

We meet in the Church Hall on Monday evening, 7 till 8 30 pm

R C I A

Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults

Science And Religion

Is science really a sort of religion for modern times, as some believe? It sometimes seems that because there's a good scientific *explanation* of every phenomenon - we can explain our feelings, phobias, even our moral priorities in terms of chemistry in the body and electricity in the brain - there's really no need for religion, which seems not to depend on reason, as science does. If we can explain everything scientifically, does that mean all our questions will one day receive a scientific answer, and we will be "sorted"?

It's very important to see exactly how far science *can* go in explaining the world's processes and composition, but also how far it falls short of explaining *why* there is anything here at all. If we seek everywhere for material causes for the world, that still leaves unanswered the question of what it's doing here, and who or what started the whole massive process off. For a while we can be satisfied with looking a few stages back in the linked causes which brought us into being. If you can trace your ancestry, you'll know who begat whom, perhaps for several hundreds of years.

But that doesn't explain who began the begatting. After all, a long series of causes disappearing into the mists of time isn't a satisfactory answer. For there to be a cosmos here at all, something or someone - *who didn't himself need causing* - with freedom and influence on a massive scale, had to start the process off. Otherwise there'd just be nowt.

Last week I suggested that most of us require this force to be personal in some way. Our religion tries to build up knowledge of this Person: by expressing what we believe we can say about God, and what we know we can't and mustn't say. Then we try to gather together around this faith, and live in the light of it as a community of people who set this dimly-understood God at the heart of its life. We believe that when people come together to search for God, God can speak to them through each other. We have a privileged example of this in the People of God who put together the Old Testament: the Jews. We keep their holy writings as the first and greater part of our Bible.

Science can tell us massive amounts of truth about the *nature* of the world. But its *intention*, its *destiny* lie hidden in the heart of God, and this is where we have to search for our meaning and the meaning of the whole world. Science cannot reach that by its amazing resources; only with the aid of God have we any chance of reading these mysteries. That is the realm of religion, and nothing can replace it.

This week the RCIA is about the search for meaning and about the excellence and dignity of a life that is open to God. There is nothing stupid about searching for significance; we need it so that we can align our lives and our strengths with the way God wants the world to go, and so come to accomplish what the Gospel calls “doing the truth”. There is nothing mean about seeking for a meaning that will cover everything: generous people know that their lives belong together, that we must have community with the others on the face of the earth, sharing our lives and gifts, and the wisdom we have found, together. It’s no use living in a frame of mind which will only be true for one person; truth is equal for all.

The Revelation of God

The Maker reveals himself in what he makes, above all in our human nature. But he also communicates with us, in an ever-increasing intimacy: at last he sends to us his Son, who has the power to reveal to us the nature of the life of God.

- So that he can reveal, he comes in the power of God.
- So that we can receive his message, he comes as one of us.

That fact sets in our midst the Image of the Unseen God - Jesus Christ.

We’ve received great things through many people who are born to the human family; artists, composers, rulers and politicians, thinkers, theologians, novelists and writers, scientists, healers, and all the rest. Most of us have irreplaceable people who gave us life, and the understanding we have of it: our parents, families, teachers.

From Jesus Christ, however, our human family has received the most influential gift of all: knowledge of God, the presence of God, the utter uniting of God with what we are, with human nature. In him the Word of God became human flesh. This is the most effective and total communication between God and us: God becomes one of us. This seals the human family as destined for divinity - for eternity - for everything God enjoys. Now it becomes really vital for us to find out what it is we’ve inherited: what is this man who has stood amongst us so that we could look upon the truth of God?

A Surprising Answer...he’s a condemned convict! The *religious* authorities of his own day handed him over to a shameful death to get rid of him, so that they could preserve their religion from him. They met him, and this meeting was enough to assure them that they were unsafe as long as he was on the loose, that it would be a lot better for the survival of the religion, if he were dead.

We need to find why this fate was meted out to a man who was later called “the image of the unseen God, the first-born of all creation”.