

C20th DISENCHANTMENT, CONVERGENCE AND RE-ENCHANTMENT

*The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.*

Historical overview

The twentieth century is likely to be viewed amongst many other insights as the age of the science and technology/information explosion and also less positively as the age of warfare – more people died in more wars in this century than in any other so far in human history.

Whether it is also known as the age of the death of God as Arnold's prophetic pessimism in the poem above suggests is far less certain. The complex and prolific German existential philosopher Frederick Nietzsche pronounced the death of God in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* in 1882 (translated by Kaufman as *The Gay Science*)¹. This collection of aphorisms particularly attacks the notion of an all-seeing judgmental God who inflicts guilt on the world. Elsewhere eg in *The AntiChrist* Nietzsche attacks Christianity for its corrupting influence on the purity of Roman ideals and in several other works he is critical of judgmental Christian morality.

Whilst Nietzsche's ideas had a wide-ranging influence on many European intellectuals especially in France and Germany and was a "must be reading" author amongst Australian university students in the 1960s yet it is doubtful whether the slogan made a deep impact on Western theology or Christian life in general. So, interestingly, A N Wilson concludes: *Just as Nietzsche's generation were declaring the death of God and Thomas Hardy was witnessing His burial, religious thinkers as varied as Simone Weil, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nicholas Berdayev and Teilhard de Chardin were waiting in the wings.*² As it happened, the announcement of the demise of God at the hands of an atheistic philosophy of science turned out to be premature.

Negative factors impacting and impeding the steady march of atheism included two world wars, a host of frenzied genocides and ethnic cleansings and the rise and collapse of European communism through the treachery of

¹ F Nietzsche (trans. W Kaufmann), *The Gay Science*, New York, Vintage, 1974 p167.

² A N Wilson, *God's Funeral* Abacus London 2000 p465

Stalin and the inevitable call for national independence from subjugated peoples. In addition, as in the Romantic period, High Art in general rejected the march of Science. This can be seen in various ways for example Yeats search for Celtic roots and explorations in theosophy. Heidegger's criticism that science overcomes praxis with its ability to provide for technologies that could eliminate human existence; Hannah Arendt's criticism that science became a self-perpetuating end in its own right and Foucault's ambivalent attitude to the Enlightenment and the inadequacy of the choice between accepting or rejecting its dictates. Hans Kung usefully summarises the situation... *science must not be made a worldview. Every science, however precise and penetrating, that absolutizes itself makes itself a laughingstock to all the world and easily becomes a common danger. And if it attempts to demystify all others (one thinks of psychoanalysis), in the end it will be demystified itself.*³

Positive factors encouraging the growth of Western Christian faith included the philosophical and real life impact of dynamic Christian apologetics from G K Chesterton, C S Lewis, John Stott and J R R Tolkien to Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Polkinghorne, Alister McGrath, Don Carson and Tim Keller; the growth and maturing of Pentecostal and evangelical Christianity especially in Korea, Indonesia, Latin America and many parts of Africa⁴; the post-modern questioning of enlightenment certainties and the new age spirituality quest of the late twentieth century all coagulating into what McGrath was able to call "the twilight of atheism" in 2004⁵. Even traditional Catholicism flourishes at almost mediaeval levels in Spain, for example the cult of the Virgin in the basilica at Valencia on any day of the week.

Having said this, one of the curiosities of McGrath's analysis is the evidence that Protestantism actually laid some of the groundwork for Enlightenment atheism. Such factors as the Protestant support for the natural sciences and experimentation which could be seen to lead directly to Deism, the separation of the sacred and the secular resulting in an absent God, the encouragement to Middle Class upward social mobility and therefore materialism, the tendency to withdraw from artistic expression and the rejection of folk spirituality can all be related to the advance of Protestantism and what McGrath has labelled *the imaginative failure of Protestantism*.⁶ These issues remain as challenges for the Protestant church in the C21st.

³ H Kung, (trans J Bowden) *The Beginning of all Things: Science and Religion*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2007

⁴ Eg T Adeyemo (Ed.) *Africa Bible Commentary: A One Volume Commentary written by 70 African Scholars*, Nairobi, Zondervan, 2006.

⁵ A McGrath. *The Twilight of Atheism* Rider, London 2004

⁶ *Ibid* pp198 -216

The most powerful negative factor damaging the fabric of religious integrity in the C20th has been the flourishing in many quarters of a narrow, bigoted and anti intellectual Fundamentalism. The slaughter of up to 1.5 Armenian Christians in Turkey at the close of World War 1⁷, bitter and horrific ethnic cleansing on religious grounds in the Balkans following the break up of Yugoslavia at the end of World War 2; the ongoing trauma of interdenominational Christian hatred in Northern Ireland; the seemingly endless Middle East tension between Fundamentalist Zionism, the legitimate desire for Palestinian and Jewish homelands and the new aggression of Islam fanned it seems at times by a Fundamentalist Christian American foreign policy agenda⁸; the evidence of extreme racial supremacy in some Southern Baptist American churches⁹ and pro apartheid Dutch Reform churches in South Africa; and the continuing intellectual suicide demanded by the Vatican for millions of devout Catholics who seek to live lives of commitment to social justice and sincere spiritual conviction within that tradition. Catholic believers are constantly called to an intellectual double think by both the extreme conservatism of successive Vatican administrations (with the noble exception of Vatican 2) and the church's refusal to act justly in relation to the behaviour of its own leaders.

It comes as no surprise following this catalogue of C20th religious disasters to see a late rally by the "new atheists" led by Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins¹⁰ and journalist Christopher Hitchens¹¹. Many of the criticisms made by both need to be said and heard but the extreme position taken by both that all religious activity is fundamentally evil has attracted its own criticism of fundamentalism. A more ordered philosophical debate is needed and the new atheism seems to be already running out of steam at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century. A world which has rejected modernism in general will not be recalled by the reductionist and strident fundamentalism of "Ditchkins" as they are called by the cultural theorist Terry Eagleton.¹²

This challenge to modernism, as represented especially by scientific materialism has coincided with the democritisation of knowledge led by communication developments especially the rise of the i phone and internet world of constant communication, chatter and twitter. In his epic novel *War and Peace* Tolstoy had reminded us that there would be no wars without

⁷ A story chillingly told in W Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium*, London, Harper Perennial, 1998, ch 1.

⁸ A useful recent account of the issues surrounding Islam and Christianity is J Wilson, *Christianity Alongside Islam*, Brunswick East, Acorn, 2010.

⁹ As detailed for example in P Yancey, *Soul Survivor: How My Faith Survived the Church* London Hodder & Stoughton, 2001 especially chapter 1.

¹⁰ R Dawkins, *The God Delusion* Bantam Press London 2006. Dawkins likens religion to an evolving 'virus of the mind' (p186)cf J Bowker *Is God a Virus? Genes, Culture and Religion* SPCK, London 1995

¹¹ C Hitchens *The Portable Atheist* Da Capo Press, US, 2007

¹² T Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009

soldiers to fight them and all the armies had to do was reject the demands of armchair generals and politicians. In the same way the democratisation of knowledge and wisdom through democratic online encyclopedias, the demise of the newspaper and the new study of history from the point of view of ordinary people rather than a few key individuals has produced a far more highly educated proletariat on every continent across the globe.

The twentieth century's distaste for materialist scientific dominance has been particularly strong in America for reasons which Mark Noll equates with the origins of American culture. American *history has been pragmatic, populist, charismatic, and technological more than intellectual*.¹³ Noll argues that American evangelicals have been unable to shake off the pervasive influence of dispensational Fundamentalism's refusal to engage with intellectual culture resulting in a docetic approach to the physical world and its problems and a Gnostic or esoteric approach to scriptural method¹⁴ and the subsequent retreat of evangelical writers from mainstream intellectual life.

This anti-intellectualism in American life was not limited to evangelicalism. Jewish novelist Saul Bellow similarly describes growing up in downtown Chicago where his family inspired career choices were party musician or rabbi. His description of Chicago as *slaughterhouses, the steel mills, the freight yards, the primitive bungalows of the industrial villages that comprised the city, the gloom of the financial district, the ballparks and prize fights, the machine politicians, the prohibition gang wars, and you had a solid cover of "Social-Darwinist" darkness, impenetrable by the rays of culture*.¹⁵

Allan Bloom has critiqued the failure of twentieth century American university education to rise above public opinion and its preoccupation with current social problems. American popular disinterest in digging more deeply into the well-springs of human creativity and wisdom is modelled elsewhere in the Western world including Australia where increasingly university faculties must organise their own funding from business to survive and knowledge for knowledge's sake is seldom valued by politicians or the people

If the twentieth century began with Fundamentalist creationist dogma attacking biological science the century ended with climate change sceptics taking centre stage and challenging the prevailing scientific paradigm at the same time that standard Western medicine was being joined by ancient Eastern methodologies including acupuncture and various forms of therapeutic meditation as well as the use of herbal and natural remedies.

¹³ M A Noll *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1994 p55

¹⁴ Ibid, p.123

¹⁵ Saul Bellow in the Foreword to A Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* New York, Touchstone, 1987 p14.

Of course the breakdown of the dominant Enlightenment/Modernism model in theology and philosophy and the subsequent growth of twentieth century post-modern relativism in the world of ideas did not in any sense result in a Western Christian revival so much as a plethora of New Age and non-Western spiritualities... what cultural historian James Sire has called *New Age spiritobabble in religion*.¹⁶ Alister McGrath describes Post-Modernism as a *cultural mood*¹⁷ and demonstrates that Enlightenment atheism may have begun as a viable attempt to decentre Western culture from State run church oppression. The inevitable result was simply the replacement of Christian immovability with atheistic immovability. Not surprisingly atheism attracted its own vigorous critics who refused to be limited by atheism's ultimately barren and life-denying reductionism.

Many of the century's deepest thinkers, whilst rejecting the evangelicalism of their parents nevertheless like John Ruskin also rejected the *prosaic either/or solutions posed by science to religious faith*.¹⁸ William James' influential Gifford Lectures delivered in 1901 and 1902 in Edinburgh used Cardinal Newman alongside Hindu and Buddhist sages to launch a vigorous and well researched defence of the pragmatic and mystical value of religion.¹⁹

Church building and attendance increased into the mid twentieth century and one response to the pointless slaughter of so many young men on the Western front during World War 1 was the growth of spiritualism and attempts of various kinds to make contact with the recently departed. The continuing spread of Swedenborgian and Theosophist ideas, for example in the work of spiritualists such as the Russian mystic Madame Helena Blavatski influenced many seekers looking for answers in a war weary world. These included William Yeats and Conan Doyle. James Joyce demonstrates Stephen Dedalus' intimate if parodying knowledge of the philosophical principles in his epic *Ulysses*²⁰. The sub-title of Denis Alexander's recent analysis of ideas about creation and evolution is *Do we have to choose?*²¹ Thoughtful twentieth century believers are grateful for this simple summary of their position.

The rise and rise of science and technology in the C20th

The story of the twentieth century scientific explosion in physics, biology, chemistry, information theory, psychology, sociology, complexity theory and neurobiology is often prefaced by an account of an allegedly confident

¹⁶ J W Sire *Habits of the Mind: Intellectual Life as a Christian Calling*, Downers Grove IL, IVP 2000 p139.

¹⁷ A McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*, London, Rider 2004 p 227

¹⁸ A N Wilson, *God's Funeral*, Abacus, St Ives 1999 p345.

¹⁹ W James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London, Longmans, Green and Co 1952.

²⁰ See the extended discussion between Dedalus and the librarian in chapter 2 of J Joyce, *Ulysses, The 1922 Text*, Oxford, OUP, 2003 p178 lines 2 -13 and notes on p.829.

²¹ D Alexander, *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* Oxford Monarch Books, 2008.

nineteenth century complacency that the basic work of science was complete. A quotation falsely attributed to Lord Kelvin (William Thompson) that *future truths of science are to be looked for in the sixth place of decimals*²² has not been identified. What Lord Kelvin did say is that if you cannot express what you know in numbers, *your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind; it may be the beginning of knowledge, but you have scarcely, in your thoughts, advanced to the stage of **science**, whatever the matter may be.*²³ This is a good example of late nineteenth century reductionism of physics to mathematics but not a sign of complacency.

John Horgan notes that the confusion may be due to a speech made by physicist Albert Michelson in 1984 who stated rather too confidently *that it seems probable that most of the grand underlying principles [of Physical Science] have been firmly established...*²⁴ The truth is that scientific knowledge was about to take exponential leaps into previously unknown territory.

In Physics, scientists began to unpack the very nature of matter as shown in the work of New Zealand physicist Thomas Rutherford and James Chadwick on the structure of the atom; Einstein's breakthrough work on light quanta, general relativity and special relativity; Niels Bohr's revolutionary 'quantum leap' theory in describing the behaviour of electrons; Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle lying at the heart of quantum mechanics and Erwin Schrödinger's series of papers on quantum wave mechanics.

John Horgan has described the developments since the 1970s in which particle physicists including John Wheeler, Edward Witten, David Bohm, Richard Feynman, Steven Weinberg, Murray Gell-Mann and Stephen Hawking have theorised about the existence of smaller particles within the structure of atomic protons, neutrons and electrons and the forces which hold them together.

These particle physicists have shown that *electricity and magnetism are aspects of a single force and that in turn electromagnetism and the weak nuclear force (which governs certain kinds of nuclear decay) are manifestations of an underlying "electroweak" force. Researchers also developed a theory for the strong nuclear force which grips protons and neutrons together in the nuclei of atoms. The theory called quantum chromodynamics, posits that protons and neutrons are composed of even more elementary particles called quarks. Together the electroweak theory*

²² For example in P Davies & J Brown eds, *Superstrings: A Theory of Everything?* CUP, Cambridge UK, 1988 p3

²³ Lecture on "Electrical Units of Measurement", 3 May 1883 published in *Popular Lectures* Vol 1, p73.

²⁴ Quoted in J Horgan, *The End of Science* Little, Brown and Company, London 1997, p19

*and the quantum chromodynamics constitute the standard model of particle physics.*²⁵

In attempting to overcome the problem of defining particles as points some particle physicists have developed superstring theory *which replaced points with minute loops of energy that eliminated absurdities arising from calculations*²⁶. Superstring theory overcomes the need for an endless succession of smaller and smaller particles by creating *a fundamental scale beyond which all questions concerning space and time become meaningless*²⁷.

It is in this latter area of what Horgan calls *ironic science* that particle physicists begin to sound more and more like philosophers or science fiction writers. Horgan defines *ironic science* as *speculative, postempirical mode thought experiments which are not, and most likely will never be able to be verified empirically.*²⁸ Earlier spectacularly “spooky” quantum events like non-locality and the warped space of special relativity were eventually able to be confirmed with empirical data even if the models used to explain the data were in conflict as for example the tension between David Bohm’s “implicate order” model and the “Copenhagen model” described by Bohr and his colleagues.

The difficulty with theories about sub-atomic particles is, however, that we cannot build a super-collider particle accelerator large enough to detect them. The Cern hadron collector was fired up near Geneva in Switzerland in September 2008 in search of the Higgs boson which is hypothesised to endow other particles with mass. Since the US shut down their US\$2 billion superconducting supercollider in 1993 after digging a tunnel in Texas 15 miles long it has taken until 2008 to get the project up again in Europe.

The Cern Hadron collider drives two beams of particles around a 27 kilometre ring at 99.9999991% of the speed of light at a cost of US\$9.6 billion. The aim is to replicate the violent fireball conditions that existed one trillionth of a second after the Big Bang.²⁹ On the 21 April 2010 the project recorded the identification of the first beauty particle called B+ composed of an anti-quark b and a quark u.³⁰ This sounds like genuine progress until the reality sets in that *to probe the realm superstrings are thought to inhabit, physicists would have to build a particle accelerator 1000 light years around (The entire solar system is only one light day around)*³¹.

²⁵ Ibid p60f.

²⁶ Ibid p61

²⁷ Ibid p 61

²⁸ Ibid p7

²⁹ This information is sourced from a newspaper report in *The Age* Wednesday 10th September 2008 p17

³⁰ <http://lhcb-public.web.cern.ch/lhcb-public/>

³¹ J Horgan, 1997 op.cit. p62

Many, but not all, particle physicists (including Einstein for the remainder of his life) dream of a final theory of everything which will unite all the known fundamental forces and in the words of physicist Stephen Hawking, help us understand “the mind of God”.³² Hawking’s earlier apparent theism seems to have departed in his later writings, coincident with his separation from his strongly committed Christian wife. In his most recent work he writes: *the laws of gravity and quantum theory allow universes to appear spontaneously from nothing.*³³

Yet this statement sounds suspiciously similar to the Christian core belief of “creation out of nothing” as expressed in Hebrews 11:3 *..By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.*³⁴ As Jesuit physicist Robert Spitzer notes: *Why would a prominent physicist claim that ‘the universe can come from nothing?....presumably, because he believes that there are reasons for thinking that the universe had a beginning.*³⁵ Neutral observers struggle to see the difference between the positions of Hawking and the Bible on the notion of creation as such.³⁶

The theological response

Matthew Arnold’s negative view of the receding tide of the sea of faith in his poem *Dover Beach* written in 1866³⁷ would be seen by some twentieth century analysts as a true prophecy and picture of the demise of religious faith in their century. The theme was taken up particularly by self styled “radical Christian Humanist” Don Cupitt in a book and television series entitled the *The Sea of Faith*³⁸ written as the author admits in his second edition “as one of the ‘non-realist’ books that I produced in the early 1980s.”³⁹

From the German Old Testament critic Wellhausen onwards the dominant history of religions and literary and form critical approach to Biblical Studies had held sway since the late nineteenth century and had done little to encourage vital Christian faith. The ordinary church person saw the labours of liberal theology as confirmation of the lack of certainty and integrity of the Biblical material in terms of history and textual certainty and schools and

³² S Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, Bantam Books, Reading UK1988 p185 cf P Davies, *The Mind of God: Science and the Search for Ultimate Meaning*, Penguin London 1992

³³ S Hawking and K Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* Bantam Books, 2010

³⁴ Hebrews 11:3 NRSV. Zondervan Grand Rapids 1990 p1364.

³⁵ R Spitzer <http://www.magisreasonfaith.org/blog/?p=39> Spitzer’s recent response to Hawking is *New Proofs for the Existence of God-Contributions of Contemporary Physics and Philosophy* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids 2010

³⁶ See for example the article by *The Age* Senior writer Warwick McFayden, <http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/books/much-ado-about-nothing-20100910-1557g.html>

³⁷ Or possibly 1850 according to Lionel Trilling

³⁸ D Cupitt, *The Sea of Faith*, 2nd edn SCM London 1994

³⁹ *Ibid* p.1.

apologists often retreated to courses on “the Bible as literature” or ethics and values clarification for their forays into religion.

Theological vitality exploded in Germany with the towering figure of Rudolph Bultmann at Marburg and his followers and peers especially Kasemann and Brunner. Bultmann’s Heidegger- influenced attempt to demythologise the New Testament to make it meaningful to materialist twentieth century man was exciting to scholars especially his work on the Pauline epistles⁴⁰ but the sheer complexity of his analysis was off putting to the layman and poorly communicated to English speakers. In spite of the dynamic achievements of English theologian John Macquarrie to mediate Bultmann to the English speaking world⁴¹ Bultmann was seen as the ‘enemy’ by conservative theologians and writers.

Even the massive neo-orthodox scholarship of Swiss theologian Karl Barth, author of the Barmen Declaration against Nazi claims to ecclesiastical authority, struggled to make headway in the English speaking world. Barth’s extraordinary ten volume *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* ranks with the labours of Augustine, Aquinas and Jonathan Edwards as a magisterial theological statement for every age. Editors Bromiley and T F Torrance⁴² with their translators Thomson and Knight produced a mighty labour to bring these volumes to English readers and a wonderful defence of the integrity of scripture and the doctrine of revelation it is. But the sheer size and breadth of Barth’s magnum opus defeated all but the most enthusiastic band of Barthians who banded together to read and support one another.

Nevertheless the theological and philosophical tide was turning in line with a new post-war optimism. Increasingly fruitful archaeological work following the exciting discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran and careful work on both Biblical sites and the papyri of the earliest manuscripts led to an explosion of both “Biblical archaeology” and Biblical theology. British conservative Biblical scholars sprang into action to challenge what was seen as the prevailing German theological scepticism. The Old Testament trio of William Allbright, G E Wright and John Bright led the way and a host of outstanding New Testament Biblical scholars and commentary writers including Bruce Metzger, F F Bruce, G B Caird, C K Barrett, R T France, W D Davies, I H Marshall and the Australian Leon Morris revitalised Evangelical scholarship in the second half of the C20th. Post-Vatican Two Catholic Biblical scholars Raymond Brown, John Meier and Joseph Fitzmeyer and

⁴⁰ Note especially Part 2 of R Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament Volume 1* trans K Grobel, London, SCM 1952.

⁴¹ See especially J Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* London SCM 1966

⁴² See especially K Barth *Church Dogmatics Volume 1.2 The Doctrine of the Word of God* (ed G W Bromiley & T F Torrance, Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1956 (1980reprint))

many others also strengthened this movement back to the historicity and integrity of the Biblical story.

In an increasingly global village evangelical Christian theology faced new challenges especially with the cultural relativism that came with the post-modern mood change of the West in the last quarter of the C20th. The universalist position of John Hick⁴³ and others that all religions share similar goals and contain teachings not mutually exclusive posed huge questions which have profoundly divided theologians and members of Christian churches.

In John Stott's commentary on the 1974 Lausanne Covenant⁴⁴ he accepts that members of all faiths have some knowledge of God but challenges whether that knowledge alone is a saving knowledge or faith. One possible way forward here is Kung's emphasis on the uniqueness but not the exclusiveness of Christianity.⁴⁵ This issue remains the biggest challenge for evangelical Christian theology in the C21st⁴⁶ A related issue is the question of the reality of Hell and the issue of whether Christian teaching involves an eternity of punishment for evil or annihilation.⁴⁷ In addition evangelical Christians have been criticised for their absence from the creative arts⁴⁸ and for their dogmatism, infighting and lack of authentic spirituality.⁴⁹ Even more difficult questions face the Church in defining a valid religious ethic in relation to moral issues such as homosexuality, genetic manipulation and euthanasia and increasingly politicians and organisations such as major hospitals look to individuals of faith to assist with these issues on Ethics Committees.⁵⁰

Disillusionment, revolution and materialistic consumerism

Not all is as it seems in Arnold's poetic statement. As Wilson aptly reminds us, Arnold's deep pessimism about the future of Christian faith shows that Arnold... *is not really thinking of faith as a sea. Had he being doing so, he would have seen the scientific revolutions of such as Spencer and Darwin as no more than a temporary aberration. Tides turn. The sea comes back in. Arnold seems not to have noticed this rather simple bidiurnal fact.*⁵¹

⁴³ J Hick *God Has Many Names* London, MacMillan, 1980 especially ch 5.

⁴⁴ <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-3.html>

⁴⁵ H Kung (trans. E Quinn) *On Being a Christian*, London, Collins 1977, p.110 (the whole of ch 3 is very helpful)

⁴⁶ A useful start is L Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, London, SPCK, 1997. See also D Strange, *The Possibility of Salvation Among the Unevangelised: An Analysis of Inclusivism in Recent Evangelical Theology*, London Paternoster 1988

⁴⁷ See D Powys 'Hell': *A Hard Look at a Hard Question: The Fate of the Unrighteous in New Testament Thought*, Carlisle, Paternoster 1998.

⁴⁸ H R Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, London, IVP, 1975

⁴⁹ A McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity*, Downers Grove IL, IVP, 1995 especially chapters 5 and 6.

⁵⁰ A useful beginning is D Alexander & R S White, *Beyond Belief: Science, Faith and Ethical Challenges*, Oxford, Lion 2004.

⁵¹ A N Wilson, *God's Funeral*, Abacus, London, 2000, p342.

The apparent “loss of Christian faith in Europe” from the middle of the eighteenth century to what can now reasonably be called the collapse of the enlightenment world view by the last decade of the twentieth century should perhaps be more carefully enunciated as a collapse in Middle Class and intellectual confidence in traditional understandings of Christian faith. In England, France and Germany this collapse was brought about by a combination of a perceived conflict with “the new” scientific/rationalist world view particularly as led by Darwin, Freud and Durkheim; the development of critical/historical analysis of Biblical literature as noted above; the launch of positivist/materialist philosophy especially through Marx and Engels and the secularisation of the political state with the consequent reduction of Papal power and control over the Catholic world.⁵²

“The loss of faith” in a traditional Biblically literal understanding of Christianity shouts more loudly in the English speaking world because of the high profile, articulate and very public musings and writings of some fine English writers including Charles Darwin himself, Samuel Butler, Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, Edmund Gosse, Leslie Stephen and Henry Sedgewick as well as in Europe through what John Ralston Saul has called *Voltaire’s Bastards* amongst the intellectual savants of France and Germany, especially Nietzsche and Goethe.⁵³

In the European, North American and Australian intellectual world this receding place for faith, particularly Christian faith, is indeed an accurate statement of the everyday life of the vast majority of Western post-Christian materialists as they go about their relatively comfortable first world lives with good health, well remunerated employment, increasingly sophisticated technology, constant travel and high standards of education.

For these Generation X, Y and Z folk the nineteenth century shock of losing Christian faith chronicled in A N Wilson’s accurately titled *God’s Funeral*⁵⁴ is long gone and replaced with a heady mix of café society chatter, post-reality game playing and second life avatar worlds⁵⁵, vast quantities of wine consumption and the unceasing search for eternal youth exemplified in gymnasium memberships and the cosmetic industry. The vast Gothic cathedrals of a prior spiritual age stand empty but for tourists, *a serious house on serious earth it is*⁵⁶ but no match for the thronging crowds of La

⁵² Two useful analyses of this process are: O Chadwick *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1975; and A Bloom *The Closing of the American Mind* Touchstone New York 1987. For Marx and Engels, see usefully (Ed.) L S Feuer, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, New York, Fontana, 1972.

⁵³ John Ralston Saul, *Voltaire’s Bastards: The Dictatorship of Reason in the West* Penguin, London 1993 pp71-73 (Nietzsche) and pp 503-4 (Goethe).

⁵⁴ A N Wilson, *God’s Funeral*, Abacus London 2000

⁵⁵ Recent figures indicate that 65% of Australians play computer games regularly.

⁵⁶ Phillip Larkin, *Church – Going*, 1955.

Rambla, Fifth Avenue or Chapel St Prahran. Canadian Karen Armstrong's description of her "escape" from the vows of her religious order in the 1960s perhaps sum up this world view most simply: *..now I could fall in love, wear beautiful clothes, travel, make a lot of money – all the things most people presumed, I had been yearning to do for the past seven years.*⁵⁷

And yet in the twentieth century God has refused to die and indeed in many ways has flourished whilst some of the nineteenth century's pretenders to religion's pre-eminence have themselves been struggling to maintain their pride of place. The causes are complex but in general the nineteenth century pride in human progress has been seriously challenged by man's inhumanity to man demonstrated by the twentieth century's preoccupation with violent conflict. Hegel's deification of scientific progress⁵⁸ was not borne out by twentieth century reality. In fact quite the opposite in North America and Europe as a spate of substantial church building at the turn of century shows⁵⁹

Thus the horror of two world wars not to mention the Ottoman Empire's genocidal attacks in Armenia, the murder of over 30 million Russians during the Stalinist regime, the killing of 2 million Cambodians during the Pol Pot reign of terror, 800000 killed in the Rwandan genocide, the defeat of western fire power despite horrific human and ecological destruction in the ultimately pointless Viet-Nam saga, waves of ethnic cleansing in the Balkans and the grinding "Western" war against terror at the close of the century have caused many to question the future of human society without a widely recognized moral compass. Swinburne's conclusion to his *Hymn of Man* written during the First Vatican Council in 1870 now looks somewhat dated.

*Glory to man in the highest!
for man is the master of things.*⁶⁰

In a more nuanced analysis John Steinbeck in his 1962 acceptance speech for his Nobel Literature prize suggested that *we have usurped many of the powers we once ascribed to God ..Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope..So that today, St John the Apostle may well be paraphrased: "In the end is the Word, and the Word is man – and the Word is with Men".*⁶¹

Closely related to man's propensity to settle conflict with weapons has been the chequered role of science in society in the twentieth century. Already

⁵⁷ K. Armstrong, *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness*, NY, Anchor Books, 2005, p.6

⁵⁸ A N Wilson, op.cit. p.56 and p 71 atheism did not lead to progress.

⁵⁹ Ibid.. p402

⁶⁰ <http://swinburnearchive.indiana.edu/swinburne/view?docId=sbshymnm00&query=&brand=swinburne>

⁶¹ John Steinbeck, http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck-speech.html

early in the nineteenth century poets like Blake had attacked *the dark Satanic mills*⁶² of industry and Keats in Part 2 of his lyric poem *Lamia* (1832) had attacked the philosophers for unweaving the mystery and beauty of the rainbow.

.....*Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine-
Unweave the rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade.*⁶³

The Romantic poets' demonisation of the cold dispassionate hand of science has caused considerable alarm amongst twentieth century defenders of scientific faith such as Atkins and Dawkins⁶⁴. But novelists also challenged the notion that every application of science was for the good of humanity. Dickens' novels and subsequent lecture tours in England and North America had made English childhood slavery and London's working class conditions known to all whilst Thomas Hardy's *Wessex* novels bemoaned the loss of rural England's charm.

Nevertheless it was Madame Curie's discovery of radioactivity, Einstein's theorising about the structure of the atom and Rutherford's aggressive pursuit of the potential of atomic energy which truly unleashed a tidal wave of materialist power early in the twentieth century and politicians on all sides were not slow to take advantage. From the Allied point of view it is fortunate that German collaborators such as Werner Heisenberg worked hard to slow down the development of atomic weaponry but nothing was going to stop the United States war machine⁶⁵ from using the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki with results that both signalled the end of World War 2, as well as the deathknell of the idea of science and technology as ethically neutral. Key American atomic scientist Robert Oppenheimer, on observing the

⁶² William Blake *Jerusalem*, 1804 [although some including N T Wright have interpreted the mills as Gothic Cathedrals or the Church of England!]

⁶³ John Keats <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/2/4/9/2490/2490.txt>

⁶⁴ Richard Dawkins has delivered the 1997 C P Snow lecture on Keats' *Lamia* and developed his ideas further in *Unweaving the Rainbow*. See <http://www.zeit-wen.de/documents/Richard%20Dawkins%20-%20Unweaving%20The%20Rainbow.pdf> Mary Midgley has elegantly chronicled the relationship between poetry and modern science in *Science and Poetry*, Routley, London 2001. She quotes Peter Atkins as saying: *although poets may aspire to understanding, their talents are more akin to entertaining self-deception...while poetry titillates and theology obfuscates, science liberates*. Ibid p.21

⁶⁵ This story is graphically retold in Robert Jungk *Brighter Than a Thousand Suns* Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1956

extraordinary first test atomic flash fire at Los Alamos is said to have at first thought of a passage from the Hindu sacred epic the *Bhagavad Gita*:

*If the radiance of a thousand suns
were to burst into the sky,
that would be like
the splendour of the mighty one...*

Later, on observing the sinister spreading radioactive cloud he is said to have remembered a further line:

*I am become Death, the shatterer of worlds.*⁶⁶

At the same time Hiroshima and Nagasaki scared for life a generation of young baby boomers who never wanted a thing to do with nuclear energy again whatever its potential for good.

In Australia, nuclear winter terrified secondary students of the 1950s poured into the universities in the 1960s with government supported scholarships and began asking questions about war and political dominance of any kind. Initially they were pure and innocent questions fired by the Woody Guthrie inspired new folk music of Pete Seeger, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Tom Paxton⁶⁷ but other forces were also at work including newfound materialism and freedom after the restrictions of the fifties.

In terms of social conscience many American and Australian students were galvanized by Rachel Carson's seminal work *Silent Spring*⁶⁸ which brought to the public mind for the first time the corrosive and destructive effects of out of control industrial pollution on the rivers, farmlands and ecosystems of the Western world. The myth of science and technology as incontrovertibly mankind's friend was shattered forever and an entire new way of looking at the fragility of the planet was demanded and established.

With regard to politics, the United States post-war anger of spurned returning black war veterans created an irresistible assault on racism and when later combined with the seemingly never – ending horror of the Viet Nam War napalm attacks a profound and world wide call for peace at home and abroad crystallized in the youthful if flawed image of President John F Kennedy. The Beatles' 1967 flower power album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* commercialised for the young adult pop masses a heady combination of Eastern religious exploration, youthful experimentation with pychaedelic

⁶⁶ Ibid p.183

⁶⁷ Bob Dylan and Joan Baez classically launched Dylan's *Masters of War* to a packed audience at the 1963 Newport Folk Festival, the recording of which is now a highly prized second hand Vanguard LP.

⁶⁸ R Carson *Silent Spring* Hamish Hamilton London 1963

drugs and marijuana, the hippy rejection of the tough military image and very soon a new raw hard edge to rock culture.

The alternative left intelligentsia celebrated instead with a newfound love of Marx and Soviet culture (for Stalin read Churchill/Rooseveltdt) until years later they learned of the Soviet gulags through Solzenhytsen. Although socialist and left wing governments continued to be elected in Europe throughout the twentieth century few people could have predicted the total collapse of Soviet political power in Europe after President Michhail Gorbachev's doctrines of glasnost and perestroika which led to a more open Russia and eventually the breakup of the Federation of Soviet republics and Cold War satellites in Europe.

Eventually came the freedom of Czechoslovakia under the inspiring leadership of Vaclav Havel⁶⁹; the triumph of Lech Walesa and the Solidarity Union in Poland strongly supported by the first Polish Pope John Paul 11; the break up of the former Yugoslavia after the death of Communist dictator Tito and of course the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the union of East and West Germany again into a United German nation. The political separation into separate nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States including Ukraine and Georgia and the re-emergence and new freedom of the Russian Orthodox Church were further symbols of the declining power of atheistic communism.

Although the cultural revolution in China delivered a crushing blow to religious freedom and intellectual growth in that ancient nation the late twentieth century found Communist China moving into a capitalist relationship with the rest of the world. Rising China based its growth on a stringent one child policy and a vast increase in manufacturing creating the world's second largest economy early in the twenty-first century and the fastest growing economy of all and included a society that was genuinely more open to the Christian faith although far from free of control.

The Darwin wars

Unlike the gigantic strides made in molecular physics and chemistry the public progress of biological scientific theory and Darwinian evolution was not all smooth sailing in the twentieth century. Although the "new synthesis" of Mendelian genetics and Darwinian theories of natural selection was well and truly established by Harvard biologist Ernst Mayr by the 1940s few could have predicted the conservative religious backlash to evolutionary theory in general especially given the substantial consensus between scientists and divines which had been established at the end of the nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ See especially V Havel *Letters to Olga* Eng trans. P Wilson, London, Faber & Faber, 1991.

The key events in a vast panoply of anti evolutionary movements can be summarised as:

- the 1925 Scopes “monkey trial” in Dayton Tennessee⁷⁰
- the late 1950’s birth of scientific creationism centred around the writings of Whitcombe and Morris and later writers such as Duane Gish⁷¹
- The unravelling of the Piltdown Man fraud in 1953⁷²
- 1970’s debates in American States about the teaching of evolution in public schools⁷³
- The 1980’s ‘secular’ attack on evolutionary theory by journalistic writers such as Rattray Taylor⁷⁴, Michael Denton⁷⁵ and Francis Hitching⁷⁶
- The 1990’s birth of the Intelligent Design movement⁷⁷ and the ‘wedge politics’ of ID led by William Dembski and Phillip Johnson⁷⁸
- The 1996 idea of irreducible complexity developed by Michael Behe⁷⁹

In essence these debates, although clothed in scientific language, began with an assumption that Biblical creation statements “count” as scientific explanations. Thus creationism is centred on the problem of the literal interpretation of the Bible and the doctrines of the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture. Even though the church from Augustine and Calvin through Warfield and Bernard Ramm⁸⁰ had laid out a clear understanding of the metaphorical nature of the early chapters of Genesis a resurgence of Biblical fundamentalism re-emerged in 1920’s America.

The movement has gained in confidence and political influence throughout the twentieth century and it has allied itself with a right wing moral majority

⁷⁰ See E J Larson, *The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* Basic Books, New York, 1997. Although a points victory for fundamentalism this trial resulting in widespread ridicule of Fundamentalism.

⁷¹ The best histories of the Creationist debate are: R L Numbers, *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993 and A McCalla, *The Creationist Debate: The Encounter between the bible and the historical mind* T & T Clarke London 2006.

⁷² See J E Walsh, *Unravelling Piltdown: The Science Fraud of the Century and its Solution*, Bath Press, Bath, 1996

⁷³ For the best account of these debates see D Nelkin: *The Creation Controversy: Science or Scripture in Schools* 2010 reprint.

⁷⁴ R Taylor: *The Great Evolution Mystery*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1982

⁷⁵ M Denton: *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* Bethesda MD, Adler and Adler 1986

⁷⁶ F Hitching, *The Neck of the Giraffe or Where Darwin Went Wrong*, Pan Books London 1982

⁷⁷ The best exponent of intelligent design is W A Dembski eg *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science and Theology*, Downers Grove, IVP, 1999.

⁷⁸ P E Johnson, *The Wedge of Truth: Splitting the Foundations of Naturalism* Downers Grove IVP 2000

⁷⁹ M J Behe, *Darwin’s Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* Touchstone, New York 1996

⁸⁰ B Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* Paternoster London 1964.

movement which has wielded significant political muscle. The reality is that a surprising fifty per cent of Americans are more in favour of a literal creation rather than an evolutionary explanation of human origins.⁸¹ In addition the movement has considerable support in Fundamentalist churches in the UK and Australia. Naturally the scientific establishment joined this battle vigorously and a vast polemic ensued.⁸² The most recent conclusion by creationist historian Ronald Numbers is illuminating: *As long as the Bible remains the most trusted and widely read text in America and scientists maintain their considerable cultural authority, consensus seems unlikely, even if desirable.*⁸³

Arrayed against this substantial Fundamentalist assault on the theory of evolution is an equally massive twentieth century Christian defence of both a high view of Scripture and the scientific theory of evolution. This position, never understood by the media and rather awkwardly described as a “theistic evolutionary approach”⁸⁴ has had many champions including geneticist R J Berry,⁸⁵ molecular immunologist Denis Alexander,⁸⁶ biologist Kenneth R Miller,⁸⁷ physicist John Polkinghorne,⁸⁸ plant biophysicist Douglas Spanner⁸⁹, microbiologist Richard Colling⁹⁰, mathematician Rodney Holder⁹¹, physicist and theologian Stanley Jaki⁹², theologian Henri Blocher⁹³, cell biologist Graeme Finlay,⁹⁴ geneticist and Director of the Human Genome Project Francis Collins⁹⁵, Literature Professor and apologist C S Lewis,⁹⁶ biologist

⁸¹ For useful analyses of American fundamentalism see: Mark A Noll: *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 1994 and D G Hart: *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* Baker Academic, Grand Rapids MI 2004. Covering similar ground in the UK is A McGrath: *Evangelicalism & The Future of Christianity* Downers Grove IL IVP 1995

⁸² An excellent collection of scientific responses is Eds A J Petto & L R Godfrey: *Scientists Confront Intelligent Design and Creationism* Norton, New York, 2007. See also P Kitcher *Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism* MIT Press Cambridge MA 1992 and in Australia: D R Selkirk & F J Burrows *Confronting Creationism: Defending Darwin* New South Wales University Press, Kensington 1987.

⁸³ R L Numbers: “Darwinism, Creationism and ‘Intelligent Design’”, in Petto & Godfrey, op.cit p54

⁸⁴ A valiant attempt to analyse the variations within ‘theistic evolution’ is J Greer, *Evolution and God* CEM London 1979. Greer distinguishes “guided”, “interventionist” and “uniformitarian” versions of theistic evolution.

⁸⁵ Ed: R J Berry & T A Noble: *Darwin, Creation and the Fall: Theological Challenges*, Apollos Nottingham 2009.

⁸⁶ D Alexander: *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* Monarch Books, Oxford 2008

⁸⁷ K R Miller, *Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution* Cliff Street Books, New York, 2000

⁸⁸ J Polkinghorne, *Science and Creation: The Search for Understanding* SPCK London 1988

⁸⁹ D C Spanner: *Biblical Creation and the Theory of Evolution* Paternoster Exeter 1987

⁹⁰ R G Colling *Random Designer: Created from Chaos to Connect with the Creator* Browning Press, Bourbonnais IL 2004

⁹¹ R D Holder, *Nothing But Atoms & Molecules: Probing the Limits of Science*, Monarch Books, Tunbridge Wells 1993

⁹² S J Jaki: *Bible and Science*, Christendom Press, 1999

⁹³ H Blocher *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* Leicester IVP 1984

⁹⁴ G Finlay *God’s Books, Genetics and Genesis*, Telos Publications, Auckland NZ 2004

⁹⁵ F Collins: *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* Free Press New York 2006

⁹⁶ C S Lewis “Dogma and the Universe” (1943) in *God in the Dock* Fount, London 1971

61 D R Falk: *Coming to Peace with Science: Bridging the Worlds Between Faith and Biology* Downers Grove IVP 2004

62 J C Lennox: *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?* Lion Oxford 2009

Darrel Falk⁹⁷, mathematician John Lennox⁹⁸, chemist Earnest Lucas⁹⁹, molecular biophysicist Alister McGrath¹⁰⁰ and perhaps surprisingly philosopher Michael Ruse¹⁰¹ amongst many others.

All of these scholars with the exceptions of Lewis and Ruse would describe themselves as evangelicals but all of them also would accept that the Biblical understanding of creation is not defined by a literal understanding of the words of Genesis 1 – 3 any more than the New Testament understanding of wealth is defined by Jesus' words to sell all that you have and give it to the poor.

Many more committed Christian scientists, scholars and theologians of a more liberal persuasion regarding the interpretation of the Bible also joined the battle against materialist evolutionary views. Significant amongst these are the German theologians Wolfhart Pannenburg¹⁰² and Jürgen Moltmann¹⁰³, excommunicated Roman Catholic Swiss theologian Hans Küng¹⁰⁴, English biochemist A R Peacocke¹⁰⁵, English philosopher Mary Midgely¹⁰⁶ and American physicist Ian Barbour¹⁰⁷. It is also important to note here the “non-overlapping magisteria” (NOMA) position of non-practising Jewish evolutionary zoologist Stephen Jay Gould who argued that religion and science have separate and non-overlapping roles to play in human thought. *If religion can no longer dictate the nature of factual conclusions residing properly with the magisterium of science, then science cannot claim higher insight into moral truth from any superior knowledge of the world's empirical constitution.*¹⁰⁸

Darwinian evolutionary theory itself came under attack from Gould and Niles Eldridge whose work on palaeobiology led them to their theory of punctuated equilibria in the evolutionary process, paying more attention than traditional Darwinism to the role of chance and particular massive environmental impacts to explain the spectacular explosions and extinctions evident in the fossil record.¹⁰⁹ Gould's very public spat with Richard Dawkins was sometimes used by creationists to bolster their assault on Darwinism but in

⁹⁹ E Lucas <http://www.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/cis/lucas/>

¹⁰⁰ A E McGrath, *Science and Religion: A New Introduction* Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 2009

¹⁰¹ M Ruse: *Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?* Cambridge University Press 2001

¹⁰² W Pannenburg *The Historicity of Nature: Essays on Science and Theology* Templeton Press 2008

¹⁰³ J Moltmann *God in Creation* Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993

¹⁰⁴ H Küng, *The Beginning of all Things: Science and Religion* Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 2007

¹⁰⁵ A R Peacocke *Creation and the World of Science* Clarendon Press, Oxford 1979

¹⁰⁶ M Midgely *Evolution as a Religion* London Routledge 1985

¹⁰⁷ I G Barbour *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners?* Harper, San Francisco 2000

¹⁰⁸ S J Gould *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life*: Vintage, London 2002 p.9f.

¹⁰⁹ A useful introduction to this debate is K Sterelny *Dawkins vs Gould: Survival of the Fittest, 2nd edition*, Icon Books Thriplow 2007

reality this debate is about details of evolutionary theory rather than major cracks in the edifice.

Amazingly even Lamarck has made a comeback in the twentieth century with the initially discredited but now generally accepted work by Australian cell biologists and immunologists demonstrating that there is strong genetic evidence that aspects of acquired immunities developed by parents in their own lifetime can be passed on to their offspring.¹¹⁰

In spite of all the noise and bluster of the “creation vs evolution” debate there is a new consensus and synthesis of views on the validity of the evolutionary model. Quite conservative Christian believers like Francis Collins and Denis Alexander who are at the heart of the unravelling of the human genome have no doubt about the basic tenets of evolutionary biology and the study of Biblical hermeneutics has in the main moved a long way from the sterile “battle for the bible” debates of the mid-twentieth century.

Philosophy – the collapse of Modernism and the reemergence of faith.

Twentieth century Western philosophy also moved initially strongly away from its Christian and metaphysical underpinnings, armed with Hume’s Enlightenment assault on the supernatural and the new power of scientific advance. Europe was inspired by the analytical work of Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *The Tractatus*¹¹¹ published in 1921. Wittgenstein forced twentieth century thinkers to focus on the question of language itself with its issues of symbolism and ultimate meaning and how to verify fact or truth. The so-called Vienna school, based on his work was mediated to the English speaking world in particular by A J Ayer¹¹² and for a time the mantra of logical positivism and factual verification, “science intoxicated” as one commentator describes the Vienna Circle¹¹³, ruled the world.

The Christian tradition struggled to respond. American/English poet T S Eliot perhaps gave best expression to this post World War 1 disillusionment with his 1925 poem *The Hollow Men...*

*...Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death’s other Kingdom
Remember us---if at all---not as lost
Violent souls, but only*

¹¹⁰ See E J Steele, R A Lindley & R V Blanden *Lamarck’s Signature: How Retrogenes are changing Darwin’s Natural Selection Paradigm* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards Sydney, 1998.

¹¹¹ L Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Eng. Trans D F Pears & B F McGuiness, London, Routledge rvsd 1974.

¹¹² A J Ayer *Language, Truth and Logic* London Penguin rep. 1990

¹¹³ N G Fotion “Logical Positivism” in T Honderick (Ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford, OUP, 1995 p.508.

*As the hollow men
The stuffed men.....*

.....*For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the*

*This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper*¹¹⁴

Another, finer symbol of a more powerful Humanism that sought to replace religion in mid twentieth century Europe was the extraordinary compassion of Dr Rieux in the French existentialist novelist Albert Camus' novel *La Peste* published in 1947. The non-believer Rieux's on going conversation with the parish priest Father Paneloux lies at the heart of the novel and the "victory" of Humanism over faith can be seen in the apparent giving up of both life and faith by Paneloux early in part three of Camus' novel. Building on Ivan's "grand inquisitor" speech in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* Camus paints a picture of selfless devotion to the practical care and cause of humanity in the face of indomitable evil in the plague, symbolising the darkness of Nazi tyranny over France. This triumph of Humanism in the face of corrupt and outmoded religion was summarised in Bertrand Russell's 1957 essay *Why I am Not a Christian*.¹¹⁵ Russell's equally trenchant criticism of the Judaeo-Christian tradition also emerges in his influential *History of Western Philosophy*.¹¹⁶

In spite of this apparent victory of atheistic Humanism new forces were at work in philosophy more congenial to metaphysics. Karl Popper, an associate of the Vienna positivists, who never subscribed to the orthodox view that non-scientific activities were unacceptable also challenged the adequacy of verification theory on the grounds that the statement itself is not verifiable. In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* Popper replaced the verification principle with the falsification principle which in simplistic terms limits the power of science to falsifying data rather than determining what is possible in any particular phenomenon. As Wilson aptly notes, *the science versus religion match is usually conducted most loudly by people who would benefit from a few months reading a third discipline – philosophy*.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ T S Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T S Eliot*, London, Book Club Associates. 1977 pp 83 -86

¹¹⁵ B Russell *Why I am not a Christian* (ed. P Edward), London, George Allen & Unwin, 1957

¹¹⁶ B Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* London Routledge 1991 reprint

¹¹⁷ A N Wilson, *God's Funeral*, London Abacus 2000 p260

Popper's assault on verification went hand in hand with a U-turn in Wittgenstein's philosophy with the publication in 1953 of his *Philosophical Investigations*. In this radical departure from the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein argued that there are many different logical kinds of description and that vagueness in the definition of a term can and does result from the meaning attached to the term. The question then becomes is the term useful not whether or not it is technically correct. Wittgenstein's new direction spawned a vast new explosion of application in many areas including religion. The imprisoned Dietrich Bonhoeffer's use of the term "religionless Christianity" during World War 2 inspired a host of younger German theologians notable Thielicke, Pannenburg, Kung and Moltmann to discover fresh ways of writing about faith, history and revelation.

Popper, Wittgenstein and Kuhn also paved the way for a re-thinking of the philosophy of religion and the history and philosophy of science. The fact that both in the past and in the twentieth century many leading scientists maintained active theistic beliefs coincided with the general popular distrust of the reductionist and mechanical application of science to all problem solving and the disillusionment with the ability of political and business leaders to turn scientific research to selfish ends. The resulting expansion of military hardware development and expenditure and the economic and pollution/waste management negatives of the continuous growth cycle in advanced and newly growing economies were factors amongst others which encouraged a turning away from materialist philosophy.

The late sixties and early seventies emphasis on linguistic analysis and the power associated with knowledge and the use of language led to the development of structuralist approaches to literature and religion in particular and the relativism of post-modernism as a cultural mood was born through the leadership of Ricoeur, Foucault and Derrida. In theology feminist critiques of Christian theology produced substantial and permanent changes to theological, liturgical and ecclesiastical approaches and practices¹¹⁸ and philosophers of Christian religion such as Alasdair MacIntyre¹¹⁹, Alvin Plantinga,¹²⁰ Michael Polanyi,¹²¹ Herman Dooyeweerd¹²² and Richard Swinburne¹²³ began to engage with the general philosophical debate in new and vital ways. At the same time evangelical scientist theologians such as

¹¹⁸ The best summary of 20th century feminist theology is E A Johnson *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* New York, Crossroad Publishing, 2003.

¹¹⁹ Eg A MacIntyre & P Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, New York, Columbia University Press 1969 and A MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984

¹²⁰ A Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford, OUP, 2000.

¹²¹ M Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* Routledge London/New York, 1962

¹²² H Dooyeweerd, *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, trans. D Freeman & W S Young, USA, Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company 1969

¹²³ R Swinburne, *Is There a God?* Oxford, OUP, 1996

Berry, Polkinghorne, McGrath and Collins began to reclaim ground that had been lost to atheism in the sixties.

In particular McGrath's program of a scientific theology¹²⁴ based on prior work by T F Torrance outlined a new way forward for a synthesis of theology, epistemology, history and philosophy. Both Torrance and McGrath argue that empirical scientific methodology can be used to provide a basic framework for a viable Christian theology. The philosophical dictum inherited from the Enlightenment that any data purporting to support theism was inadmissible has been swept away with the Post-Modern rejection of any form of foundationalism.

Central to McGrath's argument is the image of a ship on the ocean first formulated by Otto Neurath, one of the original Vienna Circle. McGrath translates Neurath's image as *We are like sailors who on the open sea who must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood, the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction.*¹²⁵ Neurath himself entirely rejected metaphysics and epistemology as well as reductionism and completed science arguing *that knowledge is intersubjective and historically conditioned.*¹²⁶ Nevertheless if the Enlightenment itself was rational argument founded on an unproven "basic belief" that there is no evidence for God then Theology also can and indeed must, legitimately provide rational argument in favour of belief in God *in accord with the going standards of evidence.*¹²⁷

A suitable postscript to the decline of C20th atheistic philosophy is the recent acceptance of theism by mid sixties arch atheist Antony Flew. When I was at University studying Arts and Science in the late 60s Antony Flew was the tyro of atheists and his use of John Wisdom's parable of the invisible gardener entitled "gods"¹²⁸ and a version of Popper's falsification theory to disprove the standard Christian apologetic very nearly turned me to an atheist and indeed challenges me yet.¹²⁹ So to find in 2004 that Flew had changed sides quite publicly was a stunning event for me.¹³⁰ In itself it means no more than would

¹²⁴ A McGrath, *A Scientific Theology Vol 1 Nature; Vol 2 Nature; Vol 3 Reality*, London, T & T Clark, 2001, 2002 and 2003. Cf T F Torrance, *Theological Science*, Oxford, OUP, 1969

¹²⁵ O Neurath, *Empiricism and Sociology* 1973, quoted in A McGrath, *A Scientific Theology Vol 3* London T & T Clark, 2003 p.218.

¹²⁶ N Cartwright and T E Uebel, "Neurath, Otto" in T Honderlich (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* Oxford, OUP, 1995 p616.

¹²⁷ N Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990 p192 Murphy in fact argues the opposite. That theology should not seek a discredited foundationalism's arguments to survive.

¹²⁸ Found in J Wisdom, *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, London Blackwell 1953

¹²⁹ Flew's paper entitled "Theology and Falsification" can be found as chapter 6 in Eds. A Flew and A MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* London SCM 1966 p96.

¹³⁰ Flew's "conversion" to theism is found in A Flew & R A Varghese, *There is(no)a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*, New York, HarperCollins, 2007.

a committed Christian turning away from the faith and writing about it aggressively.¹³¹

The significance of Flew's decision is broader than this because it is a public admission from a major C20th philosopher that *modern philosophy has come to an end*¹³² and has been replaced by a post-modern methodology which above all gives a major role to community in the development of human thought and to a holistic view of epistemology as opposed to a pre-Wittgenstein narrow view of what can and cannot be verified by certain assumed Enlightenment principles. One expression of this change is the establishment in 1978 of the Society of Christian Philosophers many of whom have taken a lead role in philosophy as noted above.

Nancy Murphy's caveat is important here. McGrath, Plantinga and Christian philosophers generally are not assuming that atheists will be argued into faith by a new post-modern philosophically acceptable program for theology. Murphy usefully writes *I see work such as this to be merely the removal of stumbling blocks. The Cross is scandal enough without Christians adding stumbling blocks of their own failure to do the hard work of making their beliefs as clear, consistent and as rationally tenable as possible.*¹³³ As thinkers and believers we can only humbly take the same point of view.

Still the question remains to be answered: how should we deal with the Bible? What authority does it have? In what sense can committed people of faith still be committed to this book? Our final three chapters attempt to answer these questions.

¹³¹ For every Madalyn O'Hair there is a Jimmy Swaggart!

¹³² So N Murphy *op cit* p.201

¹³³ N Murphy, *op cit* p192f footnote 24. cf McGrath, *The English experience suggested that nobody really doubted the existence of God until theologians tried to prove it.* A McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism*, London Rider 2004 p30.