CHRISTIAN DIALOGISTICS

Entry level course

For presentation in congregations

Dr Willem McLoud

Facilitator's Guide

Le Bey Mc Callaghan

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 3
1. ACTS 17 5
2. INTERPRETATION 13
3. BUILDING A BRIDGE 21
4. SCIENCE AND CREATION 30
5. THE NATURE OF REALITY 38
6. THE NATURE OF TRUTH 46
7. A PERSUASIVE NARRATIVE 54
FASILITATOR'S GUIDE 63

INTRODUCTION

“"There are good evidence that we come to our conclusions about things based on the relationships that we are in and the people that we trust and the stories that make sense to us" – Elizabeth Oldfield on UnHerd LIVE (14 May 2024)

This is an entry course in Christian Dialogistics, serving as an introduction to the discipline of dialogistics. A basic knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith is required. ***The purpose of the course is to equip a new generation of believers to have a good understanding of the basic tenets of their own belief system as well as being effective in engaging with non-believers within the context of postmodern society.*** Yes, students who have a wider perspective on the world and the particular challenges of the time. During the course of the seven lectures students will become acquainted with the terminology, nuances, ideas, viewpoints and cultural concerns of the postmodern person as well as the necessary practical and intellectual tools to effectively engage with such persons with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Christian dialogistics is similar to apologetics but focuses on having conversations about faith in the context of a postmodern society. It provides indispensable tools for conducting such conversations in an effective way, developing certain skills as well as a basic understanding of the elements needed for bringing such conversations to fruition and leading people to Christ.

The course consists of seven lectures which explore the basic building blocks for conducting effective conversations, namely

1) **Acts 17** serves as point of departure for dialogistics, showing how common ground is to be found in conversations about faith
2) The role of **interpretation** in all human engagements with the world but especially when talking with people having different points of view
3) Explaining and exploring the underlying dynamic and basic elements of effective conversations, of **building a bridge** for fruitful interaction with others about matters of faith
4) Introducing the theme of **science and creation**
5) Exploring the **nature of reality** and the importance of having a good understanding thereof
6) Exploring the **nature of truth** and the importance of having a good understanding thereof
7) The art of formulating **a persuasive** Christian **narrative**

At the start of each lecture a short introductory note provides an outline of the lecture. At the end appears a set of questions for discussion afterwards as well as links to articles or essays that focus in more detail on one of the important issues discussed. Also provided at the end of each

lecture are guidelines and outlines (a PowerPoint format of about 2 pages) for facilitators. As the course is not part of an accredited program, it is available to anyone who performs a role in equipping the church of Jesus Christ for the particular challenges of the postmodern age. More articles and information are available at Coreideas.co and wmcloud.blogspot.com.

1. ACTS 17

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) Different missional approaches, 2) the word *dialégomai* (converse) in Acts 17, 3) St. Paul's conversations in Athens and his address on the Areopagus as model and basis for conversations about faith, 4) the importance that others "understand" and make sense of the Gospel and of finding common ground with them in conversation, 5) a short introduction to Christian Dialogistics.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

The Lord Jesus called his disciples to be his witnesses to all people. The gospel was not only to be taken further and further in geographical terms, but also to an ever wider range of people from different cultures for whom different approaches were and are needed. In this series of seven lectures the focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach, an approach based on that of St. Paul when he visited Athens during his second missionary journey as described in Acts 17.

Different Missional Approaches

In missional terms, three important but quite different contexts in which the early church engaged with an ever wider range of people can be distinguished. These are encapsulated by three cities of importance in the story of the early church, namely Jerusalem, Antioch and Athens.

1. Jerusalem. This is the city where Jesus founded the church. The main characteristic of Jerusalem is that the early church shared their Jewish ancestry and culture with the city's inhabitants. As many Jews already shared an expectation about the coming of the Messiah, the main challenge was to show that Jesus was indeed that Messiah (Acts 2:14-36). In the early days, many Jews came to faith in Jesus as the true Messiah or Christ (Acts 2:41, 47; 4:32; 5:14; 6:7 etc).

When we understand Jerusalem in contemporary terms, it may be suggested that this city represents those who share the Christian culture and believe in the Bible but who have no real relationship with the Lord Jesus. As the church share their worldview and even basic values with these people, the challenge to bring them to Christ lies in other areas. The typical approach used by the church is "evangelism", with Evangelism Explosion International being a good example of an organization that developed tools in this regard.

2. Antioch. This is the city from where the church first sent a mission to bring the gospel to the pagans. St. Paul's missionary journeys, which counted three in total, were initiated and set in

motion from Antioch (Acts 13:1-4). During the first church council held in Jerusalem (Acts 15), the leadership of the church did not only sanction these missionary endeavors, they also gave special instructions pertaining to those who were saved from among the pagans.

When we understand Antioch in contemporary terms, it may be suggested that the city represents the church's efforts to fulfilling the great missionary command to take the gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:19). In this instance, the gospel is taken to people who do not share the Christian culture and values, to people who have their own and unique cultures and religions. The typical approach used by the church, namely the traditional missionary approach, was/is that of sending missionaries, with many missionary organizations serving as examples.

3. Athens. This is the city where St. Paul for the first time engaged with contemporary high culture, with philosophers and others belonging to Greek culture. St. Paul's approach in Athens was markedly different from that which he otherwise used on his missionary journeys.

When we understand Athens in contemporary terms, it may be suggested that the city represents the church's efforts to engage with those belonging to contemporary postmodern culture, which has become non- and even anti-Christian. In the Western world, contemporary culture poses special challenges for the missional endeavor, challenges that require approaches that are especially tailored for these circumstances, like that of the Fresh Expressions Movement which focuses on "connections" with people.

The ever widening gap between the Christian worldview and the worldviews and values associated with contemporary postmodern culture makes reaching such people especially challenging. Dialogistics is an approach tailor made for these circumstances insofar as it provides tools to engage on a conversational and intellectual level with such people.

The Word *Dialégomai* in Acts 17

In Christian dialogistics, St. Paul's engagement with the people of Athens is taken as point of departure. The Greek word used to describe this interaction is *dialégomai*, which is also the word from which the English word dialogue as well as dialogistics is derived. We read:

"Therefore he [St. Paul] reasoned [*dielegeto*; the imperfect form of *dialégomai*] in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, 'What does this babbler want to say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,' because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection." (Acts 17:17, 18; all quotes are from the NKJV except when stated otherwise)

St. Paul interacted in this manner with the Jews and Jewish proselytes in the synagogue (as he did in various other cities), but also with those he encountered daily on the marketplace. In this passage the word *dialégomai* is translated in the various versions of the English Bible as

“reasoned, spoke, disputed, had discussions, debated”. As this word is crucial for our discussion, we can take a closer look at it.

The Strong’s Concordance gives the meaning as: “to *say thoroughly*, that is, *discuss* (in argument or exhortation): - dispute, preach (unto), reason (with), speak.”

Thayer’s Greek Lexicon has: “1) to think different things with one’s self, mingle thought with thought; to ponder, revolve in mind, 2) to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss”.

HELPS Word-studies (taken from Biblehub.com): “*dialégomai* (from *diá*, ‘through, from one side across to the other,’ which intensifies *légō*, ‘speaking to a conclusion’) – properly, ‘getting a *conclusion across*’ by exchanging thoughts (logic) – ‘mingling thought with thought, to ponder (*revolve in the mind*)’ (J. Thayer). *dialégomai* (‘getting a conclusion across’) occurs 13 times in the NT, usually of believers exercising ‘dialectical reasoning.’ This is the process of *giving and receiving* information with someone to *reach deeper understanding* – a ‘going back-and-forth’ of thoughts and ideas so people can better know the Lord (His word, will). Doing this is perhaps the most telling characteristic of the growing Christian!”

This etymological analysis of the word *dialégomai* aligns especially well with St. Paul having conversed and held discussions on the Athenian marketplace on a daily basis with those who happened to be there. What is particularly important for our present discussion is the fact that the essential component of all such discussions, which follows from the analysis of the different elements of the word *dialégomai*, is the reaching of a deeper understanding of each other’s viewpoints. This is especially true for St. Paul’s engagements on the Athenian marketplace, where those participating in conversation had very different backgrounds and views. Another form of the word, namely *dialegomenos*, appears in Acts 19:8 in which case it refers to discussions St. Paul held with the Jews in the local synagogue in Ephesus over a period of three months, trying to persuade them concerning the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Although the word *dialégomai* is often associated with reasoning and argumentation, its basic meaning goes even deeper, namely to **the fundamentals of conversation**. It captures the idea at the heart of the process of conversation, of one speaking to another or others (“say thoroughly ”, “giving and taking”), which results in “reaching a **deeper understanding**” of the matter at hand and getting some conclusion across. The word was used for discussions and arguments in the work of the Greek philosophers Plato, Thucydides, Xenophon and others.

Presenting the Gospel in such a Way that It Makes Sense to People

Why is delving into the meaning of the word *dialégomai* important? When we as Christians engage on contemporary marketplaces of ideas in conversations with people who belong to postmodern culture, we could, like St. Paul, interact with them through *dialégomai*. And the most essential element of this process is that the person with whom we share the gospel should

understand it, not in a mere conceptual manner but in such a way that it really makes sense to them. As far as the gospel is concerned, all stand or fall at this basic level: ***does it really make sense to a person who has a very different worldview and set of values than us.***

This brings us to the very heart of dialogistics, namely **the essential role of understanding** in all conversation and discussion. When a conversation involves serious matters, the key element for conveying someone's viewpoint is "understanding" or making sense of what is being said. In other words, "to be understandable" means "to make sense". A person can understand a thing that makes sense. We read in the Longman Dictionary: "(to) make sense of something (is) to understand something that is not easy to understand, especially by thinking about it." And in Collins Dictionary: "When you make sense of something, you succeed in understanding it."

Jesus makes exactly this point in his Parable of the Sower. In this parable, which is foundational to all missional endeavors, Jesus tells how a farmer went out to sow his seed. While scattering the seed, some fell along the path where the birds came and ate it. As he continued, some of the seed fell on rocky places, where it sprung up but withered again because the soil was too shallow. Also, some of the seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed, however, fell on good soil, where it produced a crop.

The seed that fell on the path represents the most basic level on which people engage with the gospel. They hear it but do not really understand it: "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom **and does not understand it**, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path." (Matt. 13:19)

Jesus also quotes a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah in this passage that people would **hear but not understand** the gospel because of the hardness of their hearts:

"'**You will be ever hearing but never understanding**;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.
For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them." (Matt. 13:15, from Is. 6:9, 10 in the Septuagint)

The important point is that people cannot be converted if they do not "understand" the gospel, if it does not make sense to them. In this instance, the reason for them not understanding is that their hearts have become blunted, presumably because they had become used to the Word of God (and not appreciating the true sense thereof). Irrespective as to whether the word is presented through conversation, reasoning or preaching, true understanding is the key to salvation.

St. Paul also picks up on this. He writes in Romans 10:14: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

Again, this Greek word, *ēkousan* (to hear), has a broad spectrum of meaning, namely "To hear, listen, **comprehend by hearing**; pass: is heard, reported." (Strong's Concordance 191). Thayer's Greek Lexicon mentions (among other meanings), "1) to attend to, consider what is or has been said, 2) **to understand, perceive the sense of what is said**".

What St. Paul is thus saying in his Epistle to the Romans is that people cannot come to faith in Jesus Christ if they do not first hear the gospel, in the sense of understanding it, perceiving the sense of what is said. This is actually quite straightforward: How can we expect anybody to believe something that does not make sense to them?

Clearly, the most basic and fundamental ingredient necessary for people to come to faith in Jesus Christ, is for the gospel to truly make sense to them. In the same way traditional religion can have the effect of blunting the understanding, a person's different worldview and broader understanding of the world may result in the gospel not making sense to them. Although understanding the gospel will obviously not necessarily lead to its acceptance, it is nonetheless a prerequisite for believing and accepting the gospel.

On the Areopagus

The matter of understanding can be unpacked even more from what we read in Acts 17. Understanding is not simply to get some conceptual idea of what someone is talking about, ***it requires more***. To really make sense of what is being meant, a certain shared perspective is needed.

Without a shared perspective a person's own background, worldview and so forth can result in a distorted understanding of the meaning of what the other person is trying to convey. A person may be able to give a good conceptual account of what is said in a conversation but that does not mean that it truly makes sense to them. Their own preconceived and deeply ingrained understanding of the world and how all come together (let's say their postmodern worldview) may result in that which they hear not really making sense to them, not fitting into their picture of how everything coherently comes together to make sense. ***The greatest challenge in dialogistics is to find common ground which may serve as the fertile soil from which true understanding can grow.***

Let us continue with Acts 17. During St. Paul's conversations on the Athenian marketplace with those who happened to be there, he came across certain Greek philosophers from the Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy, conversing with them. Interestingly, many scholars are of the opinion that St. Luke in this case portrays St. Paul in similar terms as the well-known

philosopher Socrates, who also engaged people with conversation on the Athenian marketplace many years previously. Eventually his participants in conversation brought St. Paul to the Areopagus, an ancient hill near the market place (not far from the Acropolis), where he had the opportunity to address the community of learned Athenians.

What is quite fascinating about St. Paul's address is the way in which **he creates common ground with his audience**. It may be suggested that he used some of these very same motifs and even wording in his discussions or *dialégomai* on the Athenian marketplace.

St. Paul starts his address by mentioning an altar that he came across while walking around in the city. He then uses this to create common ground in saying that the unknown god to whom the altar was dedicated is "the One whom you worship without knowing" and the very same God that St. Paul is telling them about:

"I perceive that in all things you [Athenians] are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription:

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. …" (Acts 17:22-25)

St. Paul's mentioning that God as the creator of all things "does not dwell in temples" also appealed to a view held by the Stoic philosophers, namely that the supreme god Zeus was not in fact an immortal being but rather a force or power that permeates all things, a power without human characteristics for whom making inanimate images would be counterintuitive.

In his address, St. Paul then tells them more about the true God, eventually accentuating that all those who seek God will also find him as he is not far from each one of us (already working in our lives). Again St. Paul creates common ground in saying that their own poets have also said certain things to this effect:

"[F]or in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising." (Acts 17:28-29)

The Greek poets quoted by St. Paul in this passage are Epimenides and Aratus. In Epimenides's poem, *Cretica*, the character of Minos addresses the Greek god Zeus with the words: "For in you we live and move and have our being" (St. Paul quotes another part of this poem in Titus 1:12). In the opening section of his poem, *Phaenomena* (line 5), Aratus says about Zeus: "For we are

indeed his offspring". Clearly, St. Paul endeavors to present and convey his point in a way that the audience can understand and appreciate. Simply quoting the Hebrew Bible or biblical scholars or rabbi's would have been a futile and fruitless exercise.

At this stage in his address St. Paul had created ***enough common ground*** which allowed him to make his essential point:

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

Even though St. Paul created common ground with his audience, the reference to the resurrection of Jesus was for most of the listeners a step too far. When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked the idea while others said that they will hear him again on this matter. Nonetheless, some were moved and did come to faith in Jesus Christ, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

The essential point to take away from St. Paul's address on the Areopagus is that ***in conversation it is necessary to create enough common ground for the hearers to truly understand what is being said, yes, that it makes sense to them within their frame of reference***. To do this takes effort and requires tools with which to elucidate certain aspects and motifs in such a way that a better understanding is facilitated.

Christian Dialogistics

In the same way St Luke portrays St Paul as a second Socrates, with St. Paul having been acquainted with the work of certain philosophers most likely because of his particular and broad education, philosophical training has also constituted an important part of Christian education since the earliest times. In the Christian discipline of apologetics, which focuses on the defense of the gospel, good philosophical training is always included together with theology in any educational program. In classical apologetics, the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, who stood in the tradition of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, plays an important role.

Dialogistics could be distinguished from classical apologetics on various grounds. Whereas apologetics is primarily concerned with the *defense* and justification of the Christian faith, Christian dialogistics is focused on *explaining* that faith in such a way that it makes sense to our contemporaries, both believers and unbelievers. By "explaining" is not simply meant the explanation of the Gospel; it is much rather the explanation of as to why the Bible and the Christian worldview are trustworthy and sensible and thus, as a consequence, why the Christian faith is worthy of acceptance.

The three most important ways in which classical apologetics differs from dialogistics are: 1) apologetics focuses on the defense of the gospel whereas dialogistics focuses on dialogue and explanation, 2) the primary human faculty involved in apologetics is reason whereas in dialogistics it is understanding, 3) classical apologetics uses Thomism (the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas), whereas Christian dialogistics uses hermeneutical philosophy.

To learn more about Christian dialogistics, read: https://coreideas.co/coreideas-dialogistics/

2. INTERPRETATION

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) Explaining the Gospel to people with a postmodern background, 2) the importance of the word *diermēneuō* (hermeneutics), 3) the role of interpretation in our human engagement with the world, 4) modernism, postmodernism and alternative philosophical frameworks.

"And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded (explained) to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)

When we have conversations with other people about our Christian faith, their background and culture play a cardinal role in determining how to approach and converse with them. In this course the focus is primarily on engaging with people living in a postmodern world, belonging to the associated postmodern culture. A critically important aspect of all such conversations is the ability to explain the gospel in such a way that it makes sense to them. And for this we need to have a good understanding of the **underlying dynamics of such conversations**.

Explaining the Gospel

As a point of departure we can look at the way Jesus explained the messianic prophecies to his disciples. In this instance, it happened later during the same day that Jesus rose from the dead, when his disciples found it difficult to make sense of events. The disciples did not at all expect that Jesus would be crucified and die; instead they expected that as the Messiah he would establish the Kingdom of God and rule as king. To them his death did not make any sense; it went directly against their expectations, against the way in which they understood the Scriptures. When they moreover first heard that the tomb was empty and that he had risen from the dead, they were at a loss as to how to make sense of those events.

The relevant passage is found in Luke 24:13-35 and tells how Jesus joined two of his disciples on their way to Emmaus. He found them in intense conversation and trying to figure out the meaning of these events. Then he said to them:

"'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?' And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded (explained) to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

This passage is quite relevant to any conversation in which people for some reason cannot make sense of the gospel from their particular point of view. In this instance, the Jewish background of the disciples and the way they had until then and up to that time understood and interpreted the prophecies about the Messiah in the Hebrew Bible, made it difficult for them to make sense of current events pertaining to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the same way, ***people***

from a postmodern background may find it difficult to make sense of the gospel when they first hear it or even after they have become familiar with it.

In an effort to gain some insight and learn how to overcome this difficulty, we can take a closer look at the way Jesus interacted with the disciples.

The Word *Diermēneuō*

The Greek word used in this passage to describe the manner in which Jesus explained things to his disciples is *diermēneuō*. In different versions of the Bible this word is translated as "expounded, explained and interpreted".

Strong's Concordance gives the meaning as "to explain thoroughly, by implication to translate". HELPS Word-studies has: "1329 *diermēneúō* (from 1223 */diá*, 'thoroughly across, to the other side,' which intensifies 2059 */hermēneúō*, 'interpret') – properly, *thoroughly* interpret, accurately (fully) explain."

The word *diermēneuō* combines the word *diá*, meaning "thoroughly across, to the other side", which also appears in *dialégomai* (see Lecture 1), with another word, namely *hermēneúō*. Whereas in the case of *dialégomai* the word captures and describes the flow of conversation, "from one side across to the other", the flow of words as part of the discussion, the word *diermēneuō* instead captures an even more fundamental aspect of conversation, namely **the interpretation or exposition of what is meant by participants in conversation**.

The meaning of the word *diermēneuō* as "translate" is quite fascinating. In its basic form, translate concerns expressing the meaning of words (spoken or in a text) in another language. When such translation is done orally, the person is said to interpret (showing how close the words translate and interpret are to each other). Persons from different backgrounds who engage in conversation can be compared with persons speaking different languages, showing how essential the role of interpretation is in such conversations. The speakers/listeners have to constantly interpret and make sense of what the other is saying, trying to penetrate the true meaning of the words, what is really being said.

The key word from which *diermēneuō* (thoroughly explain) is derived is *hermēneúō.* This Greek word is extremely important to our discussion. It originated from the name of the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods, the god of speech, writing, eloquence and learning. The word *hermēneúō* means "to interpret" and gave its name to hermeneutics, the scholarly discipline that deals with interpretation.

Strong's Concordance gives the meaning of *hermēneúō* as a) to translate, explain, (b) to interpret the meaning of. Thayer's Greek Lexicon has a) to explain in words, expound: (Sophocles, Euripides), Xenophon, Plato, others, b) to interpret**,** i.e. to translate what has been spoken or written in a foreign tongue into the vernacular.

Interpretation is central to all our engagement in and with the world. As humans, we interpret everything all the time; we give meaning to the world around us, to things, to events, to people and to texts. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the word "interpret" means: 1) to explain the meaning of (information or actions), 2) to understand (an action, mood, or way of behaving) as having a particular meaning. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary it means "to explain or tell the meaning of**: present in understandable terms**".

"*Interpretation* is the act of explaining, reframing, or otherwise showing your own understanding of something. A person who translates one language into another is called an interpreter because they are explaining what a person is saying to someone who doesn't understand. Interpretation requires you to first understand the piece of music, text, language, or idea, and then give your explanation of it. A computer may produce masses of data, but it will require your interpretation of the data for people to understand it." (Vocabulary.com)

In Lecture 1 we discuss the importance of people understanding or making sense of the gospel in all conversations about our faith. Now it follows that ***the necessary requirement for understanding is interpretation***. To understand we need to interpret and make sense of the meaning of something.

Interpretation

Let us return to the passage in the Gospel of Luke (24:27) in which we read how Jesus joined the two disciples on their way to Emmaus and how he expounded (*diermēneuō*) the messianic prophecies to them. What follows from this passage is that the messianic prophecies could have been understood in at least two ways, namely in the way the disciples was brought up and taught to understood it (which may have differed in details from one person to another) and the way in which Jesus explained it to them in terms of the events pertaining to his life.

Even though the way in which the disciples understood the prophecies was not entirely different from the way Jesus understood and explained them, it is nonetheless true that they, for example, did not understood how the prophecies about the suffering servant fitted into the larger eschatological program. Even at a later point in time as described in the beginning of the Book of Acts, directly before the ascension of Jesus, the disciples thought that Jesus would establish his rule sometime in the immediate future:

"Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority." (Acts 1:6, 7)

To this day Christians are not in agreement as to how prophecies about future events will play out. Although they agree amongst themselves regarding the death and resurrection of Jesus as having fulfilled certain prophecies (as can, for example, be seen in the way St. Peter used texts like Ps. 16:10 in his address on the Day of Pentecost; Acts 2), they do not agree about the way in

which prophecies concerning the Second Coming of Jesus are to be understood. Accordingly, four major schools of interpreting eschatological events (especially the Book of Revelation) have arisen, namely Preterism, Historicism, Idealism and Futurism, each of these with different variants within that school.

An important point that we can take from this is that humans interpret all the time and that the meanings that they ascribe to things and events or what is said in conversation and texts, may differ from person to person.

Not a Matter of Private Interpretation

It had been suggested that we as Christians do not interpret the Bible but have an immediate recognition of its true meaning when we read it, that we understand the "Truth of the Bible" through the inner workings of the Holy Spirit. A biblical passage used to make this point is 2 Peter 1:20, which reads as follows in the King James Version:

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation."

A first impression of the meaning of this verse may indeed seem to be that understanding prophecy is not a matter of "private interpretation". But let us take other Bible translations into consideration to get a broader reading on how the translators understood this passage. The New International Version, for example, translates the verse as follows:

"Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things."

This means that no prophecy was the product of the prophet's own understanding and interpretation of matters. No, the prophets were moved by God through his Spirit and even they did not necessarily grasp the full meaning of their prophecies. Divine prophecy is God-breathed; it is not based on human understanding and interpretation of events.

This also the thrust of what we read in 1 Peter 1:10-12:

"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into." (NKJV)

What is quite interesting is that the Greek word used in 2 Peter 1:20, often in this passage translated as "interpretation", is not *hermēneúō*. It is *epilyseōs*, the noun formed from the verb *epilýō* (that appears in Mark 4:34 and Acts 19:39) and which have been translated in the different Bible versions as "interpretation, understanding, exposition and explain".

HELPS Word-studies: "1955 *epílysis* (from 1909 /*epí*, 'on, fitting' and 3089 /*lýō*, 'to loose') – properly, unloosing (unpacking) in an apt (appropriate) manner… 1956 (*epilýō*) is used throughout antiquity of *solving problems*, i.e. 'getting to the bottom of things,' 'unraveling' the issue." It follows that the meaning of the word as it is used in 2 Peter 1:20 is that biblical prophecy does not have its origin in the prophet trying to figure things out ("unpacking" its meaning) but in divine inspiration.

When we take the larger context into account we do in fact arrive at this meaning of the passage:

"And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private [j]interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit." (NKJV) [Footnote j: Or *origin*]

According to this passage no prophecy originated from any private interpretation, no prophecy was formulated by the "will of man" or in accordance with human insight and wisdom; instead, all biblical prophecy came about through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Even through the Holy Spirit guides us in our understanding of Scripture (1 John 2:27), the full understanding of the prophetic word will only come about "when the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts", that is with the return of Jesus Christ.

More generally, it shows that this passage does not teach that we as Christians do not interpret Scripture. As humans our only way of engaging with Scripture (and the entire world around us, for that matter), is through "interpretation" and that in an incomplete and imperfect manner. St. Paul expresses this idea beautifully:

"**For now we see in a mirror**, dimly, but then face to face. **Now I know in part**, but then I shall know just as I also am known." (1 Cor. 13:12)

As we all interpret the Scriptures, it is to be expected that different opinions as to the meaning of biblical passages would arise. For this reason the Apostle's Creed and later the Nicene Creed was formulated to establish the bounds within which orthodox Christian teaching are to be confined. All interpretations that are in keeping with the orthodox faith keep within these bounds set by these confessions (which are obviously not true for Jewish readings of the biblical text). In the

centuries after the Protestant Reformation when many denominations arose, each has different confessions of faith which narrow the bounds of acceptable interpretation even further.

What is an extremely important take away from this discussion is that ***we as Christians need to be careful before proclaiming that our particular interpretation of the biblical text is the "Truth of the Bible"***. Even though our understanding of passages may adhere to the Truth of the Bible as set out in the Nicene Creed or distill certain "eternal truths" (basic values, sometimes called "absolutes") from the text, it may still differ from interpretations or understandings of the same passages by other Christians. Although all Christians can agree on the meaning of passages concerning the essentials of the faith, they do in practice differ among themselves about the meaning of passages concerning non-essential issues.

The many different confessions of faith within the Christian community necessarily mean that different Christian opinions about the precise meaning of biblical passages are not an exception, they are the rule instead. Christians have different views about eschatology, the creation account, theology and so forth. Bible commentaries provide many and diverse interpretations of biblical passages. This does not mean that the Truth of the Bible is undermined (except by poor or wrong interpretations) but rather shows the richness of the biblical text, the "unsearchable riches of Christ" made manifest (Ep. 3:8). As Christians, we can all follow the well-known motto of the Moravians: ""In Essentials Unity, In Non-essentials Liberty, in all Things Love".

Philosophy and Interpretation

What is not always fully appreciated is that the interpretation of the world and of texts is usually undergirded by some philosophical framework that guides interpretation even though the interpreter could very well be totally unaware that this is the case. When we converse or read a text, we automatically bring our own background with certain preconceived ideas to the conversation or interpretation of the text.

Everybody have a certain belief system, worldview and philosophical framework (even though the particular details may not be worked out in any detail) and live within a certain cultural community or scholarly paradigm. Even though we are not even aware of it, these deeply ingrained perspectives and mold within which we are formed (through our belonging to a certain culture or paradigm) have a decisive influence on our interpretation. ***Even though we can try our very best to penetrate, understand and become fully aware of our own preconceptions, this is an impossible task and the very idea that we can fully take these preconceptions into account is an illusion.***

In dialogistics we are primarily concerned with engaging with people who live in the postmodern age, people who belong to the postmodern culture. The way in which persons who have a postmodernist mindset understand or interpret matters will be influenced and colored by that perspective on life (either cultural or ideological) in the same way the culture of traditional Jews

influences them in their understanding or certain particular Christian viewpoints influence and guide Christians in their understanding of matters. This implies that the different "languages" that we speak would tend to create a barrier between such participants in conversation, a barrier that makes it difficult to grasp the full meaning of what is meant and said by the other person.

The only way to get people from postmodern culture to fully make sense of the gospel is to become acquainted with their "language", in the same way that missionaries traditionally have to learn the language of the people to whom they go with the gospel. What is needed is to gain a good understanding of the manner in which a postmodernist perspective influences the way people understand the world around them and texts like the Bible and how Christians could respond and engage with that.

Modernism versus Postmodernism

Postmodernist philosophy originated as a reaction against modernism, which takes its name from the so-called modern period in European history, a period that lasted from the Enlightenment of the 16th and 17th centuries to the first part of the 20th century. The term modernism refers to a philosophical school of thought associated with the modern period—it is retrospectively so applied. It refers to the Enlightenment ideal of achieving absolute objectivity in scientific disciplines, with about all disciplines having strived to become recognized as "sciences" during that period.

When it comes to hermeneutics the ideal was to have an "objective" view on history and historical texts like the Bible. It was believed that readers can, with due effort and "scientific" discipline, absolve themselves from their own presuppositions arising from their particular backgrounds and culture and moreover gain a complete knowledge of the background of the authors, their psychology and their intensions. In the work of the German reformed theologian, philosopher and biblical scholar, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834), proper interpretation has two sides, one linguistic and one psychological. Schleiermacher's hermeneutics achieved something very much like the status of the official hermeneutical methodology of 19th century classical and biblical scholarship.

In reaction on the modernist ideal, a new consensus developed in the postmodern era, namely that it is humanly speaking impossible to absolve oneself from your own presuppositions, culture and scholarly paradigm which molded you into the person you are. Especially the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) showed that the culture in which a person grows up is deeply ingrained in your very being (he called it *Geworfenheit*, translated as thrownness). Humans are embedded in history and culture, they are culturally conditioned.

The impossibility of obtaining an absolutely objective interpretation of texts resulted in the postmodernist view that the meaning of texts cannot be firmly determined. For the well-known postmodernist French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), "linguistic meaning is determined by the 'play' of differences between words—a play that is 'limitless,' 'infinite,' and

‘indefinite’—and not by an original idea or intention existing prior to and outside language.” (Britannica: deconstruction) Each person with a different background can produce a different interpretation that reflects their own individuality.

In the same way that modernist philosophy filtered down throughout society and became the generally assumed way of thinking in the modern age and even in some circles to this very day (especially scientific circles), postmodernist philosophy also filtered down through all domains and aspects of society, influencing contemporary culture to its very core. This is why we can speak of postmodern culture (which does not necessarily imply adherence to postmodernist ideology).

As interpretation is so central to our human existence, the question is as to what tools we as Christians have available to engage on this level and in this culture with people around us. **The challenge is to find tools** that can enable us to navigate the way between the rocks of modernism and postmodernism, tools that are suited for this cultural milieu. In Christian dialogistics the work of the hermeneutical philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Paul Ricœur (1913-2005) are regarded as providing exactly such useful tools. In his philosophy Gadamer engaged not only with modernism but also with postmodernism (especially with Derrida).

“Hans-Georg Gadamer is the decisive figure in the development of twentieth century hermeneutics—almost certainly eclipsing, in terms of influence and reputation, the other leading figures, including Paul Ricoeur, and also Gianni Vattimo (Vattimo was himself one of Gadamer’s students)… He is undoubtedly, however, one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century.” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Gadamer’s great standing means that his work can also be effectively used in more intellectual and academic conversations. According to Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics, **texts does in fact have particular meanings (in contrast with the postmodernist view of an endless flow of meaning), even though various and different meanings of a text are possible.** What is, however, especially important is that not all interpretations or meanings are equally viable; it is possible to distinguish between sound and poor interpretations.

Another important figure who has produced valuable tools is the English New Testament scholar, Pauline theologian and Anglican bishop, N. T. Wright. Even though he is a theologian, Wright promotes a systematic approach that could even be regarded as a philosophical approach, called critical realism. This approach was first formulated by the scientist turned philosopher, Michael Polanyi (1891-1976). He argued that positivism (closely linked to modernism) supplies an imperfect account of knowing as **no observer is perfectly impartial**.

To learn more about philosophical hermeneutics, read: https://coreideas.co/coreideas-introduction/

3. BUILDING A BRIDGE

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) The importance of having a real interest in and Christlike love for people, 2) the interplay between *dialégomai* and *diermēneuō*, 3) bridging the distance/gap that separates participants in conversation (or reader and author), 4) Gadamer's concept of a fusion of horizons, 5) becoming acquainted with the ancient worldview of the biblical authors as well as other contemporary worldviews (materialism, pantheism, panpsychism and panentheism; on a basic level), 5) finding common ground for conversations with people who belong to the postmodern culture.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

A central tenet of the gospel is not only that Christians have the good news of salvation to share; it also means that they should be truly interested in the person with whom they share the gospel.

So often the main focus of Christians in conversations about faith is to get their message across. And it is indeed of cardinal importance that we should be able to explain the Gospel in a clear and understandable way. But we should always remember that the reason for sharing the Gospel in the first place is that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son for our salvation. That very same love should be manifest in our lives.

This necessarily means that in all conversation about faith we as Christians should demonstrate a real interest in and care for the other participant(s), not merely as "objects" of our missionary endeavor but as persons worthy of God's love and attention. In all conversation this goes to the heart of the matter and really matters. The other person(s) should be respected and listened to with the intension of really understanding what they have to say. ***If we are really interested in people, they might very well also be interested in what we have to say.***

All true conversation includes at least two participants who are really interested in each other and their different views. In this lecture we delve even deeper into the essence of sound hermeneutics (interpretation), with special attention given to different worldviews, especially within the context of our postmodern world. When this interchange with each other is handled with care and wisdom, opportunities will naturally arise for the seed of the Gospel to take root in fertile ground.

True Dialogue, Sound Hermeneutics

In Lectures 1 and 2 we came across two very important Greek words and concepts used in the Bible that stand central to all missional endeavors, namely *dialégomai* (Acts 17:17) and *diermēneuō* (Luke 24:27). In both instances the Greek word *diá*, which means "thoroughly across, to the other side" or "through, from one side across to the other", captures and expresses

the essence of true conversation to the effect that two or more persons are party to a conversation.

The word *diá* is combined with *légō*, which means "to speak, to say" and from which the noun logos ("word") is derived, to form *dialégomai*. It is combined with *hermēneúō* (to interpret) to form *diermēneuō.*

What is of great importance is that whereas the word *dialégomai* (say thoroughly) refers to the exchange of words and concepts during a conversation, the word *diermēneuō* (thoroughly explain) refers to the exchange of meaning, with explaining the meaning of words, concepts and ideas clearly at the very heart of this process. Whereas the word *dialégomai* is primarily concerned with conversation (dialogue), the word *diermēneuō* is primarily concerned with interpretation, something that does not only happen in conversation but also when we engage with texts (or the world in which we live). We can even say that **dialogue (conversation) forms the basis for and provides the model for hermeneutics, for interpretation**. A good way to understand the process of interpreting a text is to use the process of conversation as guidance.

When two persons enter into a conversation, each has their own background, psychology, system of beliefs, worldview and philosophical framework (even though they may be unaware of many of the details pertaining to this) which may be (or not) very different or far removed from each other. ***A good disposition, respect for each other and the desire to know more about the other person lay the groundwork for engaging and meaningful conversations.*** In conversations about our faith, the primary guiding impulse should always be Christian love and a humble attitude. When the conversation commences, the exchange of viewpoints and the explanation of the meaning of things have as a result the **bridging of the distance/gap that separates the participants**.

If common ground is found (as St. Paul managed in his address on the Areopagus; Lecture 1), the basis is laid for explaining things in more detail and eventually arriving at a good understanding of each other's positions (perhaps in subsequent conversations). Under these circumstances a person who belongs to postmodern culture may eventually gain a good understanding of the essence of the gospel, it could really make sense to them (see Lecture 1). If this point is not reached in the conversation, it cannot be expected that anyone would accept the gospel and be saved (except under very unique and exceptional circumstances).

Interpreting the Biblical Text

When this picture is applied to the interpretation of texts, the "conversation" is in effect between the reader (and their background; called the "horizon" of the reader) and the author (and their background; called the "horizon" of the text/author). **In good textual hermeneutics the goal is to bridge the temporal (time) gap between these participants**, a gap that also includes cultural and worldview differences.

Hans-Georg Gadamer says in his monumental work *Truth and Method* (1989, p95): "[W]e define the task of hermeneutics as the BRIDGING of personal or historical distance between minds." For Gadamer the practice of true hermeneutics results in the building of a "bridge" between the two horizons, the horizon of the reader and that of the author, obtaining a true "fusion of horizons". This fusion of horizons allows the reader to make sense of the information in the text, to find common ground with the author in the sense of understanding enough details to make sense of what is said. From this process of sound interpretation, a viable meaning of the text would arise.

Even though the full extent of the horizon of the text/author (their world as it truly was in itself) will forever be beyond our reach (in the same way readers do not have a complete knowledge of themselves and their own prejudices), and **a temporal (time) and historical distance exists between reader and author**, the long tradition that continued from those early times to this day, which includes a great variety of texts concerning many aspects related to the matter at hand, make finding common ground (and the building of a "bridge") possible. Gadamar accentuates that the temporal gap "is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition." (p297).

An essential component of good conversation is respect and the desire to really listen to each other. The same is true regarding texts and especially the biblical text. We need to be open to the voice of the author and the tradition (background, culture) from which they speak, take the text really serious and not simply apply our preconceived notions and familiar views to the text. In fact, both Gadamer and Ricoeur describe this attitude strikingly:

"Hermeneutics in the sphere of philology and the historical sciences is not 'knowledge as domination'—i.e., an appropriation as taking possession; rather, it consists in **subordinating ourselves to the text's claim to dominate our minds**." (Gadamer, *Truth and Method* p310)

"So I exchange the me, master of itself, for **the self, disciple of the text**." (Ricœur, *From Text to Action* p113)

Even though a critical attitude that carefully considers and evaluates the text and its different meanings (in the same way another person's standpoint is considered) underlie all true hermeneutics, this attitude should always be tempered by humility and a sincere desire to understand. Yes, to really understand, before giving in to the impulse to override another viewpoint with one's own preconceived standpoint and position. In fact, the more we are exposed to other views and standpoints and make time to seriously engage with them, the more nuanced and convincing our own position will become over time.

In the same way that in conversation people often does not really listen but simply wait for the opportunity to present their own views, readers often have the habit of immediately applying a known interpretation to a biblical passage. Even though this may not be a conscious or

considered action, it nevertheless and actually means that the reader disrespects the biblical text! In this case the reader does not really take the text serious as text or engage seriously with it in an effort to discover its meaning (without thinking in terms of just one final and correct meaning). The biblical text should be carefully read and analyzed before any interpretation or meaning evolves and unfolds from it. ***A serious encounter with the text may impact our lives in unforeseen and compelling ways.*** And as our knowledge about aspects of the text increases (for example, about the ancient world from which it originated), we may want to reconsider and instead propose more nuanced and even more convincing interpretations.

Taking the biblical text serious as the basis for Christian belief and living also means that it serves as the pre-eminent guiding light for all our hermeneutical exploration of the world. As Christians our engagement with the biblical text and the openness to really listen to and obey the Word of God ***form the basis for all other hermeneutical engagements***, namely how we understand the world around us and engage with non-believers. All our hermeneutical engagements with the world around us are built upon this foundation.

Building hermeneutical bridges should therefore never lead to compromising our Christian beliefs in an effort to find common ground; instead, it simply means finding areas of commonality that allows for fruitful engagements that can result in persons coming to salvation in Jesus Christ. We can never compromise on the "core content" of the Christian message. Although we are to "connect" with others in sharing our faith, as Christians we should at the same time always live "distinct" from the secular world in our daily walk with God.

The Ancient Biblical Worldview

When we engage with the biblical text, the question of worldviews also enters the conversation. In the same way participants in contemporary conversation may hold different worldviews, the biblical authors held to an ancient worldview, often called the "biblical worldview", which was very different from contemporary worldviews. In the same way we need to endeavor to understand the worldviews of participants in conversation, it is necessary to make a real and persistent effort to gain a good understanding of the biblical worldview if we want to enhance our understanding of biblical passages.

Even though Christians may become habitually familiar with elements of the biblical worldview in biblical passages that they have read many times before and thus not even recognize the strangeness thereof anymore, knowledge of the ancient worldview would enhance the understanding and meaning of such passages enormously. It will moreover enable us to give a good account and explanation to others who may find these ancient elements in the Bible troubling, especially when they are misunderstood as undermining the credibility of the biblical worldview and text.

The biblical worldview is in fact radically different from our own Christian worldview(s) despite the fact that Christians have obtained important aspects of our own worldview from the Bible.

The main difference is that everybody living in contemporary Western society is to some extent influenced by the scientific view of the world even though they may not actually be aware that this is the case. In contrast, the Bible was written in a pre-scientific world.

In naïve readings of the Bible, the biblical text is often interpreted as if those ancient people spoke in scientific terms, which is obviously not the case. In contrast, the worldview of the ancients was primarily based on observation, especially the observation of the rotating heavens from which they derived their views about the world and the cosmos.

In this lecture we can only touch very briefly on the ancient worldview. One example will have to suffice. We often find reference in the Bible to the four "corners/quarters of the earth" (Job 37:3; 38:13), also called the four "corners/quarters of heaven" (Jer. 39:36). What need to be observed is that these four "corners" are sometimes assigned to the "earth" and sometimes to the "heavens".

This expression is actually extremely old and appears in the very oldest literary text known to us, namely the Kesh temple hymn from ancient Sumer in Mesopotamia of which the earliest version dates back to about 2500 BC. In this hymn we read about "the four corners of heaven" as well as "a corner of heaven, a corner of earth", with the terms "heaven" and "earth" belonging to the expression "heaven and earth" as the ancients referred to the cosmos. As such, the four corners do not apply to the earth *per se*; they belong to the cosmos, which was primarily understood in terms of the celestial skies.

Accordingly, the ancients did not hold the view that the earth (as we understand it in scientific terms) is square and has four corners. No, they observed the four corners in the celestial skies where they refer to the four celestial points marking the two equinoxes and two solstices, which does in fact form a square in the framework of the zodiac (path of the sun, moon and planets through the celestial skies). When this aspect of the ancient world is correctly understood, it demonstrates that the ancients had a remarkably sophisticated view of the cosmos which does not in any way derogate the biblical narration.

What this example shows is how important good and convincing explanations are to any conversation, but especially conversations about faith. In this regard, we can remind ourselves of the role of explanation in the ministry of Jesus Christ. In Mark 4:24 we read that whereas Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, he "explained all things to his disciples". We have come across the Greek word that is translated as explain, namely *epilýō*, in Lecture 2.

Strong's Concordance gives the meaning as "to solve further, i.e. (figuratively) to explain, decide -- determine, expound".

Thayer's Greek Lexicon has: 1) properly, to unloose, untie (German auflösen) anything knotted or bound or sealed up; (Xenophon, Theocr, Herodian). 2) to clear (a controversy), to decide, settle: Acts 19:39; to explain (what is obscure and hard to understand).

The art of explaining is to untie the knots that prevent true understanding, in which case the matter becomes settled. When we have a good grasp of things we are in a position to explain them to others. In the same way Jesus explained his parables to his disciples by giving them the keys to understand them (this means that etc.), we need to **unlock the mysteries of the world of the Bible for others in conversation**, in this way facilitating not only understanding of those passages but also of belief in the integrity and trustworthiness of the Bible.

Modernist versus Postmodernist Hermeneutics

After discussing the basis for sound hermeneutics, it is time to also take a look at the hermeneutics associated with modernism and postmodernism (see Lecture 2). A good comprehension of this historical background will unlock the keys to effective conversations with people belonging to postmodern culture and hopefully bringing them to belief in Jesus Christ.

Our discussion now returns to modernism and postmodernism. These two overarching philosophical frameworks had/have a profound effect on scholars and people from all walks of life influenced by its persuasive sway, on their worldviews, paradigmatic commitments and interpretation of texts. All aspects related to effective conversations with people centers on these basic philosophies, they perpetuate all dimensions of the belief systems and worldviews that people in the postmodern society hold.

In the modernist framework, the overarching goal of all disciplines was to obtain an objective view on the world, a view that is truly "scientific". In biblical studies, this scientific approach to the study of the Bible meant that all phenomena that cannot be scientifically explained were discarded as the illusions of the primitive mind. A good example is found in Abraham Keunen's book *Prophets and Prophecy in Israel* (1875):

"As soon as we derive a separate part of Israel's religious life directly from God, and allow the supernatural or immediate revelation to intervene in even one single point, so long also our view of the whole continues to be incorrect... It is the supposition of a natural development alone which accounts for all the phenomena."

In this approach scholars believed that they had a God-eye or objective view on the ancient world, that as scientists they look back (down) on a pre-scientific world full of superstition and irrational belief. Once only materialist causes are presupposed, the entire supernatural and divinely-inspired character of the Bible as the Word of God is denied. In this so-called scientific hermeneutics the text of the Bible is approached with suspicion, the authors of the biblical text are regarded as having manipulated facts to suit their own purposes, their own agendas and disguised intensions (in actual fact reflecting the disguised intensions of these scholars themselves which they project onto the text).

As Eta Linnemann, who was herself a scholar in this tradition (professor at Marburg, East Germany) before renouncing her previous views, writes in her book *Historical Criticism of the Bible, Methodology or Ideology* (1990): "What the [biblical] text clearly states can, by no means, be true" (in the biblical criticism view; page 87). This historical-critical approach has continued and lived on in the form of biblical criticism.

It is immediately clear that this approach does not adhere to the basic requirements for sound hermeneutics; in fact, it simply reflects the bias and prejudices of the critical biblical scholars. We can compare this with someone with whom you are in conversation, who are skeptical about everything you say, who do not think much of your views, who ascribes all sorts of agendas to you, who speaks all the time and tries to force their own view on you. Paul Ricœur calls this approach the "hermeneutics of suspicion", which he contrasts with the hermeneutics of faith (or hermeneutics of trust). Gadamer also states that these two different approaches to texts, namely the hermeneutics of suspicion and the hermeneutics of faith, are complimentary to each other (i.e. one can use either the one or the other).

In the postmodernist reaction against modernism, the idea of obtaining one scientific and objective meaning of a text is rejected. But what is proposed instead is even more radical.

In postmodernism (called post-structuralism and deconstructionism in scholarly circles), the main point of departure is a rejection of the idea that the author plays any role in the meaning(s) of texts. As such, the voice of the author and tradition from which they originate, also called the "logo-centric" view of texts, are denied. In *The Death of the Author* (1967), the philosopher Roland Barthes argues that the author is not the source of meaning of a given text. Instead, he announces the "birth of the reader" since, in his view, the reader is the source of the proliferation of meanings of the text. In postmodernism the author is "dead" and the view of the "reader" (and their preoccupations) dominates.

What postmodernism shares with modernism is a total disregard for the voices of the authors of the ancient texts and especially the biblical text. Insofar as this denies those authors any legitimacy, the entire idea of conversation as the basis for hermeneutics (interpretation) is undermined and rejected. Actually, it is not only that the "logos" (word) of the biblical authors are silenced; it is also that the Logos speaking through the divinely inspired Scriptures is silenced. In both these philosophies, the Bible is not regarded as the Word of God; instead it has very little to teach us.

Worldviews in a Postmodern World

We can now consider the impact of these philosophies on the postmodern world and more particularly on the worldviews hold by people in this postmodern age. A good grasp of these matters may provide important insights as to how such conversations are to be conducted.

The worldview that is typically associated with modernist and secularist thought is materialism. According to this view, only the material world of our senses, the world that we encounter in science, exists. The biblical view of a spiritual realm existing beyond this material world and of an afterlife is thus rejected.

What is, however, quite interesting is the influence of postmodernism on the views of contemporary people holding such a worldview. Some people who to some extent hold on to the materialist worldview are at the same time quite open to strange ideas like extraterrestrials having visited planet earth in the past (this view basically replaces that of the fallen angels in the Bible). Even though this view can be consistent with materialism, it often happens that it also opens the door for an interest in aspects pertaining to non-materialism, for example, near death experiences (NDE's). Discovering common ground with people holding such views may lead to conversations which bring the participants much closer to each other's views than would otherwise be the case.

As for postmodernism, the worldviews that typically flourish in this milieu are those associated with other religions, especially pantheism (underlying Hinduism), panentheism (underlying Buddhism but also found in Hinduism) and panpsychism. Whereas pantheism identify divinity with the universe, claiming that "all is god", panentheism ("pan-en-theos" means "all-in-God") makes a distinction between God and the universe, claiming that God and the world are inter-related, with God being in the world and the world being in God (closely linked with mysticism). Panpsychism, derived from "pan" ("all") and "psyche" ("soul" or "mind"), or universal consciousness, is the view that all things have a mind or a mind-like quality. It features in branches of ancient Greek philosophy, paganism and Buddhism. Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998), who wrote *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), celebrates the pluralism of the many gods of paganism in contrast with the one God of Judeo-Christianity.

What is very significant about postmodernism is that it rejects all "meta narratives", that is, all as found in science or Christianity. The result is that for them a coherent view of the world is unimportant. The implication is that in the postmodern age people often hold views that are not inherently coherent and sensible. A person may have a statue of Buddha on their porch but that does mean that they adhere to the Buddhist religion. This means that in conversations with such people, common ground may be found in surprising places. **The challenge is to discover pockets of common ground from where the conversation can be continued**.

A practical hint as to how common ground can be created after a successful first conversation is that each of the participants share, for example, YouTube videos that they find really interesting with each other in the periods between consecutive conversations. Whereas the first postings will perhaps be of little interest to the other participant, the process of coming to know each other and each other's position better will eventually lead to more relevant postings that can serve as the basis for more in-depth and productive conversations.

An important hindrance to effective conversation in our postmodern age concerns the rejection of the "logo-centric view" found in postmodern philosophy. As a consequence people tend to have a negative attitude towards the spoken word, especially when it comes from somebody with a different point of view. They prefer "safe spaces" where they do not need to listen to people holding other and different views. Having a conversation with such people may be quite difficult.

In these circumstances common ground may need to be created on other grounds, for example social grounds, as envisioned by the Fresh Expressions Movement that focuses on forming "connections". But even in this regard, the role of technology in the postmodern culture works against social interaction, with young people spending their time playing games and developing antisocial behavior.

A common social space could serve as an effective basis for possible conversation that would otherwise be impossible. **Building trust precede the possibility of having open and honest discussions.** In all of these endeavors the practice of Christian love may open doors that will otherwise be closed as someone so aptly said: "The answer is deeds or acts of love and mercy".

One of the most significant results or outcomes of the postmodern age is a nihilistic mindset, with people believing that life is without intrinsic value, meaning or purpose. More and more people are without hope and the perceived meaninglessness of life overwhelms them. It is in this context that deeds of love and mercy can make a great difference to people's lives and even lead them to Christ. Let us as Christians live up to this great motto.

Even though the implications that postmodernism has for conversations about faith can be unpacked further (and in much more detail), this will have to do.

To learn more about the ancient worldview, read: https://coreideas.co/ancient-world-introduction/

4. SCIENCE AND CREATION

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) An expose of four different Christian views on creation, 2) the relationship between the different Christian views on creation and contemporary science, 3) prospects of the different Christian views finding common ground in conversations about faith.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen.1:1)

In all conversations about faith the particular Christian viewpoint adopted in the conversation could play a decisive role in determining whether such conversations are fruitful. As not all Christian positions will lead to the participants finding common ground between them for the conversation to carry on and produce positive results, it is important to look more carefully into this aspect of conversations.

In this lecture different Christian interpretations and positions on the creation account in Genesis 1-2 are discussed. On the one hand it serves as a practical example of Christians having different interpretations of biblical passages (and familiarize the student with these positions) but on the other it shows to what extent different positions could be conductive to (and provide favorable conditions for) or unfavorable to finding common ground in conversations with persons from different backgrounds. The lecture also touches on the role of science and the play between science and faith in conversations about faith.

The Creation Account: The Different Viewpoints

In the same way people with whom we as Christians engage in conversation can hold different worldviews (some of which were discussed in the previous lecture) which require tailor made strategies for productive conversations, Christians also hold different views about non-essential matters that have to be taken into consideration. And in the same way the different worldviews of people require different strategies, the details and nuances of particular Christian viewpoints also have an influence on the suitability of our approaches, especially within the framework of our postmodern age and culture.

As the **single most important characteristic of effective conversations between people with different backgrounds are finding common ground between them**, the "building of a bridge" between them (Lecture 3), the main question to ask is what effect the various and different Christian viewpoints would have on this process. What is moreover quite interesting is the fact that any Christian's background and fields of interest play a significant role in the viewpoints they hold, implying that these interests can play as much a role as the particular positions in the process of finding common ground.

An important theme that is set to become the focus of most conversations at some point or another is creation. In Christian belief, God is the creator of all things as we read so beautifully expressed in the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90:

"Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You [b]had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God."
[Footnote b: Lit. *gave birth to*] (NKJV; Ps. 90:2)

Even though Christians believe that God in the beginning of time created the cosmos out of nothing (ex nihilo), different interpretations of the creation account(s) given in Genesis 1 and 2 have developed through the ages. Although many different views exist, four broad streams of interpreting these passages can be distinguished, namely 1) young-earth creationism, 2) old-earth creationism, 3) the Sumerian hypothesis and 4) the polemical text view. This overview simply provides a short introduction to these views; it does not include any critique of the soundness of these interpretations.

- **Young-Earth Creationism**

In this view the seven days of creation are regarded as solar days. It is based on the repeated mention of the expression, "So the evening and the morning were the first [second etc.] day" (used for all six creation days), which could be read as saying that each day of creation involved "an evening and a morning". This means that God created the cosmos about 6 000 to 10 000 years ago.

According to the creation account, God created humans on the sixth day of creation: "So God created man [*adam*] in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." (Gen. 1:27) In this view this is understood as a reference to the creation of Adam and Eve as described in more detail in Genesis 2.

As for Adam, he was the very first human whom God created from the dust of the earth: "And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." (Gen. 2:7) God moreover made Eve from Adam's rib, taken from him while he was asleep (Gen. 2:21-23). From Adam and Eve all humans were then descended.

A different variation of this view appears in the Scofield Reference Bible, according to which the creation described in Genesis 1 was actually a recreation that came about after an earlier creation was previously destroyed after the fall of Lucifer. The words "The earth was without form, and void…" (Gen. 1:2) that follow directly after "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1) are interpreted as meaning that the earth "became" without form and void sometime after it was first created.

The words in Jeremiah 4 are applied to this period in the history of the earth:

"I beheld the earth, and indeed *it was* without form, and void;
And the heavens, they *had* no light.
I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled,
And all the hills moved back and forth.
I beheld, and indeed *there was* no man,
And all the birds of the heavens had fled.
I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land *was* a wilderness,
And all its cities were broken down
At the presence of the LORD,
By His fierce anger." (Jer. 4:23-26)

The Scofield view allows for the existence of pre-Adamites, people who belonged to the earlier civilization.

Young-earth creationism is popular among communities of traditional Christians who strive to follow a strictly literal interpretation of the Bible. As some of the other views also follow a literal interpretation (but not to this extent), it is better to call this a "simple interpretation" of the biblical text. Answers in Genesis and Creation Ministries International are the main organizations promoting young-earth creationism.

- **Old-Earth Creationism**

In this view the days of creation are regarded as long periods of time. The reason for coming to this conclusion is that the sun, moon and stars were made on the fourth day of creation, which implies that solar days only came into being on this day of creation. We actually read that this was indeed the case:

"Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for [solar] days and years" (Gen. 1:14).

The proponents of this view believe that the expression "an evening and a morning" should in the light of this apparent contradiction rather be taken in symbolic terms. If the days of creation are not solar days but long periods of time the cosmos can actually be billions of years old.

Some of these interpreters see a close correspondence between the creation account that is found in Genesis 1 and the dominant scientific view of our times, namely that the cosmos came into being through the Big Bang. They associate God's words "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3) with the Big Bang and find detailed correspondences between the biblical account and the scientific view pertaining to the history of the cosmos and the different features and life forms that characterize each subsequent period.

In this interpretation, the Hebrew word *adam* used in Genesis 1:27 is taken to mean "human being". Strong's Concordance does in fact give the meaning of the word as follows: "ruddy i.e. A human being (an individual or the species, mankind, etc.)". This is why most Bible versions also translate *adam* in this case with "man, mankind, human beings" in accordance with *adam* having included both males and females (see Gen. 5:2).

The creation of *adam* on the sixth day of creation, when God created humans as "male and female", thus refers to the first appearance of Homo sapiens about 200 000 years ago. The first human being or *adam* is then identified with Adam, the progenitor of the entire human race. As "parents" of the human race, Adam and Eve refer to the Y-chromosomal Adam and mitochondrial Eve from whom all humans have been descended.

The well-known Christian apologist William Lane Craig, in his book *In Quest of the Historical Adam: A Biblical and Scientific Exploration* (2021), argues that Adam and Eve, the progenitors of the human race, should be identified with individuals who belonged to the species Homo heidelbergensis and who lived about 500 000 years ago.

Old-earth creationism is popular among Christian scientists and can be called a "scientific interpretation" of the biblical text. Reasons to Believe promotes this view.

- **The Sumerian Hypothesis**

The Sumerian Hypothesis assumes that the primeval history (Gen. 1-11) goes back to source material that the Abrahamic family brought from Ur in Sumer to Canaan. Having been handed down among Abraham's Semitic ancestors who lived in the plain of Shinar (Sumer), the biblical text preserves many of the same motifs and themes also found in Sumerian tradition. As such the biblical and Sumerian traditions, having had their origin in the same events and motifs, later on existed in parallel in Mesopotamia as well as among the patriarchs and then the Israelites.

In this view the creation account served as a divine model for human cult practice in accordance with the fact that such an approach—to write a creation narrative that serves as the model for cult practice—is found all across the ancient Middle East. The seven days of creation thus served as a divine model (and belong to a divine order greater than that of our earthy existence) for putting in place the week consisting of seven solar days when it was first implemented among the Israelites, with the seventh day a day of rest (the Sabbath). We read:

"And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made." (Gen. 2:2-3)

As for the creation narrative, some elements of this description are typical of the ancient Sumerian understanding of things. The opening words that God created "heaven and earth" use the typical Sumerian expression for the cosmos. The primeval "deep" agrees with the Sumerian concept of the primeval waters. The idea of the creation of "heaven and earth" from the primeval waters was an old Sumerian one. And so is the idea of the first light being lit from the deep.

The ancient view about the cosmos coming forth from the primeval waters is actually an old metaphor based on childbirth, with babies being "born from water" (a point also discussed in John 3:5). We find that this is exactly how the process of creation is described in the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90:2: "You had formed (literally: gave birth to) the earth and the world".

As for Adam, he has a clear counterpart in a similar figure from Sumerian tradition, namely Adapa. Like their names, their stories also have much in common, implying that the stories of Adam and Adapa go back to the same origin. The image of Adam being created from the soil was furthermore an old Sumerian metaphor (as it was a Hebrew metaphor; Is. 64:8; Jer. 18) and the story of Eve having been made from Adam's rib has a close parallel in an old Sumerian story about Ninti, "lady rib". These motifs should thus not be taken literally.

In the case of Adapa, he was not the first human ever to have lived but rather the first known human, the one who brought civilization to southern Mesopotamia. This implies that Adam may also not have been the first human, especially since we read about people living outside the garden who had the intension of killing Adam's son, Cain (Gen. 4:14). It seems that the biblical author simply assumed the existence of such people.

Interpreting Genesis 1-3 in keeping with ancient Sumerian (Middle Eastern) tradition does not exclude the possibility that the text can also be read consistent with science given its divine inspiration. As such, the days of creation could very well be long periods of time, with humans (*adam*) having been made on the sixth day of creation a few hundred thousand years ago. But given the ancient Middle Eastern background of the biblical story, the personal name Adam should instead be viewed as belonging to someone who lived about six thousand years ago, the first known person with whom the supreme God had a relationship. Even though Adam and Eve were then not literally the progenitors of the entire human race, they may still be regarded as such within the framework of biblical history, as the archetypal first human pair.

The Sumerian Hypothesis is promoted by COREIdeas (coreideas.co).

- **The Polemical View**

According to this view the creation account reflects the concerns and issues of the time when it was written, which scholars from the biblical criticism tradition nowadays place in the period

after the Babylonian exile (post-exilic). It shows some agreement with other ancient Middle Eastern creation stories, for example, in using the motif of the cosmos coming forth from the primeval waters (Gen. 1:2, 6-10). God's acts of creation brought order to chaos, changing the original world that was without form and void and with darkness upon the face of the deep (Gen. 1:2) into a place that humans could inhabit.

Genesis 1 is not a "true and correct" account of the origin of the world. In fact, these interpreters do not see any contradiction between the creation account and the scientific view about the origin of the universe—these apply to different times, to different situations. Critical scholars hold that even if the author wanted to say something about the real origin of the world, his pre-scientific worldview would have made it impossible for him to say anything useful to us about it. We should therefore not use the text as a guide to the true origins of the universe; we should simply regard it as a religious text that came into existence in a particular environment.

The creation account of Genesis 1 is then an ancient polemical text in which the Hebrew author argued his case against those worshipping other gods. The reason why the sun, moon and stars were made only on the fourth day of creation is that the author wanted to show that these celestial bodies, which some surrounding nations venerated as important gods, could not be compared with the great creator God of the Hebrews who brought all things into existence. God is so powerful that He can create light and let the plants grow even without the presence of the sun.

This interpretation is compatible with various different views about Adam and Eve. Scholars from the biblical criticism school usually take the story of Adam and Eve as a metaphorical tale or a myth, without any basis in history. It is a "kind of traditional story that cultures use to understand themselves—stories that unpack the common experience of humanity".

The polemical view has traditionally been popular among theologians. Some Christian scientists, like those from BioLogos, whilst holding that the cosmos is billions of years old, nonetheless do not agree with the scientific view (see above) but rather prefer this view.

Creation and Science

In conversations about creation, science usually forms part of the discussion.

What is science? According to the Oxford Dictionary, science is "the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation, experimentation, and the testing of theories against the evidence obtained."

As scientists study our world in a systematic manner, Christians expect that it would reveal divine design and purpose in nature and the cosmos. And this is indeed found to be the case as can be seen in the existence of the "laws of nature" or the "fine-tuned" nature of the cosmos. The

universe's fine-tuning for the existence of life is for example dependant on certain cosmic constants like the gravitational force constant, the electromagnetic force constant, the strong nuclear force constant, the weak nuclear force constant and the cosmological constant.

The problem is, however, that the generally accepted scientific view about the origins of the cosmos and life on earth are in some instances in conflict with the interpretation of the biblical creation narrative. Young-earth creationism is the clearest example, as adherents to this view believe that God created the cosmos about 6 000 to 10 000 years ago whereas the age of the cosmos is currently taken to be 18.7 billion years.

In contrast, old-earth creationism does accept the scientific age of the cosmos but these interpreters usually do not accept the Neo-Darwinian theory of evolution. The main reason is that Neo-Darwinism assumes the principle of random genetic variation (generated by mutation), which goes against the view that the cosmos reflects God's design and purpose. Design and purpose stand in direct contrast with the randomness at the heart of Neo-Darwinian evolution. Scholars from the Discovery Institute argue that "intelligent design" can be discerned at various stages of the biological development of the different species, for example, during the Cambrian Explosion about 540 million years ago. In their view, intelligent design shows that the species were actually created and did not evolve by means of Neo-Darwinian evolution.

Some Christian scientists like those from BioLogos accept that God worked though Neo-Darwinian evolution to bring the different species into being. They argue that so-called "broken genes" that appear in different species show that evolution did in fact happen. But even if some form of theistic evolution did happen, the question remains as to whether Neo-Darwinian evolution is the correct theoretical model to describe this process.

The main problem is that the strong scholarly attachment among biologists to Neo-Darwinian evolution could, at least in part, be ascribed to the theory being consistent with the secular worldview and thus serves as an alternative to the biblical worldview. It is nonetheless also true that quantum biology has made great progress in recent years in explaining more complicated matters and a quantum theory of evolution can be expected sometime in the future. This would be very significant as quantum physics implies the kind of order consistent with design and divine purpose.

Creation in Conversations

Creation is a topic that can be expected to become part of most discussions about faith, especially in a postmodernist milieu where most people in the Western world are scientifically informed and accept science as correct. What is immediately clear is that not all the Christian viewpoints about creation are conductive for such conversations. The larger the difference between the Christian viewpoint and the scientific view, the greater is the chance that the conversation will lead nowhere and be ended abruptly.

This does not necessarily mean that someone holding, for example, to the young-earth creationist view would not be able to find some common ground with people from a postmodernist background. Certain participants in conversation may not regard the conflict between this view and science as an important issue. But in most instances the divide separating the view of these Christians from those that they might encounter in Western contexts, will simply be too great to find common ground between them. Even though such people would easily be able to understand the basic tenets of this Christian point of view, it would just not make sense to them given their familiarity with and acceptance of the scientific perspective. In general, the young-earth creationist view is more compatible to the Jerusalem and Antioch contexts (see Lecture 1), when conducting evangelism or missionary work.

As the other Christian views about creation, namely old-earth creationism, the Sumerian Hypothesis as well as the polemical view accepts the current scientific view, albeit with certain reservations, they could all be effectively employed to find common ground in conversations with people from a postmodern background and culture.

As these different views emphasize different perspectives, they may be conductive to the participants finding common ground based on areas of common interest like science, the ancient world from which the Bible came or theological issues and concerns. As theologians in practice often have a blind spot with regard to the interest and concerns of common people, strange as it may sound, the polemical view may be the least conductive to effective conversation among these views.

An interesting question is whether someone holding to the young-earth creationism view can use any of the other views simply for the purpose of finding common ground and to overcome this particular obstacle to effective conversation. As long as this happens in an honest and open way, with the person stating that they hold that view but that other Christians hold different views, this may provide a way out.

To learn more about the different Christian views about creation, read:

https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2013/03/does-creation-narrative-of-genesis-1.html

5. THE NATURE OF REALITY

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) The biblical worldview, 2) metaphysics and the nature of reality, 3) the limits of science and 3) the use of questions in conversations about faith.

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36)

What is the most basic ingredient of conversations? Even though it may be quite obvious, it is at the same time possible to lose sight of the fact that no conversation is possible without a subject matter. The knowledge about and the skill with which the subject matter is handled in a conversation determines whether a positive outcome can be obtained. If we compare a conversation with a game of football, the subject matter would be the football. And to play a winning game the players should not only display the necessary skills and essential techniques, they should above all constantly keep their eye on the ball.

When conversations about faith are conducted, Christians often assume that the subject matter needs to be the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But this is not correct. Even though our goal is to share the Gospel, we have already seen that the path towards reaching this objective involves first of all laying the groundwork, building a bridge and finding common ground. Christians often fall with the door in the house, they get to the point in their fervent desire to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ but it is often more prudent to be patient and first establish some common ground. And finding common ground necessarily concerns some subject matter.

The most important underlying issues pertaining to the subject matter in all conversations about faith concern the nature of reality and truth. In fact, general misunderstandings about the nature of reality and truth can perhaps be identified as the most important reasons why people find it difficult to believe the Gospel in the postmodern world. For example, those who believe that empirical facts are the only measure of reality usually think that only the material world exists (and thus that spirits and God do not exist) whereas those who believe that everyone has their own truth think that all religions are equally valid (they doubt Christianity's claim to be the unique revelation of God's salvation).

Whereas the subject of reality underlies and stands central to all conversations concerned with and related to the participants' worldviews, the nature of truth is important for discussions about the trustworthiness of the biblical narrative. In this lecture the focus is on the nature of reality; the next lecture focuses on the nature of truth. Even though the words "reality" and "truth" may never explicitly enter the conversation, a good understanding of the nature of these concepts constitutes an essential and necessary tool to demonstrate the correctness of the biblical worldview and the truth of the biblical narrative.

What is also significant is the role of questions in coming to know the view of the other participant(s) and effectively steering the conversation and bring it to fruition.

The Kingdom of Heaven

A central biblical and Christian tenet is that the material world is not all that exists. No, reality is much more extensive than the material world and includes a spiritual dimension, a realm in which the Kingdom of God, also called the Kingdom of Heaven, is located. Even though this realm cannot be seen, Christians believe that it truly and really exists.

Many biblical passages refer to this realm and Jesus himself has promised:

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not *so,* I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." (John 14:1-4)

St. Paul often refers to this heavenly abode:

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself." (Philippians 3:20-21)

And St. Peter writes that this heavenly inheritance will be revealed "in the last of time":

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible (imperishable) and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Peter 1:3-5)

It is important to note that the spiritual world includes a much larger realm than the Kingdom of Heaven; it also includes the Kingdom of Satan (Matthew 12:26, Luke 11:18). In the same way God is served by angelic beings in his kingdom, Satan is served by fallen angelic beings as St. Paul writes:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places.*" (Ephesians 6:12)

What we thus find is that in the biblical understanding of reality, the material world is complimented by an invisible spiritual world in which the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan exist. Even though many other features about these two contrasting worlds can be added, these introductory remarks are sufficient for the present discussion.

Where is Heaven located?

A question that can be asked at this point is as to where exactly the Kingdom of Heaven has its locus. Although Christians usually prefer to simply affirm the existence of this celestial abode somewhere beyond the material realm, we may gain some valuable insights if we know where the term Kingdom of Heaven originated and more specifically what is meant by "heaven".

According to Strong's Concordance the Greek word *ouranos*, translated as "heaven", means (a) the visible heavens: the atmosphere, the sky, the starry heavens, (b) the spiritual heavens.

A differentiation is made between the visible heavens and the invisible or spiritual "heavens". But why is the term "heavens" connected with this invisible realm and how did it happen that the concept of "spiritual heavens" came into being? The answer to this question follows from the ancient biblical worldview that has been introduced in Lecture 3.

As we have already seen, the ancients referred to the universe by the expression "heaven and earth", a term that describes the relation between the earthly observer and the starry heavens. What is quite intriguing in this regard is that the rotation of the earth creates the impression that the northern celestial skies have the form of a massive dome, often **imagined as a cosmic mountain**. What is more is that this celestial or cosmic mountain was regarded as the great mountain where God has his abode. This does not mean that they believed that the northern celestial polar region is in fact the Mountain of God; rather, it is an image of the invisible Mountain of God. The visible heavens thus served as a guide pointing to the greater reality that exists beyond in the spiritual heavens. In contrast to the cosmic mountain that is located "above" the earth, the southern skies lay beyond or "below" the earth.

It is important to note that this layout or design observed in the celestial skies did not serve as some kind of theory about what the cosmos "really" looks like (as we find in science) but rather as a mere visible manifestation, like a picture projected on a screen, of that invisible realm forever beyond and out of our sensible reach. This means that the three-tiered conception of the universe (heaven, earth and netherworld) that is found in the Bible does not mean that the ancients held a primitive and unreliable view about the cosmos. Instead, it shows that they had a remarkably sophisticated view which is as valid today as it was at that time.

A beautiful biblical passage in which this celestial mountain features is found in the prophet Isaiah:

"For you have said in your heart:
'I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;

I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:13-14)

What we see in this description is that the "mount of the congregation", where the divine council gathers around God's throne, is located above the "stars of God" on the "farthest sides of the north". The divine council is also mentioned and described in other biblical passages like Psalm 82:1, Psalm 89:5-7, Job 1:6, 2:1 and 1 Kings 22:19.

Metaphysics: The Nature of Reality

All views about the nature of reality are described by the term "metaphysics".

What is metaphysics then in simple terms?

Glossary Definition: "Derived from the Greek *meta ta physika* ('after the things of nature'); referring to an idea, doctrine, or posited reality outside of human sense perception. In modern philosophical terminology, metaphysics refers to the studies of what cannot be reached through objective studies of material reality."

Metaphysics is concerned with the nature of reality, with the question as to what the world is really and truly like in reality. On the one hand the nature of reality concerns the material world that we encounter with our five human senses and in scientific experiments. On the other hand it concerns the possibility that the real world can include aspects or dimensions that are not accessible to the human senses or scientific instruments. The philosophical and belief systems that people hold determine their metaphysical view of the world.

As for the Christian worldview or the Christian metaphysical view, we have already seen in the previous paragraphs that it asserts that reality includes both the material and the spiritual worlds, both mortal and immortal modes of existence, both the body and the soul or spirit. Interestingly, this view is in fact not restricted to or particular to Christians. All across the ancient world people once believed in the existence of the spiritual or invisible world. It even makes its appearance in the writings of the great Greek philosopher Plato (died in 348 BC).

Plato distinguished between the visible world in which the human body exists and an invisible realm in which the soul exists. In Plato's view, the invisible realm is "the realm of the absolute, constant and invariable" whereas the visible world is always changing. He got this idea from Parmenides of Elea (died c. 450 BC) who also argued for two such worlds, namely one that is the "real" world which is eternal, indivisible, motionless and changeless and the other which is the world of our senses, which is a world of "appearances". Insofar as the soul is concerned, Plato writes in his *Phaedo*: "Since the soul is invisible, it belongs to the eternal invisible world... When it [the soul] investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and changeless; and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from

interference, consorts with it". Even though the invisible realm is inaccessible to our senses, it can be accessed through our intellectual intuition.

After the Enlightenment, however, a major change in thinking occurred. Modern man doubted everything that was handed down from the ancients and required proof before believing anything to be true. As a consequence the idea of the spiritual world and the existence of the soul were rejected since science was not able to provide any proof of their existence. Expressing this sentiment, the American philosopher Wilfred Sellers (1912-89) famously proclaimed that "science is the measure of all things". Only that which science can establish to be fact can be believed.

In this period of history the modernist mindset (see Lecture 2) produced a metaphysical view that is called scientism (not to be confused with Scientology). As the term scientism suggests this view takes science as its guide but go one step further than what is done in science; it assumes that only that which is found in scientific experiment really exists. In their view, all the rest are unsupported by evidence and based on primitive ideas. They typically believe that nothing exists except matter, which is why their worldview is called materialism.

What is emphasized by atheists holding this view is the dissonance between the material world explored by empirical science and belief. In his book, *A Manuel for Creating Atheists*, the philosopher Peter Boghossian focuses exactly on this disparity and shows how the Platonic method of dialogue (quite similar to dialogistics) can be used to get people to become atheists. We read on the back cover:

"Peter Boghossian draws on the tools he has developed and used for more than twenty years as a philosopher and educator to teach how to engage the faithful in conversations that will help them value critical thinking, cast doubt on their religious beliefs, mistrust their faith, abandon superstition, and ultimately embrace reason and rationality."

In reaction to this modernist approach, postmodernists are open to religious ideas and often accept the existence of spirits. In the postmodern age people may not be religious but they are quite often interested in spirituality and belief systems that assume that reality is larger than the material world. In this regard they carefully consider for example stories about near-death experiences (NDE's) and insights of shamans and others who claim to have access to the spiritual realm to try and make sense of what true reality is like. Such people are usually also open to the use of mushrooms and other hallucinogenic products to induce otherworldly experiences and to experience firsthand what that world is like.

The question is as to whether it is in practice possible to find common ground with people holding these worldviews that have a different view of reality than the Christian view. Before exploring this there is another aspect of science that needs to be brought into the discussion.

The Limits of Science

When we consider science as a tool to be used to inquire into the nature of reality it is important to understand **the nature of science** itself. The most important feature of all scientific enterprise is that it is empirical, i.e. based on observation and experience, which is why we speak of "empirical science".

What is however not always appreciated is that ***science is effectively restricted to that which can be observed by the human senses and by extension, by scientific instruments***. Mere empirical means can never access anything other than the material world of matter. But if science cannot observe anything but the empirically accessible world of matter, how can it be asserted that nothing else exists?

Scientists have actually discovered aspects of reality that does not consist of matter and are not part of the material world! In fact, the entire quantum realm is beyond the possibility of empirical access; all our knowledge about the quantum realm comes from indirect observations (secondary observations) and the mathematical equations used to describe that behavior.

During the early 20th century modernist philosophy (modernism) culminated in a philosophy of science called logical positivism, which argued that only that which can be observed constitutes knowledge. These philosophers formulated a principle called the verification principle according to which a statement is meaningful only if it is either empirically verifiable or a truth of logic. But then a problem arose which resulted in this entire approach eventually having been discarded, namely that quantum particles in the quantum state are not empirically verifiable! Once quantum particles have been measured they are no longer in the quantum state and their quantum behavior is lost; they have been reduced to matter.

Quantum particles are actually not the only aspect of our world that lies beyond the possibility of empirical access. The Big Bang, for example, through which the cosmos is assumed to have come into being (out of nothing) and currently the most widely accepted model for the origins of the cosmos in the physics community, is also forever beyond the possibility of empirical access. Scientists can never empirically observe the Big Bang. The reason why scientists accept the Big Bang Theory as an accurate description of what happened is that this model provides the best explanation for the data that is empirically observed, especially the redshift phenomena and the cosmic microwave background radiation. This data constitutes indirect evidence for the Big Bang Theory.

The empirical problem shows that the material world is definitely not all that exists. This can, however, not be taken as evidence for the existence of the spiritual world or the biblical worldview. For this more detailed and positive arguments need to be made (to be discussed in the advanced courses in dialogistics). In this regard Christians can use the Big Bang (serving as a good comparison with the biblical view that God created the universe out of nothing) as analogy for God having made the world. In the same way that scientists cannot directly observe the Big

Bang but are forced to rely upon indirect evidence, Christians believe that God can also not be observed empirically but his works are observable in the design/order observable in nature.

Interestingly, when asked why they do not believe in God, atheists in one Facebook group for the most part replied that no empirical evidence for the existence of God exists. They mistakenly believe that since God cannot be observed empirically this means that he does not exist. But this reflects a deep misunderstanding about the nature of reality and the concept of God.

A general problem is that scientists who propagate these scientism views find an accepting audience on the internet and have influenced society to such an extent that many common people believe that science "proves" that only the material world exists. The challenge is for the dialoguer to set the record straight: Reality does not only consist of the material, empirically accessible part of our world.

The Use of Questions

When these issues are the topic of conversation, the question arises as to how to get the biblical point of view across in a convincing and compelling way.

No sensible and in-depth discussion is possible without good questions. Even though Jesus knew the answers, he nonetheless asked 339 questions that are recorded in the four Gospels. It is through the use of questions that we gain an understanding of the viewpoints of the other participants in the conversation. It is also through questions that common misunderstandings are brought to light and revealed, which can then be corrected (without entering into disputes) in an effort to produce common ground for conversations.

A good question is therefore like a probing instrument. It enables the dialoguer to discover and learn what the other participants believe as well as why they believe that; it also reveals common misconceptions like the ones discussed in this lecture. What is then required is to show and demonstrate (again using questions as far as possible) the discrepancies and incoherencies that accompany these misconceptions. The dissonance between them and the nature of reality as observed by science could then create opportunities to prompt and even persuade the other participants to adjust their views or at least allow for other possibilities than those originally conceived.

We find that St. Paul did exactly the same in his address on the Areopagus. He made the point that it was due to their ignorance that people all across the world worshipped idols as representations of the divine. But since the divine cannot be represented in this way (and as is acknowledged by the philosophers), the time has come to consider a better proposal, namely that the divine or God is in fact the creator of all things who will judge the world by a man that he has ordained and proclaimed as such by raising him from the dead. This why all mankind need to repent and come to salvation. (Acts 17:23-31)

The important point is that reality (as revealed by science) does not conform to the modernist view as expressed in scientism. **As humans we can never have more than a very partial access to true reality, both with regards to what the world is really like and history** (see Lecture 7). The limits of natural science make that impossible. The acknowledgement of this fact creates the space to present a viable and convincing explanation as to why the Christian worldview is correct and the Bible is true.

Sometimes people are immovable in their position. At this point the following question may prove to be helpful: What would be needed or necessary for you to believe in God?

When it comes to people who are interested in spirituality but does not hold to the biblical worldview, the probing need to go in another direction. In this case the question concerns the extent to which near-death and other spiritual and mystical experiences can actually tell us something about the true nature of spiritual reality. There is no way to evaluate and independently determine what such experiences really tell about the afterlife.

In such conversations the trustworthiness of the Bible as a source of information about the otherworld is relevant. The reason as to why Christians believe the Bible about these matters follows from them also believing in its divine inspiration. And as evidence for divine inspiration Christians can point to the accurate fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Even though this is not an easy topic to consider it is nonetheless an important one.

Even though engaging in conversations with non-believers may seem challenging, especially when more difficult topics like reality are to be discussed, it should always be remembered that the dialogist should at all times be absolutely dependant on the guidance of the Holy Spirit as Jesus has said: “do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:11) If we trust him, God will enable us in ways we cannot foresee.

To learn more about the limits of science, read: https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2016/08/science-and-metaphysics-in-search-of.html

6. THE NATURE OF TRUTH

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) The truth of the biblical message, 2) the nature of truth, 3) the difference between Truth and truth, 4) truth according to different philosophical frameworks and 5) the Call of Truth.

"Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?'
Jesus answered, 'You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'
Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'" (John 18:37-38a)

The question about the real nature of truth is an old one and today more relevant than ever before. In our so-called "post-truth" era this question is of extreme importance as it underlies and has an impact on all conversations about faith. A large segment of society has become convinced that truth is a matter of perspective, that everyone has their own "truth". To be able to conduct effective conversations about faith in our postmodern age it is thus a prerequisite to have a good understanding of the nature of truth.

Truth is precious. In our day and age truth is becoming scarce as the anything goes attitude of society undermines the very basis of truth itself. At the same time it becomes all the more difficult to determine what is in fact true. And this is the challenge: the dialoguer needs to have ***the ability to explain the nature of truth to others*** in such a way that they themselves come to understand it and as a consequence are open to accepting the truth of the biblical narrative.

The Truth of the Biblical Message

When Jesus Christ stood before Pilate he made an astonishing claim, namely that he was born and came into this world for the primary purpose to bear witness to the Truth. What Jesus is referring to is the entire purpose of his ministry, the reason for him coming in the flesh, as the Word of God becoming man. In our world where our access to reality is severely restricted as we discussed in the previous lecture, Jesus proclaims that he came from beyond the confines of this world into this word with a message about the true nature of all things, about what reality truly exists of or what is ultimately the Truth.

What Jesus is saying is that he is a "witness" to the Truth of the greater reality of all things even beyond the limits of our human existence. Moreover, he testifies not only about the true nature of all things but also about his place in all of that. He is the Son of God, the one who existed from all eternity in the Being of God, partaking in the essence of God (see John 1:1-2; Heb. 1 etc.). As the Word of God, he became incarnated as a man to reveal God in his own person to us, to allow

humans to see the glory of God manifested him (1 John 1:1-2; 2 Pet. 1:16-18) and as a consequence to see and hear God's Truth:

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

God's Truth was manifest in Jesus. It was manifest in his very being, in the way he acted and in what he proclaimed:

"Jesus said to him, "**I am** the way, and **the truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

"And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life." (1 John 5:20)

The gospel or good news proclaimed by Jesus and the apostles has to power to set us free:

"So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and **you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free**." (John 8:31-32)

The Gospel is the "Word of Truth" and the early church was called "the Way" or "the way of truth":

"In him you also, when you heard **the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:13-14)

"And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them **the way of truth** will be blasphemed." (2 Peter 2:2; see Acts 9:12; 19:9, 23)

Saint Paul calls the Word of God the "word of truth" (2 Cor. 6:7; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:15) in keeping with similar pronouncements in the Old Testament:

"The entirety of Your word *is* truth" **(**Psalm 119:160)

The reason for believing that God's Word is the Truth is that it has been inspired by the Holy Spirit:

"For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received **the word of God** which you heard from us, you welcomed *it* not *as* the word of men, but **as it is in truth, the word of God**, which also effectively works in you who believe." (**1 Thess. 2:13)**

"All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness…" **(**2 Tim. 3:16).

The question may be asked as to why we have reason to believe that Jesus spoke the truth, that he was actually the Son of God and that the Gospel, like the rest of the Bible, is indeed the Truth. The early church took the resurrection of Jesus as the single most significant confirmation that everything he said was true. It should be noted that the bodily resurrection of Jesus was without parallel in the ancient world; no such claim had ever been made before. St. Paul writes that, in accordance with God's promises, Jesus was born from the "seed of David according to the flesh, and **declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead**." (Rom. 1:2-4) In his first *Epistle to the Corinthians*, written in 53-54 AD, about 20 years after Jesus was crucified, St. Paul quotes an early Creed of the Church emphasizing the bodily resurrection of Jesus:

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time." (1 Cor. 15:3-8)

The resurrection confirmed Jesus's testimony that he came to bear witness to the Truth.

The Nature of Truth

At this point we can delve somewhat deeper into the nature of truth. According to Strong's Concordance the meaning of the Greek word translated as "truth", namely *alétheia*, is: "truth, but not merely truth as spoken; truth of idea, reality, sincerity, truth in the moral sphere, divine truth revealed to man, straightforwardness".

The word "truth" clearly has a variety of meaning. What have been discussed so far is "divine truth revealed to man". Truth also has a moral aspect that pertains to a person's character. As such, the word refers to "truth as a personal excellence; that candor of mind which is free from affectation, pretence, simulation, falsehood, deceit" or "sincerity of mind and integrity of character, or a mode of life in harmony with divine truth" (see John 8:44; 1 Cor. 5:8; 1 Cor. 13:6). (Thayer's Greek Lexicon)

When it comes to the more general use of the word "truth" in contrast with what is true in things appertaining to God and the duties of man ("moral and religions truth"), two further meanings of the word are distinguished, namely "truth as spoken" and "reality".

HELPS Word-studies: "225 *alḗtheia* (from 227 */alēthḗs*, '*true* to fact') – properly, *truth* (true to *fact*), *reality*. [In ancient Greek culture, 225 (*alḗtheia*) was synonymous for '*reality*' as the *opposite of illusion*, i.e. *fact*.]"

Contemporary dictionaries also distinguish between these two meanings of truth, namely reality/facts and speaking in accordance with the facts.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives the meaning of "truth" as 1) the body of real things, events, and facts or the state of being the case (fact) and 2) the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality. Britannica gives the meaning of truth in ordinary discourse as: "to agree with the facts or to state what is the case".

That which can be empirically confirmed constitutes facts or empirical reality. This does not refer to the truth of our metaphysical views about the world, what the world is truly like (Lecture 5) but simply to that which lies within the domain of experience and experiment. We have already discussed the nature of reality in the previous lecture.

When it comes to truth insofar as a statement is concerned or truth-telling, someone is telling the truth when telling the facts openly, honestly, and unambiguously. The truth is always in accordance with the facts or reality. ***A true narrative is consistent with what have existed or happened (in the past) or what exists (at present).***

What is extremely important to note is that although we as Christians believe in the Truth of the Gospel and the Bible more generally, a large part of this belief can never be directly confirmed. It lies beyond the realm of the empirical or outside the reach of the empirical endeavor. The only way to confirm such matters is via indirect means.

The same problem is found in science, with scientifically accepted belief systems like that of the Big Bang Theory also forever beyond the possibility of being empirically confirmed. When scientists want to test the truth of a theory like that of the Big Bang, they know that they would never be able to empirically verify that event. It is simply impossible and far beyond the possibility of empirical access. What they instead do is to look for indirect evidence supporting their theses. All such beliefs are based on interpretations of data obtained via indirect means.

Truth is No Simple Matter

The single most important drawback regarding Truth is that we as humans have limited access through our senses to the world as it really exists or have once existed (in the past) and as a consequence our understanding of things are also severely limited. This limitation does not only pertain to the bigger issues of life but also to our everyday experiences and perceptions of things. In this regard it is important to distinguish between truth and Truth.

Let's take a closer look at the difference between truth and Truth. ***Truth (with a capital T) is that which has really happened, how things have really unfolded or unfold or what the world is really like.*** Truth agrees with a God's eye view on things, present and past. Truth is not a model or concept of Truth (which will be truth if verified and confirmed) but Truth itself, as things

really are or were. The problem is that no human has a God's eye view on things; we all interpret things to form our own understanding of the truth about the Truth.

To tell the truth is to tell what has really happened from your perspective. Nobody has unfettered and unrestricted access to the Truth. This means that we can only have access to "truth", not "Truth", except insofar as we as Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Truth and know that He is in our lives. But this is a belief in Truth or a deep inner experience of Truth, not an understanding or grasping of Truth.

As humans we always interpret things, events and texts. In science this can be seen, for example, in quantum physics which on the one hand gives an astoundingly accurate description of what is found in experiments but on the other hand cannot tell what the true nature of reality exists of. This can be seen from the fact that many different interpretations of quantum physics exist, for example, the Copenhagen interpretation, the Von Neumann-Wigner interpretation, the Bohmian interpretation and the Many Worlds interpretation. Philosophers of science even speak in this regard of the "metaphysics of quantum physics".

The same is true in the field of archaeology. The archaeologist, Vance Watrous, has famously observed: "One of the most interesting things about archaeological material, is you get the same object, you get three archaeologists, you come up with three different interpretations based on that." The reality of what happened in the past is for the most part not easy to determine.

When witnesses give their accounts of what happened, it is expected that some amount of difference will exist between these testimonies because each tells their story from their own particular experience and interpretation thereof. When such testimonies agree too closely it creates the suspicion that the witnesses have beforehand colluded in aligning what to say. The truth of someone's testimony is not undermined by the fact that such a person interprets things and events and understands them in a certain way. Even the Gospels show some minor differences and include different material despite the fact that they are in agreement as to the main storyline about the life and death of Jesus Christ.

The difference between Truth and truth does not undermine the essence of truth.

The best way to understand the difference between Truth and truth follow perhaps from considering the justice system. For any court to be able to make a just judgment as to the guilt of the accused the judge or jury needs to decide what is true and what is not. The procedure and rules of the court are developed for this very purpose, namely to establish which narratives before the court are true and which are false. On the one hand a narrative of events is presented by the prosecution; on the other a narrative of events is presented by the defense. The court has to decide which narrative is true or at least the most truthful and conforms best to the facts and as to whether a lack of sufficient evidence does not allow for a decision in this regard.

The only way to decide which of the opposing narratives before the court is true is to carefully consider, evaluate and test the evidence, evidence consisting of forensic evidence, witness testimony and expert testimony. In most cases, ***the full Truth of what has happened will never be revealed***. Even when the accused makes a full confession, it is not known if everything contained in the confession is in fact true. For someone to be found guilty, the judge or jury has to accept the truth of the narrative presented by the persecution based on the evidence before the court. If the truth of this narrative cannot be established above a reasonable doubt, someone should not be found guilty.

What the justice system teaches us is that although the truth of the matter can be established (using the criterion of the reasonable person), Truth is beyond the reach of the court. The same is true with regard to the biblical account of history. In the past, critical biblical scholars have approached the biblical text with a hermeneutics of suspicion, calling everything that cannot be explicitly proven to be true into doubt. They used the **positivist yardstick of the modernist age** according to which only evidence that can be positively demonstrated to exist can play a role in establishing the truth of the biblical narratives. But this criterion places the bar far too high, it goes far beyond that which can be reasonably be expected to be found in the archaeological endeavor in support of the biblical narratives.

A good example that demonstrates the problem is the Tell Dan Stele. Before this stele was discovered in 1993 it had become a widely held consensus among archaeologists that the biblical king David was not a historical person. When this stele in which mention is made of the "House of David" and which date back to the ninth century BC was found, its authenticity was doubted by some scholars for the simple fact that it stood in conflict with the commonly held scholarly position. But during the excavations the next year another piece of the stele that fitted perfectly with the rest was discovered, proving that the stele was real.

As humans we are severely restricted in our empirical access of nature, the world of events and history. We are always interpreting data which can at most provide a good but never the full picture. We do not have access to the Truth but merely to the truth. This does not mean that truth is compromised but simply that it is not always easy to establish the truth.

In larger society people often have wrong expectations as to what is required to establish the truth of the biblical narratives. They do not understand the limits of our humanity and science and what can realistically be expected as evidence when it comes to deciding the truth of the biblical narratives. Wrong expectations lead to people not believing the Bible is true. The challenge before the dialoguer is to rectify these wrong expectations and to show that the biblical narrative is indeed true to the extent that we can realistically expect to find confirmation for those events.

Truth According to Philosophical Frameworks

The main culprit for these wrong expectations is modernism (Lecture 2). During the modernist period scholars were under the impression that they have an objective view on the world and history. They believed that they can obtain and have access to the Truth. They did not understand the severely restricted nature of all human endeavors. As a consequence, the views of these early pioneers had a major impact and influence on many generations of scholars who came after them, many of whom to this day unconsciously (because they are not philosophically informed) follow a modernist approach in disciplines like archaeology and biblical studies.

With the arrival of the postmodern era the entire situation changed. When the restricted nature of our human endeavors and the awareness that we always interpret everything dawned on the scholarly community, a reactionary philosophical position evolved that has already been discussed in Lecture 2, namely postmodernism. In this instance, a false dichotomy took hold, namely that if the obtainment of Truth is not possible, truth itself does not exist. It was reasoned that since humans always interpret things, they can do no better than each having their own interpretation and truth. This view is sometimes called perspectivism. But if everyone has their own truth, then the existence of truth is basically denied for the simple reason that "truths" that stand in opposition to each other cannot have any claim to be true.

In contrast with the modernist and postmodernist philosophies, the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer allows for the existence of "better" interpretations. ***The reason why the postmodern view is not correct is that a distinction can in fact be made between poor and sound interpretations.*** The most important feature of "better" interpretations is that they do not contain obvious and real contradictions. In the already discussed court setting it is the purpose of cross-examination to bring these contradictions to the fore, to reveal weaknesses in the witness testimony, to reveal lies. The main principle used to distinguish between truth and lies is that of non-contradiction. The truth will be in line with the data before the court; all lies will contradict those facts.

Closely connected with "better" or sound interpretations are "better" or sound narratives, narratives that are true because they correspond with the facts and evidence at hand. We arrive at the truth when we have a good understanding of the limits of our own humanity. This enables us to come as close as possible to the Truth, to construe well-informed narratives corresponding with the truth. In contrast, poor habits of interpretation and inferior philosophical frameworks like modernism and postmodernism result in inaccurate and false narratives that do not agree with the truth. They lead to misguided and wrong conclusions.

The Call of Truth

What is quite remarkable about Jesus's testimony before Pilate is not only the claim that he came into this world to bear witness to the truth, but also the claim that "Everyone who is of the

truth hears My voice" (Joh. 18:37). Everyone who loves the truth will hear the Call of Truth! In the same way we as humans hear the "Call of the Sea" or the "Call of the Wild", we have a deep innate desire for the truth, a desire to believe that which is true. We have a deep inner sense which rejects lies and chooses truth. This is very similar to our conscience, our deep innate sense of right and wrong. We do not want to be misled; we want to know what is true. And God has provided **enough evidence** for those who truly seek the Truth in order for them to find the truth.

What this means is that the goal is not so much to convince others of the correctness of the biblical message; dialoguers simply have to be honest and serious in their efforts to accompany others on their journey to finding the truth. **The truth has the power to convince.** But what is needed is obtaining a good understanding of the nature of truth and what can realistically be expected from a narrative to be true. Some would rather adhere to a lie, calling it true. But those who love the truth will allow themselves to be convinced by the truth.

What this also means that that dialoguers need to be absolutely dependent on the Holy Spirit to lead them to have conversations with the right people and to make the Call of Truth manifest to their hearts and minds. Whereas the dialoguer strives towards enhancing a good understanding of matters pertaining to the faith, the Holy Spirit opens their minds to understand (Luke 24:45) and works the acceptance of the Gospel into their hearts. We should be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit with whom we are co-workers in the Kingdom (1 Cor. 3:9). Absolute dependence on God is required.

To learn more about the limits of our human understanding, read:

https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2016/03/science-and-our-restricted-human.html

7. A PERSUASIVE NARRATIVE

OUTLINE OF THE LECTURE: 1) The challenge to provide a well-thought-out response, 2) the elements of a good response, 3) a reasonable faith, 4) some considerations pertaining to the formulation of a persuasive narrative, 5) criticisms often brought against the Bible.

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear…" (1 Peter 3:15; KJV)

As Christians we are called upon to give well-considered responses to those with whom we converse about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even though Christians converse with people all the time, the postmodern age presents special challenges for such conversations. What is needed is not only the cultivation of the necessary skills and knowledge, but also mastering the art of construing a good overall narrative for the purposes of conducting effective conversations on the marketplaces of ideas.

The eventual goal of Christian dialogistics is to develop dialoguers that have a good understanding of the dynamics of conversations and the skill set needed to conduct conversations, able to present the Christian narrative and faith in such a way that it makes sense to the other participants in the conversation and has as a result them coming to faith themselves.

A Well-Thought-Out Response

In 1 Peter 3:15 (quoted above) the disciples of Jesus Christ are called upon to be ready to always give an answer to every person who asks about the reasons why they believe. The key word used in this passage is *apologia*, usually translated as "defense" or "answer".

The word *apologia* was used in classical Greek times for defending a person's position in a legal setting. A good example is the defense of St. Paul before King Agrippa, where the same Greek word is used (Acts 25:16; 26:24). What is however quite interesting about the usage of this word in 1 Peter 3:15 is that it does not actually refer to a court setting but instead to everyday conversations with "every man" that asks about reasons for believing. In this instance *apologia* clearly has a slightly different meaning.

The varieties of meaning of *apologia* are given in HELPS Word-studies:

"627 *apología* (from 575 /*apó*, 'from' and 3056 /*lógos*, 'intelligent reasoning') – properly, a well-reasoned reply; a thought-out response to adequately address the issue(s) that is raised. 627 /*apología* ('reasoned defense') is the term for making a legal defense in an ancient court. Today 627 /*apología* ('biblical apologetics') is used for supplying evidences for the Christian

faith. [An ‘apology’ in classical times had nothing to do with saying, ‘I'm sorry,’ but rather was a reasoned argument (defense) that presented evidence (supplied compelling proof).]”

It is important to note that *apologia* is formed from the word *logos*, in the same way as *dialégomai*. In fact, St. Paul’s address on the Areopagus in Athens, which followed on and continued his conversations (*dialégomai*) with Jews and proselytes in the synagogue and later on with everybody whom he came across on the marketplace, is exactly the kind of “intelligent reasoning” or “thought-out response to adequately address the issue(s) that is raised” designated by the Greek word *apologia*. It may be assumed that St. Paul’s discourse included the very same motifs and views that he previously expressed when he engaged in conversations on the marketplace. He would have presented the same or similar well-though-through responses and narrative that he gave on the Areopagus.

All good conversations include setting out well-though-out responses. In the same way St. Paul spoke (*dialégomai*) daily with everyone who happened to be on the Athenian marketplace, St. Peter calls upon Christians to answer (*apologia*) everyone who asks about matters concerning their faith. What is rather interesting is that St. Peter emphasizes the question and answer format in everyday context which stands at the heart of all good and in-depth conversations. He also emphasizes the need to provide good answers and convincing reasons as to why we as Christians believe and all of that in a manner emanating “meekness and fear”.

We have already come across the analogy between those narratives presented in a court setting and the presentation of the biblical narrative to others on the marketplaces of ideas (Lecture 6). The very same idea is found in 1 Peter 3:15, namely that our conversations with others have certain important correspondences with a defense given in court. The most important and significant aspect of such a defense is that it is a well-though-through response, a response that presents the truth of the matter in an understandable and convincing way. What is more is that this response does not only concern the defense of the Gospel (apologetics) but also presenting the Gospel in an understandable and convincing way (dialogistics).

In response to St. Peter’s response, ***Christians should thoughtfully consider the question: Why do I believe?*** The rest of this lecture is dedicated to enabling students to provide a well-thought-through response to this question. Once we can answer this question for ourselves, we will also be able to give sensible and viable answers to others in conversations about faith.

Elements of a Good Response

When the responses of St. Paul before King Agrippa and on the Areopagus are carefully considered, the following important elements can be distinguished: 1) personal testimony, 2) a good and well-thought-out account of the Christian narrative (belief system) and 3) a presentation of the Gospel of salvation.

In his defense before King Agrippa, St. Paul gives a detailed account of his conversion (Acts 26:12-18). He has previously in his first epistle to Timothy also described the appearance of Jesus before Pontius Pilate in similar terms, when Jesus witnessed about his own coming into this world to testify about the Truth (John 18:37). St. Paul writes: "I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who made the good confession in His testimony before Pontius Pilate…" (1 Tim. 6:13; Berean Standard Bible) The Greek word translated as "testimony" is *martureó* and means "to bear witness, testify". A personal testimony given from the heart may have a great impact on those listening.

On both the mentioned occasions St. Paul also provides an overview of the Christian belief system, the biblical narrative of God's workings throughout history and his manifestation in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This aspect of conversations is discussed in more detail below.

St. Paul also presented the Gospel of salvation. Towards the end of his address he asked King Agrippa as to whether he believed the biblical prophets who prophesied about the Coming of the Messiah (Christ). Agrippa then said those well-known words: "You almost persuade me to become a Christian." (Acts 26:28) On the Areopagus St. Paul also ended his address with a presentation of the Gospel: "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:30-31)

The entire purpose of presenting a well-thought-through biblical narrative is that those to whom we testify become convinced of the integrity of the biblical message and are open to accepting the good tidings of the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ. The dialoguer needs to have the ability to convincingly show ***why the biblical narrative is trustworthy and the Gospel of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ worthy of acceptance***.

A Reasonable Faith

The question that needs to be asked is what the basic requirements are for construing a persuasive biblical narrative. These include:

1) Sound interpretations of biblical passages and the historical aspects of the text
2) Have a good sense of the ancient world from which the Bible originated as well as the timeline of biblical events
3) Consider both the Masoretic text and the Septuagint (see below)
4) Have a good understanding of the field of archaeology and its limits
5) Know what constitutes a good and convincing biblical narrative

Each of these points can be discussed in much more detail but this goes beyond the scope of this lecture. Interpretation and what constitutes good hermeneutics have been touched upon in

Lectures 2, 3 and 6. The ancient worldview that underlies the understanding of the biblical authors has been touched upon in Lectures 3 and 5.

As for the Masoretic text and Septuagint the following can be mentioned: The Masoretic text refers to the standard text used by the Jewish community since the Council of Jamnia in about 90 AD and is named for a group of Jewish scholars called Masoretes who during the ninth century supplied the diacritical marks that enable correct pronunciation. The Septuagint (called LXX) in turn refers to the Greek translation of the Hebrew text that was made in the city of Alexandria in Egypt from the mid-third to the first century BC and received its name from the 70 Hebrew scholars who according to tradition produced the translation. Some textual scholars believe that the Septuagint was based on a Hebrew source text that differed slightly from the source text used later on as basis for the Masoretic text. Although the differences between these texts are small and for the most part concern chronological differences, these may be quite significant and important when construing a convincing biblical narrative.

When it comes to evidence for the correctness and trustworthiness of the Bible, the academic disciplines that are primarily involved are archaeology together with textual studies and ancient Middle Eastern studies. Central to all these disciplines is the issue of interpretation. In all instances, the interpretation of the texts and the data should be done with **careful consideration of both the methods and their limits**; otherwise the conclusions could be way off the mark. Often practitioners in these disciples give up too high for their own fields of study - using the methods without due consideration of the limits within which they are valid.

In accordance with the inherent limitations of science to access “true reality” (see Lecture 5), archaeology is indeed also limited in its reach. In fact, archaeology is even more limited than the natural sciences for the simple reason that the reality with which archaeology is concerned belongs to the past and can never be completely restored despite the best efforts of archaeologists. Even though archaeologists obtain access to certain remains that originated in the past, the archaeological record is always incomplete and can never provide full access to the past as it really existed or all the events that happened.

Archaeologists find it especially difficult to distinguish between trade, emulation (imitation) and migration in the archaeological record. Even with a large amount of data, it often happens that archaeologists cannot decide among themselves which of these models (or combinations thereof) are applicable. Archaeologists from different backgrounds often adhere to different models to explain the same data. The reason why this is important is that the biblical exodus was such a migratory event. This means that (as is typical for such events) it is extremely difficult to find evidence that can without any reservations be ascribed to this migration. A large amount of indirect and supporting evidence is however available to support the biblical tale of the exodus.

During the modernist period the so-called positivists required positive proof before accepting anything written in the Bible as true (see Lecture 6). They did not understand the limits of the

fields of archaeology and textual studies and had no idea how wrong they were. Even today some archaeologists with no philosophical training make strong statements based on positivist views that they wrongly take as being "scientific". As is the case in physics, it is quite common among archaeologists that they do not have a good understanding of the limits of their own scientific discipline.

These historical developments in archaeology had enormous implications for biblical studies. With these wrong expectations, those scholars wrongly thought that all important events in the Bible should be sufficiently represented in the archaeological record. Lack of such evidence immediately led to the wrong conclusion that the Bible is an untrustworthy source of history. ***One of the main reasons why critical biblical scholars originally started doubting the historical accuracy of the Bible was exactly because they held positivist expectations which are discarded today. The problem of historical verification does not necessarily lie with the texts but may instead be due to the very limited nature of the archaeological data.***

The foremost question that should be asked is what kind and amount of evidence is to be expected before the historical accuracy of the text is taken as confirmed or at least well supported. All the facts pertaining to historical events described in the bible are seldom available from archaeological sources. What have been found through the years, however, is that new discoveries tend to support and strengthen the case for the accuracy of the biblical narrative, without anything showing up that directly contradicts that account.

With this background it is easy to understand why the era of trying to "prove" matters of faith is long gone. Instead we have to understand that we are always interpreting (both the biblical text and the archaeological data) for the simple fact that as humans we are severely constrained in our experiential and experimental access to the world. We may be able to provide good and convincing evidence and make strong arguments but "prove" in the true sense of the word is often not even possible in science. **But we certainly have good reasons to believe.**

What is interesting about the quoted verse in 1 Peter 3:15 is that St Peter challenges believers to provide "reason of the hope that is in you". As Christians we need to be able to provide the reasons why we believe, to give an account of our faith and belief system and why the biblical narrative is true. Christians sometimes refer in this regard to a "reasonable faith", a faith that those who are truly willing to explore with an open mind will also find convincing.

Stated differently, Christians believe that they have reasonable grounds to believe, that there is enough and substantial evidence to support the testimonies of the Biblical authors.

Once we understand that a burden of proof beyond that which is reasonably possible cannot be required and discover that there is nothing contradicting the biblical truth, we can with great boldness proclaim that what we believe and believe in is in fact true.

Other Considerations

In making the case for the accuracy of the biblical text the student should have a good overall idea about the various issues related to the history and dating of the text as well as the evidence that is available in support of the historicity of biblical events.

The oldest biblical texts that have been discovered to date are the Hinnom Scrolls – two silver amulets that date to the seventh century BC. These rolled-up pieces of silver were discovered in 1979-80 in the burial caves at Ketef Hinnom and contain the priestly benediction from Numbers 6:24-26.

The oldest biblical texts written on perishable material belong to the Dead Sea Scrolls and date to about 250 BC. The Dead Sea Scrolls is a collection of more than 900 manuscripts discovered from 1947 to 1956 at the caves around Qumran near the Dead Sea, written on papyrus, animal skin and even forged copper and dating from the third to the first century BC. They include all the books of the Old Testament except Nehemiah and Esther. Before their discovery, the earliest complete Old Testament manuscript was the Leningrad Codex, dating to 1008 AD. The discovery showed how incredibly accurate the biblical text had been handed down over the centuries.

It can be asked why no earlier texts of the Bible have been discovered. The main reason is that older texts would have been written on papyrus, which becomes extremely fragile over time. Many of the Dead Sea Scrolls are thus also very fragmentary and broken. This means that the oldest texts simply did not survive the eroding effects of the ages. One of the oldest Hebrew texts (not a biblical text) that survived the ages, for example, appears on a pottery shard and dates back to the time of King David.

Only a few inscriptions written in the old Canaanite language from which the ancient Hebrew language evolved have thus far been discovered. Two cuneiform tablets found years ago in Iraq and dating from c. 1800 BC (the age of the well-known Babylonian king, Hammurabi) was recently translated and found to contain a dictionary with common Canaanite words and phrases (immediately recognizable as proto-Hebrew) and their meaning in the Akkadian language (the lingua franca of the ancient Middle East). This shows that despite the fact that only a few short inscriptions have been preserved and discovered through the years, the Canaanite language was actually extensively used since those early days (also in written form). The same situation pertains to the Phoenicians of whom many inscriptions on stone and fragments of ceramics are preserved but no literary, historical or other work in the Phoenician language survives due to the fact that such texts have been written on perishable papyrus or parchment.

The fact that the available biblical texts are not that old therefore does not mean that much older texts did not exist. Archaeological evidence suggests exactly the opposite.

Another question concerns the dates when the biblical texts were first written down. Traditional biblical scholarship date the original biblical texts either to the conventional dates assumed for their authors (like Moses) or at least assign relatively early dates to those parts of the Bible that they believe were written in the monarchical period (influenced by the so-called Documentary Hypothesis that assigns different parts of the Pentateuch to different "sources").

In contrast, contemporary critical scholarship believes that the entire Pentateuch in its present form was written after the return from the Babylonian exile in 536 BC. In this case the implication is often that the historical material in the Bible has no real historical value. It is however also true that these critical scholars nowadays distinguish many "redactional layers" in the biblical text (different phases of compiling material and editing the text), the oldest of which may, according to some of them, incorporate really old material.

As for the New Testament, critical scholars also assign late dates for the texts. One of the considerations in determining this dating is the rejection of the authenticity of biblical prophecy. A good example appears in a book authored by Robert A. Spivey and D. Moody Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament* (1974), in which they argue that the only way that the author of the book could have known about the fall of Jerusalem is if it was written after the fact. "[T]he earliest date for Luke would, therefore, have to be sometime after Jerusalem's fall in AD 70".

In contrast, it can be argued that the best explanation as to why the account in the Book of Acts ends after St. Paul lived for 2 years under house arrest in Rome (i.e. ending in 60 AD) is that this was when the book was written. And since Acts was written after the Gospel of Luke (see Luke 1:1-4; Acts 1:1) it follows that Luke must have been written sometime in the 50s AD (about 20 years after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ).

The only way to counter the critical view is to show that extra-biblical evidence supports the traditional view that the Bible records real history. To do this the manner in which the biblical tales are to be correlated with extra-biblical or secular history has to be established. How does the biblical narrative relate to the known framework of secular history?

This is not easy to determine because the Bible for the most part does not provide enough details. A good example is the name of the Pharaoh of the exodus. As a result three different views have been proposed namely 1) that it took place in the 15th century BC (i.e. taking the biblical chronology serious, with Amenhotep II usually assumed to have been the exodus pharaoh), 2) it took place in the 13th century BC (with Ramesses II the exodus pharaoh; his name appears in Exodus 1:11) and 3) that it was simply a cultural memory (or the product of the imagination of a late Jewish author).

In the New Testament, St. Luke has gone to great lengths to provide the exact dates for events and also mentions that eyewitness testimony has been collected: "And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. … Now in the fifteenth year of the

reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness." (Luke 1:2; 2:12; 3:1-2)

When the Bible does mention persons and events that are known from extra-biblical sources, the question is how the biblical authors came to know about that. Take some of the biblical personages mentioned in the primeval history (Gen. 1-11), persons like Adam and Enoch who correspond closely with similar figures mentioned in Sumerian and Babylonian tradition, namely Adapa and Etana (his name means "he who went up to God"). Critical scholars believe that the author borrowed this information from Babylonian sources after the Babylonian exile (called the Babylonian Hypothesis). According to the Sumerian Hypothesis (see Lecture 4) the Abrahamic family brought the source material that was later used to compile the primeval history with them when they migrated from Ur in ancient Sumer to Canaan. In this case these details have been handed down among the Abrahamic family since the earliest times and were part of their own prehistory.

Another example is the Elamite incursion mentioned in Genesis 14 in the story of Abraham. In recent years it had been established that an incursion into northern Syria did in fact happen during the reign of the Elamite king, Siwe-palar-huppak, about 4 years before Hammurabi became overlord of Mesopotamia. The question is how the biblical author could have known about this event as the memory thereof was lost until it was rediscovered a few decades ago. The only reasonable conclusion is that the information was based on knowledge of the event.

For a more comprehensive overview of extra-biblical evidence that supports the biblical narrative, the books of the archaeologist Dr. Titus Kennedy are recommended.

Criticisms Often Brought Against the Bible

Some typical criticisms brought against the trustworthiness of the Bible can be mentioned:

1. There is not sufficient evidence for the truth of the Bible. This view is based on the positivist approach described in this and the previous lecture.

2. The Bible contradicts itself. The reason why the Bible may appear to contradict itself concerns interpretation. The question is as to whether such "contradictions" are a result of poor interpretations that lack sufficient knowledge of the background situation or the author's inconsistent writing. For the most part this is impossible to determine. The golden rule is, however, that authors usually present their views in a coherent and consistent manner. What may also contribute to so-called contradictions are quotations from the Septuagint found in the New Testament text that differ from the Masoretic text.

3. The biblical values of the Old Testament are crude and very unchristian. This view often makes the contemporary value system a timeless norm, having no understanding of the deep formational effect that culture has on the customs of early periods. The Bible originated in an ancient world very different from our own and it is unrealistic to expect that God would have spoken to them in terms totally foreign to their own culture and experience.

In the final instance it should be remembered that the process of convincing others of the faith always takes time and that nobody knows when the tipping point that turns the scale will be reached. Sometimes many follow-up conversations may be necessary, approached with patience and a belief that God is the one who does that which may seem impossible to us.

To learn more about the limits of archaeology, read: https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2012/08/a-critique-of-archaeology-as-science.html

FASILITATOR'S GUIDE

The Purpose of the Facilitator's Guide

The purpose of the guide is to provide a structured framework and set of guidelines for moderators to effectively facilitate discussions and training sessions. It serves as a reference tool to help moderators manage the session smoothly, engage participants, and achieve the session objectives.

Key objectives:

1. Provide clear instructions and tips on how to facilitate discussions and manage group dynamics.
2. Ensure consistency in the way sessions are conducted.
3. Will help you to prepare for the session by providing an overview of the session objectives, agenda, and key topics.
4. Offer techniques and strategies for engaging participants and maintaining their interest throughout the session.
5. Guide how to handle challenges such as disruptions, conflicts, or technical issues that may arise during the session.
6. Help maintain the quality of the session by providing moderators with tools and techniques to ensure that the session objectives are met.
7. Includes guidance on how to collect feedback from participants and evaluate the effectiveness of the session for future improvement.

Moderator Role and Responsibilities

As a moderator you role is to:

1. Understand the backgrounds, interests, and needs of your audience to tailor your content and approach accordingly.
2. Use open, discussion, and group activities to keep participants engaged.
3. Create a supportive environment where participants feel comfortable contributing their thoughts and ideas.
4. Use simple language, explain terminology, and avoid jargon to ensure everyone understands the information being presented.

5. Stick to the agenda and use time management techniques to ensure you cover all important topics.
6. Remain neutral and focus on facilitating discussions rather than expressing personal opinions.
7. Address disruptions calmly and respectfully, redirecting the conversation back on track if needed.
8. Seek feedback to identify areas for improvement and refine your skills.

Introduction

1. This is an entry-level course in Christian Dialogistics and an introduction to the discipline of dialogistics.
2. A basic knowledge and understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith is required.
3. Christian dialogistics is similar to apologetics but more conversational addressing faith in a postmodern society.
4. Dialogistics provides tools for conducting conversations effectively, developing certain skills, and a basic understanding of the elements needed to bring such conversations to fruition and lead people to Christ.

The course consists of seven lectures that explore the basic building blocks for conducting effective conversations:

1. **Acts 17** serves as a point of departure for dialogistics, showing how common ground is to be found in conversations about faith.
2. The role of **interpretation** in all human engagements with the world but especially when talking with people having different points of view.
3. Explaining and exploring the underlying dynamic and basic elements of **effective conversations**, with others about matters of faith.
4. Introducing the theme of **science and creation.**
5. Exploring the **nature of reality** and the importance of having a good understanding of it.
6. Exploring the **nature of truth** and the importance of having a good understanding of it.
7. The art of formulating **a persuasive** Christian **narrative.**

1. Acts 17

Session Overview

After the lecture the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The meaning and importance of *dialégomai.*
2. The importance of understanding and making sense of the Gospel.
3. The reason why it may be difficult for people to make sense of the Gospel.
4. The importance of finding common ground in conversations.
5. The difference between Christian apologetics and dialogistics.

The approach is based on that of St. Paul when he visited Athens during his second missionary journey as described in Acts 17. Use a map showing St. Paul's missionary journeys to provide background for the lecture.

Outline of the lecture:

1. The different missional approaches
2. *Dialégomai* (converse) in Acts 17
3. St. Paul's conversations in Athens and his address on the Areopagus as model and basis for conversations about faith
4. The importance that others "understand" and make sense of the Gospel and of finding common ground with them in conversation
5. An introduction to Christian Dialogistics.

Begin your lecture with the verse: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

1. Agenda:
2. The missional Approaches:
    a. Jerusalem
    b. Antioch
    c. Athens
3. The Word *Dialégomai* in Acts 17
4. Presenting the Gospel in such a way that it makes sense
5. The Areopagus
6. The Unknown God
7. Christian Dialogistics

Focus Questions

1. Why is the model of the three cities important for our missional endeavor?
2. Why is the approach used by St. Paul in Athens applicable to today's postmodern context?
3. Why is understanding the Gospel so important? And what may be a hindrance to understanding and making sense of the Gospel in postmodern society?
4. Why is Christian dialogistics tailor-made for conversations in contemporary postmodern contexts?

5. What do you think about the role of philosophy in equipping students for conversations about faith?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.
2. Give them the focus questions before the lecture and go back to these questions throughout the discussion to encourage participants to think critically and participate in the discussion.
3. If need be divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
5. Pause periodically to allow participants to reflect on the material and ask questions or share their thoughts.

Time management during a lecture or teaching session is crucial to ensure that you cover all the necessary material while keeping participants engaged. Here are some tips to help you manage your time effectively:

Time Management Tips

1. Stick to your schedule as closely as possible.
2. Use your guide to prioritize key points.
3. If you plan to include activities or discussions, set time limits for each to ensure they do not take up too much time.
4. While it's important to stick to your schedule, be prepared to be flexible if necessary. Sometimes discussions or questions may arise that are valuable and worth spending extra time on.
5. Engage participants throughout the session to maintain their interest and ensure they are following along.
6. Monitor your pace, if you find you are running behind, consider skipping less important points or moving them to the end of the session.
7. After the session, collect feedback from participants to see if they felt the pace was appropriate and if there are any areas where you could improve your time management.

Closing

1. Summarize the answers to the key questions.
2. Feedback and Evaluation

Supporting Resources

More articles and information are available at Coreideas.co and wmcloud.blogspot.com.

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.

2. Interpretation

Session Overview

After the lecture, the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The meaning and importance of *diermēneúō* and *hermēneúō*
2. The importance of interpretation in facilitating understanding
3. The fact that as humans our only way of engaging with Scripture (and the entire world around us, for that matter), is through "interpretation"
4. The difference between essentials and non-essentials
5. The role of philosophical frameworks in interpretation
6. Modernism, postmodernism, and philosophical hermeneutics.

The Outline of the lecture:

1. Explaining the Gospel to people with a postmodern background
2. The importance of the word *diermēneuō* (hermeneutics)
3. The role of interpretation in our human engagement with the world
4. Modernism, postmodernism, and alternative philosophical frameworks.

Begin your discussion with the verse: "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded (explained) to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." (Luke 24:27)

The focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach.
A critically important aspect of all such conversations is the ability to explain the gospel in such a way that it makes sense to them. And for this, we need to have a good understanding of the underlying dynamics of such conversations.

Agenda:

1. Explaining the Gospel
2. The Word *Diermēneuō*
3. Interpretation
4. Private Interpretation
5. Philosophy and Interpretation
6. Modernism versus Postmodernism

Focus Questions

1. Why is it impossible to read the Bible without interpreting the passages?
2. Why do Christians have different understandings of passages?
3. What is the difference between essentials and non-essentials?
4. In what way do philosophical frameworks influence society?
5. How does modernism differ from postmodernism?
6. Why is philosophical hermeneutics a good approach?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.
2. Give them the focus questions before the lecture and go back to these questions throughout the discussion to encourage participants to think critically and participate in the discussion.
3. If need be, divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
5. Pause periodically to allow participants to reflect on the material and ask questions or share their thoughts.

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4. While it's important to stick to your schedule, be prepared to be flexible if necessary. Sometimes discussions or questions may arise that are valuable and worth spending extra time on.
5. Engage participants throughout the session to maintain their interest and ensure they are following along.
6. Monitor your pace, if you find you are running behind, consider skipping less important points or moving them to the end of the session.
7. After the session, collect feedback from participants to see if they felt the pace was appropriate and if there are any areas where you could improve your time management.

Closing

1. Summarise the answers to the key questions.
2. Feedback and Evaluation.

Supporting Resources

To learn more about philosophical hermeneutics, read: https://coreideas.co/coreideas-introduction/

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.

3. Building a Bridge

Session Overview

After the lecture, the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The interplay between *dialégomai* and *diermēneúō*
2. The importance of having a good disposition, respect for each other and the desire to know more about the other person
3. How the exchange of viewpoints and the explanation of the meaning of things result in the bridging of the distance/gap that separates the participants
4. Gadamer's concept of a fusion of horizons
5. The ancient worldview of the biblical authors as well as other contemporary worldviews (materialism, pantheism and panentheism; at a basic level)
6. The modernist and postmodernist approaches to hermeneutics and its impact on biblical interpretation
7. The way that common ground can be found in conversations within a postmodern cultural context.

Outline of the lecture:

1. The importance of having a real interest in and Christlike love for people
2. The interplay between *dialégomai* and *diermēneuō*
3. Bridging the distance/gap that separates participants in conversation (or reader and author)
4. Gadamer's concept of a fusion of horizons
5. Becoming acquainted with the ancient worldview of the biblical authors as well as other contemporary worldviews (materialism, pantheism and panentheism; on a basic level)
6. Finding common ground for conversations with people who belong to the postmodern culture.

Begin your discussion with the verse: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

The focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach.
A central tenet of the gospel is not only that Christians have the good news of salvation to share; it also means that they should be truly interested in the person with whom they share the gospel.
So often the main focus of Christians in conversations about faith is to get their message across. And it is indeed of cardinal importance that we should be able to explain the gospel clearly and understandably.

Agenda:

1. True Dialogue, Sound Hermeneutics
2. Interpreting the Biblical Text
3. The Ancient Biblical Worldview
4. Modernist versus Postmodernist Hermeneutics

5. Worldviews in a Postmodern World

Focus Questions

1. Why is having a real interest in the person you are sharing the Gospel with important?
2. Why is it important to listen carefully (instead of speaking) when conversing with someone?
3. What does the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer mean by the idea of a "fusion of horizons"? What role does the finding of common ground play in this process?
4. Why is exposure to other views and standpoints a good thing? And when can it be dangerous?
5. How do the modernist and postmodernist approaches to hermeneutics differ from each other? And what is its impact on biblical interpretation?
6. Have you had the opportunity to talk to somebody who belongs to the postmodern culture? What did you learn from that experience?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.
2. Give them the focus questions before the lecture and go back to these questions throughout the discussion to encourage participants to think critically and participate in the discussion.
3. If need be divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
5. Pause periodically to allow participants to reflect on the material and ask questions or share their thoughts.

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Time Management Tips

1. Stick to your schedule as closely as possible.
2. Use your guide to prioritize key points.
3. If you plan to include activities or discussions, set time limits for each to ensure they do not take up too much time.
4. While it's important to stick to your schedule, be prepared to be flexible if necessary. Sometimes discussions or questions may arise that are valuable and worth spending extra time on.
5. Engage participants throughout the session to maintain their interest and ensure they are following along.
6. Monitor your pace, if you find you are running behind, consider skipping less important points or moving them to the end of the session.
7. After the session, collect feedback from participants to see if they felt the pace was appropriate and if there are any areas where you could improve your time management.

Closing

1. Summarise the answers to the key questions.
2. Feedback and Evaluation

Supporting Resources
To learn more about the ancient worldview, read: https://coreideas.co/ancient-world-introduction/

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.

4. Science and Creation

Session Overview

After the lecture, the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The four discussed Christian views on creation (young-earth creationism, old-earth creationism, the Sumerian Hypothesis, the polemical view)
2. The interplay between these views and science
3. The extent to which each is compatible with scientific theories
4. Strategies for conducting conversations in which the topic of science features.

Outline of the Lecture:

1. An expose of four different Christian views on creation
2. The relationship between the different Christian views on creation and contemporary science
3. Prospects of the different Christian views finding common ground in conversations about faith.

Begin your lecture with the verse: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen.1:1)

The focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach.
In all conversations about faith the particular Christian viewpoint adopted in the conversation could play a decisive role in determining whether such conversations are fruitful. As not all Christian positions will lead to the participants finding common ground between them for the conversation to carry on and produce positive results, it is important to look more carefully into this aspect of conversations.

Agenda:

1. The Creation Account: Different Viewpoints
2. Young-Earth Creationism
3. Old-Earth Creationism
4. The Sumerian Hypothesis
5. The Polemical View
6. Creation and Science
7. Creation in Conversations

Focus Questions

1. What view do you hold about creation? Do you agree with one of the discussed views or do you hold another view?
2. What criticism can be brought against the hermeneutics used for the different views on creation?
3. What do you think about the validity of our best current scientific theories?
4. What are the weaknesses of the different views on creation?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.
2. Give them the focus questions before the lecture and go back to these questions throughout the discussion to encourage participants to think critically and participate in the discussion.
3. If need be divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
5. Pause periodically to allow participants to reflect on the material and ask questions or share their thoughts.

Time management during a lecture or teaching session is crucial to ensure that you cover all the necessary material while keeping participants engaged. Here are some tips to help you manage your time effectively:

Time Management Tips

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5. Engage participants throughout the session to maintain their interest and ensure they are following along.
6. Monitor your pace, if you find you are running behind, consider skipping less important points or moving them to the end of the session.
7. After the session, collect feedback from participants to see if they felt the pace was appropriate and if there are any areas where you could improve your time management.

Closing

1. Summarise the answers to the key questions.
2. Feedback and Evaluation

Supporting Resources

To learn more about the different Christian views about creation, read: https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2013/03/does-creation-narrative-of-genesis-1.html

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.

5. The Nature of Reality

Session Overview

After the lecture, the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The biblical worldview.
2. What is meant by metaphysics?
3. The nature of reality.
4. The meaning and origins of scientism.
5. The nature and limits of science.
6. How to find common ground with people holding worldviews that have a different view of reality than the Christian view.
7. The use and role of questions in conversations about faith.

Outline of the lecture:

1. The biblical worldview.
2. Metaphysics and the nature of reality.
3. The limits of science.
4. The use of questions in conversations about faith.

Begin your discussion with the verse: "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." (John 18:36)

The focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach.
What is the most basic ingredient of conversations? Even though it may be quite obvious, it is at the same time possible to lose sight of the fact that no conversation is possible without a subject matter. The knowledge about and the skill with which the subject matter is handled in a conversation determines whether a positive outcome can be obtained.

Agenda:

1. The Kingdom of Heaven
2. Where is Heaven located?
3. Metaphysics: The Nature of Reality
4. The Limits of Science
5. The Use of Questions

Focus Questions

1. Where is heaven located?
2. How does the ancient worldview enable us to understand the biblical concept of "heaven"?
3. What is meant by scientism and materialism and what is the relation between these views?
4. In what fundamental way is science restricted in its endeavors and why does that matter?
5. What is the "empirical problem"?

6. Do you have friends who do not believe? Have you spoken to them about matters of faith and what can you learn from that?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.
2. Give them the focus questions before the lecture and go back to these questions throughout the discussion to encourage participants to think critically and participate in the discussion.
3. If need be divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
5. Pause periodically to allow participants to reflect on the material and ask questions or share their thoughts.

Time management during a lecture or teaching session is crucial to ensure that you cover all the necessary material while keeping participants engaged. Here are some tips to help you manage your time effectively:

Time Management Tips

1. Stick to your schedule as closely as possible.
2. Use your guide to prioritize key points.
3. If you plan to include activities or discussions, set time limits for each to ensure they do not take up too much time.
4. While it's important to stick to your schedule, be prepared to be flexible if necessary. Sometimes discussions or questions may arise that are valuable and worth spending extra time on.
5. Engage participants throughout the session to maintain their interest and ensure they are following along.
6. Monitor your pace, if you find you are running behind, consider skipping less important points or moving them to the end of the session.
7. After the session, collect feedback from participants to see if they felt the pace was appropriate and if there are any areas where you could improve your time management.

Closing

1. Summarise the answers to the key questions.
2. Feedback and Evaluation

Supporting Resources

To learn more about the limits of science, read: https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2016/08/science-and-metaphysics-in-search-of.html

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.

6. The Nature of Truth

Session Overview

After the lecture, the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The nature of truth.
2. The difference between truth and Truth.
3. Positivism and its problems.
4. Truth according to different philosophical frameworks (modernism, postmodernism, philosophical hermeneutics).
5. The Call of Truth.

Outline of the Lecture

1. The truth of the biblical message.
2. The nature of truth.
3. The difference between Truth and truth.
4. Truth according to different philosophical frameworks.
5. The Call of Truth.

Begin your discussion with the verse: "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?'" (John 18:37-38a)

The focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach.
The question about the real nature of truth is an old one and today more relevant than ever before. In our so-called "post-truth" era this question is of extreme importance as it underlies and has an impact on all conversations about faith.

Agenda:

1. The Truth of the Biblical Message
2. The Nature of Truth
3. Truth is No Simple Matter
4. Truth According to Philosophical Frameworks
5. The Call of Truth

Focus Questions

1. Why is truth important in our day and age?
2. What is the difference between facts and a truth narrative?
3. What is Truth?
4. Is it possible to obtain absolute truth?
5. Do restrictions in obtaining absolute truth imply subjectivism? Why not?
6. Why is it important to have realistic expectations about truth?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.
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3. If need be divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
5. Pause periodically to allow participants to reflect on the material and ask questions or share their thoughts.

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7. After the session, collect feedback from participants to see if they felt the pace was appropriate and if there are any areas where you could improve your time management.

Closing

1. Summarise the answers to the key questions.
2. Feedback and Evaluation

Supporting Resources

To learn more about the limits of our human understanding, read: https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2016/03/science-and-our-restricted-human.html

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.

7. A Persuasive Narrative

Session Overview

After the lecture, the student should have a clear understanding of:

1. The challenge to provide a well-thought-out response.
2. The elements of a good response.
3. What is a reasonable faith?
4. Some of the considerations pertaining to the formulation of a persuasive biblical narrative.
5. How to answer the criticisms often brought against the Bible.

Outline of the Lecture:

1. The challenge to provide a well-thought-out response.
2. The elements of a good response.
3. A reasonable faith.
4. Some considerations pertaining to the formulation of a persuasive narrative.
5. Criticisms are often brought against the Bible.
6. The focus is on reaching people belonging to our postmodern world and culture with the gospel using the dialogistics approach.

As Christians we are called upon to give well-considered responses to those with whom we converse about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even though Christians converse with people all the time, the postmodern age presents special challenges for such conversations. What is needed is not only the cultivation of the necessary skills and knowledge but also mastering the art of construing a good overall narrative.

Begin your discussion with the verse: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear…" (1 Peter 3:15; KJV)

Agenda:

1. A Well-Thought-Out Response
2. Elements of a Good Response
3. A Reasonable Faith
4. Criticisms Often Brought Against the Bible

Focus Questions

1. Why is the Bible true?
2. Why is the Christian Belief true?
3. What is positivism and why was it rejected?
4. What is important to construe a persuasive biblical narrative of the past?
5. How could Christians convince sceptics about the truth of the Gospel?

Participation Engagement

1. Remember to have participants use their training guide and make notes.

2. Give them the focus questions before the lecture and go back to these questions throughout the discussion to encourage participants to think critically and participate in the discussion.
3. If need be divide the discussion into shorter segments and include interactive discussions between segments to keep participants engaged.
4. Relate the content of your discussion to real-life examples and experiences to make it more relevant and engaging for participants.
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Closing

3. Summarise the answers to the key questions.
4. Feedback and Evaluation

Supporting Resources

To learn more about the limits of archaeology, read: https://wmcloud.blogspot.com/2012/08/a-critique-of-archaeology-as-science.html

Note: The structure can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the session and the preferences of the moderator.