their children when they misbehave. The empiricist says: "show me the evidence that spanked children turn out better than unspanked children". The intuitionist says: "Seems the right thing to do to me". The man or woman who leans toward reason as a way of knowing says: "It makes good sense to

me, or it doesn't make good sense to me", depending on which side of the line he or she wants to come down.

I said that epistemologists tell us there are three sources of knowledge - intuition, reason and experience. Christians however recognise that there is another source of knowledge — *biblical revelation*. The Bible, because it is given us by the God who created us has an authority that no other book has. Who better to address our condition than the One who designed us? My conviction is that without the framework and foundation of revelation the other three paths will invariably lead us to concepts that are inadequate to guide us through the problems of life.

In relation to the matter of spanking a child for misbehaving a Christian committed to the fourth way of knowing — biblical revelation — might quote Proverbs 22:15 which says: **"foolishness is bound in the heart of a child but the rod of correction will drive it from him"**.

But how confident can we be that we have a sound Biblical epistemology in approaching human problems when the Bible has no reference to conditions or problems which a psychologist or psychiatrist may meet every day in their offices or clinics? I believe we can be very confident when we observe how Scripture provides us with rich categories of thinking that lead us to the heart of what are described nowadays as 'psychological problems'.

By 'categories of thinking' I mean such a thing as this; the thirst which God has placed within the human heart for himself and the difficulties which arise when we attempt to slake that thirst at wells of our own making. That category of thought is beautifully summarised in Jeremiah 2: *"My people have committed two evils; they have turned from Me the fountain of living water and have hewn for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns which can hold no water"*. Take another category — that of depravity — Scripture shows that we are infected and affected by a disease called "Do it Yourself". There is within us a stubborn commitment to independence that leads us to take our own way in issues rather than submit to the direction of God. This is effectively summarised in the well known verse of Isaiah's "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way". I have mentioned just two, but there are dozens of categories of thought found in Scripture which, when put together, give us a framework of thinking about people and their problems that enable us to come up with ideas that take us beyond psychology and give us a more realistic understanding of what goes on in the human soul. Scripture, I suggest, is a strong base for knowing when it comes to the problems that exist in the human heart. There is no better book.

This brings me to my next question: HOW DO PEOPLE FUNCTION? THIS TAKES US INTO THE REALM OF ANTHROPOLOGY? What does it mean to be a human being? Is there such a thing as Biblical anthropology? What does it mean to be a human being from the perspective of Scripture?

A biblical anthropology leads us to the understanding that mankind is created in the image of God. God paid us the highest compliment he could when he made us in His own image. Theologians once again differ on what it means to be made in God's image, but the least it can mean is this — we are made to resemble God and reflect Him. Perhaps nothing can be more important in understanding people and their problems than the fact that we are bearers of the divine image.

I tell my students in counselling: "until that concept brings goose pimples up on your skin you are not ready to counsel".

My own view of the image of God in mankind is that we are made with five aspects to our being. Firstly, we are designed as spiritual beings - beings who are built to connect with God. Secondly, we are rational beings - beings who can think. Thirdly we are volitional beings - beings who can choose. Fourthly we are emotional beings - beings who can feel. And fifthly, God has encapsulated this image of himself into a human body so that here in physical fashion we are intended to resemble God, to be microcosms of the Deity, reflecting the image of God here on earth as God reflects it in heaven.

But this image has been deeply damaged by the Fall. Because of Adam's transgression we are ruined temples, or to change the metaphor, crippled athletes. Wonderful though the original image was it has been fragmented by sin. Made to think like God, feel like God and choose as God chooses we choose other things. Instead of thinking correctly about where life is found, we choose differently, and thus we feel differently. Because of this enormous problems go on in our personalities.

Why is comprehending the divine design so important? Because if we do not understand how God made us then we will become more interested in human functioning than in human responsibility. Take an example: a man approached me on one occasion to ask my view on a suggestion made to him by his psychiatrist that he might overcome the sexual difficulties he was experiencing with his wife if he was to resort to using a prostitute. Now I hasten to add that there are not many psychiatrists that would give that kind of advice but what was the goal of the one I have referred to? It was good for functioning. But what about design? God never designed us for extra martial relationships. We were built for fidelity, for faithfulness, for commitment. The question that guides someone who has a sound biblical anthropology is not will it work, but is it right?

Many of the suggestions and ideas given to people to help them cope with the problems of living are antithetical to the way God has designed us. When function takes precedence over design then all that is being done is a re-arrangement of the symptoms. There can be no real solutions if one follows that direction.

What have I said so far? I have said that secular society, if they believe in God at all have a concept of him as less than all-powerful and His Word, The Bible, as less than relevant. I say that God is unchanged and unchanging and His Word is as powerful today as it ever was. Whilst we do not ignore or dismiss other ways of knowing, the Bible is a sound epistemological base particularly when it comes to understanding people and their problems because mankind was made in the image of his Creator and who better to help him with our difficulties than the Designer himself? Guided by a sound biblical epistemology and a sound biblical anthropology we are ready to ask the next question: WHAT ARE THE REAL PROBLEMS? THE ISSUE OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY.

What really is wrong with the soul? And how can it be cured? And how does the Bible lead us to conclusions about this? People have different ideas on what is the core problem of the human condition and even in Christian circles there are competing approaches to this issue. The roots of our problems, I believe, lie in the area of relationships. I learned this from the Bible. Almost every problem I have come across in my life, if it is not arising from a physical base, has its roots in relationships. It has a relational component. A person is not relating well to God, to himself or herself, or to others.

To clarify what I am saying we have to look again at the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us that there is more than one divine person in the courts of heaven. God is His own community. In some of the world's religions God is seen as a solitary figure playing "Solitaire" who needs nobody, feels nothing but just sits and thinks. The Bible

teaches us there is one God in Three Persons. People often say to me: what is a relationship to be like? I like to take them to the Trinity. Sometimes we find it difficult to get on with one another for a few days without getting into an argument. The Trinity have existed for all eternity without a single argument.

The very first thing we see about God as we open up the Bible and we are only four words into Scripture is this: In the beginning God (Elohim) is in the plural. Then it says Let us: To whom is God speaking? To the other members of the Trinity.

One of the greatest paradigm shifts I have ever experienced in my life took place in relation to the truth of the Trinity. One day many years ago now I was reading a book entitled **The Everlasting God** written by an Anglican theologian by the name of D. Broughton Knox. I want to read you the statement that arrested my attention, part of which put me off my food for three days, sent me into a period of deep spiritual contemplation and brought about a major change in my thinking. Writing on page 64 of **The Everlasting God** he wrote:

“The Father loves the Son and gives him everything. The Son always does that which pleases the Father. The Spirit takes of the things of the Son and shows them to us. He does not glorify Himself. We learn from the Trinity that relationship is the essence of reality and therefore the essence of our existence. And we also learn that the way this relationship should be expressed is by concern for others. Within the Trinity itself there is a concern by the persons of the Trinity for one another.”

Here is the statement I am referring to: **we learn from, the Trinity that relationship is the essence of reality and therefore the essence of our existence.** You see I had always been taught and believed that truth was the essence of reality. That had been my conviction for years. But along comes a theologian who says “No, truth is important, but it is not ultimate reality. Ultimate reality is not prepositional but personal. It is not about sentences, or words but is something demonstrable. Ultimate reality is God loving - something demonstrable. Ultimate reality is God loving - something seen.

Someone has said, most beautifully, I think “Relationships is the thread which holds together the pearls of Gods universe”. That is what the universe is all about. Nothing greater than that. It is the essence of reality.

Listen further to what Broughton Knox has written: “We learn from the Trinity that relationship is the essence of reality and therefore the essence of our existence and we also learn that the way this relationship should be expressed is by concern for others. Within the Trinity itself there is a concern by the persons of the Trinity for one another”.

What does all this mean in terms of people and their problems. The energy that pulses at the heart of the Trinity is other-centred. That's why self-centredness is such a terrible thing; it violates the universal design. We were made in the image of the Trinity to have more concern for others than we have for ourselves, and the violation of that design is I suggest the core of our problems. If we could take self-centredness out of the human heart we would have few difficulties.

When you cut your way through the layers of psychological problems what you find is a person, a person who is not experiencing deeply enough a relationship with God, a relationship with themselves and a relationship with others.

So what am I saying? Almost every problem has its root in a defective relationship — relationship with God, relationship with self, or relationship with others. This is the core of psychopathology. When I am counselling I seek to find where that person is out of relationship with God, themselves, and then to others. We are built to give ourselves to

others, and without that self giving, that other centredness, life will just not work in the way it was designed to work. I got that understanding not from any book on psychology but from the Bible. I was interested to see that an American psychiatrist by the name of M. Scott Peck, has written a whole book on this subject in which he says that if we could solve the problem of community we would go a long way to solving the problems of the age. I got it from Scripture, he got it from empirical research. Scripture and reality join hands together to form the conclusion that Broughton Knox so forcefully propagates that relationship is the essence of reality. It is self-centredness that snarls up our lives. There can be no wholeness in the Church or in secular society until that is recognised.

This brings us to the final question: HOW DO I DEAL WITH THEM? THE ISSUE OF METHODOLOGY.

Everyone who seeks to help people with their problems has some kind of treatment plan. Usually the goal of this treatment is the solution of the problem. But this is where I see the Bible differing from secular approaches. The primary goal of helping people with their problems from a Biblical perspective is not I suggest *the solution of the problem*. This is of concern of course and I am not saying that nothing should be done about bringing some immediate relief and help to a person. But God sometimes allows problems into our lives in order that they may draw us closer to him. If this is so then an attempt to remove them is to work against the divine design.

If I understand the Scriptures correctly the primary purpose of God is, as Henry Newman, a famous Catholic theologian in the United States, puts it, not happiness but holiness. God is more concerned about making us holy than happy. Holiness first, happiness next.

A friend of mine, Dr. Larry Crabb, a Christian psychologist, has written a book entitled **Finding God**. In it he says that we seem to want to use God to solve our problems rather than using our problems to find God.

Many times in counselling I have found myself saying to a person: You know I think you are going to have to stay with this problem as I can see God is using it in your life to deepen your character and enable you to know Him better.

For example, if the goal of counselling is the removal of problems, then someone with that goal when helping Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 and his experience of a thorn in the flesh would have been working against the purposes of God. If the primary purpose was to relieve the problem then people would try to help Paul in a way that would work against the purposes of God. If the presenting problem is part of God's purposes to bring a person nearer to him, closer to him, then no counsellor could remove it despite his or her best efforts.

What I am talking about here is a theology of sanctification. We are not to make our primary focus the removal of problems but removing the blocks to godliness. I have never heard anyone in my life who has come to me and said "I am really struggling with some problems in my life but what I am most concerned about is how they are blocking my path to being a more godly person. I am struggling with this problem but I would really love to know God better in this". Of course not and that is why we need an approach that is based on doing what God wants, not what a person wants. I usually say to my students when they come into counselling: welcome to the world of unpopularity.

I personally believe that the deepest changes in a person's life comes about through a relationship with God, right relating to themselves and then right relating to others. I have sought for years to find the genesis of human problems and I am more convinced

than even that a relationship with God is the dynamic for powerful change. That is why I use relationships as a window into the persons soul.

Conclusion:

Why do I believe the Bible is God's word for today? Does the Bible give us a framework for thinking through people's problems in today's world? Is it outdated, outmoded, replaced by psychological textbooks? I think not. The Bible is God's word for today. It is a book that is contemporary. It goes to the heart of issues that are important. It has an epistemology that can be trusted. It has an anthropology that is the clearest and soundest in all the world. It has a view on psychopathology that enables us to do more than treat symptoms but get to the heart of people's personal problems. And it provides us with a methodology that enables us to lead people to holiness and not just happiness.

I close with this quotation from Eugene Peterson. In his book *Living the Message* he says: "when we find ourselves deficient in wisdom it is not because the work of God has pages missing but because we have not seen all there is on the pages we already have. It is not another book we need but better attention to the book we have; it is not more knowledge we require, but better vision to see what has already been revealed in Jesus Christ."

I submit therefore that the Bible is God's word for today. There is none better.

Response

Revd Maurice Fearon OP

"You have made us for yourself O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You".

This quotation from Augustine sums up the basic premise from which the Bible proceeds. Central to the Bible is the belief in a personal loving and provident God who is the creator and origin of everything that exists, including man. According to the Bible man was the high point of God's creation. Man: male and female were created in the image and likeness of God and were created to exist in relationship with God. The Bible tells us that Israel, as a people, was brought into existence through love, that she was conceived in love and brought forth in love; her whole relationship with her God is described in terms of love. This is a basic truth that the Bible is ever anxious to communicate. The Bible is, to put it simply, a love story. Through the lived experience of the people of Israel, through the revealed Scriptures, through the life of the Incarnate Word, God has always revealed himself in terms of the relationship of love; never in theological or philosophical terms. Often this love is described as poignant, sometimes as angry and frustrated, but always it is described as steadfast, caring, concerned and selfless.

[Isaiah 65:1-3; Hosea 11:1-4; Micah 6:3-4]

The New Testament revelation of the Trinity continues this basic thrust. It proclaims to us that God is not some lonely, isolated, remote being. God is a living community of persons, complete in itself, united and bonded in love. When the Bible tells us that God created us he did so in his own image: "male and female he created them, in the image of God he created them". We too, were fashioned to be a community of persons bonded in love and ultimately destined for the community of love which is the triune God. In a sense both our sexuality and our ability to communicate verbally, emotionally and physically take on an almost sacramental character indicating that we were never designed to be self contained units. We were designed to go beyond ourselves and it is only in doing so that we ever truly discover who and what we are. On our own we are fundamentally incomplete. To quote Buber "where there is no thou, there is no I", or to quote the Book of Genesis "it is not good for the man to be alone". The philosophy of *mé féin* is both a sterile and lonely road to nowhere. These are fundamental insights that the Bible tells us about ourselves and they are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago.

It is true as Selwyn says that the Bible does not speak to us of contemporary problems such as anorexia nervosa, bulimia, multiple personality disorder, obsessive compulsive neurosis, depression, stress and so on. The Bible has no knowledge of these, just as the Bible has no knowledge of evolution or the big bang theory of creation. The written Scriptures while communicating timeless truths are also themselves time conditioned. They are products of their own age and culture and of the talents and insights of their individual writers. Neither the evangelists, nor Paul, nor any other biblical writer were addressing the needs and problems and concerns of a Dublin audience at the end of the second millennium A.D. To expect them to do so is unfair. To jettison the truths that they do communicate just because they were written a long time ago and in a different culture is equally unfair.

While it does not specifically speak of any of the disorders mentioned above the Bible does speak of the fundamental, ontological disorder which in a sense lies behind all of these: it speaks of the disorder of sin. In the story of Adam and Eve recounted in chapters

2 & 3 of Genesis the writer speaks of the introduction of sin and of its effects in human affairs. Prior to the advent of the disorder brought about as a result of sin man and woman are presented as existing in fundamental harmony with God and with one another. Enter sin and the result is disorder, unease, tension, distrust, friction, disfunctionality. Genesis presents us as being not quite the full shilling. We are not everything we were designed to be. The Bible generally describes sin as an attitude or state of: slavery, rebellion, death, prostitution, lostness, blindness, deception.

Collectively these phenomena contemporary psychiatrists might describe as alienation. It is a condition of contemporary society that afflicts very many people. If we were to accept as true the sayings of Ezra Pound that artists are "the antennae of the race", that they capture and express for all to see the vague feelings, the atmosphere, the personal experiences of the age, the culture and milieu floating around them, then it is almost paradoxical that in an era when human power and achievement is at its height and is most evident that the arts should present us with a pessimistic and disenchanting vision of man who is alienated, lost, lonely, without direction or purpose, incapable of communicating at any deep level, committing slow suicide. A verdict that is borne out by a sociologist such as Eric Fromm: "We are a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent - people who are glad when we have killed the time we are trying so hard to save".

Sin is not a fashionable word today. Indeed it has almost totally disappeared, not only from the vocabulary but also from the very consciousness of many people today. The Bible, however, takes sin very seriously. There is no attempt to explain away its seriousness as is very much the case today. The Bible sees sin as something heinous, culpable and tragic. It is a condition of dreadful estrangement from God the sole source of human well-being, fulfilment, happiness and life. From one point of view the entire Bible is preoccupied with two theological concerns:

- a) Man's sin
- b) man's salvation or redemption

Or to put it another way man finds himself in sin and suffers its consequences: God offers him salvation from it through Christ. That is the Bible in a nutshell. It is, thus a word of life.

Sin from the Bible's point of view is to be lost, separated from the source of our being, viz. God. Separated from God our hearts, as Augustine says, are restless. Hosea expresses it more poetically "Ephraim herds the wind, and pursues the east wind all the day long". This is the reality of which Jesus speaks when he says people are rushing to their destruction, that everything is on a knife edge, that the last hour is at hand. It is the message of so many of his parables. This is the reality of sin, disorder, lostness, call it what you like, that people need to be redeemed and liberated from. This is what the incarnate word of God, both in written and human form have to offer. As Jesus put it in John: "I came that you may have life, and have it to the full". This is a message that is as true and as relevant to people's lives today as it was when first uttered.