

The Gospel's Mission To Culture In New Zealand
By Harold Turner

Three years ago I returned to New Zealand after thirty-five years' absence, in Africa, Britain and the U.S.A. It was good to discover how real one's 'flaxroots' were and that there were no great 're-entry' problems. On the other hand it was clear that the New Zealand to which I had returned was very different from the New Zealand which I had left. One of the most obvious areas of change was in the area of religion.

An explosion of religions

It took only a few weeks to confirm the decline of my own and the other larger churches (a decline which had apparently been steady since the fifties), to note the apparent secularism, and at the same time to find that New Zealand was right up to date in its new religious movements. - gurus, healers, therapies, personal development and human potential movements, meditation and spirituality techniques, American, Chinese, Japanese, Buddhist and especially Hindu systems, all offering seminars and courses promising to enable anyone to reach any desired goal, and often charging accordingly. The ecology movement and the public community adult education system (especially in parts of the humanities) have both been penetrated by New Age philosophies and teachings: yoga, meditation, spirituality, personal fulfilment, self-esteem and self-assertion courses....all offering the true teaching and the effective techniques.

I met it everywhere: on public library information racks and on their bookshelves, on my doctor's waiting room noticeboard, in the tertiary education prospectuses, in my own church's parish newsletter and its social services, in news items in the local free newspapers, in the bookshops - once one started looking it was everywhere. Indeed, Auckland seemed to be ahead of Britain in the extent to which religious varieties and substitutes had penetrated society, including the churches. The self and subjectivity, power and success are the ruling themes - and what a sick society that indicates. Then we have the constant succession of 'spiritual specialists' from overseas (the Matthew Foxes, Peter Spinks, James Spongs and Don Cupitts) who arrive to traverse the country with seminars and lectures that will give us the answer, and who leave behind bands of disciples to spread the new teachings and techniques. Many of these come with the label 'Christianity Up-to-date' and are taken up by the media and by university further education centres. They are liable to be very minor figures in their own countries, but are presented here as the 'controversial' people beloved of the media, with the implication that they are the prophets ahead of their time, as yet without honour in the blindly conservative churches.

In contrast others, often major specialist thinkers who really are right on the frontiers of Christian thought, come unheralded for some particular purpose and depart without publicity. I think of some in the last year or so: Jürgen Moltmann, Dan Hardy, John Polkinghorne, and Alvin Plantinga, former president of the American Philosophical Association.

Auckland at least was nothing less than a sizzling religious stewpot of para-religions.

All of this religious variety show, denies a merely secularised society. I deliberately spoke earlier of an 'apparent' secularization of society. We have long been told that secularization is an inevitable process which we must come to terms with. In fact that thesis has been steadily disproved. While this twentieth century is the great century of the growth of the Church in the non-Western world, it is in the West itself not the century of secularization, but of unprecedented religious innovation.

The Church on the merry-go-round

What about the churches themselves in this situation? Well, they can produce their own variety show. For a small nation it is quite remarkable how many individual Christian groups there are, over and above all the obvious denominations. Apart from the main church agencies, the list of small missionary societies or agencies for overseas societies runs into many scores. Each has a commitment or agenda, a committee or representative, seeks funds from a constituency, and supports personnel or work abroad.

A similar listing of para-church and inter-church voluntary groups over and above the main church structures would probably run into hundreds. Almost every issue of the Christian press reports some new group initiative, with a new name, a special thrust and high hopes, inviting others to join in. And then from the churches' leadership comes a succession of plans and projects that would appear to be little more than changing the labels every few years: new life organisations, re-structuring for mission, the decade of evangelism, 'forward in the eighties' (and then the nineties, and then...). In no sense do I list these in cynicism. They all come from committed and deeply concerned Christian people, both laity and clergy, endeavouring to restart the stalled churches on their missionary task in this country. But in all truth do they not just peter out or potter on, one after another? And the position of the Gospel in the nation appears even less effective than before. So what now? Think up a new one? Work harder? Evangelize more? Organise better? Reform radically? Find a better guru/specialist from overseas? Those of us who have been around for a while probably find it progressively harder to respond with enthusiasm to the latest 'way forward'. We have seen it too often before. For most of us it is just struggle on loyally in our parishes, appreciating the small encouragements that do come and suffering the contrasts between the Gospel we profess and the influence of us Christians in the nation. I admire those, and especially the clergy, whose morale does not fail, whose nerve remains firm and confidence intact. And I can feel for those whose morale, nerve and confidence are in danger of collapse. Now my purpose is not merely to offer a dose of realism and to encourage people to hold on, although this must also be done. And after what I have said above I cannot offer any 'quick fix', introduce a new guru, propose another structure, suggest a new method, or reveal the hidden answer that has been eluding us. I need to insist on that from the start, for what I am going to say will appear in some such terms to some of you. Let me suggest that what we need is not likely to be some single proposal that we can understand fairly readily and apply in the near future with visible results. The answer, insofar as we begin to find one, is more likely to be ongoing and long-range rather than immediate, pervasive and complex rather than a simple single focus, in depth rather than on the surface, and more unexpected than obvious. In the first instance, and perhaps for a long time, it will involve ourselves rather than the church noticeboards. It will entail a good deal of solid but not necessarily

abstruse thinking, opening up for us things we half know already but have not developed. It will certainly transcend our present denominations.

I have come to identify the situation of the Gospel and the churches in terms of what I may call four 'pointers'. These are not born of my wisdom, but I think may claim to summarize an understanding of where we have arrived in Christian history that is shared by many of the leading Christian thinkers of our time. These four pointers are a set of signposts indicating where we stand in the ongoing mission of the Gospel at the end of the twentieth century. Specifically, they outline what I see as the main features of our current situation as New Zealand members of the world Christian community whose lives are set within the Western culture. Further, they suggest the vital point of concentration necessary if we are to deal with that situation in a creative way.

I. We face an unprecedented new mission task

1. The last three centuries have been the great age of Christian missions, of organised taking of the Gospel to further peoples, cultures and races. This has in fact been largely from the white race of Europeans in Western societies to virtually the rest of the world. Nothing like it had ever happened before in scale and in results. Despite its defects, and its association with colonialism and imperialism, God has used this movement to the extent that there are Christian communities planted in every corner of the globe and substantial churches in every race and most cultures. That is the great new Christian fact of the twentieth century, and it represents the end of an era.

Of course there are still particular 'unreached' peoples, where what has been the classic mission task has to continue. But the task as a whole is winding down. In replacement there are new fraternal relations between Western and other churches, where we give each other new kinds of help. This includes our partners sending emissaries of the Gospel to the West! The era of Christian missions from the West to the rest of the world, is ending. This is the backdrop for whatever we may think about the Gospel in our own country.

The first conversion of Europe...tied the Gospel into positions of power and privilege.

2. This amazing advance across the non-Western world has occurred while the results of the first great advance of the Gospel into a major cultural-geographical area, into Europe, have been dissolving. From the Church's peace with the Roman Empire reached under Constantine there developed the two Christendoms: Western Christendom, based on Rome, and Eastern Christendom, centred on Constantinople. These two magnificent attempts to create a Christian culture and society have now collapsed. World War I was the terminus for Western Christendom; the Bolshevik revolution in 1917 and the Turkish defeat of the Greeks at Smyrna in 1922 marked the end of any hopes of a restored Eastern Christendom.

The first conversion of Europe got many things wrong. It tied the Gospel into positions of power and privilege. It tried to form Christian empires and nations, with state churches. It is better ended. Methodists in Fiji trying to create their own Christian state, and Christian political parties in New Zealand with similar aims,

need help to avoid continuing the 'Christendom' approach. They need to understand that we have a new situation, otherwise their zeal becomes counter-productive. Efforts to restore or extend Christendom must now be replaced by a new mission to our post-Christian and largely pagan culture. There is no precedent for such a mission, a mission to a major culture that thought it had been converted when it hadn't, and then publicly discarded the Christian faith. Under God we face a wholly new mission task. This is the first feature of our New Zealand situation, as sharers in Western culture. Let us face it.

3. This same Western culture is becoming a pervasive modern culture for the whole world. This is because of the great values it also certainly embodies, such as the truths of science; the skills of technology; representative democratic systems in politics; some at least of the economic structures that undergird higher standards of living; and a concern for justice. The rest of the world can't get these things from the West fast enough. The recent progressive collapse in the Third World of many of the political alternatives testifies to this. Western culture is modern culture, and is so pervasive and effective that every society in the world is now becoming to some degree bi-cultural. (Bi-culturalism is no peculiarly New Zealand problem; it is a world phenomenon - and problem. Let us share it.)

All this means that our national situation, in its basics, is essentially part of the world situation. We must not let our emphasis on 'doing New Zealand theology' become a new parochialism that shuts us off from the fundamental shifts in the world Christian situation. We rightly try to contextualize our thinking about the faith in this country, but our peculiar New Zealand context is only one version of the new world context of the Gospel. To see ourselves we also look across the one world where so much of what happens here is really determined.

This wider view tells us that the Gospel everywhere is in a wholly unprecedented mission situation: mission to the first-ever post-Christian and world culture. Even small town churches in New Zealand are in this situation, whether they know it or not. A couple of years ago when in Christchurch I saw something in the Anglican diocesan magazine about problems over a car road race in Waimate. I wrote to one of the ministers there and this is what I learned. On Sunday November 17th 1991 the town was given over to the great Waimate car race - from 8.15 a.m. till 5 p.m. It was going to be quite impossible to hold church services. After negotiation the most the churches could achieve was a postponement in the start of forty minutes. This enabled them to squeeze worship in before 8.55 a.m. The Salvation Army hall was worst affected, being close to the race pits. As a gesture the race committee paid for the hire of an alternative hall further away. Otherwise the churches just had to lump it. That story provides a sharp indicator of where public life in this country stands in relation to the Church and the Gospel. Christendom publicly ended in Waimate on November 17th, 1991.

Every congregation needs leaders who are starting to see our situation as it really is. Missions to 'heathen cultures' now include our own. This is no merely theoretical analysis, it is a description of our actual practical, real, local situation.

II. The Gospel has never been more free for mission

What might at first sight appear to be great set-back for the Gospel is, if we see it in a different way, really a great gain. I want to put before you six ways in which I see the Gospel as being better placed in the world than it has ever been in the whole of its two thousand year history. There are at least six new freedoms for the Gospel operative increasingly in our time.

1. There is firstly the emergence of one world. We see this in the world of communications and the technologies that almost annihilate space. There is a new interdependence politically and economically - seen most dramatically when the world comes to the aid of disaster-stricken areas. Along with this, and interlocked with it, is the emergence of the world Christian community. Despite the ongoing persecutions and bannings of Christians in certain regions, the Gospel has access to virtually the whole world as never before.

2. The range of human resources available for the expression and the service of the Gospel is wider than ever before in human history. With the emergence of one world all races and cultures now have an opportunity to contribute to the understanding and expression of the Gospel. The feminine half of the human race is also securing its new freedom to make a full contribution to the Church and to the world.

Missions to 'heathen cultures'
now include our own.

3. However it may have stumbled, the new ecumenical concern presents a critique of denominationalism that will not go away. The new relationships between Catholic and Protestant; between Eastern Orthodoxy and the rest of us; between the main-line 16th century Reformation and the so-called Radical Reformation represented by some of the European 'sects' (as the likes of us have called them) - all this in my lifetime is astonishing. It betokens a new freedom for the Gospel from all quarrels and issues. And then there is the fact that the Bible has never been more available across the world, in quantity, in translation and in tools for its understanding. We can be free of bibliolatry and false literalism and set the Scriptures free to witness to all men as never before.

4. The worldwide spread of the Gospel has freed it from the stigma of colonialism. The great mission expansion of the Church in recent centuries occurred in inescapable conjunction with the colonial expansion of the imperial European 'Christian' nations. This facilitated the mission, but hindered it also in other ways. Overall it has tended to smear the image of the Gospel, especially in the present era when 'colonialism' continues to be a bad word in the West as much as in the rest of the world. We can be grateful that the Gospel once again is free to run on its own merits, without the dubious association with the colonial era that has now ended. This is a new and healthy freedom.

5. The breakdown of Christendom means freedom from its dangers. We may lament the breakdown of Christendom - the loss of the good old days when New Zealand was (as it seemed) a more Christian country, when our small home towns were safe at night, and the media were not mocking the Christian faith and presenting non-Christian life-styles as acceptable alternatives, (and the list goes on.....) I could join in the lament too, but it is more important to see beyond this to the ways in which the Faith in these times past was also locked in to many unchristian positions. There were for example the corruptions that flow from being part of the establishment, with privilege and

power for the Church. Although this was less evident in New Zealand than in Europe, there were Christians here, especially those with national churches behind them in England and Scotland, who sought to establish the same kind of privilege here. More subtle were the distortions that derive from being locked in to a culture that still operated with many basic but unrecognised assumptions inherited from the non-biblical world of the Greeks that I will look at next. Despite the achievements of Christendom therefore, there were also great problems for the Gospel, which is now set free to stand on its own merits.

6. The last and most important of the new-found freedoms is more subtle and pervasive, and not easily explained. Do bear with me as I try. Our Western culture has complex roots, partly in the Semitic world view of the Bible and partly in the world view inherited from Greek culture which in turn was affected by Asian outlooks. The overall effect of the Greek influence was a dualistic separation of mind from matter, the spiritual from the physical, the soul from the body, thought from the senses, theory from practice, the changeless world of eternity from the changing world of time, and separation of God from active interaction with the creation. There could be no incarnation and no resurrection on these premises.

This dualistic way of thinking about the whole of our lives has been a powerful limiting and distorting influence throughout the history of Christianity since it first moved out into the Graeco-Roman world. It appeared early, in the Arian heresy, and persisted in some of the teaching of the great Augustine and in the medieval synthesis of Aquinas. It took new shape in the work of the 17th century French philosopher Descartes. He divided experience into the inner world of the self and the outer mechanical world of objects. This dichotomy was assumed in the scientific world-view of Isaac Newton. Late European philosophy has ill served the cause of truth and the Gospel. Coupled with the 18th century philosophic movement self-designated as the Enlightenment, it did little more than ring the changes on this fundamental dualism. It bequeathed to us Christians and our whole culture the fatal distinction between 'faith' and 'knowledge' (or reason), between 'values' and 'facts', between subjective opinions and objective truth. The Enlightenment fostered much that was good, such as religious toleration and freedom, and recognition of the need to constantly and humbly re-examine our firmest beliefs. Its dualistic base, however, was a uniformly disastrous legacy.

We have all sought to live the biblical Faith in a culture based on these dualistic assumptions, this Western and unbiblical world-view. This clearly applies to contemporary pluralists and relativists, like John Hick, Paul Knitter, Don Cupitt or Cantwell Smith, all those who remove the Gospel from the realm of true knowledge and fact and place it in the realm of differing cultural values and viewpoints. But it is just as true for pietists who rely on 'faith' and ignore reason, and fundamentalists who try to defend the Gospel by reasoning within a different kind of dualistic framework. Many among the medley of New Age movements are simply extreme examples of the same dualist tradition, and can be understood only in this context.

Alongside this powerful distorting tradition in our Western culture, however, there has remained the truly revolutionary Christian world-view which is anchored in the incarnation (even of God in a physical body) and the resurrection (yes, of the body too!), and expressed in the subsequent doctrine of creation and in the ecumenical creeds. For

nearly two millennia this profoundly unitive vision has struggled against the Greek heritage and its European developments. The biblical world-view has prevailed sufficiently for the Christian doctrine of creation to provide the essential basis for modern science - even for Newton in spite of his dualism, and for the other great 16th century founders of science. These were almost all professedly Christian, although still bound within this dualistic world-view. Now, in this century, something of the profoundest importance has happened. For the first time in the whole of Christian history the dualistic world-view has been exposed for what it is, and abandoned by modern theoretical science (which is fundamentally physics). The process began with the revolutionary thought of the devoutly Christian physicist James Clerk Maxwell, from the mid-nineteenth century. It was pursued by Einstein and Planck and many since. It has been worked out for the philosophy of science by Michael Polanyi (see his great book of 1958, *Personal Knowledge*), and it has been popularised by such scientist-theologians as John Polkinghorne.

Alongside this revolution in science there has been a slower and less-known revolution in philosophy. The dualistic view of knowledge that contrasted objectivity in all its forms (value-free, factual, scientific, rational, unbiased and absolute) with subjectivity (personal, private opinions, biased, prejudiced and culturally relative) has given way to non-dualistic unified theories of knowledge that embrace both the objective and the subjective factors. John Macmurray is just one example of a thinker who was ahead of his time in pioneering this kind of approach.

Parallel to these revolutions in science and philosophy has been a revolution in theology, again in rejecting the dichotomy between value and fact, between faith and reason, and presenting a new more unitive and holistic approach to religious truth. Some of the landmark names here might be Edward Irving and Samuel Taylor Coleridge from early last century; and then in our own century P.T. Forsyth, Martin Buber, Rudolf Otto, Karl Barth, John Baillie, T.F. and J.B. Torrance, Eberhardt Jüngel, Colin Gunton, Carver Yu and many others.

Now all this together amounts to a massive revolution indeed. It represents the greatest freeing of our Faith from its Western cultural incubus in the whole of its story. As Keith Ward, then of King's College, London, has put it in the title of his little paperback it is indeed *The Turn of the Tide*. This is almost too modest a term for such a basic revolution. We have been trying to live and witness as biblical Christians while operating unconsciously with hostile cultural tools that have distorted or negated our efforts. No wonder we have been frustrated, baffled, demoralised. But this schizophrenia has been diagnosed. Its causes have been identified. The new freedom awaits us. I thank God I have lived to see this day.

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I cannot over-emphasize the importance of some grasp of all this for our morale, and the relevance for understanding the new world culture to which the Christian mission must now be directed. A missionary preparing for work in Islamic lands undergoes serious study of the language, history and culture; if being sent to some tribal people,

then it is linguistics and anthropology as giving entry to that kind of culture. We cannot now escape the equivalent preparation for mission to our own culture, which becomes mission to ourselves, right within our own parishes! Thinking like this is essential preparation for our daily job if we are to be relevant and effective in any deep and long-term way.

To summarize this whole section: the Gospel has never in the whole of its history been so free to be itself, to be ecumenical, catholic, and missionary in the widest sense of each of these terms. When from within the parish and the N.Z. scene, we see all that is really happening back-stage, all these new freedoms that provide the true scenario for our work, then for me indeed my nerve becomes firm and my confidence returns, my morale is high. It is a wonderful time in which to be alive, and with head uplifted to sing the songs of Zion.

III. The Special Vocation of New Zealand in the World

My third pointer for our thinking about the mission of the gospel today is that New Zealand has its own special form of some of these cultural issues, and opportunities and freedoms which are special to us. For example:

1. Both Maori and Pakeha (and the more recent Island communities) face the problem - from quite different perspectives - of relating to the dominant Western/Modern culture as part of the One World. The bi-cultural issue of relation between Pakeha/Western and Maori/tribal cultures provides an opportunity for a unique inter-faith work-out between the Christian Gospel and the primal or tribal religions. In a way that has not yet been done anywhere else for primal religions we can explore both the deep affinities and the basic differences between the traditional Maori faith and the Christian Gospel. This interaction may well bear fruits that are important far beyond New Zealand.

2. Immigrants to New Zealand in the 19th and earlier 20th centuries came from somewhere in Europe, with either Western or Eastern European Christendom as a cultural background. Now, however, the question of the relation between East Asian and Western/Modern cultures is rapidly becoming more important in New Zealand. Japan provides a classic example of this tension, being divided between incompatible traditional Shinto-Buddhist and Modern/Western world-views. Will Japan crack as the communist world has cracked? When this Japanese problem is exported unresolved to New Zealand, and added to our own problems, the cultural confusion is indeed intimidating. It should at least be foreseen, and understood at the level of deep culture. It must be said that government policies and other public organs show no recognition of the massive problems ahead when the respective underlying world-views conflict in certain basic respects. The increasing number of Christian congregations of Asian origin in New Zealand provide a locus where these issues should be explicitly identified and dealt with.

3. But Church and Nation in New Zealand have special potential for these tasks. We share in most of the 'credits' of Western culture without as yet many of the 'debits'. We also enjoy an equable climate, comparative affluence, a national identity. We already possess a remarkable record for a small population of innovation and of contribution to the wider world, although most of these contributions have been pragmatic rather than in the realms of thought. Our short history leaves us comparatively free from

crippling traditions; our geographical isolation frees us from border and other problems, and yet we can be a bridge between the South Pacific and the rest of the world. We have increasingly rich human resources: Maori, Pakeha, Polynesian and others. It may well be that in no other three million people anywhere is the Church better placed to capitalize on the virtues of smallness (we can all know and help one another), to see the real issues unclouded by other matters (a Kiwi getting to the point and calling a spade a spade!), and to respond more quickly through being unhampered by the dead weight of history. Perhaps we have special opportunities to give a lead in rebuilding the shattered Christian community and in the reconstruction of the foundations of Western/modern/world culture. There is on the other hand a serious vacuum painfully evident in our national life, especially in the lack of a social and political philosophy. This low point in our fortunes, however, may itself provide the incentive to discover and critique the deeper levels of existence. This is something we must do for ourselves rather than expect to import ready-made from elsewhere, although there are rich resources available from across the world which could be appropriated much more extensively. No one can predict time-scales here: the process may take fifty years, or a substantial breakthrough might come in five.

Within the Christian community, despite the withering of the first ecumenical effort, there are signs of creative re-alignments to be followed up in hope and prayer. Recently a remarkable Brethren pastor, who has welded together the biblical-evangelical, charismatic and social responsibility traditions, told me about sitting down with a Catholic cardinal, an Anglican archbishop, a Salvation Army officer, and leaders of the other main denominations to work together on the mission of the Gospel to this nation. Is there any other country of the world where this is happening? So many in what used to be called the main-line churches simply haven't caught up with these realignments and developments. And they are in my experience something unique to New Zealand. God is at work here to do something tremendous through this little country.

IV. The Need for Deep Mission to the Roots of Modern Culture

Mission occurs at three levels: individual, social, and cultural. We have not always recognized this - indeed we have not always needed to do so. Today such an understanding is inescapable. Let us look at each of the three levels in turn.

1. There is little new to be said about personal evangelism, the mission of the Gospel to individual needs. This kind of evangelism has a certain priority, still works and always will. People go on being converted, sometimes seemingly 'out of the blue'. What happens at this level today, however, appears insufficient even to maintain the Christian community, much less to enlarge it to serve the Kingdom. Moreover the personal Christian life is subject to the schizophrenia at the cultural roots we have already described. The personal Christian life is either assisted, hindered or choked altogether by what happens at level three. Church growth in the sense of more individual members may be a deceptive advance where it merely extends the incidence of this schizophrenia.

Also included at this first level is what is called 'social service', since it is really still the loving service of the Gospel to individuals in personal need. It is diakonia in distinction from kerygma. It will always be needed and will have many different

methods, priorities and specialisations. But our shrinking church base and resources, coupled with the escalation of old social problems and the emergence of quite new ones mean that we cannot cope with the situation. The scale of the world's needs grows and cannot be overtaken. What is now happening in our country in terms of sheer basic human need is painful demonstration of these facts.

2. This is why many Christians focus on the second level, that of the social system itself. The aim is to reform the public social, educational, economic and political structures and institutions in order to reduce the needs apparent in the sphere of 'social service': fencing the top of the cliff rather than ambulancing the bottom. This is certainly an aspect of Kingdom-building. There are as many different views and approaches to this task as there are people committed to it: conservatives, radicals, and single-issue fanatics. The results are different too, but always still inadequate. Can one really imagine new structures ever overtaking all the social problems? For every new and better structure there seem to emerge new and unforeseen problems.

How do we know the truth? By detached, merely intellectual, impersonal methods...or by the interweaving of faith, tradition, authority, experience, experiment and reasoning all together?

Other concentrations on the second or social level include leavening the present system from within by humble service as citizens, helping to keep the system going meanwhile as well as possible. We are all doing this, and rightly so. The world owes more than it knows to these silent invisible Christians. Too often, however, all these efforts in the social sphere lead to disappointment, frustration and disillusionment. They do not attack the underlying errors at the very roots of our culture, the axiomatic, unconsciously adopted beliefs and practices that conflict with a Christian stance. These are the real problem, and action on level two, though good in itself, cannot really attack them. Nor are these roots reached by the popular view of what constitutes culture - the social customs and life-styles evident in foods, clothing and housing, greetings, parties and entertainment, births, marriages and funerals. It is possible to have great variety here, as say between the English, Irish, Welsh and Scots, and yet to share uncritically the same basic Western culture and its errors.

3. Hence we come to the real need of today, what we might call 'deep mission' to critique and to convert in the depths of our culture. Here we reach basic issues, and touch the heart of our malaise. Is human nature an individual atomistic Self, as it was for Descartes, or is it constituted by its relations with others as in the thought of the Bible (and indeed many tribal cultures)? The one view leads to the 'self-religions' of the New Age; the other leads to the Kingdom.

How do we know the truth? By detached, merely intellectual, impersonal methods (Descartes once again) or by the interweaving of faith, tradition, authority, experience, experiment and reasoning all together?

Is there one common truth, both public and private, for all people in all cultures; a truth as valid in the realms of morality and religion as well as in those of science? There is no room for multi-culturalism at this deep level of how reality, either material or personal, is constituted. There is only the one truth (as far as we

can grasp it). God's creation is not made in the way which the Greeks, Descartes and much European philosophy has described. It is made in the way indicated in the Scriptures and now echoed in modern science. Basic human nature and the way the world out there operates are the same for everybody in all cultures.

This is the real mission challenge of our day. To leave this basic area of our existence unexamined and unchanged is to prolong the schizophrenia of our Christian existence. It is to prolong the mounting ills of Western society, and to prolong the baleful influence of the new modern culture upon the whole world. Only change here can undergird and direct changes in the social system of level two, by providing sound roots for the social philosophy we so lack in this country. Only change here can extend conversion to the whole life of the individual person, so that the Christian is no longer living in a world where Christian values are nullified at the deeper unconscious realm by the incompatible assumptions about human nature and about truth which are at the heart of Western culture.

Conclusion: The Gospel and Our Cultures

This then is the challenge that lies before us: to radically critique and transform the foundations of our own culture with the tools of a truly Christian world-view. This is not a substitute for mission at the first two levels I have described above. It is, however, the basic pre-requisite for effective mission at any level. Without it we are wasting our time.

My own introduction to all this really reaches back to the shaping influences in the first decades of adulthood in New Zealand. Now, late in life, these have been brought to a consummation through participating in Britain in the developing programme 'The Gospel and Our Culture' that began to take shape there in the 1980s. This movement brings together some of the best Christian resources from the British Council of Churches, the Bible Society, and also from (strange though it may seem) an heir of the 'Radical Reformation' that remained in tension with the development of Christendom, the Mennonite Church from America, which has long had a small mission exercise in its European homeland based in Stuttgart. Similar networks seeking to develop this new deep mission have emerged in Europe, in America and in Australia. We in New Zealand have a significant part to play in that enterprise, as part of what is a global mission to the roots of modern culture.

The best known name in this new mission is that of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin. Now in his eighties, after forty years' mission work in India, he is engaged in the greatest mission of his life. Many readers of this article will have profited by the flow of his writings since the 1930s. All of us can explore further what I have been trying to say about deep mission to our culture through his writings in the 1980s - *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, *The Gospel as Public Truth*, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, and others - that have both expressed and furthered this mission. They serve as a kind of touchstone or litmus paper for what is most relevant. Newbigin, however, must not be presented as the latest 'guru', but simply as one who after a lifetime of consistently biblical and theological writing has so well set out the issues and the task on our behalf. He does not have all the answers. That is for us, and for all thinking Christians, to explore.