

On
Being
Human

in the 21st century

John Everett

Copyright © 2014 John Everett

All rights reserved.

ISBN:
ISBN-13:

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the correspondents of 'Meditations of a Netcaster', who will be recognise quite a lot of the material in this book, much of which was originally written in response to their questions.

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	i
1	Introduction	1
2	On using the Bible	4
3	Science	7
4	Ancient Gnosticism	11
5	Modern Gnosticism	14
6	Understanding the Psyche	17
7	Neuroscience	22
8	Male and Female	26
9	Body, Soul, and Spirit	39
10	Soul Sickness	46
11	Health	49
12	The meaning of Salvation	51
13	Heaven	57
14	Hell	62
15	The Cosmos	66
16	The Mind	77
17	More about the Spirit	81
18	Where next?	86

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The passages quoted in this book are from either the Revised Standard Version or the New International Version of the Bible. The references are given for each passage. Stand-alone quotations are signified by a change of font. The only modification has been to omit verse numbers, for better readability. These were never part of the original documents in any case.

Introduction

This book covers a wide range of topics: psychology and psychoanalysis, neuroscience, and the psychological insights we find in ancient texts. To be fully inclusive in tackling the question of what it means to be human we need to address spiritual answers as well as scientific answers. Who can possibly be an expert in all these fields?

The good news is that possibly no one is an expert in all these fields, so maybe someone who is quite well read in all of them may be useful.

Not everyone will agree that one needs to see what the New Testament of the Bible has to say on the subject is useful. Some will *a priori* reject the idea. But suppose it is true that the thing that differentiates us humans from the rest of the animal kingdom is that we have the capacity to be spiritual. Suppose is it true that unless we have a viable relationship with the source of all being we are in reality somehow diminished, somehow less human than we have the potential to be.

In 1999 I began posting occasional short blog

articles which I called 'Meditations of a Netcaster'. Fifteen years later I have reviewed these, and decided to include just a few of them in a longer attempt to address the question we are focusing on. Some have been slightly revised in this process.

My qualifications to write on this subject? I read Classics and Theology at Cambridge University, and I taught the New Testament at Advanced Level for several years before starting my own business, a software house. This company provided a back-office system for private client stockbrokers. From ancient texts in languages no longer spoken to modern high level computer languages is quite a jump. It brings one firmly into all the modern ways of thinking, and in my case this has extended to thinking about how one might reconcile modern views on psychology with the traditional answers given by the followers of Jesus Christ about what it means to be human.

My experience as a human includes being a husband, a father, and a grandfather, teaching teenagers, managing a business with 70 employees, and now being an elected local councillor as retirement public service. I have published a text-book on the life of Jesus Christ, and a critique of the book of Genesis, comparing modern scientific knowledge with this ancient text.

I am sure, dear reader, that you will not agree

with everything you find here, but my hope is that you will have been stimulated to think about these issues, and come to your own reasoned conclusions. So please read this book slowly, as it is not very long, and pause for thought regularly as you do so. It may provoke you to look in more detail at some of the topics raised. I am more focused on provoking questions than in supplying answers.

On using the Bible

We need to understand what the Bible is before we can use it helpfully. In these pages I will be using the New Testament predominantly, so here are some thoughts about it.

It is categorically not a collection of proof-texts which we can turn to in order to answer all the questions about God we might have. In reality it is mostly stories. The first five books are all pure narrative: who did what, who said what. One copy of mine of the whole New Testament has 570 pages, and of these the first 335 are narrative. Then come lots of letters, some quite short, all written for the same reason we ever write letters: because we have something to say but could not get there to say it face to face. These letters contain stuff about purely local situations, together with greetings to people obviously known to the writer but otherwise never mentioned in any surviving literature. Then to round it off we have a series of visions, and even this book has seven letters in it.

Not one of the individual parts of what we now call the New Testament was written with any consciousness that they would be eventually included in an authoritative collection of

writings. The age in which they were written was not like ours, with its emphasis on the written, printed word. That age gave far more weight to the spoken word. While there were living witnesses of events, who needed a written account? It was only when these living witnesses were beginning to be fewer and fewer, as age and death overtook them, was there any need for their memories to be preserved on paper. The task of the Christian Church in the second century was to define which of those written accounts and letters had real authority, and this is how the collection of them became what we know today as the New Testament of the Bible.

Two thousand years later we cannot have any better evidence of what Jesus did and said, or of what those immediate followers – to whom he had directly given authority – taught. The key word is authority. This, to me, is what the New Testament has.

Inevitably any references to the human condition in these narratives, letters, and visions is purely incidental. In no way was the writer addressing the question about what it means to be human. He was addressing quite different questions, but using assumptions about being human that allow us to extract some helpful insights into our fundamental question.

Are these extracted insights useful? Are they

true? That is the question that you, dear reader will have to consider. But certainly they may be regarded as useful if they are set alongside the assumptions made by modern clinical psychology, with its competing methodologies, its differing diagnostic criteria, and its differing treatment procedures.

Science

There was a time once when people discussed Religion and Science, as though they were alternative ways of understanding the human condition.

For most thinking people this is no longer a valid debating point. Religion has been deemed irrelevant, and the discussion has moved on.

Well I want to bring it back. For the very good reason that having won the argument Science (with a capital 'S') has itself become a religion. If you don't believe me, consider how often you read a statement beginning with the words 'scientists believe...'. If this phrase does not hurt your ears a little, you have already fallen into the trap. Doh! What trap?

The basis of science is discovering the nature of things by hypothesis and experimental testing. By this means we get to know the truth, and '*scientia*' is the Latin for knowledge, things I can '*scio*', 'know'.

So the statement 'scientists believe' is no more useful (and no less useful) than 'lorry drivers believe', for the beliefs of any scientist are

exactly those parts of their life not based on science.

There is another reason to suspect any statement couched in terms of 'scientists believe', and that is that anyone who is a scientist usually calls himself a biologist, a chemist, a physicist, or whatever, but rarely simply a 'scientist'. Science as an academic discipline is just too huge for any one person to be a generalist: there are no thermo-nuclear-physicists who are specialists in, say, botany or any other branch of science.

Please bear with me, as this matters. Where is 'Science' taking the human race, and do we really want to go there? And who are the high priests of this religion, who call themselves 'scientists'? Above all, what is this religion called Science, and what are its beliefs?

The scientific method can be very simply stated: it is a verification process, that demands repeatability. If I propose a hypothesis, then my verification process must be watertight; all possible logical alternatives must be ruled out, and my experiments must be capable of being repeated with the same results every time. My hypothesis must also be potentially refutable. I must propose certain sets of data that would, if they occurred, actually disprove my hypothesis. So, my hypothesis must, in essence, be both verifiable and refutable. Even then Newton will be corrected by Einstein, and Einstein will be

corrected by ..., and so on for a long time yet, as our ability to find and handle new data progresses.

All the beneficial advances made in the last three centuries or so have been made possible because doctors, chemists, biologists, and physicists have found out the truth about blood circulation, viruses, bacteria, combustion, and a million other things by direct observation, and experimental verification. To give but one example, infant mortality was drastically reduced when doctors started washing their hands between observation of different pregnant mothers, and that not so long ago. The list is endless of how beneficial knowledge ('*scientia*') can be.

Knowledge replaces superstition, and sometimes (eventually) vested interests too. The pharmaceutical industry, the tobacco industry, and of course all the science used in the construction of warfare technology, have a legacy that is not entirely for the benefit of the human race. It needs to be remembered that science has given us both aspirins and heroin, both immunisation and nerve gas, and so on; the list is endless.

The rockets that propel our communication satellites into space, the internal combustion engine that takes us to work, and almost every appliance we take for granted, have all arrived on the basis of knowledge gained by scientific

observation, measurement, and verification. Science is truly the basis for civilisation as we know it. But it is up to humans to determine whether any scientific advance is good for us or not.

I intend to follow through with a little more about knowledge, how we can know anything, before moving on to more central themes.

Ancient Gnosticism

The Greek word for knowledge is *gnosis*, and it is from this word that the approach towards understanding reality that was prevalent by the first century is called gnosticism. It was a combination of religion and philosophy, and it was attractive to those who wanted a more intellectual, sophisticated approach. A gnostic could pride himself on the knowledge he possessed, especially if it was packaged round the idea that this was exclusive knowledge.

The essential belief of gnosticism was that the true God was beyond man's understanding, even with deep and prolonged meditation. But – gnostics believed – one could get in touch with lesser divine beings, who were intermediaries between mankind and the true God. The techniques for achieving this were, of course, secret: only available to the initiated, through secret rituals, which would be progressively revealed as one moved up the ladder of knowledge.

In this very oversimplified definition of gnosticism one immediately recognises parallels from every age, including the present one. How wonderful to have secret knowledge,

to be a member of an exclusive group. How seductive and attractive, how boosting of one's ego.

Gnosticism came in many flavours: pagan, Jewish, and from the first century onwards, even Christian. In fact the early Christian church often saw its main threat, apart from the very obvious intermittent persecutions, to come from those preachers who would add their own gnostic interpretations to the fundamental Christian message: that in Jesus Christ the Word had become flesh and dwelt among us. The challenge to the multiple intermediaries of gnosticism was the Christian message that there was only one intermediary, who was both Man and God. The doctrine of the incarnation as a unique and real event was a logical challenge to the mind. How could any being be both Man and God. So there were those who taught that Jesus was only Man, and got 'adopted' into divinity. Or, at the other extreme, that Jesus was indeed divine, God on earth pretending to be human, and so only 'seeming' to be human.

How the early Church recognised these threats and dealt with them, ultimately by producing the authoritative statements of faith we usually refer to as the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, is a matter that can be studied in the many history books that have been written.

The point of giving this (again I must insist,

very superficial) account is to raise awareness of the whole question about truth and reality: how can we know the truth? How can we know reality?

Modern Gnosticism

We have noted that the Gnosticism derives from the Greek word for knowledge. We need now to remind ourselves what the Latin word for knowledge is – *scientia* – from which, of course, the word 'science' is derived.

Just as one of the early enemies of Christianity was Gnosticism, offering a salvation through secret knowledge, we can see how 'knowledge through science' is now increasingly seeing its agenda as removing 'the God delusion'.

I have regularly read the New Scientist. Many of the articles are very helpful, one on Climate Change particularly so, and I recall feeling very helped by others on the subject of health and computers.

But (and you knew there was a 'but' coming) many of the articles are openly theological. Belief in God is put in the same category as belief in ghosts. Morality is explained away in purely evolutionary terms. Evil people merely lack empathy, we have been told. And the chief idea attacked – apart from belief in God – is the concept of the soul.

The creed of the New Scientist and other similar publications is that human beings are simply sophisticated animals, or – to use a slightly different metaphor – very complex machines. At death we die, and that is the end of us. Those of us who understand the core methodology of science will spot straight away that science cannot examine this area. It cannot collect evidence, it cannot test hypotheses, about what happens to us after our bodies die. So why this interest in an allegedly scientific journal? Why so much theology?

The answer is that the Scientism of this and other journals is very theological. Its creed is that what science cannot investigate simply does not exist. While one body of literature distinguishes between the 'seen' and the 'unseen', Scientism proclaims: 'there is only the seen.'

So those of us who experience the 'unseen', knowing we cannot bring scientific evidence precisely because it is unseen, are condemned as suffering from a delusion. We have the wrong sort of knowledge!

Christians are usually, in this sort of literature, labelled 'creationists', and are presumed to deny evolution totally. Well I delight in the description Christian, and also accept that there is a lot of indisputable evidence for evolution; whether through accident or by what farmers call 'breeding', we all know that the

physiology of animals and plants can change and be changed.

But whether the physical, observable, measurable, cosmos is 'all there is', is a philosophical and ultimately a theological question, a matter a faith and belief. I no longer feel impressed by a sentence which begins 'scientists believe ...'. There are many such sentences in the New Scientist. Pure theology most of them. The modern enemy of Christianity is this updated definition of where knowledge comes from, that excludes the spiritual dimension completely. This is modern gnosticism. Since it rejects any reference to the spiritual realities many of us actually experience, we need to look at a more inclusive view of reality.

Understanding the Psyche

In the period which historians usually call the 'Enlightenment' there was a movement away from understanding more or less everything on the basis of a given authority (usually associated with the medieval church) towards a purely rational way of thinking.

Freud is the best known name of those who tried to analyse the human condition in this totally rationalistic way. He gave the names 'id' and 'ego' and 'super-ego' in his analysis of our psychic apparatus. Actually he gave the names in his natural language of German, but when they were translated into English, the 'it', the 'I', and the 'over-I', did not sound technical terms enough, so in English we got the Latin equivalents. Freud also referred to the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, elements of the mind.

Freud was aware (aren't we all?) of the tensions arising from our natural desire for the necessities of life (to satisfy our need to be fed and sheltered, and so on) and he called this the 'id'. In opposition to this natural urge is our conscience that advises the reality that we cannot just take whatever happens to be at

hand (it might belong to someone else). This aspect of our being he called the 'super-ego'. It is within our very selves, the 'ego' in us, that the tension between wanting and having, the constraints of the society we live in, is played out. Freud, trained as a medical doctor, saw the tension we all see being worked on, from the infant who grabs whatever there is, and the educational process, mainly from parents, of tempering the natural with the moral. He saw this developing process as going through these stages: oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital, the last being reached at puberty. He proposed that many psychotic difficulties could be explained by repressed events of a sexual nature which had occurred much earlier, but were now lodged in the subconscious and needed to be brought to the surface. He is famous for originating the idea of the Oedipus complex (a boy's sexual desire for his mother) and the Electra complex (a girl's desire for her father). He also believed that dreams could be used as symbolic evidence of what was going on in a person's subconscious.

Another founding father of modern psychoanalysis was Carl Jung, and he gave much more attention to the spiritual side of life. He introduced the concepts of extroversion and introversion as categories of mental orientation. Wikipedia comments: 'Jung's work on himself and his patients convinced him that life has a spiritual purpose beyond material goals. Our main task, he believed, is to discover

and fulfill our deep innate potential. Based on his study of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, Taoism, and other traditions, Jung believed that this journey of transformation, which he called individuation, is at the mystical heart of all religions. It is a journey to meet the self and at the same time to meet the Divine.'

There were other followers of these early proponents of psychoanalysis, all with different emphases around the central tenets originated by Freud, but the main difficulty they all had was scientific verification of these hypotheses. Control groups, essential for systematic testing of medical hypotheses, are virtually impossible within the framework of psychoanalysis. You can do it with drugs, but how can you do it with talking?

As a postscript to this bald summary of the origins of psychoanalysis it is now possible to read a book called 'Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire' written by Hans Jürgen Eysenck, who believed very strongly that understanding of personality should be fully scientific in its methodology.

More recently cognitive psychology focuses more on the mind rather than the psyche. It investigates the mental processes of attention, language use, memory, perception, mimicry, problem solving, creativity, and thinking. More on this later.

All attempts to understand the human condition recognise the dichotomy between our conscious and our sub/un-conscious, and character variations such as introvert and extrovert. We talk of autism, schizophrenia, and paranoia, with many phobias defined under the general heading of psychic disorders. Within modern psychiatry there are different schools of thought, different terminology, and different views on diagnosis and treatment. Can psychotic problems be best treated by counselling or drugs, or a combination of both?

The trouble with psychiatry is that it focuses on what, as the word's derivation actually means, may be called a 'sickness of the soul'. To be able to define something as a sickness one needs first to make a judgment of what is 'normal'. This often means making a value judgment: what is good, what is bad? There is a noticeable tendency in recent times to describe certain patterns of behaviour as an illness, which in former times would simply have attracted the epithets 'good' and 'bad'.

Anyone who taught in schools as I did during the 1960s will remember what we then called bad or disruptive behaviour. We treated it as controllable naughtiness, and the sanctions (deterrents) were primitive – if usually quite effective. Nowadays we have the same behaviour classified as a disorder (illness): attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD for short). The treatment? If you have the time

and trained staff available, conselling, but why not simply give them a drug to manage their naughtiness, sorry, disorder?

In fact, if you thought that calling naughtiness a disorder a bit over the top, how about 'oppositional defiant disorder' (ODD) which has now (2013) been added to the list in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders of the American Psychiatric Association? I will resist the temptation to make the obvious pun.

Yes, I recognise that these comments reveal my generational distance from modern approaches, and who am I to say they are wrong?

As a remedy for my own ignorance on this subject I have been reading Iain McGilchrist's books about the 'divided mind' ('The Master and His Emissary', and the much shorter and less technical 'The Divided Brain and the Search for Meaning'). This has led me to explore in some depth the whole subject of neuroscience, and how it can help us understand how the psyche actually works in modern scientific terms.

Neuroscience

In a book like this, it is impossible to do full justice to a subject as broad and detailed as the branch of science you see at the top of this page. I apologise for what will inevitably be superficial, but I feel I must make the attempt, as some very interesting insights emerge.

Neuroscience is focused on understanding how that part of us we call the brain (or the nervous system to use a more technical term) actually works, and especially in neuropsychology how injury to any part of our brain results in psychological outcomes. It is only in the last generation or two of scientific studies that we have learned as much as we have, and all agree there is a lot more left to learn. Some of the injuries' effects studied happened through strokes and lesions, some through externally caused accidental damage, and some through deliberate experimental interventions such as electrical stimulation or inhibition.

On physical examination of the brain it becomes clear that it is divided into two hemispheres, left and right, by tissue called the corpus callosum. From the data obtained from the sources described above it has become clear

that the left and right hemisphere are both physically and functionally asymmetrical. And although they have differing functional strengths and weaknesses, they cooperate (to use a metaphor) to give us the end result of our mental activity. They are connected as well as separated.

Modern thinking about right brain and left brain thinking, although there had been occasional medical insights much earlier, developed from the research in the late 1960s of an American psycho-biologist Roger W Sperry. He discovered that the human brain has two very different ways of thinking. One (the right brain) is visual and processes information in an intuitive and simultaneous way, looking first at the whole picture then the details. The other (the left brain) is verbal and processes information in an analytical and sequential way, looking first at the pieces then putting them together to get the whole. This was the start of what has become a huge debate among scientists, as they realised that this was an important insight, which needed more study and clarification.

It is only fair to say that though the fundamental premise of asymmetry of the two hemispheres is not challenged, there is still much discussion about the exact differences, and how the two hemispheres interact. The research is definitely unfinished, and if you want to study this in more detail the topic is

often referred to as brain lateralization.

As an overview of the conclusions being reached we can say that the strengths of the left brain are: language skills, skilled movement, analytical time sequence processing, exact calculation and fact retrieval. If we reach for something to grasp it, that is seen as left brain activity. The strengths of the right brain are: understanding geometric properties, reading faces, music, understanding of metaphors, expressing emotions, reading emotions, to mention only a few. It is with the right brain that we have empathy with other people or situations.

Neuropsychologists are researching on whether certain psychotic conditions are actually caused by a dysfunction of one of the two hemispheres; for instance, they are asking whether autism or schizophrenia are wholly or partly caused by right brain malfunctioning. To quote a New York Times article: 'Strong evidence suggests that schizophrenia involves decreased communication between the left and right sides of the brain.' Again I am presenting topics and questions for a great deal of further study well beyond the scope of these pages.

In a later section of this book we will come upon two lists: one includes love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. All very right brain activity. The other list includes strife, jealousy, anger, and selfishness; in other

words all grasping features of left brain activity. Look out for the context of these two lists, and you will possibly think along the same lines as I do when you read them.

Male and Female

One fundamental about being human is that we are aware of being male or female. This is both at a physical level and at a self-conscious level. A very, very small minority of us find a conflict between our physical identity and our self-conscious identity, and this can lead to a medically controlled gender change. But I want to address the vast majority of us for whom there are no such questions. This means talking about marriage.

Interestingly the definition of marriage has in the UK become very topical: not only may two men or two women engage in a 'Civil Partnership' with almost identical legal rights as a married couple, but now our parliament has decreed that they may get 'married'.

So what is marriage? Looking in the Bible we find:

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.' (Gen 1:27-28)

and in the next chapter:

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.(Gen 2:20-24)

When Jesus was asked about marriage and divorce he quoted this second passage:

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

"What did Moses command you?" he replied.

They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mark 10:2-9)

The importance of marriage as an institution is also emphasised in the Ten Commandments, where we are told to honour our father and mother, and not to commit adultery. The family, centered on a union between a man and a woman, is the core of human society.

The Prayer Book of the church I attend has, in its 16th century original version, these comments about marriage:

First, it was ordained for the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and to the praise of his holy Name.

Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continence might marry, and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body.

Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity.

For many the first and the third of these purposes will seem the most relevant these days. For the whole thing about marriage is that it represents a committed union, 'till death us do part'. It would seem to me that unless there is commitment of this kind, it is no true marriage. The main victims of divorce are, of course, the children. And there is a lot of evidence that the children of single parents have particular disadvantages, both

emotionally and educationally.

To sum up, society suffers in many ways if marriage is devalued. It is a vital ingredient of good communities where people who really care are the guardians of the vulnerable, both young and old. I am at the age now where I know I can count on the children I am father to for the support I am likely to need eventually. So thank God for families, and thank God for marriage, as He defines it.

I have deliberately introduced the topic of sex by talking about marriage, because if one asks what is the purpose of sex in nature generally the answer has to be procreation. Animals of every kind, not to mention flora, mate to produce offspring, and in many, many cases – birds and land animals – the mother and father of the offspring care for them until they can care for themselves.

We humans, throughout history and not just in recent times, have seen the main purpose of sex as a source of pleasure. We jokingly refer to prostitution as 'the oldest profession'. In many temples, in many religions, sexual activity was the prime activity. There is a lot of evidence, from sculpture and pictorial images on vases or walls, of sexual activity in classical times. Greek culture seems to have had no problem with love between an adolescent male and a mature male, and King David described the relationship he had with Jonathan as 'greater

than the love of women.' Many ancient laws defined the legal status not only of wives but also of concubines, while many religions allow polygamy.

An advertising truism is that there are three magic words, NEW, FREE, and SEX, and the greatest of these is ... (I think I need not complete this for you).

The age we live in is beginning to recognise how diverse sexual urges are, and accepting that human sexuality is more complex than has hitherto been understood.

Our sexuality as humans is possibly the most important feature of our lives. The first commandment addressed to humans in the Bible is: 'Be fruitful and increase in number'. This is the urge that defines us, the urge to beget, the urge to conceive.

The Genesis story of the first humans, Adam and Eve, is very revealing. I will not quote it in full here, assuming most readers are aware of it. I have written at some length about it in my book 'Genesis Revisited'.

Before the first disobedience 'the man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame'. After the first disobedience, 'then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realised they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves'.

Even knowing they were naked was the indicator of that disobedience: 'who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree I commanded you not to eat from?'

What conclusions can we draw from this story? Many, no doubt, that there is no space for here. But this conclusion is safe: if there is any truth in this story, our sexuality is a hugely powerful force within us, by intention of our designer, and that departing from that design will cause us grief.

The western world, inasmuch as it is trying to deny the distinctiveness of male and female, and is trying to take away marriage and the family as the bedrock of society, is denying the very foundations of the human race's place in the designer's plan.

Individually we are responsible for the way we respond to this trend. Do we follow fashion, or challenge it?

Most of our desires are very logical and rational. Often they are simply a response to what our bodies need, in terms of food, water, and warmth. Our emotional needs of security, freedom from fear, the good opinion of others, explain a great many more. But there are two areas of desire that are less easy to understand: the craving that drug addiction brings, and the urges for sexual fulfillment.

I have nothing to say about the craving drug addicts suffer from. I smoked as a youth (in the 1950s when little was publicly known of the dangers) and gave up permanently at the age of 21. So that sort of craving is a distant memory now. I have no idea what other drug cravings might be like, and no intention of finding out.

But like every other human (I suppose) I know what sort of urges I am subject to, and what triggers them. I know that people will do things (especially if they believe they are unobserved) that they later feel a great degree of shame about. And I am not referring simply to our sexual urges, but to all those moments when thoughts come into our minds which, in our best moments, we reject. We know things about ourselves that have to do with these temptations ('testings' is the original meaning of the word) that nobody else knows about, not even our nearest and dearest. Some of us may suspect that this hiddenness is not just true of us, but of every member of the human race.

In the animal kingdom the sexual urges observable all seem to focus on a single objective: procreation. The male copulates with the female when the female is in her short period of fertility, and only then. This is true whether the fertilisation of the eggs is internal or external, whether penetration is required or not. Whatever urges they have built into them, the procreative urge is a tremendously powerful force.

With humans everything is much more complicated, not least because we seem to adopt the view that sex is mainly for pleasure, and pregnancy something akin to a disease. The Internet itself has more commercial activity associated with satisfying the 'sex for pleasure' urge than any other single commercial sector. It is streets ahead of Internet share trading and gambling (the desire for wealth?), which comes a very poor second.

All this would be a little easier to understand if it was always pointing in the direction of finding a desirable mate for the ultimate purpose of procreation. We are more complex than the animal kingdom in a host of other ways besides how we experience sexual urges.

But what can one say about sexual urges that deviate from this obvious goal of the begetting and conceiving of babies? What word even dare one use? Is 'deviate' acceptable? (It comes from Latin words meaning straying from the path) Dare I call attractions which cannot possibly lead to procreation deviations? This may sound judgmental, arrogant, and certainly would be condemned by the proponents of political correctness.

Here the human race seems unique in all creation, that men and women seek to respond to urges that cannot possibly be explained by any fundamental instinct to procreate. Where

do these urges come from?

The Bible mentions the two most obvious ones in Leviticus chapter 18 (of at least three thousand years ago), so there is nothing recent about this. The passage begins with the condemnation of incestuous relationships, and we know there are good medical reasons for following these moral imperatives.

And then other forbidden territory is defined:

No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD.

Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her.

Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father.

Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.

Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would dishonor you.

Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife, born to your father; she is your sister.

Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister; she is your father's close relative.

Do not have sexual relations with your mother's

sister, because she is your mother's close relative.

Do not dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt.

Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her.

Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother.

Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness.

Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.

Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.

Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.

Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.

Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways,

because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. (Lev. 18:6-24 NIV)

It should be interesting to measure your own reactions on reading this. You might be distracted by the reference to sexual activity during menstruation, and wonder who Moloch was (the god of a nearby tribe, actually), but I suggest you set aside those thoughts. The condemnation you are worried about is even clearer in the next but one chapter, if you are in any doubt. I know there are many who will find references to 'a man lying with a man as one lies with a woman' difficult to reconcile with modern views about homosexuality. And to find it alongside bestiality, as if both were equally unnatural, makes one pause for thought.

It seems that God is perfectly aware that we humans can get it all wrong, and misdirect our sexual energies. In the nation he chose to be a living example of his design for humans, God wanted total purity, and set drastic sanctions. Leave aside the sanctions, for no one advocates them for today. But can we ignore the standards? Can we find true happiness in a path away from the designer's intentions? And while we may not want to be literalistic about the laws given to a very different sort of society than today's, we must always look at the principles behind those laws, and ask how they

should be applied today.

This is not to deny that there can be deep friendships between two men, and two women, and these friendships can take on an importance in the lives of those involved as significant as any other bond between two humans. I am sure that God does not reject those for whom such deep and committed friendships seem to be the only way they can be true to themselves. And Paul was very clear that marriage and procreation were not for him, and he commended any others who chose celibacy as a way of life.

When we read the words that King David spoke at the death of Jonathan, eldest son of King Saul, at the hands of the Philistines, once again the Bible becomes a reference point on a difficult topic:

How the mighty have fallen in battle!
Jonathan lies slain on your heights.
I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother;
You were very dear to me.
Your love for me was wonderful,
More wonderful than that of women.
How the mighty have fallen!
The weapons of war have perished!
(2 Samuel 1:25-27)

Each of us finds attraction in our own individual way. The only safe rule is that we

treat sexual urges as an opportunity to give, rather than take. Those who exploit others, whether naturally or unnaturally, are dehumanising themselves, and cutting themselves off from any hope of real happiness.

Body, Soul, and Spirit

We come now to an introduction to human psychology from a totally different standpoint from that based on atheistic and materialistic premises. It is well worth knowing that one of this century's most respected philosophers, Karl Popper, has some very deep criticisms to make of Freudian, and other other similar schools of psychiatry. He basically rejected their claims to be scientific. On page 41, for instance, of his autobiographical 'Unended Quest' he calls Freud's psychoanalytical theories pseudo-scientific. For Popper they are not scientific in the way physics is scientific, for they do not present any objective means for validation by potential falsification. But you must read Popper's whole book to understand his position.

What I present here is not scientific either, but I want to emphasise that I am not unaware of alternative theories about the human psyche. Many of them have already been summarised above.

Let us begin with some etymology. The word '*psyche*' is the Greek word usually translated

'soul'. The Latin equivalent is '*anima*'. When Paul offers a prayer (1 Thess 5:23) for the well-being of his friends, the Thessalonians, he says: 'may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless ...', and this tripartite description of the human condition is found regularly in the New Testament.

The Latin words used in the earliest translation, following the same order, are '*spiritus, anima, corpus*' and the original Greek words are '*pneuma, psyche, soma*'. There are many words in English derived from this trio, and no doubt many will occur to each reader. 'Psychosomatic' refers to reactions in the body from conditions of the soul, and such an illness is not to be cured by attacking a virus, but by understanding that, for instance, acute anxiety can result in ulcers.

It is even, according to the writer to the Hebrews, a vital matter to distinguish rightly between soul and spirit.

So in this chapter I am going to try to summarise, and put very simply, how the Bible talks about our Body, Soul, and Spirit, and what lessons we can learn from this. Much of what follows has been influenced by reading (more than once) the three volume book 'The Spiritual Man' by Watchman Nee (translated from the Chinese), and some of the books referred to in it.

Let us begin with Soul. This word is used to mean the 'real' me, who I am, what it is that identifies me uniquely, what of me is still 'me' regardless of all the changes to my body. I am a living being, I am a soul. Everything else is what I have, especially my ever changing body. The Soul is not static either, but the Soul is the true me, the inward me, the core of my being. There is no word for any deeper part of me. All the other things are peripheral, whether we talk of mind, emotions, will, purpose, whatever. If you talk about my character you are really talking about what characterises me as me, hence my soul.

So what is the Body in relation to the Soul?

It is more than anything else the means by which the Soul experiences the Physical World.

Your body is a mobile set of instruments, to enable you to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the objects that surround you. Through our bodies we experience light, colour, sounds, aromas, tastes, warmth, cold, hardness, softness, shape, through the way our body's nervous system responds to every physical stimulus. All the processes by which we nourish the body, rest it, respond to injury, or get rid of waste matter, are there to support what the body does. It provides us with a continual stream of sensory experiences.

It is easy to think that mobility is what

distinguishes our body, but even a body totally paralysed, and trapped in a wheel chair, is undiminished in its range of physical experiences. Only sleep gives us a rest from this continual flow of experience, and many think we need this regular pause to enable us to digest the input. Our dreams often reveal the digesting process, which we recall on waking.

All our pleasures are a combination of these physical experiences: art, music, gastronomy, books, and much more, are fed into our souls by means of the senses of our body. The way our soul responds, pain or pleasure, happiness or sadness, surprise or boredom, and so on through all the range of emotions and states of mind we experience, are essentially a combination of the response of the soul to data provided by the senses. We know it is our brain than does a lot of the data processing, whether through optical nerves, or other responses, and we know also that our mind uses the brain for imagination, and mathematics, and memory, and all these other intellectual activities. It is possible to detect and measure activity in the brain, and its absence means our body has died.

In many ways the relationship between our mind (Latin '*animus*' masculine) and our soul (Latin '*anima*' feminine) is the nearest and most confusing, as implied by the proximity of the words in Latin. When we decide to 'think of a number', or whatever, it is the soul telling the

mind to engage in a particular mental task. The one thing that Descartes was sure of was that because he could instruct his mind to think, he therefore had a soul. Which is a possible translation of '*cogito, ergo sum*' – I think, therefore I am.

Modern science is very interested in examining and measuring brain activity. A number of experiments are being designed to find out where in the brain certain types of activity take place. No doubt the end result of all this research will be that some scientists will use this expanding knowledge to claim that it shows we humans are just complex machines. But even when we know, as I dare say we will eventually, exactly what is happening, and where, in my brain when I am doing a crossword puzzle, it will not be able to answer the question: why did I chose to do a crossword puzzle? The decision to do something is not the same as the process of doing it.

The soul is the seat of decision making, the soul is my will, my desires, my intentions. I am the sum of all my decisions, and the current me is the sum of all my desires. This is what defines me. This is what needs most help, too.

Do I look to my body for all pleasures? Is this what I am? If so, then I am very dependent on the well-being of my body, and it is designed not to last for ever.

Which brings us to the Spirit. Consider this revealing question in a letter Paul wrote:

Who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? (1 Cor. 2:11 NIV)

While the English word 'unspiritual' a few verses later is the nearest we can come to what in the original is the Greek adjective from 'soul' ('soulish' literally).

The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:14 RSV)

This aspect of my tripartite nature is the most difficult to be aware of, and for many the Spirit is effectively dormant. For the Spirit is to the Soul with regard to the unseen world what the Body is to the Soul for the seen world.

It is with my Spirit that I communicate with God and with my Spirit I listen to His voice. My Spirit is for seeing, hearing, experiencing, the unseen world in all its glory.

Paul describes this unseen world as the battleground of the Soul. He talks about principalities and powers and spiritual hosts, with whom we have to battle (Ephesians 5:12). By the Spirit we become aware of God, and of all the reality of the spiritual world, good and

evil. The New Testament speaks of the fruits of the Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, and of living by the Spirit. Paul compares praying (and singing, and speaking) with his mind and praying (and singing, and speaking) with the Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:14-19). And he was not theorising; this was what he actually experienced. But to anyone who has no experience of these things, it has little meaning. It is as if their own capacity to perceive spiritual things is defunct. We are told that unless God brings our Spirit to life, we cannot experience these things.

Having thought about the soul in these last few pages, I turn next to what these days is described as a sickness of the soul.

Soul Sickness

A good starting point for this chapter are the reported comments by George Carey (then Archbishop of Canterbury) that counselling was tending to become a new religion, a false god, or substitute for religion. He also put consumerism and education in the same bracket.

Counselling can be a false god if it offers something inherently beyond its powers to deliver. It is difficult to make the case that counselling does actual harm, since those who practise it would reject very strongly the accusation that their intention is to do harm at all. Quite the reverse, they would contend: our sole aim is to do good.

I respect all this. Someone I know well is training to become a counsellor, and I know that their motives are entirely to do whatever good they can.

An interesting statistic is that there are currently in the UK approximately the same number of accredited counsellors as there are clergy: a figure of around 25,000 for both categories. Among counsellors there are

competing methodologies (transactional analysis, psychodynamic analysis, person-centered, and so on), just as in the sphere of religion there are different denominations.

The key 'problem' – as I see it – for counselling is the question of focus. Anyone who goes to a counsellor will find their focus drawn more and more inward; they will focus on themselves, their problems, the causes of these problems, and the cure for these problems. They will be encouraged to talk about themselves (a counsellor is essentially a paid listener) and their problems. The counsellor is trained to get this focus working overtime.

But what if this inward focus is the very problem itself?

Counselling sets out to offer happiness, and peace of mind; to take away irrational fears; to banish depression; to deliver inner contentedness. What a Faustian temptation!

The message of Jesus Christ was a perfect antithesis to this. He challenged men and women to focus, not on themselves, but on others. From the Torah of Moses he took the command 'Love your neighbour as yourself', and added 'Love your enemy!'

The summary of His whole message is that we will only find peace and joy for ourselves if we are focusing on giving peace and joy to

someone else, and forgetting about ourselves.

Do I focus on myself? Then I will be off to the nearest counsellor, and seek advice on how to become a happier person. Do I care about other people? Then I will see how I can make their lot easier. I will supply what needs I can supply. I will focus on what they need. And as a happy bi-product, in forgetting about myself, and my own needs, I will find the sort of blessing that only comes to those who are not looking for blessing at all.

What both counselling and religion offer may be called 'salvation', though this would not be the word used by a counsellor. But it is a good word, a strong word, and from its derivation essentially means 'health'.

Health

With the advances of medicine we understand a lot more about our physical health than we used to. One fundamental remains: our bodies have been designed for self-repair, and doctors will often acknowledge that all they can do is promote and facilitate this natural process.

Much research has been done on the causes of cancer, and it has been noted that societies that have a vastly different diet than a typical western one have very little incidence of some types of cancer, not to mention heart disease.

Health is the default condition of being human, and our life style and diet can either promote the natural condition of being healthy, or diminish it.

And our mental activity plays its part too, inevitably.

Consider this narrative:

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door,

and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12 NIV)

Paralysis caused by guilt, and the cure supplied by the removal of guilt. To any modern doctor this cause and effect sequence would seem perfectly natural. Christians praying for healing know that they are not looking for something out of the ordinary, but for something natural.

The meaning of Salvation

Salvation in the religious sense is a widely used term. Each religion defines it differently, however. Hinduism and Buddhism define it as an escape from the endless cycle of birth-death-rebirth into union with the universal, impersonal, Absolute. The Hindu word is 'samsara' (Sanskrit for 'migration') and the Buddhist word is 'nirvana' (Sanskrit for 'blowing out'). This hoped for merging of the self into the Universal One would be an end of self-consciousness, an ultimate release into oblivion.

The great monotheistic religions, by contrast, promise not an escape from existence but an escape into existence, not an end to the individual's self, but an enhancement of it.

Of course both opposing views can easily be belittled and parodied. The classic parody of the Christian view of Heaven is to call it 'pie in the sky when you die'. It is easy to suppose that Christians believe that they (and only they) are going to be rewarded, and the rest punished with eternal fire in a place called Hell. An even worse parody is for one group of Christians

(whom others will refer to as a sect) to suppose that membership of their particular group is an essential, and that all other flavours of Christianity are condemned to eternal perdition simply for having failed to join the right group.

So salvation is an important doctrine, and understanding what the Bible teaches about it is essential if we are to avoid the distortions that will prevent us from responding to the Good News of the gospel.

The root of the word comes from the Latin for health, so the metaphor we are using with the word 'salvation' is illness and healing. What sickness are we in need of being healed from? The Bible throughout has a simple but unpopular word for it: sin. We are fallen from the high place God intended for the human race, and now suffer from a tendency to do evil things. Those who are most aware of this are also most aware of how difficult it is to combat this tendency in one's own strength. Such people long for a transformation deep within that will enable them to desire better things, and to have the power to do those better things too.

The transformation we need is so total that a good metaphor for it is 'new birth'. As Jesus said to a leading man of his day, Nicodemus, 'I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.' And the

footnote to this verse (John 3:3) adds a possible alternative translation as 'born from above'. We need the birth from the womb ('born of water') and also the birth of the Spirit. John 3:6 gives us: 'Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.'

Christianity is unique at this point. It describes two kinds of 'life': there is 'bios' (simply being alive in the way all animals are) and there is 'zoe' (spiritual life). Zoe is a new quality of life, much more than a biological life with no physical death to follow. When Christians talk about eternal life they are not thinking in temporal terms (how long? for ever). Rather they are thinking qualitatively (what sort? of the spirit; where? now in this universe, and ultimately in the 'new earth and new heaven').

It is also important to think of salvation as having three tenses. Christians find themselves saying: 'I have been saved', 'I am being saved', and 'I will be saved.' It may seem confusing, but all three tenses are right.

In the first instance (the past tense) we are looking at God's intervention through Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again. In the second (the continuous present) we are thinking of the Spirit of God beginning the transforming process that enables us to start to share in the character of Jesus Christ. In the future tense we are thinking of the promise that the death of our physical bodies will not be the

end of us, but that we will share in the resurrection of Christ, and we too will rise to live, transformed, within a promised 'new earth and new heaven'.

The key thing to avoid is any mechanistic view of salvation, as if there were some formula, do this and you will be saved. For instance if a Christian thinks he is being saved by receiving communion he needs to review this. Communion is the symbolic remembrance that Christ's body was broken, Christ's blood shed, for us. Wearing a Victoria Cross medal does not make anyone brave. The medal commemorates the bravery that has already been demonstrated. Wearing a golf club's badge on one's blazer does not make one a member of that club. Being a member entitles one to wear the badge. This principle is true of all the 'badges' there are. Christians call the badges sacraments. Baptism is an important badge, but the reality it is symbolising is what matters. The symbol (as Paul explains in Romans 6) is of dying with Christ, being buried (submerged under water) with Christ, and then arising with Him, as He rose from the dead. Unless there is a real union with Christ, both in His death and in His resurrection, any amount of water (or bread and wine) and any amount of special words uttered by people deemed authorised to utter them, will be much the same as pinning a badge on a tailor's dummy. It will be no more than decoration.

Salvation is not a lottery prize which God decides to give to some, but not others. Nor is it a reward awarded to the good but withheld from the bad. And thank goodness for that. Which of us dares hope to be good enough to deserve it?

Salvation is the healing of our sickness, the transforming of our total being, and is a process which we are either experiencing or not. My guess is that most folk who are experiencing it are as frustrated as I am that I seem to be responding so poorly, and the progress (through my own fault) is so slow. How I long for the better things. How frequently I fall in the mud and get dirty, like a child.

Salvation began at a point of time in history, in a particular place, because 'God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.' (John 3:16) It continues in the here and now, as we open our hearts to the Saviour to be filled with his Holy Spirit. And we think of the future, beyond the grave, when we shall be like Him, having shared in His resurrection. We long for this, knowing how much better it will be. But the life we live now, frustrating as it is, is the arena where we fight the battles we are called to fight, and ask God to be patient with our failings.

So having introduced the topic of Heaven and

Hell, let us go into more detail for both, even though this may seem something of a digression in an attempt to look at the question of what it means to be human.

My view is that it is vital to address the question in this broader sense. Am I an eternal being, or simply one with nothing to come after they put me in a box? The answer to this question is very relevant to our big question.

Heaven

Heaven and Hell are probably the two most misunderstood words one can come across, and the two most misused as well. So quite a lot of what I must write down is linguistic, and necessarily detailed. But bear with me, as there is a worthwhile purpose, I trust.

In the Old Testament of the Bible the word is actually plural (Hebrew *shamayim*) and means literally 'heaved up things'. The English translation varies from a singular 'heaven' to a plural 'heavens'. It is used of what we would call the atmosphere (or the sky), in phrases such as 'the birds of the heavens', or even space: 'the stars in the heavens' and so on. So when Moses is commanded to 'stretch forth thy rod towards heaven' (Exodus 10:21) it does not necessarily mean anything more than 'upwards'.

The trouble comes when we get to phrases which seem to treat Heaven as God's own place, and this is carried into the New Testament: in Matthew's gospel the 'Kingdom of Heaven' is used where the exactly equivalent phrase in Luke's gospel is the 'Kingdom of

God'. When we say today 'Heaven forbid!' we mean simply 'God forbid!'. Paul talks about 'the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). This helps us understand a third essential meaning for 'heaven': in contrast to earth (the physical universe) there is heaven (the spiritual universe). As recorded in the gospel of John (3:12) Jesus says to Nicodemus: 'I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?'

So there is a first heaven (the sky – the atmosphere – where birds fly), the second heaven (space – where stars and planets are), and a third heaven (outside, beyond, not of this physical universe). We do well to remember these threefold uses in the Bible.

This is what Solomon said when he dedicated the building he had built where God might be worshipped in Jerusalem: 'O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in the heaven above or on the earth below ... But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built?' (1 Kings 8:22-27)

And Paul writes of his own 'out of body' experience: 'I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know – God knows ... He

heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.' (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

The trouble comes when we start talking of Heaven as a place, or worse, as a reward, where the 'good' go after they die. This leads to all sorts of silly thoughts about who is going to get an entrance ticket, and on what basis, which is a total parody of the 'good news' of the Christian message.

Let us be quite clear: we are all going to exist for ever. That is the core belief of the vast majority of the human race in all history; it is only in relatively recent times that an ideology has come into popularity that asserts that death is the end not only of the body but also of the soul, the essence, the identity, of any human. It is singularly popular in post-Christian materialism; it certainly does enable a believer in this doctrine to say: 'eat, drink, and be merry; for tomorrow we die.'

The ancient Greeks believed in an afterlife, with Hades, and the river Styx, and the Elysian Fields, and so on. The three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) all believe in an afterlife, and in their own distinctive way, Hinduism and Buddhism also believe in a continuity of the soul beyond the death of the body. So to assert that death brings an absolute end, like the snuffing out of a candle, is to depart from the majority position. It is an act of faith, as much

as to believe that death is not an absolute end is an act of faith. In many ways the belief that death is not an absolute end is more difficult, not less difficult: that there is a continuation implies that what I do in this mortal life has eternal consequences, really matters, in other words. Life matters, eternally. This is the doctrine which calls us to take it more seriously, to consider the eternal as well as the temporal, the heavenly (which will last for ever) as well as the earthly (which will pass away).

Now there is a certain approach where a reward, a paradise, in one doctrine asserted to be literally full of pleasures like eating, and the presence of beautiful women (houris), are promised to those who earn it. A dangerous doctrine indeed, when young men (and women) can be persuaded that going into a crowded place with a bomb strapped to them and detonating said bomb, to achieve their own death and those of many unsuspecting others, will ensure such a reward. What sort of a God rewards His followers in this way?

The Christian view never proclaims Heaven as a reward. Quite the contrary: if we are to get what we deserve, says the Christian gospel, it were far kinder to give us extinction. What Jesus Christ offered was 'life', not 'bios' (biological life) but 'zoe' (spiritual life). When we are released from this earthly body, there will be a better body awaiting us, imperishable

and glorious. This is the message that Christians celebrate at Easter, that the last enemy has indeed been conquered:

'So it is with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.' (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)

Those who desire the presence of God within their lives in the here and now will find that choice has determined the 'then' too. Similarly, those who prefer to leave God on the outside now are choosing an eternal 'outside'. The choices we make every day matter – eternally. Something more than we can ever earn or deserve is offered, and it is a gift that is ours for the taking. Only the fool wants rewards, his just deserts, what he has earned. Alas, that is just what he will get.

Hell

I concluded the previous chapter emphasising that either we are constantly making choices that bring us closer to God, and that this process continues after the biological death of our bodies, or we are making choices that take us further and further away from God. Neither Heaven nor Hell are places, in the way that Yorkshire is a place. But the process of receiving God's gift of 'zoe' continues until we are indeed eternally in the promised 'new earth and new heaven'.

This physical universe seems so real to us, but physicists know that this is an illusion. What we call solid, or tangible, is a collection of invisible forces, called protons and neutrons and suchlike, whirling round each other in complex orbits. Christians believe that the greater reality is what lies beyond the reach of our physical senses, and is eternal and imperishable. There is an eternal part of every one of us, which we call the soul. The eternal condition of our souls, and our transformed bodies, is what this is all about.

All our choices have eternal consequences, and

this is what Christians understand about Judgment: 'this is the judgment, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil' (John 3:19 RSV). The word 'judgment' here is translated 'verdict' in the NIV (the Greek is 'crisis'), and as you can see, the verdict is the one we pass on Light, not the one passed on us.

Just as I emphasised in the previous chapter that Heaven is not a reward, a prize, awarded to some and withheld from others, so it is important to understand that Hell is not a punishment, which some are deemed to deserve, while others are 'let off'. Hell will involve pain and anguish, certainly, but only those who choose it will receive it. We can choose it by rejecting the gift of 'zoe' offered to us by the Saviour of all mankind Himself.

Hell is the English translation of the Greek 'Hades', the place of the departed in Greek mythology. In this sense the Apostles' Creed speaks of Jesus as 'crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell.' When Jesus spoke of the Church He was building, and that the 'gates of Hell would not prevail against it' the NIV rightly translates the word as Hades (Matt. 16:19). There is another word translated as Hell, and this is Gehenna, which was the rubbish tip outside Jerusalem where the rubbish was burnt. It is a wonderfully dramatic metaphor to say that those who reject God will

be consigned to an eternal rubbish tip, and there is a 'consigning' or 'casting' or 'disposal', as is clear from these words of Jesus: 'do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more ... fear him who, after the killing of the body, has the power (authority) to throw you into hell' (Luke 12:4-5).

The best description of the state of those whose choice is to move further and further away from God is that given by Paul writing to the Thessalonians: 'they shall suffer the punishment (literally 'judgment' or 'sentence') of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord ...' (2 Thess. 1:9 RSV). To every one who persists in a determination to live their life away from God, the awful truth is that they will eventually succeed. God will finally grant their wish. This is described in the chilling phrase as 'the second death' (Rev 20:14).

We can experience a foretaste of both heaven and hell in this life, which is why we read so much pictorial language: that heaven is filled with light and music and dancing and rejoicing; that hell is filled with darkness and fire and pain and suffering. But let us not be simpletons. Most of our comprehension of things eternal is the childish thinking Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13 we need to leave behind. 'Now we see blurred reflections ... then (when we have passed through the gateway we call death) we will know perfectly, even as we are

known.'

We will all eventually 'know' – and that knowledge will be either the making or the unmaking of us, the perfecting or the destruction of us, eternal joy or eternal sorrow, heaven or hell.

In these past two chapters I have focused, in thinking about heaven and hell, on choices. Now I want to look at both of these in a much wider context.

The Cosmos

There are some words we use when the only person who really knows what they mean by the word is the person using it. The problem is multiplied when we are thinking of words in another language. This chapter will be about the Greek word *kosmos*.

It is used a great many times in the New Testament, and the common translation is 'world'. It is the basis for the English words cosmic and cosmology, and the latter can be understood to mean 'the study of the universe in an attempt to understand its origins and how it works'.

So already we have a translation problem, and to remedy this, hopefully, I am going to use *kosmos* in every passage I quote, leaving the reader to think through what the best word in English might be. Or even to realise that possibly there is no exact English word that might do.

Here are just a few samples, using the RSV for all the other words:

What does it profit a man if he gains the whole

kosmos and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:25)

Jesus said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this *kosmos*, I am not of this *kosmos*." (John 8:23)

Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this *kosmos* to the Father. (John 13:1)

Jesus answered, [Pilate had asked, "Are you the King of the Jews?"] "My kingship is not of this *kosmos*; if my kingship were of this *kosmos* my servants would fight ... but my kingship is not from the *kosmos*." (John 18:36)

Now we have received not the spirit of the *kosmos*, but the Spirit which is from God. (1 Cor. 2:12)

There are also numerous uses of the phrases 'creation of the *kosmos*' and 'foundation of the *kosmos*', which echo more strongly the modern term cosmology.

Just these few instances of *kosmos* (out of many more that occur in the New Testament) should begin to make us realise that we are being presented with not only the 'whole perceivable universe' but also a category that is beyond this. Using the Greek preposition *meta* in its usual sense of 'beyond', it looks as though there is a *metakosmos* as well. Something, or somewhere, beyond the universe we can sense

or measure.

Is the *kosmos* a good or a bad place? First we need to note that God made it and loves it.

'For God so loved the *kosmos* that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his son into the *kosmos*, not to condemn the *kosmos*, but that the *kosmos* might be saved through him.' (John 3:16-17)

God made the *kosmos*. God loves the *kosmos*. But there is something drastically wrong, and the *kosmos* needs saving.

What ails the *kosmos*? Some things Jesus said helps us understand. To his followers he said: 'The *kosmos* cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.' (John 7:7) 'Now is the judgment of this *kosmos*, now shall the ruler of this *kosmos* be cast out.' (John 12:31) '[The Holy Spirit] ... will convince the *kosmos* ... of judgment, because the ruler of this *kosmos* is judged.' (John 16:8-11) 'In the *kosmos* you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the *kosmos*.' (John 16:33) As many as three times in John's Gospel the enemy is described as 'the ruler of this *kosmos*'. (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11)

These sayings, and there are many more similar ones, indicate the nature and extent of

the problem. We live in enemy occupied territory. There is a battle being fought in the *kosmos* between good and evil, and although appearances may cause us to feel overwhelmed we should be reassured that the ultimate victory will be God's.

I have said little so far about the *metakosmos*, a term I introduced as a possible way to refer to what is beyond the *kosmos*, and so we move to thinking about it next, and it will surprise no one that we usually call this 'heaven'.

The trouble is that the word 'heaven' is used in three different ways in the Bible, as we have already noted. It means either where birds fly (e.g. Jer. 4:25), where the stars are (e.g. Deut. 28:62), or – most often – where God is.

But here saying where God is can lead to confusion. It tends to suppose that heaven is a place, somewhere in the universe, which might in theory be located by an astronaut. In fact the first (Russian) astronaut, Yuri Gagarin, said that because he found no sign of God in his orbital journey in the heavens, this proved that there was no God.

We need to understand that the 'the third heaven', somewhere beyond the sky, beyond cosmic space, is truly beyond. When Paul experienced 'the third heaven' he had no idea whether it was in the body or out of the body.

We can only understand this 'heaven' if we realise it is a different mode of existence, beyond the cosmic physical reality we live and breath every day. It can overlap our daily experience, though it is very overwhelming when it does. If you are visited by an angel, who dwells normally in this *metakosmos*, all the precedents indicate you will be scared out of your skin.

The Bible tells us that God's plan is to redeem this spoiled outcome of His creative activity with a remade, a new Heaven and Earth. Paul tells us that we are eventually, after death for most of us, to be transformed in so dramatic a way that our current experience of being human has no words to express the change.

As already noted, it is a gross and misleading parody of Christianity to say that it is the answer to the question: 'how to get to heaven'. There is no physical journey to somewhere else, no ticket issued to those who earn it, or denied to those who fail to earn it. 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable ... we will all be changed.' (1 Cor. 15:50-51)

Heaven is a different mode of being, and we will have to be transformed. And what is more, there is to be a 'new heaven and a new earth' because the transformation we need will be applied to everything there is. (Matt. 24:35)

The New Testament often joins together Heaven with Earth, as essentially the sum of all things. The *kosmos* and the *metakosmos* are linked, and we may understand also overlap, as we read these short quotations of the words of Jesus. I have, for brevity's sake, chosen only those from Matthew's gospel, though there are parallels in the other gospels. The list that follows is only a selection of those verses that might be included.

For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:18)

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 18:18)

Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:19)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. (Matthew 24:35)

And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

(Matthew 28:18)

The whole purpose of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection can be summed up in the words He taught His followers to pray for: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." This is the agenda for His followers throughout history, to do what can be done to ensure that God's will be done in the here and now of this *kosmos*, as it surely is done in God's eternal presence in the *metakosmos*.

However, there is a problem, and it looks as though God's entire creation, the *kosmos* and the *metakosmos*, is so radically flawed in its present condition that "Heaven and Earth will pass away."

This leads us to one of the New Testament letters:

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:7)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10)

But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:13)

The ultimate victory we are promised will be a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (Revelation 21:1)

These quotations present us with a huge theme, as we are forced to consider where we are in the middle (or near the end) of God's plan for the redemption and remaking of His whole creative purposes.

The phrase 'Under the Earth' comes in this passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians:

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, (Phil 2:10)

Archeological evidence shows that as far back as we can trace indications of belief, the human race has presumed some form of survival beyond physical death. The burial customs of ancient peoples show remarkable attempts to equip the dead person with food, weapons, and suchlike, for their future life. For the Greeks there was an underworld ruled by Hades, and the name Hades came to be the name of the

place as well as its ruler. Like other first-century Jews literate in Greek, early Christians used the Greek word Hades to translate the Hebrew word Sheol.

Thus we find several uses of Hades in the book of Revelation, of which the following is very clear:

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. (Revelation 20:13)

There is even a reference to Jesus having suffered death and then preaching to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:19)

Thus, the New Testament answer to the question 'What happens when we die?' is that we have a conscious and immaterial existence in a place of waiting, and at the end of the age, in God's time, we will eventually be resurrected for judgment.

Whole books have been written on this topic alone, and I have no desire to try to expound the various questions that this very simple answer to the basic question gives rise to. Paul's teaching about the resurrection emphasises that we do not have enough experience to find the right words for what our ultimate resurrected bodies will be like (1

Corinthians 15) but of one thing he was sure. The intermediate waiting in Sheol would be uplifting:

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:22-24)

Having thought about the Greek word Hades and the Hebrew word Sheol, we need to bring in another Hebrew word Gehenna as well, and a further Greek one, Tartarus.

When Jesus was teaching the people in the Judea of his day, he would almost always have been using the contemporary Hebrew dialect of Aramaic. Very occasionally the gospel writers actually include these Aramaic words. And, as I noted in the last chapter, when translating Aramaic into the Greek which the gospel writers wrote in (since this was the language known very widely across the Mediterranean countries), Sheol was translated into Hades.

Hades was understood as indicating a place, or state, of conscious existence following physical death of the body. The problem comes in translating Hades into Hell, which is what the best known English translation, the King James Version (also known as the Authorised

Version) did when it was published in 1611. And to compound the problem, these translators (they were a team) also translate Gehenna as Hell, and also the one use of the other Greek word, Tartarus. The result is that any reader of the KJV (AV) is led to think that the same word for Hell was used in the original books of the New Testament, when in fact there were four. Each of these four words would have had a distinctly different meaning for the original readers of the New Testament books.

I have included all this to make one very simple point. Every generation needs to have an up-to-date translation, since language itself is not static, and as time goes by historians begin to learn more and more about what the original users of any word, two or three thousand years ago, actually meant by it. We must develop our own understanding of deeply important theological concepts on the best possible evidence. In my own lifetime I have used the AV, the RSV (Revised Standard Version), the NIV (New International Version) and am now finding one of the latest, *The New Testament for Everyone*, by Tom Wright, particularly refreshing. He gets the four key words quite right, by the way.

The Mind

So far in this short book I have possibly gone beyond what a casual reader might have expected from the title: yes, I have talked about body, soul, and spirit as the components of who I am as a human, but I have digressed also somewhat: can science tell us everything? Is there a reality beyond the seen? What happens when we die?

Are these valid digressions?

My proposal is that to understand truly what it means to be human we do have to see ourselves in the context of eternity. The Bible presents us with a challenge: we humans are God's creation; we have a purpose originally given of being the custodians of the planet we live on, and that responsibility has not been withdrawn; we humans are going to live for ever, either within or outside the presence of our Creator; the grand plan is for a total transformation of ourselves, which our current language has no words for.

In the 21st century these ideas are rarely accepted as a given, as an acceptable, truth. Our thinking does not come to these naturally.

Perhaps there is something wrong with our thinking.

And that is quite simply how Jesus began His public ministry: He said that people needed a 'new mind', though the sentence usually comes over as the archaic word 'repent' (Mark 1:15). But the word actually means 'get a new mind'.

The Greek word for mind is *nous*. Here are some passages in the New Testament where the word occurs:

Furthermore, just as they [godless people] did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved **mind**, so that they do what ought not to be done. (Rom. 1:28)

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my **mind** and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. (Rom 7:21-23)

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:2)

Now this I affirm and testify in the Lord, that you

must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their **minds**. (Eph 4:17)

Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your **minds**. (Eph 4:22-23)

[people to avoid] ... are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual **mind**. (Col 2:18)

[warnings about] ... men who are deprived in **mind** and bereft of the truth. (1 Tim. 6:5)

[warnings about] ... men of corrupt **mind** and counterfeit faith. (2 Tim. 3:8)

To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very **minds** and consciences are corrupted. (Titus 1:15)

The concept of mind from these examples is very clear: our very patterns of thinking can become corrupted, and need to be renewed. Our minds need the influence of the spirit to be 'put right'. Our standards, our values, our sense of right and wrong, can all be skewed, especially by the influence of the values and standards we are surrounded by.

Being human in the 21st century involves examining all the standards and influences of

JOHN EVERETT

the society we live in, and taking nothing for granted. Some challenge!

More about the Spirit

One contrast with the mind, as we have hinted at from the list of mind references given in the previous chapter, is the 'spirit', especially with the references to an 'unspiritual mind'.

Paul endorses this contrast when he says 'I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also.' (1 Cor. 14:15 NASB) The 'mind' is again the Greek word *nous*, and to make the sense of this statement many translations use 'understanding' instead of 'mind'.

Earlier in the same letter Paul talks in more detail about how it possible to pray in a manner other than with understanding.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to

another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines. (1 Cor. 12:7-11)

The 'gifts of the spirit' is a huge topic, and takes our understanding of what it means to be human into a new dimension. There are some who say that these gifts died out after the first generation of Christians, while there are others, myself included, who actually experience these gifts in the 21st century, and there are whole denominations (usually called Pentecostal) based on the reality of these 'charismatic' gifts.

These Pentecostal denominations take their name from the festival of Pentecost which came a few weeks after Easter. Here we read about what happened to the first disciples of Jesus:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in

bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:1-12)

I am merely scratching the surface of this topic with these few passages from the New Testament. The influence of God's Spirit on the human spirit is a central part of the Christian experience, and it is clear that it is not mechanistic. Christians are repeatedly urged by Paul to 'live by the spirit', and he assumes that this is a choice each Christian can make. He speaks of it as a battle between our tendency to live on the lower level, which he calls the 'flesh', which we have as a carry-over from before becoming a Christian.

I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Rom. 7:25)

Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live

according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Rom. 8:5-8)

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Gal. 5:16-24)

According to Paul, being human means being in a battle, with part of us wanting all sorts of wrong things, against which the spirit we have received from Jesus draws us towards all the good things we can experience: love, joy, peace

and so on. I am certainly very conscious of this struggle, and I doubt if I am alone in this.

And the good news is, for those of us who may sometimes find the struggle difficult ... :

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 NIV)

Where next?

I am very conscious that I will have had two main divisions of readers (if you got this far): Christians and non-Christians. I hope both groups may have begun to ask some questions they have not asked before. Even where I have apparently been delivering answers, as when I have cited passages from the New Testament, I have always been wanting those passages to be mainly a stimulus. Each needs carefully thinking about and pondering over. I certainly still do.

One area from my recent study of modern discoveries about how the brain actually works has been opened up to me. I now ask questions about how the Holy Spirit operates within me. The coincidence of the fruit (a lovely metaphor) of the Spirit being all right brain strengths really set me thinking. Does the Holy Spirit, who came into my life 54 years ago, operate literally on my brain, to strengthen my right brain and make it more dominant? While still very conscious of my faults, I have become aware of being more empathetic and tolerant, less dogmatic and literal, as time has gone by. My intuition (which I hope is guided by the Holy Spirit) is something I now rely on more

strongly. Modern neuroscience gives me a new dimension for understanding the spiritual domain, and opens up many positive avenues of thought. Hence the temerity to write about being human from a spiritual perspective.

Some readers will still be challenging that it is possible to refer back to stuff written two thousand years ago for a modern answer to the basic question: what does it mean to be human? Why on earth have I had to wade through all that stuff about heaven and hell?

To this group I suggest you pause a little. Certainly the modern age tends to see science as the alternative to spirituality. Since we cannot examine scientifically what happens to us after our bodies cease to function, we tend to rule out even thinking about it. Science cannot answer moral questions: what is good, what is bad? Science cannot answer teleological questions: is there a purpose in life?

Deep down, however, we know that these questions do matter. So we will have to look for answers somewhere else. I suggest that the man who lived two thousand years ago, and is now worshipped by millions in every continent of the globe as God incarnate, Saviour and Lord, is a source you should study. He claimed to be the answer to your questions, after all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Everett read Classics and Theology at Cambridge University, and then went straight into secondary teaching. He taught both Ordinary and Advanced Level Religious Education. The syllabus for the former was the four gospels, and for the latter was simply the whole of the New Testament. After 22 years of teaching John had taught himself computer programming, and founded a software house writing back office systems for private client stockbrokers. This firm employed 70 people when John retired as its CEO. In the late 90s John began using the internet to publish blog articles which he called 'Meditations of a Netcaster'. John is married with three daughters, a son, and two granddaughters. During his retirement he has continued to be active and is an elected council member of a district council in Leicestershire. He maintains a website at johneverettbooks.co.uk.